"Lizzie's Story Felt Like Home:"
Meaning-Making and Narratively-Constructed Digital Intimacy in Literary Web Series

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Abstract

This thesis explores readers' experiences with a genre of digital narratives known as literary (inspired) web series. These narratives present updated, digital retellings of classic literature from the Western canon and arise from the rapid development of the convergent media environment and the evolution of social media platforms. Literary web series draw on a variety of storytelling methods to create interactive, immersive, and emotionally resonant narrative experiences for readers. As hybrid media-literary artefacts, these narratives leverage the affordances of social media platforms to encourage reader participation and interaction, generate forms of narrative immersion to convey an authentic and realistic story, and capitalise on the literary resonance of their source texts to foster the development of an engaged community of readers. These methods of meaning-making help create intimate narrative experiences that provide readers with a significant and lasting connection to the text. Using the literary web series, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (LBD), as a case study, this thesis explores LBD's use of the sociotechnical affordances of YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr; LBD's creation of narrative immersion for its readers; and the literary resonance of LBD's source material, *Pride and Prejudice*. Results from a mixed-methods online survey of LBD readers and follow-up semi-structured interviews with select respondents reveal that readers' experiences with LBD were deeply meaningful and contributed to readers feeling a sense of intimate connection with the narrative and other readers. Consequently, this thesis will propose that literary web series like LBD can help drive the formation of what I have labelled "narratively-constructed digital intimacy," an affective feeling stemming from the methods of meaning-making in LBD as well as mediated and narrative intimacies, and para-social interactions. Subsequently, reader experiences of literary web series that include narratively-constructed digital intimacy can provide readers with a "a long-lasting and ineffable sense of significance" (Stockwell, 2009a).

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Last, but never least, I thank my grandfather, Dr. Donald Borbee, for inspiring me to take this journey. I so wish he could be here to see his oldest granddaughter follow in his footsteps and earn a doctorate. I hope wherever he is, he's smiling proudly. I can practically hear him say, "Excellent! Now get a job."

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Glossary of Literary Web Series

Series Name	Source Material	Acronym
The Autobiography of Jane Eyre	*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë	AOJE
Carmilla	*Carmilla* by J. Sheridan Le Fanu	n/a
Classic Alice	A variety of classic literature from the Western canon	CA
Emma Approved	*Emma* by Jane Austen	EA
Frankenstein, M.D.	*Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley	FMD
Green Gables Fables	*Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery	GGF
The Lizzie Bennet Diaries	*Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen	LBD
Lovely Little Losers	*Love's Labor's Lost* by William Shakespeare	LLL
The March Family Letters	*Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott	MFL
Mina Murray's Journal	*Dracula* by Bram Stoker	MMJ
The Misselthwaite Archives	*The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett	MA
The New Adventures of Peter and Wendy	*Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie	NAPW
Nothing Much To Do	*Much Ado About Nothing* by William Shakespeare	NMTD
Project Green Gables	*Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery	PGG
A Tell-Tale Vlog	"The Tell-Tale Heart" by Edgar Allan Poe	TTV
Welcome to Sanditon	*Sanditon* by Jane Austen	WTS

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Evolution of the (Literary) Web Series

He called it his "most favourite idea ever." It was 1995, and companies such as Compuserve, America Online, and Prodigy were beginning to offer subscription services that allowed individuals to access the World Wide Web, a new-fangled creation of Tim Berners-Lee that enabled people to "explore and use the Internet's vast information resources using point-and-click computer commands" (Meikle and Young, 2011; Lewis, 1995, ¶ 4).[1] Producers, directors, and writers in the entertainment industry grappled with ongoing "rhetoric about a coming digital revolution" that seemed to suggest that "new media was going to push aside old media [and] that the Internet was going to displace broadcasting" (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 5). Amidst these changes, film and television producer Scott Zakarin proposed his aforementioned favourite idea, the project that would soon become the first successful web series. Zakarin wanted to combine the new possibilities of the Internet with the style of popular television shows like *Melrose Place* and *The Real World*, creating "the illusion of reality" that would bring the entertainment industry to the World Wide Web (Geirland and Sonesh-Kedar, 1999, p. 12). The result was *The Spot*, an online episodic drama about a group of young adults living together in a California beach house. Primarily text-based, *The Spot* used "daily diary entries, snapshots, and relentless email and message-board exchanges" between the characters to convey its narrative (Krantz, 1997). This first foray into web television quickly became popular, with thousands of Internet users visiting the website each day; according to Christian, *The Spot* "ran for two years, winning the first Webby for a series… and eventually providing the catalyst for a short-lived online 'network' of [web] series called American Cybercast" (2012, p. 344).[2]

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[1] The paragraph symbol used in this citation will also be used throughout this thesis to indicate more precise locations of content found on websites or in digital form. Though this practice is more commonly associated with the APA style of referencing, the Harvard system does recommend providing section or chapter indicators for direct quotes, when no page numbers are present.

[2] Created in 1996, The Webby Awards are given in honour of excellence in a variety of media types for content published and distributed on the Internet ("About The Webby Awards," 2019).

More than two decades later, however, *The Spot* has largely disappeared from the pop culture spotlight. American Cybercast, the network that had once "aimed to be 'the Web's first episodic entertainment network'" disbanded before the new millennium, while the "dot-com bust… scuttled online development (Christian, 2012, p. 343-345). Despite Zakarin's lofty ambitions to "change the world" with episodic entertainment content produced exclusively for the Internet (Krantz, 1997), the development of web series generally lagged behind television and film in the early 2000's. Indeed, web series were not fully embraced as a viable avenue for releasing entertainment content until the creation of YouTube, the introduction of live-streaming and other forms of online video, and the increase in stronger, more reliable Internet connections. Christian (2012, p. 351) points out that "broadband adoption and streaming technology encouraged a broader base of video producers," which in turn led to the creation of more individualised content and allowed audiences to pick and choose the specific videos they wanted to consume. In the years and decades after *The Spot* launched, numerous other web series debuted, ranging from spin-offs of more traditional broadcast television shows, such as *The Accountants*, a web series featuring secondary characters from the U.S. version of *The Office*, to original narratives intentionally created for and distributed through online platforms, such as Felicia Day's *The Guild* and Joss Whedon's *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* (Stein, 2018; McCormick, 2018).

One web series in particular attracted a great deal of attention from the press and, as Bakioğlu argues, "played a surprisingly important role in transforming YouTube into a legitimate storytelling platform and a site of cultural production worthy of commercial attention" (2018, p. 185). That web series was *lonelygirl15* (LG15). In early 2006, YouTube was still a new platform working to refine its features, and not yet owned by Internet powerhouse Google, when a teenaged girl named Bree uploaded her first video. Almost immediately, Bree's videos amassed hundreds of thousands of views and likes, raising her profile. Within a few short months, she "became an Internet phenomenon" who captivated audiences and prompted more than a few conversations about the nature of her videos (Bakioğlu, 2018, p. 185). Some viewers of *lonelygirl15* were suspicious from the beginning; despite using a confessional-style vlog, in which she spoke directly to the camera and the audience, the stories Bree told seemed a bit too crafted, and the editing of the videos appeared a bit too professional for a (supposed) amateur vlogger. Bakioğlu suggests that "the issue of whether or not the videos were 'real' or the

authentic account of a teenager became the ultimate enigma" that drew audiences in and kept them watching, hoping to uncover another clue that would provide a definitive answer (2018, p. 185). Ultimately, Bree was discovered to be a fictional character, the brainchild of three friends interested in "exploring the narrative possibilities of Internet technologies" (Bakioğlu, 2018, p. 189). The initial success of *lonelygirl15* allowed the creators' to extend Bree's story beyond YouTube. Forums offered fans a place to discuss their latest theories, Myspace and Facebook hosted profiles of Bree and other characters, and LiveJournal became home to countless fanfiction stories (Bakioğlu, 2018). The expansion of this fictional universe to multiple websites and social media platforms "invited viewers to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a story" (Mittell, 2009, ¶ 3). In fact, Bakioğlu argues that LG15's "irresistible charm" came not from the mystery of Bree's authenticity or the fascination with a new mode of storytelling, but rather from the creators' "ability to effectively activate the participatory culture that emerged in the era of media convergence" (2018, p. 190). LG15 fans quickly realised that the YouTube platform would allow them to create and share their own fan videos, fanfictions, and spin-off stories. Moreover, the LG15 creators enthusiastically encouraged fans to participate, guessing (correctly) that such participation would also contribute to word-of-mouth buzz around the narrative. Its successes enabled *lonelygirl15* to "become the harbinger of successful web series" in the years that followed its release (Bakioğlu, 2018, p. 199), inspiring many others to find new ways of telling stories through digital technologies.

About six years after *lonelygirl15* debuted on YouTube, a small subsection of web series began to take shape. This genre of web series adopted many of the features that initially made LG15 successful: the use of the confessional-style vlog, encouraging viewers and fans to participate, leveraging other social media platforms besides YouTube to supplement the videos, and an emphasis on realism and authenticity. Unlike LG15, however, these web series focused on retelling and re-imagining existing literature and, specifically, classic, well-known novels from the Western canon. In a 2013 special issue of the *Adaptation* journal, Chris Louttit claimed that "the classic novel adaptation has, much like other genres, been changed utterly by the shifting media landscape" of media convergence (p. 173), and these web series served as support for Louttit's statement. At the same time, while these web series were (and still are) certainly adaptations of previously published works, they are more than "just" adaptations. Alternatively

known as literary-inspired web series, literary web series, or new media adaptations, these web series are a combination of a variety of storytelling methods.[3] Besides acting as adaptations, literary web series are stories distributed on the World Wide Web, usually through the uploading of videos to YouTube. They mimic the traditions of broadcast television by releasing the story in short instalments, often on a weekly basis. Most literary web series record and distribute their narratives as vlogs, with a character or characters speaking directly to the audience. Additionally, many literary web series choose to include parts of the story on other social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram), thereby functioning as a transmedia narrative (that is, a narrative with different components distributed across media). Lastly, like *lonelygirl15*, literary web series take advantage of the specific features of social media platforms such as YouTube or Twitter to actively encourage audiences to participate in and interact with the narrative.

The particular combination of storytelling methods embedded within literary web series provides the audiences of these stories with a different kind of narrative experience, one that is ultimately significant. To create meaningful experiences for readers, literary web series employ three primary methods of meaning-making: (1) they leverage the sociotechnical affordances of social media platforms to encourage and allow readers to participate in the narrative; (2) they capitalise on the enduring resonance of classic literature and readers' previous experiences with those works to increase interest and participation; and (3) they use the affordances of social media and literary resonance to create a sense of narrative immersion for readers, drawing them into the story. As this thesis will demonstrate, the resulting experience that arises from these methods of meaning-making is one that gives readers a sense of intimate connection to the narrative, a feeling of attachment to the story and its characters. I therefore propose that literary web series, as narratives that draw inspiration from a range of digital and convergent storytelling methods, can contribute to the creation of what I call "narratively-constructed digital intimacy." Narratively-constructed digital intimacy incorporates aspects of what Chambers (2013) refers to as mediated intimacy, Abidin's (2015) concept of perceived interconnectedness (itself an update of Horton and Wohl's 1979 concept of para-social interaction), and narrative intimacy as defined by Day (2013). Chambers, for instance, has suggested that contemporary media, and especially

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[3] Throughout this thesis, I use a simplified version (i.e., literary web series) as my preferred term for these types of narratives.

social media networks, have shifted our understanding of intimacy from one that emphasises romantic and familial relationships to one that focuses more heavily on friendships and "families of choice" that are often cultivated at least partly online (2013). As digital narratives that are distributed online and take advantage of social media affordances, literary web series encourage readers to approach fictional characters as if they were real, allowing the readers to develop intimate relationships with those characters. At the same time, because the characters are, in fact, fictional and bound within the confines of a narrative, the intimacy that exists between readers and literary web series is inherently para-social (Horton and Wohl, 1979). Readers' perceived connections (Abidin, 2015) with literary web series characters is, in part, imagined and one-sided because the characters are limited by their fictionality. However, as Day (2013) highlights, there are specific narrative features that can help blur the lines between fiction and reality, and many literary web series use those features to create narratively-constructed digital intimacy for readers.

As multimodal narratives, literary web series include text, video, images, and audio, and accordingly, incorporate multiple comprehension activities, such as viewing, listening, and reading. For simplicity's sake, I refer to the consumers of literary web series as "readers" here and throughout this thesis. In doing so, I draw on research from Mangen and van der Weel, who suggest that "changes to the 'mediascape' have prompted a broadening of core concepts such as 'text,' 'reading,' and 'literacy'" (2016, p. 116). While scholars such as Baron (2015), Carr (2008), and Miall (2002) argue that digital media use correlates with a decline in close reading and close reading skills, Mangen and van der Weel point out that "people are [not] spending less time reading (if anything, the reverse is probably true), but [rather] they are reading so very differently" (2016, p. 117). They propose that "reading is interaction with a technology/device with specific interface affordances" and "'what we read' is therefore not only the text itself, but also the material and technical features of the device or technology presenting or displaying the text" (Mangen and van der Weel, 2016, pp. 119-120). Consequently, the consumers of literary web series are readers inasmuch as they interact with the narrative through the multiple interfaces and technologies (e.g., YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr) presenting the text.

The case study presented in this thesis, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, debuted in 2012 as one of the first literary web series, and helped spark a trend of transmedia adaptations of classic literature. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (or, LBD) is a retelling of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and uses vlog-style videos, Twitter feeds, blog posts, and additional social media content to craft a modern, contemporary version of a timeless story. When LBD came to its initial conclusion in 2013, the literary web series genre was starting to grow considerably. Narratives such as *Welcome to Sanditon*, *Emma Approved*, *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre*, and *A Tell-Tale Vlog* all released in 2013, with dozens more arriving in later years. Just as *lonelygirl15* helped stimulate the web series genre as a whole, LBD served to inspire many of the other literary web series, particularly with regards to how literary web series can make meaning for readers and enable the development of narratively-constructed digital intimacy. A survey of LBD readers, conducted in the fall of 2017 for this research project, found that 88% of survey respondents felt that the LBD narrative was significantly or somewhat realistic and immersive, and slightly more than half (58%) indicated that the ability to participate in and interact with the narrative was an important part of their overall narrative experience. What follows in this thesis is an exploration of how LBD leveraged the sociotechnical affordances of social media platforms and forms of narrative immersion to create meaningful, resonant experiences for readers, which in turn contributed to the development of narratively-constructed digital intimacy.

My rationale in choosing LBD as the case study is threefold. First, as previously mentioned, LBD was one of the first literary web series and helped set conventions that many subsequent literary web series would follow. Second, as an adaptation of Austen (and, particularly, of Austen's best-known novel), LBD evoked the rich history of Austen's legacy, drawing inspiration from and contributing to the "massive amount of scholarship and commentary" about the novelist who commands "greater recognition than any other author writing in England not named William Shakespeare" (Looser, 2017, loc. 100). Austen is also a dominant presence in fanfiction spaces, with a significant number of fan-created sequels and variations available online (Jamison, 2013; Organisation for Transformative Works, 2019a; Reynolds, 2014). LBD arrived on the pop culture scene at the exact right moment; in January 2013, as Lizzie's stay at Pemberley was unfolding on social media, Austen enthusiasts around the world celebrated the 200th anniversary of *Pride and Prejudice*'s publication (Greenfield, 2013; Welsh, 2013). Last, I

was – and still am – a reader and fan of LBD, having followed the narrative during its original release in 2012 and 2013. I often found myself completely consumed by Lizzie's story, waiting anxiously for each new YouTube video, obsessively checking Twitter for new tweets and photos, and discussing theories and reactions with other fans on Tumblr. My personal experience of LBD was deeply immersive and meaningful, and I sought to explore other readers' experiences in an attempt to understand why LBD appealed to audiences and how it crafted significant, long-lasting narrative experiences for many readers.

While there are substantial collections of existing research pertaining to adaptations, serial entertainment, participatory media, and transmedia narratives, the specific genre of literary web series is, in contrast, understudied, though this is slowly changing. Within the last three to four years, there has been a marked increase in publications discussing these texts; these articles and book chapters, however, have primarily addressed the creation and production of literary web series, with discussions of authorship (Kuznetsova, 2014; Seymour, Roth and Flegel, 2015; Tepper, 2015) and adaptation (Baeva, 2015; Berryman, 2017; Jandl, 2015). This thesis, and the research presented herein, therefore, represents the first known empirical study of readers of a literary web series. While Stein's research (2015; 2016a) has explored the audiences, readers, and fans of literary web series (and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* in particular), her work has mostly involved secondary research and relies on public social media posts. Consequently, the research in this thesis also represents one of the first studies to recruit individual readers of literary web series and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* to share, in their own words, the details of their qualitative experiences with the narrative. Additionally, in undertaking this research in the years LBD's initial release, I have been able to collect data that includes the audience's recollections of past experiences. By asking the readers of literary web series to reflect on their experiences with the case study, this research can consider both the initial reactions and feelings of readers, as well as current perspectives. Importantly, it also enables me to compare the experiences of readers who consumed LBD in real time, as it released over the course of a year, to the experiences of readers who encountered LBD after the serial release and had the opportunity to consume the narrative all at once. The differences between these two experiences help highlight the importance of serial distribution of literary web series, and the role it plays in reinforcing a narrative's sense of

authenticity and realism – a key component of narratively-constructed digital intimacy I will discuss in later chapters.

As an in-depth, critical analysis of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and particularly of its readers and their experiences with the narrative, this thesis contributes to the discipline of fandom and fan studies, which "aims to represent fandom in a positive light and tends to study fan communities and practices" (Duffett, 2013, p. 2). According to Duffett, fans are individuals who have "relatively deep, positive emotional convictions about someone or something" and who express these convictions through their "drive to explore and participate in fannish practices" (2013, p. 18). Research about fans and fan studies in general often includes discussions of fans in relation to media convergence and participatory cultures because, as Jenkins points out, "the age of media convergence enables communal, rather than individualistic, modes of reception" and fans, with their deep emotional connections of their object of fandom, are more likely to "insist on the right to become full participants" (2006a, p. 26; p. 131). Fan participation can take a variety of forms because fans are increasingly (and in some cases, simultaneously) readers, creators, contributors, authors, and commenters. Later chapters in this thesis will illustrate how LBD operates as a participatory culture in the convergent media environment, while also explaining how and why many LBD readers came to self-identify as fans. This identity, along with their strong, positive feelings about the narrative and its characters, motivated many fans to leverage their different roles to craft individualised and deeply personal experiences with a digital text, which in turn further strengthened their connection to the narrative and their sense of narratively-constructed digital intimacy. Thus, this thesis' exploration of literary web series and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is a valuable contribution to our ever-expanding understanding of what it means to create and consume narratives in digital spaces.

In addition to its contributions to the fan studies discipline, with its focus on the fan-reader experience of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, this thesis also contributes to the electronic literature (e-lit) field by highlighting the features of the born-digital literary web series genre and by challenging traditional interpretations of what it means to read in the convergent media environment. As I will explain in Chapter 2, literary web series function as digital media, offering readers different modes of engagement through social media platforms. Literary web

series are also literary texts and therefore represent a new way for readers to immerse themselves within a story. The print and linear source texts of literary web series are transformed into multimodal narratives and share characteristics with other forms of digital literature. As hybrid media-literary objects, literary web series also necessitate a reconsideration of we mean when we say consumers "read" literary web series. Though print reading and digital reading are often set in opposition to one another (see: Baron, 2015; Carr, 2008; Miall, 2002), "the problem with creating a binary between print and digital reading is that it ignores the incredible overlap between the reading strategies we use to read both print and digital texts" (Morris, 2016, p. 126). Moreover, a print/digital binary overlooks the possibility of using print and digital texts in conjunction with one another, as Hayles (2012) suggests. For instance, approximately 76% of LBD readers who completed the survey for this research indicated that their experience with LBD motivated them to read or re-read Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, directly challenging Baron's claim that "digital technologies are contributing to lowered expectations" and making it "increasingly difficult… to get young people to read the 'hard stuff'" (2015, p. 230). The survey responses and interviews analysed in this thesis clearly indicate that readers had prior existing relationships with Austen's source novel, further demonstrating that print and digital texts can indeed complement each other.

The primary focus of this thesis is *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and, specifically, the fan-readers of LBD and their narrative experiences. While I do refer to other literary web series throughout this work to illustrate different key points, the conclusions I draw in Chapter 6 apply solely to LBD and its readers. Additionally, while Chapter 5 will offer an in-depth discussion of the research methods and methodologies I used and Chapter 7 provides an overview of some of the limitations of the research, it is important to note two key points about the scope of this thesis. First, due to my use of snowball sampling techniques and the general demographic makeup of the Jane Austen fandom worldwide, the survey and interview participants overwhelmingly identified as female (95.5%), and as such, this thesis does not form any conclusions about the importance or relevance of gender on a reader's LBD experience. Second, in an effort to minimise the amount of demographic data collected from survey and interview respondents (with the ultimate goal of ensuring participant privacy and anonymity), I did not collect data regarding participants' race. I outline the implications of this decision, as well as possible opportunities to

address it in future research, in Chapter 7. Nevertheless, this thesis does offer useful insights into the methods of meaning-making in literary web series, as well as the specific experiences of fan-readers of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. This thesis will show that those experiences, with their potential to create narratively-constructed digital intimacy, can be deeply meaningful for many readers of LBD.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries (LBD) is an adaptation of Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, in which Austen's story is updated for the twenty-first century and told through multiple digital media platforms. Originally released over the course of a year in 2012 and 2013, LBD unfolds primarily on YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr, with main character Lizzie's YouTube video blog (or "vlog") serving as the narrative's centre. LBD's narrative components have remained readily accessible in the years after the story's official conclusion. Readers old and new can still watch Lizzie's videos, free of charge, on YouTube, or scroll through her tweets on Twitter. Thus, even if someone missed LBD's initial release in 2012 and 2013, she can still consume the narrative in 2019, giving her the sense that the narrative (and, by extension, Lizzie's life) remains open and constantly unfolding.[4] According to media researcher Emily Roach, this allows fans who "are very invested in these characters" to imagine "how they might go on to live their lives outside the narrative [the fans are] given" (quoted in Williams, 2017). LBD has left a lasting influence on the literary web series genre. Prior to LBD, the web series form focused primarily on original fiction stories, such as *Lonelygirl15* and *The Guild*. In the immediate months and years after LBD's initial release, however, there were increasingly more web-based narratives specifically retelling classic literature. As a leader in the literary web series genre and a successful one at that, LBD is the ideal choice for further examining these hybrid media-literature objects and readers' narrative experiences of them.

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[4] While the majority of LBD's content is still online, some of it is no longer accessible by the general public. Some of the image hosting sites, for example, closed, leaving dead links or photos that will not load properly.

I. The LBD Story

In a 2013 roundtable discussion for *The Nerdist*'s Writers Panel podcast, the writing staff of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* explained that they reworked the chapters of Austen's novel into month-long narrative arcs. This decision, according to LBD writer Margaret Dunlop, was "an artefact of production… because [they] would shoot a month's worth of content at a time" (Blacker, 2013). Consequently, a close reading of LBD can follow these narrative subsections, which aligned with the real-world passage of time from April 2012 to March 2013. LBD's complementary YouTube channels for Lydia, Darcy (via Pemberley Digital), and Collins & Collins also followed the real-world calendar and provided useful parallels and counterpoints to Lizzie's videos and the month-long narrative arcs.

Lizzie's story begins on 9 April 2012, with the release of her first YouTube vlog. There is an immediate connection to Austen and *Pride and Prejudice*, because Lizzie starts her vlog by reciting the now-famous opening sentence of the novel: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen, 2012, loc. 523; Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012l). Whereas Austen was being ironic and setting up the novel's recurring questions about "what kind of truth gets acknowledged and what kind remains unsaid" (Brownstein, 2011, loc. 454), Lizzie mocks the words as ridiculous, especially given that they appear on a tee-shirt she received from her mother. Thus, LBD begins both by signalling its connection to its source material and clearly demonstrating that its main character will be inspired by Elizabeth Bennet, rather than a faithful reproduction. LBD's first narrative arc, as depicted in episodes one through seven, introduces readers to Lizzie, her sisters Jane and Lydia, her best friend Charlotte, and through the use of costumes and dramatised re-enactments, off-screen characters such as Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, the mysterious new neighbour, Bing Lee, and Bing's friend Darcy. The first arc ends with Lizzie recalling her disastrous first interactions with Darcy at a mutual friend's wedding, a pivotal moment in the story which helps establish Lizzie's emphatic dislike of Darcy.

The second narrative arc, depicted in episodes eight through 16, provides additional insight into Lizzie's relationships with her two sisters. These videos help highlight Lizzie's strong bond with

Jane and her (occasionally harsh) judgment of Lydia. The second arc also reinforces the idea that Lizzie presents a biased perspective in her videos. For example, in episode 15, aptly titled "Lizzie Bennet is in Denial," Jane and Charlotte temporarily take over Lizzie's YouTube channel because they feel Lizzie isn't "being particularly comprehensive with her commentary regarding recent events" and that "her last video was a bit inaccurate" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012i). Charlotte justifies this takeover as a necessary step to "reveal the truth to all you lovely viewers" (ibid), which suggests to the audience that readers need to be cautious about accepting Lizzie's statements as fact. LBD's third narrative arc, consisting of episodes 17 through 26, further explores the dynamics between Lizzie and Lydia by emphasising the differences in their personalities and behaviours. This provides the foundation for their eventual estrangement and reconciliation later in the narrative. The third arc ends with Lizzie's videos recorded at VidCon and the news that the Bennet family home will be undergoing renovations, thus necessitating a temporary relocation.

The fourth narrative arc of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is also known as "The Netherfield Arc," as it portrays Lizzie and Jane's extended stay at Bing Lee's home, named Netherfield because Bingley's estate in Austen's novel was so named. These videos, which include episodes 27 through 35, feature the first on-screen appearances of Bing Lee and Caroline Lee, as well as Lizzie's contentious interactions with Darcy, who remains off-screen for now. Caroline's debut on the vlog comes as she reveals that she is aware of Lizzie's YouTube channel and wants to help Lizzie recount different events. The resulting videos, however, often show Lizzie ranting against Darcy, which reinforces the idea of Lizzie as an unreliable narrator and suggests to readers that Caroline has ulterior motives. Bing, meanwhile, believes Lizzie is recording a video letter to Charlotte and is not unaware that Lizzie uploads the videos featuring him to the Internet. Following his first appearance, Lizzie struggles to determine the ethical boundaries of vlogging while giving her viewers the content they want. While Lizzie and Jane engage with the Lee siblings and Darcy, Lydia begins vlogging on her own YouTube channel and recounts her adventures with her cousin Mary. These videos have an amateur aesthetic, giving readers the impression that Lydia recorded them spontaneously with her mobile phone. This creates a distinction between Lydia's relaxed and impromptu videos and the increasingly polished look of Lizzie's videos.

The fifth and sixth narrative arcs sees Lizzie and Jane return to their home, while introducing new characters and conflicts. This series of videos, as portrayed in episodes 36 through 42, includes LBD's modern update on Collins' proposal to Lizzie, then Charlotte. In this contemporary adaptation, Collins makes a business proposal to Lizzie and offers her a job at his media company. When Lizzie turns the offer down, Collins asks Charlotte and she accepts, sparking an on-screen argument between Lizzie and her best friend. In addition to illustrating the ideological differences between these two characters, Lizzie's fight with Charlotte emphasises the inherent flaws with Lizzie's perspective. At one point, Lizzie accuses Charlotte of "throwing away [her] dreams," to which Charlotte curtly replies, "what do you know about my dreams?" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012ab). In a later video, Lizzie admits that she "didn't realise [Charlotte] was so unhappy" before she concedes that she "should have known [Charlotte] was unhappy" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012ac). As Lizzie adjusts to her new normal without her best friend, episodes 43 through 50 include the on-screen introduction of George Wickham, which furthers Lizzie's prejudice against Darcy. The vlogs in this part of LBD also recount Bing's birthday party and his subsequent, sudden decision to end his relationship with Jane. At the end of the sixth narrative arc, Bing, Caroline, Darcy, Charlotte, Jane, and Wickham have all left town for various reasons and Lizzie contemplates the need to move on herself.

Episodes 51 through 59 mark the first part of the "Hunsford" narrative arc, in which Lizzie reconciles with Charlotte and begins an independent study project shadowing Charlotte at her new job. In Austen's original novel, Hunsford is the name of the village and parish to which Charlotte and Mr. Collins have moved, following their wedding, and where Elizabeth travels to visit with them. LBD's adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* mirrors this section of the story with Lizzie's time at Charlotte's company, and informally naming this part of Lizzie's narrative the "Hunsford" arc reinforces the literary web series' connection with its social material. The most important part of this arc comes when Lizzie learns about Darcy's role in ending Jane and Bing's relationship. This revelation strengthens Lizzie's certainty that Darcy is not a good person, causing her to proclaim that she "hates him… more than ever" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012s). Episode 59 concludes with Lizzie vowing to avoid "that slimy, unfeeling, sociopathic robot" just as Darcy appears in the frame of the camera and interrupts her (ibid). Meanwhile, with both of

her sisters away from home, Lydia returns to making her own vlogs in their absence. These videos (episodes eight through 14 on her YouTube channel) highlight Lydia's loneliness and rash decision-making. In episode 13, for instance, readers discover that Lydia travelled to Los Angeles to visit Jane without informing their parents first. Lydia's vulnerabilities are on display as she explains her decision, telling Jane, "I missed you!" and "Mom… won't listen" (The Lydia Bennet, 2012d).

The narrator of *Pride and Prejudice* points out that "angry people are not always wise" (Austen, 2012, loc. 5307), and this is a lesson both Lizzie and Darcy learn at the start of the eighth narrative arc, which comprises the second part of the Hunsford arc. Episode 60 marks a significant milestone in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*: the first on-screen appearance of Darcy, a character long discussed but previously unseen. In this vlog, Darcy professes his love for Lizzie, who is taken aback and quickly rebuffs him, saying "those feelings are not mutual" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012c). Their confrontation ends when Lizzie inadvertently reveals the existence of her YouTube channels and videos, of which Darcy was not aware. The subsequent videos in this arc show Lizzie beginning to rethink her assumptions and prejudices about Darcy, as well as realising that Caroline's friendliness earlier in the narrative had been contrived. Throughout the arc, Lydia continues to update her own YouTube channel with vlogs as she returns home and faces the consequences of her decision to visit Jane.

The ninth narrative arc of LBD (episodes 69 through 76) reunites the Bennet sisters and Charlotte for the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. It also gives Lizzie the opportunity to face some uncomfortable truths regarding her anxiety "about leaving home before [she is] ready" and to consider Jane's suggestion that "maybe it's time for you to make a change" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012ad). This conversation eventually leads Lizzie to "leave the nest" and "find where [she's] supposed to be" by accepting a job shadowing opportunity in San Francisco (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012y). At the same time, however, Lizzie's birthday gift to Lydia sparks an argument between the sisters, which leads to their estrangement and Lizzie's declaration that she's "washing my hands of the whole thing" with regards to Lydia (ibid). Lydia, meanwhile, uses her YouTube channel to lash out at Lizzie, offering sarcastic advice and angrily telling Lizzie to "stop thinking you're better than everyone else" (The Lydia Bennet, 2012c). Lizzie and

Lydia remain in conflict and separated as the narrative arc ends, with their relationship left in an uncertain state.

Episode 77 signals the start of the Pemberley narrative arc, so named because Lizzie's job shadow opportunity takes place at Darcy's company, Pemberley Digital. These videos mirror Elizabeth's visit to Darcy's estate in Austen's novel, and offer readers a glimpse of Lizzie and Darcy's growing understanding of each other. This portion of the LBD narrative also introduces Darcy's younger sister, Gigi, and the details of her previous interactions with Wickham. Bing makes another appearance and finally realises that Lizzie has not been filming video messages to Charlotte all this time. As Lizzie and Darcy begin to move beyond their past encounters and develop a friendship, Lydia's vlogs depict her new relationship with George Wickham and its toll on her personality. It is here, in this tenth narrative arc, that the distinctions between Lizzie and Lydia are particularly striking. At the beginning of LBD, Lydia appears bold and colourful, with a vibrant, outgoing personality, while Lizzie is more reserved. At Pemberley, however, Lizzie seems to relax and enjoy herself as she gets to know Darcy in a new way. In contrast, episodes 23 through 29 on Lydia's YouTube channel portray Lydia's increasing isolation from her family and friends, as well as the drastic changes to her personality arising from Wickham's influence. The arc ends when Lizzie learns about Lydia's sex tape and Wickham's plans to sell it online, which forces her time at Pemberley to end prematurely.

The eleventh narrative arc represents the emotional climax of the LBD story, as Lizzie, Lydia, and the rest of their family deal with the repercussions of Wickham's exploitation of Lydia. Episodes 85 through 92 also emphasise Lizzie finally confronting and admitting her failures, particularly in relation to her younger sister. In episode 87, Lizzie confesses that "sometimes [she] feels so clever and rational and appropriately analytical about the world around me," but with Lydia, she feels "so incredibly useless" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2013a). When Lydia then breaks down on camera, Lizzie fiercely reassures her sister that "you are not alone" before apologising: "I'm sorry I wasn't there before. I'm sorry I didn't understand. But I love you" (ibid). As Lizzie and Lydia begin to repair their relationship, the Pemberley Digital YouTube channel features Gigi demonstrating the company's newest technology. Through these vlogs, readers learn what Lizzie does not yet know: Darcy is using his resources to locate George

Wickham and prevent the release of Lydia's sex tape, which is eventually what occurs. The arc ends with Bing returning to apologise to Jane, before they reconcile and relocate to New York City for Jane's new job.

In the twelfth and final narrative arc in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, portrayed in episodes 93 through 100, Lizzie spends a lot of time using her vlogs as a way to sort through her feelings about recent events. She and Lydia learn that Darcy is responsible for shutting down the sex tape website, and Lizzie struggles to make sense of his actions in light of her abrupt departure from Pemberley and their tumultuous relationship. While Charlotte returns to offer Lizzie some advice and comfort, an unexpected confrontation with Caroline indirectly leads to Darcy's reappearance, a mutual declaration of love, and the long-awaited start of Lizzie and Darcy's romance. As Lizzie and Darcy make plans for the future, Lizzie decides to end her videos, commenting that her time as a YouTube vlogger "has been a grand chapter in my life… [but] now it's time to move on to the next thing" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2013h). Interestingly, Darcy does not appear in the final video, but Lydia and Charlotte do, reinforcing the idea that Lizzie's relationships with her sisters and best friend hold just as much importance in the LBD version of the story as does her relationship with Darcy. Though Lizzie does mention that there are some decisions she wishes she could change, she also says she is grateful for the experiences depicted in her videos. Episode 100 concludes with Lizzie's final sign-off: "My name is Lizzie Bennet and thank you for watching my videos" (ibid).

II. Creation and Production

LBD was "the first and so far, the most successful literary adaptation expressly produced on and for YouTube" (Jandl, 2015, p. 168), and is one of the few literary web series to garner widespread attention from mainstream press outlets. Articles about the narrative appeared in publications such as *Time Magazine*, *USA Today*, *The Huffington Post*, and *The Guardian* ("Press," 2014). LBD is also one of the first literary web series to win a Primetime Emmy Award, receiving the distinction of being the Best Original Interactive Programme for 2013. LBD's success can also be traced to co-creator Hank Green who, by 2012, had earned a degree of fame through a number of online video projects and platforms. Green and his brother John are

also known as "The Vlogbrothers" due to a 2007 experiment through which they gave up all forms of textual communication in favour of communicating entirely through video blogs for a year. The Green brothers publicly shared these vlogs on YouTube and other social media sites, which resulted in the development of both the Vlogbrothers brand (which includes several YouTube channels and creative projects) and a dedicated fan base. It was this existing group of fans that Hank Green leveraged when *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* first launched. On 12 April 2012, Green devoted his daily "Vlogbrothers" video to introducing his latest project, a multimedia, multi-platform update of Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, which had been released a few days prior on 9 April 2012. In his video, Green explained that he wanted to "do something no one had ever done before – an adaptation in online video" and take "a previous work and [transfer] it into this new media," the new media in question being social, networked, digital media sites such as YouTube (Vlogbrothers, 2012). Green chose *Pride and Prejudice* in part because the novel was a favourite of his wife's, and in part because it provided a "very dialogue-based and very character-based" narrative that would not require an extensive (or expensive) production (Vlogbrothers, 2012).

While Green was well-known within the YouTube community, he freely admitted he had little experience producing a narrative with actors, camera operators, and other technical aspects, explaining, "I had the idea that it would be cool to convert a piece that was in the public domain into a video blog, but it was just an idea. I didn't have any way to execute it" (Miller, 2012). However, Bernie Su, a writer, director, and producer, did have the requisite experience, having won awards for a previous web series. As he was based in Los Angeles, he also had several contacts within the United States' entertainment industry. After meeting, Green and Su moved forward with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, with Su serving as the narrative's executive producer, head writer, and showrunner. Over time, other members of the production staff joined the project as LBD expanded, some due to their connections with Green and Su, others because of their specific area of expertise. The production and writing staff eventually included producer Jenni Powell, producer and writer Margaret Dunlap, transmedia producer Jay Bushman, writers Kate Rorick, Anne Toole, and Rachel Kiley, and transmedia editor Alexandra Edwards. The group worked collaboratively to leverage each writer's individual skills for different aspects of the

story because, as Dunlap pointed out, each individual "brings a different voice" to the story (Blacker, 2013).

Though LBD existed exclusively online during its initial release, towards the end of the narrative, in early 2013, a vocal portion of LBD's audience began to ask about the possibility of a physical DVD set. While Green and Su had their own reservations about taking a story created for the Internet and transforming it into a more traditional format, fans of LBD clearly expressed their preference to offer financial support to the team and project through a DVD purchase. Consequently, at the end of March 2013, as the LBD narrative was coming to its initial end, Green and Su launched a Kickstarter campaign to fund the production of the DVDs, commentary tracks for each YouTube video, and a short, spin-off narrative based on Austen's unfinished novel, *Sanditon*. The campaign exceeded all expectations; fans and backers raised the initial goal of $60,000 in just a few hours. By the time the campaign closed, some 7,000 LBD supporters had provided more than $450,000 to finance the project, an amount that represented 770% of the original goal (Pemberley Digital, 2013). The success of the crowdfunding campaign also helped extend the narrative beyond its original lifespan, keeping the story open in many ways. For example, in late March 2013, after video 100 aired on YouTube, Bushman provided fans and readers with an epilogue on Lizzie's Twitter feed. In a series of text and image tweets, Lizzie and her friends celebrate recent events, with fans treated to photos of Lizzie and Darcy's nascent relationship. Shortly thereafter, the success of LBD inspired the production team to leverage that success to start production on two spin-off literary web series featuring secondary characters from LBD. Bushman and Dunlop developed the first spin-off, *Welcome to Sanditon* (WTS), which was based on the aforementioned Austen novel *Sanditon* and featured Gigi Darcy in the role of the main character.[5] *Welcome to Sanditon* released in the summer of 2013 and was intended as a bridge between LBD and the second spin-off, *Emma Approved* (EA). Produced by Su and Green, *Emma Approved* adapted Austen's novel *Emma* in a similar manner as LBD and included LBD's Caroline Lee in a supporting role. Though Lizzie herself did not appear in either *Welcome to Sanditon* or *Emma Approved*, the inclusion of other LBD characters and sly references clearly placed these narratives in the same storyworld.

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[5] In August 2019, ITV began airing its own version of *Sanditon*, written by well-known screenwriter and Austen adapter Andrew Davies (Hughes, 2019).

Additionally, the production team leveraged the Twitter and YouTube accounts for Lizzie, Lydia, Jane, and others to provide readers and fans with glimpses into Lizzie's life, giving the impression that she continued to live her life. In March 2014, for instance, Lizzie's Twitter account became active again, with a week's worth of tweets showing Lizzie and Lydia packing their belongings as their parents prepare to sell their house. These short vignettes, crafted as part of the 2014 Twitter Fiction Festival, marked the one-year anniversary of LBD's original end point and gave readers and fans an opportunity to imagine how Lizzie's life might be unfolding ("Twitter Fiction," 2019). The small glimpses into Lizzie's life were not limited to Twitter, either. Shortly after the March 2014 tweets were published, Su released two "bonus" videos on YouTube featuring Lizzie and Darcy answering reader questions. These videos coincided with the publication of the first of two novels that complemented the original LBD narrative. The first book, *The Secret Diary of Lizzie Bennet,* is a novelisation of the LBD narrative written by Su and Rorick that was published in June 2014. The novel, told through more traditional diary entries, tells essentially the same story as Lizzie's YouTube videos, albeit in a different format, and with additional details from events that occurred off-camera, such as the wedding at which Lizzie and Darcy first meet (Cooper, 2014). In addition, the e-book version of the novel includes hyperlinks to each specific YouTube video on Lizzie's channels for those readers with browser-enabled e-readers. The second book was published in September 2015. *The Epic Adventures of Lydia Bennet*, written by Rorick and Kiley, follows Lizzie's younger sister Lydia as she moves on from the events of LBD. This second LBD-branded novel represents entirely new content from the LBD production team as it expands Austen's characters beyond the original *Pride and Prejudice* narrative (Cooper, 2015).

To commemorate the fifth anniversary of LBD's release and target a new group of fans, in March 2017, Pemberley Digital (the company founded by Green and Su after LBD's success) announced that they would be re-releasing Lizzie's YouTube videos. For this re-release, the YouTube videos and accompanying social media posts and publications were shared through Facebook and Instagram. In a Pemberley Digital blog post announcing the anniversary plans, the company points out that the original LBD had "many components spread out across different platforms and then spread out even more across different accounts on those platforms" (Rivkin,

2017). While the initial release of LBD used YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook as the primary platforms for distributing Lizzie's story, the five-year anniversary campaign in 2017 and 2018 relied more heavily on Instagram. The stated goal of the anniversary re-release was to attract fans who may have missed the narrative during its original release, and "by having it all unfold in one place, [they] hope to make things easier for new viewers" (Rivkin, 2017). The decision to shift towards Instagram therefore made sense. Use of photo- and video-sharing applications such as Instagram and Snapchat increased from 2012 to 2018, and there are indications that it will continue to rise. According to the Pew Research Centre's Social Media Reports, roughly 13% of online adults used the Instagram application in 2012. By 2014, that number had doubled to 26% and in the 2018 report, the percentage of adult online Instagram users is approximately 35% (Duggan et al, 2014; Smith and Anderson, 2018). Though the content for the re-release remained the same as the original, with videos posted twice a week in real time (as they were in 2012 and 2013), the reading and viewing experience for fans in 2017 was undoubtedly different since the re-release was limited to one media platform and the original transmedia elements (that is, the portions of the narrative besides Lizzie's YouTube videos) were re-published out of their original context. For example, readers who encountered LBD during the re-release did not have the same opportunities for interaction as 2012-2013 readers. A reader following the narrative in 2012 could send a tweet to Lizzie and potentially receive a reply, strengthening the narrative's depiction of Lizzie as realistic and authentic and reinforcing the reader's sense of immersion in the narrative. In contrast, the 2017 re-release did not include a reactivation of LBD's character accounts on social media, and therefore a reader in 2017 who sent a tweet to Lizzie would not receive a reply. Additionally, the Facebook and Instagram content for the re-release often incorporated the hashtag #lbd5year, clearly distinguishing it from the original release. As later chapters in this thesis will show, readers who experienced LBD through its serial, real-time release in 2012 and 2013 across multiple media platforms were more likely to feel immersed in the narrative and connected to the characters, because Lizzie and her story appeared more realistic and authentic.

III. Narrative Structure

Throughout the initial release of LBD (in 2012 and 2013), Lizzie used her YouTube videos as a diary of sorts, narrating her life and sharing details about different events as they occurred, while a variety of accounts on several different social media platforms supplemented the videos by highlighting parts of the narrative not seen or included in the videos. Among LBD's Twitter accounts, for instance, was an account for Darcy, who actively used the microblogging platform for months before he ever appeared in one of Lizzie's videos. Similarly, Lizzie's older sister, Jane, shared her own interest in fashion by creating photosets for the online community Lookbook and image sharing site Pinterest, while Lizzie's younger sister Lydia maintained her own YouTube channel with her own video blogs (see figures 1.1 and 1.2. below).
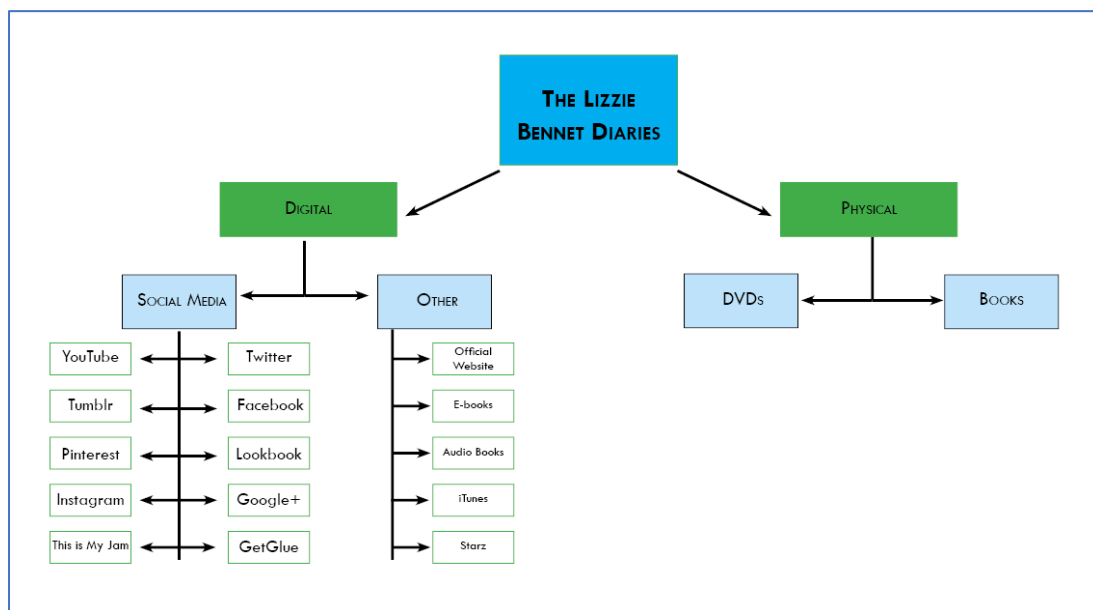
Figure 1.1 - A map of LBD's various components and narrative branches.
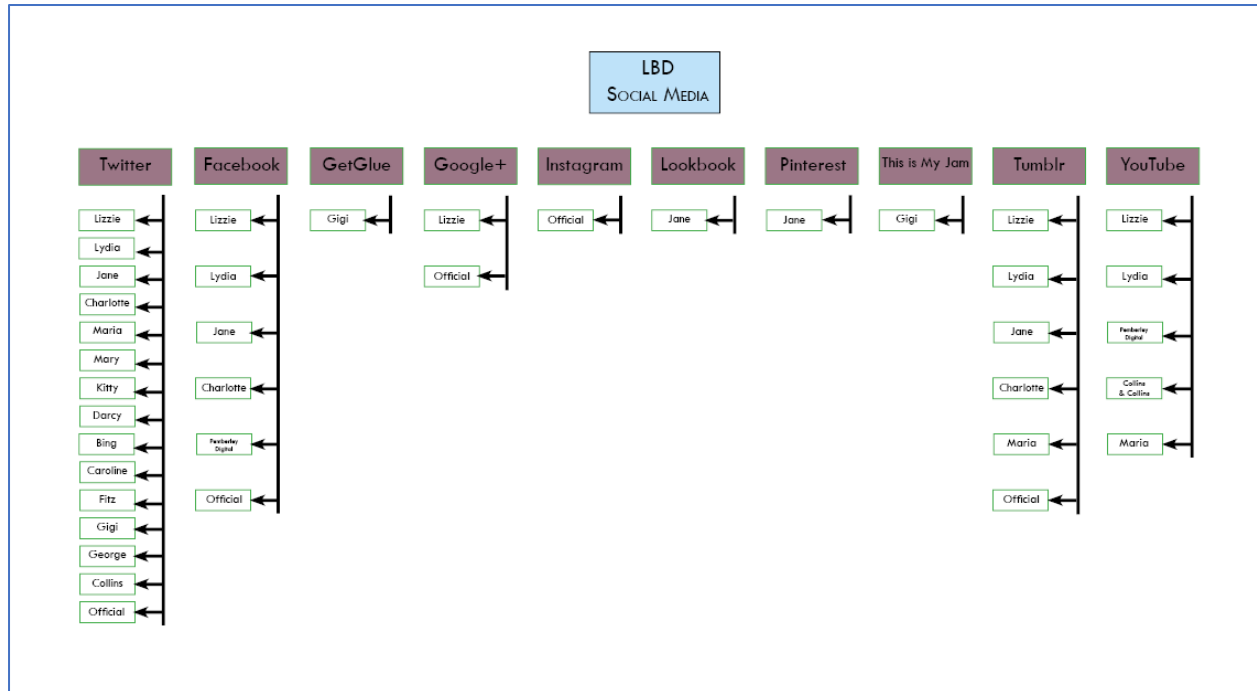
Figure 1.2 - A closer look at LBD's various social media accounts.

By distributing the LBD narrative across different social media networks and websites, the producers and writers of LBD created what Ryan (2015b, p. 2) calls a "transmedia storyworld," a creation in which the individual pieces of a story combine to form a more complete narrative experience. For the LBD production team, the phrase "transmedia" came to define any part of the narrative other than Lizzie's YouTube videos, meaning the Twitter feeds, the Tumblr blogs, the additional YouTube channels and the other social media accounts.[6] As previously stated, Lizzie's videos served as the narrative's centre, with the writers crafting the videos to convey a complete story with a beginning, middle, and end (albeit one with certain limitations given the video diary format). However, Transmedia Producer Bushman has repeatedly asserted in several interviews his belief that a reader's narrative experience is incomplete "if you don't consume all of the transmedia content" (Tepper, 2015). This is exemplified by LBD's "digital breadcrumbs," or little hints and nods to well-known plot points in Austen's novel. The digital breadcrumbs foreshadowed events that either had not yet occurred in Lizzie's videos or did not appear in a

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[6] Accordingly, for the purposes of this section, "transmedia" and "transmedia elements" will refer, generally, to any part of the LBD narrative other than Lizzie's YouTube videos. Chapter 2 offers an in-depth examination of transmedia narratives and storytelling.

video at all. Early in the narrative, for instance, the characters Bing, Caroline, and Darcy exchanged messages on Twitter while attending a wedding:

> **@bingliest:** @wmdarcy put your phone down and go dance with somebody.
> **@wmdarcy:** @bingliest not likely.
> **@that_caroline:** @wmdarcy nice catch! #awkward
> **@bingliest:** @wmdarcy I take it back. you should definitely stay off the dance floor.
> (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012b)

The content of the tweets implies that Darcy caught the garter during the wedding's reception and then danced with someone. Shortly after these tweets were published on Twitter, Lizzie used one of her videos to relate to readers that she was present at the same wedding, caught the bouquet, and thus was the person dancing with Darcy (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012w). While reading the Twitter conversation was not necessary to understand or enjoy Lizzie's videos, doing so provided additional context and information – especially for those readers already familiar with *Pride and Prejudice*. Fans of Austen's novel likely would have been able to recognise Lizzie and Darcy's dance as their infamous first meeting, which is a crucial part of the narrative and vital to the development of Lizzie and Darcy's relationship. Since Lizzie's videos featured Lizzie speaking directly to her audience, in a video-diary format, readers who only viewed the video did not have the opportunity to see or read Darcy's reaction to the meeting. Through the conversation on Twitter, however, LBD provided readers with Darcy's perspective on events, contributing to the creation of an in-depth "interactive storyworld" that allowed readers to fully immerse themselves in the LBD narrative (Swallow Prior, 2013). Consequently, the parts of the LBD narrative designated as transmedia (i.e., the aforementioned Twitter feeds, Tumblr blogs and so forth) were important complements to Lizzie's YouTube videos by offering readers alternative perspectives on the narrative's events, expanding upon certain parts of Austen's original plot, and providing readers with opportunities for interactivity and participation.

According to Kelly (2002, p.124), Austen's work was "one version of the social novel," a nineteenth-century literary genre that provided "accurate observation and description of the general life… [of] a particular social or working community" (Williams, 2001, p. 306). In many ways, LBD can also be considered a social novel, although it is social in a different, more contemporary and digital way. As LBD co-creator Bernie Su explains, Lizzie's story was

crafted to "accurately represent" the life of a young adult in the twenty-first century United States (Su, 2012b). Accordingly, LBD offered readers live, real-time interaction and engagement with the narrative, immersing them in Lizzie's world and encouraging the development of social connections between readers and narrative, all while tapping into audience's knowledge of and connection to the source material. LBD therefore offers readers an experience that extends beyond the act of reading a text digitally (i.e., on a Kindle or other e-reader) and the act of consuming a modern adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (such as *Bridget Jones' Diary*). Consequently, later chapters in this thesis will highlight the analysis of LBD readers' responses to survey and interview questions, which will show that, for many readers of LBD, their experience of the narrative was significant, long-lasting, and contributed to the creation of narratively-constructed digital intimacy.

Thesis Structure

In Chapter 2 of this thesis, "Theoretical Foundations of Literary Web Series," I discuss the theoretical foundations of and context for the literary web series genre. First, I define literary web series and outline their features, highlighting the ways in which they draw on a variety of storytelling methods. I then explain how media convergence, and specifically textual and social convergence, and participatory cultures have helped lead to the creation of literary web series. Following this, I discuss literary web series as transmedia narratives and explore how these stories leverage the use of multiple media platforms, drawing on research from Dena (2009), Jenkins (2006a; 2007; 2011), and Ryan (2013; 2015b). Defining transmedia storytelling is important because while literary web series include elements from several different modes of storytelling, they often intentionally promote themselves as transmedia narratives. The final section of Chapter 2 will illustrate the overlaps between literary web series, fanfiction, and digital literature, arguing that these narratives are both media artefacts and literary objects.

In Chapter 3, "Agency and Affordances in Literary Web Series," I first position literary web series in relation to Murray (2017)'s characteristic pleasures of digital literature: agency, immersion, and transformation. I then explain in detail the first primary method of meaning-making in literary web series: the leveraging of sociotechnical affordances on social media

platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr to actively invite readers into the narrative and provide them with a sense of agency. Using Bucher and Helmond (2017)'s distinction between high-level and low-level affordances, I explore the specific features of YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr and highlight how the features of these sites encourage readers of literary web series to share, converse, and create. I conclude Chapter 3 by linking sociotechnical affordances with Chambers' (2013) concept of mediated intimacy, pointing out that the structures of social media sites are designed to facilitate intimate connections between users. This chapter will also show how those connections can form between readers and literary web series. Chapter 4, "Immersion and Resonance in Literary Web Series," will outline two other methods of meaning-making in literary web series: the creation of spatial, temporal, and emotional immersion; and the capitalisation and strengthening of the source material's literary resonance with readers, such that it emphasises readers' ongoing emotional attachments to certain texts. The sections on immersion will draw from Ryan (2015a), while work from Stockwell (2009a; 2009b) provides the foundation for the resonance sections. Chapter 4 will demonstrate that the methods of meaning-making in literary web series help readers connect and engage with the narrative on a deeper level and foster the development of intimate narrative experiences that are arguably unique to the literary web series genre. Throughout the chapter, research conducted by Abidin (2013; 2015), Baym (2010; 2018), Chambers (2013; 2017), Raun et al (2018) and others will help illustrate how the agency, immersion, and resonance found in a narrative such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* can create deeply meaningful and long-lasting intimate connections for readers. Examples from LBD and other literary web series will appear throughout Chapters 3 and 4.

In Chapter 5, I will present my methodologies and data analysis. This chapter will include an overview of the research paradigms that informed data collection, the collection methods used, and both qualitative and quantitative results of the reader survey and interviews. Chapter 5 will also highlight the major themes and trends arising from the surveys and interviews. This, in turn, will help support the contentions made in Chapters 3 and 4, which argue that literary web series use specific methods of meaning-making to blur the lines between the reader and the story and foster the development of intimacy between readers and fictional characters.

Chapter 6 is titled "Narratively-Constructed Digital Intimacy in Literary Web Series" and will bring the threads of the previous chapters together to propose that literary web series can offer readers a new kind of narrative experience – an experience with the potential to generate narratively-constructed digital intimacy, a type of intimacy that incorporates elements of mediated and narrative intimacies, and para-social interactions. This chapter will define my concept of narratively-constructed digital intimacy by highlighting its key overlaps with existing ideas from Chambers (2013), Abidin (2015, by way of Horton and Wohl, 1979) and Day (2013). Then, using the data collected from the survey and interviews, this chapter will illustrate how *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* offered readers a long-lasting, meaningful connection to the text and to other readers, resulting in the creation of narratively-constructed digital intimacy. Chapter 7, "Conclusion," will complete the thesis with a review and summation of the key ideas from this research project, emphasising how literary web series like LBD help exemplify contemporary digital media consumption practices and invite us to rethink what it means to read in digital spaces. This final chapter will also acknowledge the limitations of the study, using the challenges encountered as entry points into potential future research. The conclusion will address the need for additional empirical data pertaining to other literary web series and consider possible avenues for quantitative research with these media-literary hybrids.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Foundations of Literary Web Series

Preview

In this chapter, I provide the theoretical foundations of and context for the creation of literary web series. First, I define literary web series and outline key features incorporated from a variety of storytelling methods, with reference to existing research published by Berryman (2017), Kuhn (2014), Kuznetsova (2014), and Stein (2016a). I then provide a brief overview of media convergence (per Jenkins, 2001, 2006a; Meikle and Young, 2011; and Murdock, 2000), before focusing specifically on textual and social convergence, as well as participatory cultures (referencing Delwiche and Henderson, 2013; and Jenkins et al, 2009), to illustrate the shifts and changes that have taken place within media that have enabled the growth of the literary web series genre online. Following this, I discuss literary web series as transmedia narratives; though literary web series draw inspiration from multiple forms of storytelling, most (including *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*) promote themselves as transmedia narrative and therefore, an understanding of broader transmedia concepts as well as the ways in which literary web series adopt the conventions of transmedia storytelling is warranted. The discussions in this section draw from the work of Dena (2009; 2019), Harvey (2014), Jenkins (2007; 2011; 2019) and Ryan (2013; 2015b). I conclude this chapter with an exploration of the connections between literary web series, fanfiction, and digital (electronic) literature, using Busse (2017) and Jamison (2013)'s definitions of fanfiction and Hayles' (2008) definition of digital literature. While the first three sections of this chapter position literary web series as media objects, the final section will highlight how literary web series also function as literary texts, and explain why this dual categorisation is important.

Defining Literary Web Series

In her chapter about *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* for the *Seeing Fans* edited collection (Bennett and Booth, 2016), Louisa Stein describes literary web series as a "rapidly evolving form" of web series that feature "famed… literary figures… sharing their lives through the platforms of contemporary digital culture" (2016a, p. 169). Here, Stein refers to these narratives as "vlog-

style literary adaptations" because they "retell literary classics from a first person perspective" (ibid). Other terms used for this genre include "social media fictions," "new media adaptations," "literary adaptation web series" and, of course, literary (inspired) web series. This particular genre of narrative "borrows the [stories], characters, and morals of classic works of literature, and modernizes them to fit contemporary settings and platforms" (Berryman, 2017, p. 31). The origin of the term "literary (inspired) web series" is currently unknown, as my extensive attempts to discover its genesis did not yield any definitive answers. Google search results show the term gaining popularity in 2014, which aligns with the generally accepted peak of the literary web series trend. At varying times throughout 2014, *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre*, *Carmilla*, *Emma Approved*, *Frankenstein, M.D.*, *Green Gable Fables*, *The March Family Letters*, *The New Adventures of Peter and Wendy*, and *Nothing Much To Do* were among the literary web series releasing new content and videos. However, most creators within the literary web series genre point to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (LBD), which debuted in April 2012, as the initiator of this specific type of narrative. Though LBD did receive attention from mainstream national publications such as *Time Magazine* and the *USA Today* newspaper soon after its initial release in April 2012 ("Press," 2015), the earliest appearance of the term "literary inspired web series" in a journalistic publication seems to be an October 2013 article on *Hypable*, an entertainment and popular culture website (Whyte, 2013d). LBD Transmedia Editor Alexandra Edwards mentions first seeing the term used by the "LBD Care Centre" Tumblr; an LBD fan created this blog in February 2013 and renamed it the "Literary Webseries Centre" in 2016 (Edwards, 2019; Watson, 2017). While the creator of the Tumblr does not claim credit for coining the term, a perusal of the blog's archives does show the "literary inspired web series" term appearing in blog posts in 2013 and 2014, as well as in posts published in more recent years (LIWCenter, 2019). Based on these comments from Edwards and the creator of the Literary Webseries Centre, it appears that the "literary inspired web series" phrase evolved, at least in part, within fan spaces on Tumblr.

Skains suggests that "digital texts are frequently multimodal, creating meaning through text, image, sound and movement" (2019a, p. 137). A literary web series such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, as a multimodal digital text, therefore uses video, images, and audio alongside text to craft its narrative and create meaning. Literary web series also draw on elements and conventions

from multiple forms of storytelling, including web series, broadcast television programmes, personal vlogs, transmedia narratives, and adaptations. For instance, both web series in general and literary web series specifically are "audio-visual forms… that are serial, fictional, and have the basic structure of a narrative [and] are produced exclusively for Internet platforms" (Kuhn, 2014, p. 143). In many ways, literary web series evoke the hypertext "web soaps" Murray wrote about in the first edition of *Hamlet on the Holodeck*. According to Murray, web soaps "paved the way for today's… proliferating and increasingly ambitious independent web serials" (2017, p. 77). These stories allow readers to "hop through the various [parts of the narrative] to compare different versions of the same event" and to "participate in the story by posting opinions, advice, or their own stories to a bulletin board" (Murray, 2017, p. 63). Web series can be as diverse and varied as any other form of narrative, but they do share some basic characteristics.[7] According to Kuhn, because web series are specifically intended to be dispersed and consumed online, "one of the central characteristics… is that the episodes are hardly ever longer than 15 minutes; three to ten minutes is the average" (2014, p. 144). Shorter episodes or instalments make it easier for the audience to consume the narrative in pieces, but also allow for binge-watching if desired. The short length of web series' episodes most likely stems from the initial design and structure of YouTube, which hosted many of the first web series. In YouTube's early years, the platform established a time limit on video uploads, restricting users to videos of 10 minutes; this was later extended to 15 minutes (Maryrose 2006; Lowensohn 2010). Though current users can now upload longer videos after verifying their account, the convention of the short video remains. Short video length is also characteristic of contemporary consumption practices online. Carr (2008) argues that consuming content on the Internet, which often involves "hyperlinks, blinking ads, and other digital gewgaws" can "scatter our attention and diffuse our concentration," making it more difficult to give longer videos or blog posts our full attention. Additionally, shorter videos are easier for audiences to consume on the smaller screens of mobile phones and tablets, enabling audiences to stay updated on the narrative "as they go about their daily lives, intertwining their experience of the fiction with their day-to-day routines" (Berryman, 2017, p. 116).

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[7] Kuhn (2014) suggests that the direct-to-camera vlog style often associated with web series is largely due to the success of *Lonelygirl15*, which, as detailed in Chapter 1, helped create and set standards for web series.

Another aspect of web series that contributes to the convention of short video lengths is their status as serial stories. The literature and entertainment industries often make a distinction between series and serials: a series is usually a set of objects or texts that share common features with each individual object or text containing a complete narrative, while a serial is usually a text "issued in successive instalments" over time (Oxford, 2019e). Thus, Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories are a series, as each story or novel offers a full narrative that can stand on its own and be read in any order. Dickens, in contrast, was primarily a serial novelist, frequently publishing his novels in monthly or weekly instalments. Readers would have to follow along as the instalments were published and read them chronologically in order to understand the narrative as a whole (Winter, 2011). Within the world of television, soap operas and dramas are often serial, with daily or weekly episodes conveying part of a larger story told across several months or years. Web series often adopt this convention of broadcast television, as they are "inherently episodic, consisting of [content] that is published over time" and they "report events as they unfold" (Page, 2013, p. 35; p. 40). For instance, in *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre*, Jane would post a YouTube video every Friday, while in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, Lizzie posted her videos on Mondays and Thursdays. As a result, literary web series become a kind of "performance [where] the story is being created line by line" (Kuznetsova, 2014, p. 273). Serialisation also gives readers a choice – wait until the narrative concludes and consume it all at once, or "tune into the story at the precise time and read it [piece by piece] becoming a participator of a live show" (Kuznetsova, 2014, p. 273).

Web series frequently use close-up shots and imitate the vlog (video blog) style video. In many web series, and literary web series in particular, "the protagonists are typically characterised as vloggers," with characters looking into the camera and "addressing the supposed audience directly" (Berryman, 2017, p. 32; Kuhn, 2014, p. 145). While vlogs themselves may be classified as a range of types, web series most often resemble the conversational or confessional vlog, which mimics face-to-face communication by having the vlogger address the unseen audience. The characters relate events, feelings, and thoughts in the larger context of the narrative. Consider this exchange between Lizzie and Lydia in the first episode of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, when Lydia interrupts Lizzie's first video:

Figure 2.1: Lydia discovers Lizzie making her first video (Lizzie Bennet Diaries 2012l).

Lydia: Lizzie! Did mom tell you about who just bought that mansion in Netherfield?
Lizzie: Haven't heard a word about it.
Lydia: So this... wait. What are you guys doing?
Lizzie: Makin' a video. Everyone, this is my sister, Lydia.

(Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012l)

When Lizzie introduces Lydia, her gaze is directed at the camera – and, by extension, the audience. Lydia's gaze, which had previously been directed towards Lizzie and Charlotte (who was off-camera), shifts towards the camera as she notices it, and her next words are now focused on the audience of whom she is suddenly aware. Similarly, in the first episode of *Nothing Much To Do*, Beatrice opens the video by saying "hello, people of the Internet!" (The Candle Wasters, 2014a). Conversational vlogs give viewers the sense of "sitting [and] chatting on-on-one with vloggers in their home" (Werner, 2012, p. 50). Since web series use the same techniques and styles as actual vloggers, Kuhn argues for referring to these types of web series as "pseudo-authentic web series" because, while they create a sense of authenticity by "imitating regular video blogging" (2014, p. 143), the characters and stories remain within the fictional realm and are therefore separate from personal vlogs. While the imitation of the conversational vlog tends to be the most popular choice for web series, there are some that "make use of conventions and forms that have been established in television and cinema" (Kuhn, 2014, p. 143), aligning them more closely with broadcast series and films. These types of web series are usually associated with or are extensions of popular television shows that use the web series format to expand the world of the show and provide viewers and fans with content that could not or did not fit within the television narrative (Mittell, 2014).

Literary web series also leverage the "intradiegetic use of cameras, mobiles, chats, video messages, e-mails, short messages, Twitter, Facebook, etc." to extend the narrative beyond YouTube and add content to enrich the story (Kuhn, 2014, p. 145).[8] The video description section of each YouTube video for *Carmilla*, for example, includes hyperlinks to the Twitter and Tumblr accounts for main characters Laura and Carmilla along with the short video description. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* uses the final frame of an episode to embed links to Lizzie's social media accounts and previous videos. Viewers of *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre* are encouraged to follow Jane on Instagram or peruse the Thornfield Exports website (AOJE, 2013a). This intradiegetic content often serves to supplement the narrative found in the YouTube videos; because many literary web series embrace the first-person vlogger format, the story is therefore filtered through that character's perspective, resulting in a (potentially) biased narration. By expanding the narrative to include Twitter, Tumblr, and/or Instagram accounts, literary web series can "express [the] thoughts of different characters and show the story from different angles" which helps create "multiple perspectives of a single story" (Kuznetsova, 2014, p. 273).

In the first half of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, for example, Lizzie devotes a significant portion of her videos to criticisms of Darcy, alternatively describing him as "obnoxious," "boring," "a stuck-up pompous prick," or "a robot with buggy programming for social interaction" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012r; 2012w; 2012p). Darcy's Twitter feed, however, provides readers with a glimpse into his interactions with his friends and family, allowing him to showcase, in his own words, a different side of his personality. In a Twitter exchange with Bing, for instance, Darcy demonstrates his subtle sense of humour when he dryly declares that Bing is so friendly, he "could have a pleasant conversation with a traffic cone" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012q). Later in the narrative, a conversation with his younger sister Gigi reveals his protective nature when he tells Gigi he worries because "I'm your big brother. It's my job" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012n). This intradiegetic content supplements the narrative found in Lizzie's YouTube videos, enabling literary web series to function as transmedia narratives as content is dispersed across multiple

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[8] By dispersing the intradiegetic content across multiple media platforms, literary web series compel readers "to hunt for, interpret and connect the fragments of [the] narrative" (Berryman, 2017, p. 118). Thus, readers of literary web series engage in a "reader-directed, screen-based, computer-assisted" process that Sosnoski (1999, p. 167) and Hayles (2012, p. 61) call "hyper reading."

media platforms. Perhaps most importantly, literary web series have been able to adopt the features of a diverse range of narratives and digital media because of media convergence and a digital environment in which disparate storytelling forms can come together. The next section of this chapter discusses literary web series in relation to the convergent media environment.

Literary Web Series in the Convergent Media Environment

While narratives and storytelling are not new phenomena in any sense, the rapid development of the World Wide Web in the 1980s and 1990s, along with the increase in digital technologies, has introduced new methods of telling stories that grant any would-be storyteller "the ability to combine text with audio-visual, ludic, and hypertext elements" (Skains, 2010, p. 97). Though these "new frontiers for storytelling" (ibid) have continued to evolve over time, their origin can be traced to media convergence and the convergent media environment. Under its broadest definition, convergence refers to a "coming or drawing together" of "things that were previously separate" (Oxford, 2018a; Meikle and Young, 2011, p. 2). When this definition is applied to media, convergence then becomes the combination of once-disparate forms of media (be they companies, content, or platforms) to create something new. Where previously the production of media existed separately and distinct from its consumption, now it "takes place in a collaborative, participatory environment which breaks down the boundaries between producers and consumers" and provides individuals with the opportunity to become "produsers," producers and users both (Bruns, 2006, p. 2). In the convergent media environment, an iPhone is no longer just a phone, but also a camera, a music and video player, an image storage device, a game console, a global positioning system (GPS), and an alarm clock. Additionally, with new platforms, devices, and companies taking shape each year, the convergent media environment adjusts and adapts, "altering the logic by which media industries operate and by which media consumers process" content (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 16). Consider, for example, Netflix, which was founded in 1997 as a mail-order DVD rental service designed to compete with the then-popular video rental chain Blockbuster (Rataul, Tisch, and Zamborsky, 2018). As technology improved and consumer desires shifted, however, Netflix adapted to new opportunities and challenges, eventually shifting from offering DVD rentals to providing an online streaming service and

original content (ibid). As media technologies continue to evolve, consumers and users adapt as well and the concept of media convergence expands and grows to incorporate new ideas.

Thanks to convergence, authors and readers alike can engage with narratives in a variety of new and different ways, whether they choose to interact with each other through social media, use hyperlinks to craft and experience nonlinear story structures, or participate in narrative-focused discussion forums. It is media convergence that has helped create the ideal atmosphere for literary web series. In the convergent media environment, previously separate media forms (i.e., text, audio, video, and image) can come together to form one comprehensive narrative, available on one device. A reader of a literary web series such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* needs only a smartphone to watch Lizzie's videos through a YouTube app, read Darcy's tweets on Twitter, and reblog Lydia's Tumblr post. She is no longer a passive consumer, but an active participant in the narrative, crafting a narrative experience according to her own preferences. Though the development of the literary web series genre owes much to media convergence in general, it is primarily textual (or cultural) convergence and social convergence that have influenced these narratives, as the next section explains.

I. Textual and Social Media Convergence

Media convergence has dramatically altered our current understanding of nearly every aspect of the contemporary media environment. Technological convergence, for instance, has led to the transformation of analogue content into digital data, resulting in a printed text like Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* becoming pieces of digital data that are recombined to create an e-book, a website with hyperlinks, or even an online database.[9] Technological convergence has also helped decentralise and democratise content, such that one only needs an Internet connection and Internet-capable device to access a variety of literary web series from anywhere in the world. Industrial, or economic, convergence, meanwhile, has brought about the "ongoing processes of consolidation" and the "mergers, acquisitions, and partnership agreements" between different media companies (Meikle and Young, 2011, p. 35; Murdock, 2000, p. 38). This has led to

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[9] One such database is *Austen Said*, a project at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, in which the contents of Austen's novels are digitised and encoded to examine patterns of diction with regards to Austen's use of free indirect speech. For more, see http://austen.unl.edu/.

increasingly fewer media companies being responsible for larger percentages of media content produced, as they expand and diversify in an effort to retain audiences and consumers. However, it is the processes of textual and social convergence that have most directly contributed to the creation of literary web series.

Within the convergent media environment, there has been an "explosion of new forms of creativity" (Jenkins, 2001), which often results in the combination of different media forms that alters the traditional understanding of those forms. This is known as cultural or textual convergence. Previously, media forms were usually separate and distinct; audiences could read Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as a printed book, view the feature film adaptation in a cinema, and watch the television miniseries in the comfort of their own home. The convergent digital media environment, however, breaks "the direct link between texts and a particular physical system of delivery and consumption" because "there is no *technical* reason why established media forms need remain separate" (emphasis original; Meikle and Young, 2011, p. 80). As a result, a literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* can exist in multiple parts and multiple forms, spread out across multiple media platforms – the phenomenon better known as transmedia storytelling. Additionally, the convergent media environment actively encourages and invites audiences to engage in textual convergence by providing them with "the tools to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate content" which, in turn, allows users to become "navigators mapping out personal routes" through the digital world (Jenkins, 2001; Murdock, 2000, p. 36). This aspect of textual convergence is also known as remix culture, or as Lessig defines it, "read/write culture" because "if the user has 'read/write' permissions then he is allowed to both read the file and make changes to it," remixing the content into something new (2008, p. 28). Lessig's notion of read/write culture recalls Barthes' contention that "a text is made of multiple writings" and that "the reading of the modern text… consists not in receiving but in writing it anew" (1977, p. 148; p. 153).

As audiences experiment and re-invent their favourite media texts, textual convergence gives rise to new media forms, such as the mash-up (which combines several texts from different sources into one new text), and the digital transmedia narrative, which incorporates audio, text, video, and more into one final overarching story. Though these creative endeavours are not new or

unique to the convergent media environment, they are more easily achievable nowadays, where the tools and techniques audiences need to engage in textual convergence are readily available. Moreover, according to Stein, textual convergence has also contributed to a "heightened feedback loop, with the labour and perspectives of media producers seemingly available to fans and the labour and perspectives of fans seemingly available to producers" (2016, p. 170). Thus, a literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* can listen to reader comments and adjust or adapt the narrative if necessary.

The increased connections between media producers and media consumers form, in part, because the convergent media environment enables users to communicate and collaborate with other individuals across time and space, unbounded by geographic or temporal boundaries. Known as social convergence, this phenomenon "blurs the lines between one-to-one and public communication" and in doing so, "manifests a shift in the way we experience mediated communication" (Meikle and Young, 2011, p. 59). Social networking sites and tools, such as Facebook or Twitter, are the most obvious examples of social convergence. Meikle and Young (2011) suggest that social media sites merge the functions of personal communication (one-to-one communication) and broadcast communication (one to many) to create new methods of interaction. A Facebook status update can be read, "liked," or shared by large groups of friends (with a broadly expansive understanding of the term "friend"), while a tweet on Twitter can be directed towards hundreds or thousands of people, many of whom the user may not even know personally. Thus, thanks to social convergence, media content creators can engage fans in conversation on Twitter, reply to audience questions in YouTube's comments section, or share behind-the-scenes photos on Instagram – all in a public manner that enables anyone to consume the content, regardless of whether they personally follow a particular creator on any given platform.

Furthermore, social convergence contributes to the development and growth of social networks. Where technological convergence creates networks of computers, social convergence creates networks of people, individuals who join together based on shared interests, entertainment preferences, or hobbies (Meikle and Young, 2011, p. 62). For Jenkins (2001), social convergence also implies the "multitasking strategies [required] for navigating" the convergent media

environment, since many social networking sites encourage users to carry on multiple conversations with multiple people at once. Users on Facebook, for instance, can comment on one friend's post while simultaneously chatting with another through the Messenger feature, while Twitter allows users to send tweets to two or more people in the same tweet (see figures 2.2 and 2.3 below).
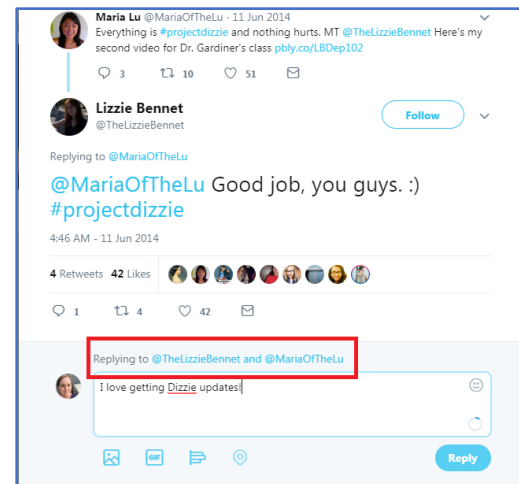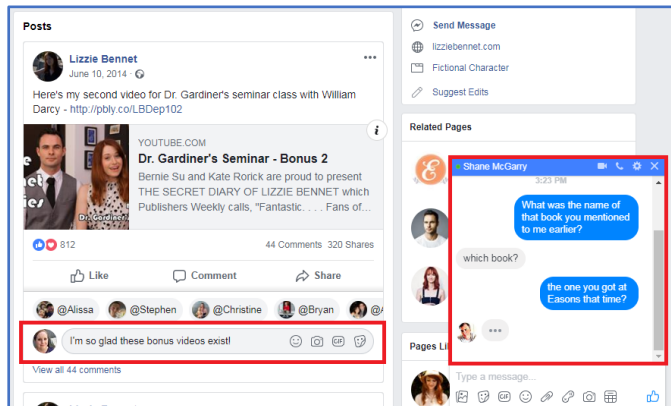
Figure 2.2: (Left) Facebook's mechanisms for communicating with two people at once through comments and chats; Figure 2.3: (Right) Twitter's mechanism for sending a tweet to two or more people at once.

While the term "media convergence" can refer to one specific type of convergence (i.e., technological, industrial, textual, or social), all types of convergence contribute to the convergent media environment as a whole, creating ideal conditions in which to produce and distribute literary web series. However, as previously mentioned in this chapter, textual convergence and social convergence have had the most obvious influence on literary web series. Textual convergence sees different media forms merge and combine, enabling the transformation of print novels into digital narratives that incorporate text, audio, video, and image. Social convergence, meanwhile, encourages the formation of communities and networks structured around interests, rather than geographic location. Thus, audiences of literary web series have increased opportunities to engage directly with the narrative and connect with other like-minded individuals, as they are primarily situated on and make use of social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr (Stein, 2015; 2016a). Together, textual and social convergence

combine to actively invite audiences of literary web series to participate in the narrative through remix tools, fanfiction, original artwork, and the evolution of fan communities.

Indeed, while many digital technologies and media platforms enable and encourage collaboration and participation between users by removing or reducing barriers, social media sites in particular "simplify processes of creation, manipulation, submission and combination, [making] collaboration significantly easier" (Meikle and Young, 2012, pp. 120-121). Thus, readers of literary web series can not only connect with others, they can do so across great distances and time frames for a relatively low cost. In many ways, the convergent media environment is fuelled by the active engagement of its users. Readers of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, for instance, participated in the narrative by commenting on Lizzie's YouTube videos, replying to Lydia's tweets, and sharing Jane's fashion blog posts. The next section of this chapter explores the notion of participatory cultures and how literary web series can function as such cultures.

II. Participatory Cultures

According to Jenkins, active users are largely responsible for helping to drive the distribution of digital media content, in part because of the widespread availability of digital technologies and tools that allow "average consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and re-circulate media content" much more easily and quickly (2006a, p. 1). Thus, in the convergent media environment, users are active participates in many ways, and often seek out opportunities to engage directly with the content they consume and enjoy. In doing so, these users comprise an aspect of the convergent media environment known as a "participatory culture" (Jenkins et al, 2009). A participatory culture is

> A culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal membership whereby what is known by the most experience is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, they care what other people think about what they have created).
>
> (Jenkins et al, 2009, p. 7)

Though most often associated with digital spaces, participatory cultures are not new phenomena. Groups of like-minded individuals coming together for a shared purpose have existed long before the advent of the Internet. What has changed, however, is the ease with which these like-minded individuals can find each other and collaborate – a result of social convergence's creation of personal networks of connections based on interests, rather than geography. Participatory cultures are often as varied and diverse as the users and consumers who populate them, and these communities can provide users with the opportunity to engage in a variety of behaviours. For instance, depending on a specific community or culture's stated intentions, users might choose to affiliate themselves with a particular group or subculture, express themselves creatively, collaborate with others on a task, and circulate or share content with a wide range of audiences. According to Delwiche and Henderson, participatory cultures allow users "to create, share, and comment all within a safe and supportive environment" (quoted in Jenkins, 2013). Thus, some users might leverage digital tools and technologies to create new media texts, from YouTube videos to fanfiction stories on platforms like Archive of Our Own. Others may choose to create original fan art or parody role-playing accounts on Twitter and Tumblr. Individuals who self-identify as "booktubers" may film a review of their favourite literary web series or even craft a fan video set to specific music (Scott, 2014; Freund, 2018). For readers of literary web series who prefer in-depth discussion and analysis, there are comment threads on Twitter and YouTube, as well as podcasts like *Excessively Diverted*, which focuses on "modern... adaptations of classic novels" or *The Bennet Edit*, where the hosts chat about "(almost) every adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*" (North and Campbell, 2019; The Bennet Edit, 2019).

Importantly, participatory cultures can offer users a sense of shared identity and belonging, giving them spaces through which they can connect with others. For instance, many readers and fans of literary web series can associate themselves with other readers and fans by joining narrative-specific groups on Facebook or following the "Literary Inspired Webseries Care Centre" on Twitter and Tumblr. A Reddit message board dedicated to Jane Austen, for example, could give users a sense of affiliation with that particular sub-reddit while also functioning as a smaller part of the broader, worldwide Austen fandom ("r/janeausten," 2019).[10] Conversely,

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[10] Reddit is an online, real-time message board that allows users to contribute content (often categorised into specific categories known as "sub-reddits") on a wide range of topics and interests. One key feature of Reddit is the ability of

users on YouTube can create and express themselves through their video uploads, while also maintaining a sense of connection to other "YouTubers" through the platform's social tools (comment threads, channel subscribers, and sharing tools). In Rotman, Golbeck, and Preece's analysis of specific YouTube users, for example, they discovered that while there was "no structural evidence [for] the existence of a community" on the platform, users subjectively reported "feelings of membership, attachment to other users… and a feeling of belonging to the larger social body of YouTube" which ultimately did create "a 'sense of community'" (2009, pp. 46-47). For a literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, which converged around Lizzie's YouTube channel, the sense of community that arose around those videos helped readers reinforce their connection to the narrative and its characters, and contributed to the creation of narratively-constructed digital intimacy.

Finally, participatory cultures also support the collective problem-solving skills of users, who might choose to work in concert with each other towards some larger goal. These goals can be tangible, such as the publication of a wiki or the completion of a multiplayer game, or they can be broader goals that focus on consensus and "agreement-based" outcomes (Delwiche and Henderson, 2013, quoted in Jenkins, 2013). Literary web series occasionally incorporate aspects of this collaborative problem-solving ethos, such as when readers of these stories "join together to leverage the power of collective intelligence" (ibid). In January 2013, for example, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* revealed the existence of "lydiabennettape.com," a website purporting to offer a sex tape featuring Lizzie's younger sister, Lydia.[11]

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users to "upvote" content deemed by users to have value and to "downvote" content deemed as irrelevant or unimportant (Chandler and Munday, 2016d).

[11] While the URL still exists, the site no longer hosts any LBD content.

Figure 2.4: A screenshot of the Twitter account for Novelty Exposures,
the now-defunct website that claimed to offer Lydia's sex tape.

Some readers and fans, deeply invested in the narrative, suggested that perhaps fans themselves could help prevent the release of the tape by asking hackers to attack and crash the site (Seymour et al, 2015; Su 2013a). Other readers have contributed to wikis and other resources to help categorise and archive narratives; Tumblr user *shaelit* started a "literary web series master list" in 2015 that has since been updated several times due to feedback and suggestions, in addition to being liked and shared more than 2,000 times (*shaelit*, 2015). As these examples illustrate, readers and fans of literary web series undertake a diverse and varied range of activities as part of their narrative experience. These activities, and the distribution of literary web series through social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr, firmly positions literary web series as media objects within the convergent media environment. At the same time, the use of multiple media platforms in conveying a single narrative (albeit one with several parts) such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* indicates that these stories also function as transmedia narratives. In the next section of this chapter, I discuss transmedia narrative and transmedia storytelling techniques in relation to literary web series.

Literary Web Series as Transmedia Narratives

Defining the concept of transmedia and transmedia storytelling can be challenging. Scholars such as Dena (2009), Harvey (2014), Jenkins (2007; 2011), Ryan (2013; 2015b), and many

others have proposed their own, occasionally conflicting, definitions. [12] Complicating matters further is the muddled history of transmedia storytelling as a concept, which existed in practice (particularly within fan spaces) long before someone thought to start writing about it. As Mittell explains, "even if the term is new, the strategy of expanding a narrative into other media is as old as media themselves" (2014, p. 253). Consequently, decades before the publication of any transmedia research, female *Star Trek* fans began extending the stories of their favourite characters in fanfiction, thereby creating "multiple standalone stories on [different] types of media that are all connected to the same storyworld" (Jamison, 2013; Bushman, quoted in Whyte, 2013c). It is therefore unsurprising that Jenkins argues that transmedia storytelling practices "often defy any simple, rigid or static definition" and also espouses "the value of an expansive definition of transmedia" that acknowledges its place in "a period of profound and prolonged media change" (2019, p. xxix).

While Jenkins contends that our current understanding of transmedia storytelling developed "at the intersection between theory and practice, and through exchanges between academics and media-makers" (2019, p. xxviii), he also acknowledges a debt to media convergence; as consumers became increasingly desirous of opportunities for participation and interaction in their media consumption, transmedia storytelling offered a way for media producers to experiment and provide audiences with different narrative experiences. Ryan, meanwhile, suggests that transmedia storytelling is "a response to the proliferation of media and delivery systems that the digital revolutions of the past fifty years has brought upon us" (2013, p. 384). The convergent media environment has undoubtedly altered "the way media is produced and... the way media is consumed" (Jenkins, 2006a, pp. 15-16), and consequently, storytelling methods and practices have been altered as well. Though books, film, television, and radio still exist and are still used for storytelling, the digital convergent media environment allows for new modes and methods for crafting and sharing stories. As a result, Murray argues, "the unit of storytelling in the early twenty-first century has become not the individual novel, film, or television series, but the 'transmedia' storyworld" (2017, p. 117). Narratives are not restricted to just one format; stories

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[12] For example, the 2019 publication, *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies*, includes 50 chapters from a wide range of academics and media-industry professionals and most of the authors make a point of specifying what they, personally, mean by "transmedia."

can now incorporate text, audio, video, and images. At the same time, audiences have more autonomy in navigating through the story, and can even contribute to the larger storyworld, because "everything we create in digital form is potentially an element in a larger archive, available for re-viewing and recombination" (Murray, 2017, p. 117). Many literary web series specifically identify themselves as transmedia narratives, but given the wide-ranging definitions available, it is important to distinguish between the variety of transmedia theories and outline a working definition that applies to literary web series.

I. Defining Transmedia Narratives and Storytelling

One of the first formalised definitions of transmedia storytelling came from Jenkins, who suggested that

> Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story.
>
> (2007, ¶ 2)

Consider *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* in light of this definition. First, elements of the narrative are indeed "dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels" per Jenkins' (2007) definition. LBD included five separate, but complementary, YouTube channels, thirteen Twitter accounts, five Tumblr blogs, and a number of accounts on other social media sites such as Facebook, Pinterest, and Lookbook. While each individual account or delivery channel was nominally separate and distinct, when combined, they created an "unified… entertainment experience" (Jenkins, 2007) and more fully complete narrative (Bushman, quoted in Tepper, 2015). Moreover, per Jenkins' definition, each social media platform offered different "unique contributions" to the LBD story. Lizzie's videos appeared first on YouTube, which also enabled readers to respond immediately in the comments section. The Twitter accounts offered the "digital breadcrumbs" mentioned in Chapter 1 (i.e., content that, for various purposes, was not or could not be filmed as part of the vlogs) as well as content in between video releases and the ability to interact more directly with LBD characters. Tumblr, meanwhile, hosted and circulated original fan art, commentary and analysis discussions, and GIF sets. Though Jenkins first defined transmedia more than ten years ago, his definition is still relevant and applicable to more recent

transmedia creations. In addition, other authors and researchers have used Jenkins' definition as a starting point for their own work, adapting and remixing the ideas put forth, while Jenkins himself continued to reflect on and update his definition (Long, 2007; Jenkins, 2011).

Of course, this is only one of many definitions; the Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication, for instance, defines transmedia storytelling as a "new media form drawing upon networked digital media" while Bushman favours two connected definitions: the multiple standalone stories mentioned earlier in the introduction to this section, and the single story told over multiple media channels (Chandler and Munday, 2016e; Whyte, 2013c). Similarly, while the term "transmedia" has become the largely accepted standard term for the practices to which it refers, it is by no means the only term used. Some scholars, such as Ruppel, prefer the phrases "cross-sited narratives" or "cross-media" when discussing "stories told across multiple media platforms" (2009, p. 283). Meanwhile, Ito's research on Japanese anime and manga applies the expression "media mix" to "linked content in multiple media forms" (2006, p. 4). The range of diverse definitions for transmedia storytelling supports Jenkins' call for an expansive, inclusive definition that incorporates a variety of elements, as well as Ryan's proposal for a transmedia continuum or spectrum, with "a variety of shades situated between two poles" (2013, p. 363). The first pole, according to Ryan, is akin to the snowball effect, wherein a narrative "enjoys so much popularity or becomes so prominent culturally that it spontaneously generates a variety of either same-medium or cross media" offshoots (2013, p. 363). Entertainment franchises such as *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977) and Marvel Comics, which began in one medium before being expanded into others, would qualify as "snowball transmedia." At the opposite pole on Ryan's scale are stories which are "conceived from the very beginning as a project that develops over many different medium platforms" (2013, p. 363). *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is an example of this pole, since Lizzie's story was structured as a transmedia narrative from the very beginning (Blacker, 2013).

Despite wide-ranging definitions, there is at least one common, shared characteristic of transmedia stories that Dena (2009), Harvey (2014), Jenkins (2007; 2011), and Ryan (2013; 2015b) agree on: the need for continuity within a transmedia narrative or storyworld. Though transmedia can take a multitude of forms, these four scholars recognise the necessity of some

aspect that binds the story together. Dena, for instance, argues that transmedia require "an effort to maintain the logic of the fictional world," especially when a transmedia story has several authors or producers (2009, p. 121). Like Dena, Harvey asserts that "consistency – perhaps of scenario, of plot, of character" is central to transmedia storytelling, by which he means that transmedia stories, regardless of their form, structure, or shape, must convey a consistent story across its various components (2014, p. 279). Jenkins, too, advocates for narrative cohesion when he bemoans attempts at transmedia storytelling that are "riddled with sloppy contradictions" and "fail to respect the core consistency audiences expect" (2006a, p. 105). Ryan, meanwhile, declares that consistency across the narrative components (through what she terms a storyworld) is essential to transmedia storytelling "since it is what holds together the various texts of the system" (2013, p. 363). Many literary web series excel as transmedia narratives precisely because they are able to maintain consistency, often by virtue of being adaptations of previously completed texts. In contrast, literary web series that have difficulties maintaining consistency may struggle. Buenneke makes this point in her comparison of LBD with its follow-up, *Emma Approved*, explaining that while LBD has a clear perspective and understanding of its storyworld, "the distinction of what is and is not visible to the characters in [*Emma Approved*] is not immediately apparent" (2014, ¶ 12). As a result, "fans [of both narratives] have expressed… frustration with the lack of consistency in Emma's universe" (Buenneke, 2014, ¶ 14).

Beyond the continuity of a coherent fictional world, scholars also seek to categorise transmedia stories based on either their structure (Dena, 2009) or the relationships that exist within the storyworld (Ryan, 2013). In her doctoral thesis, Dena proposes that transmedia stories are "not identified in end-product traits necessarily, but in the processes, knowledge and skills that produce it" (1009, p. 98). Dena's research offers a theorisation of transmedia storytelling, suggesting that transmedia narratives are best described as "*intracompositional* and *intercompositional* phenomena" (emphasis original; 2009, p. 97). According to Dena, with intracompositional transmedia stories, the story itself is "the sum of multiple media platforms" – that is, elements of a single story are distributed across different media platforms (digital and analogue) and when combined, create a cohesive and complete narrative (2009, p. 161). With intracompositional transmedia, Dena suggests, the emphasis is not on the relationships between

the elements of the story, but rather "the units that make up the one transmedia composition" (2009, p. 162). Dena offers the example of a young adult novel that incorporated elements of an alternate reality game:

> Sean Stewart and Jordan Weisman's novel *Cathy's Book: If Found Call 650-266-8233* is a novel that also contains a variety of "personal" items one may find in a real life diary: removable photos, scribbles and napkins with phone numbers, that lead to character recordings and fictional websites. These photos, napkins, voice recordings and websites are not compositions in themselves, but are part of the experience of the book. All of the elements work together to create one composition.
>
> <div align="right">(2009, p. 162)</div>

In contrast, intercompositional transmedia stories are composed of multiple, separate components that share a fictional world that tie them together. As Dena explains, with intercompositional transmedia, "each of the works in the fictional world – the television episodes, feature films, and books – are… substantial works in their own right" and become part of the transmedia phenomenon "when they are studied according to their fictional world" (2009, p. 104). She further proposes that the components of intercompositional transmedia can either be the work of one producer or company, or several people working together, as long as "each composition is intended to be a part of the meaning-making process" (2009, p. 107). This helps distinguish components of intercompositional transmedia from fan creations, remixes, or adaptations, which may expand upon the original story and/or exist within the same fictional world, but are not "officially" part of the transmedia product. One such example of intercompositional transmedia is the massive *Star Wars* franchise (Lucas, 1977). The films, television shows, comic books, and novels are complete works on their own, created and produced by a range of individuals working under the supervision of Lucasfilm. A consumer could easily enjoy, for instance, the *Rogue One* film without having experienced any of the other films, shows, or books. The various products in the *Star Wars* franchise, however, are linked together by an overarching fictional world and mythology; thus, *Rogue One* has connections to *Star Wars Rebels* (a television show), *Catalyst* (a prequel tie-in novel), and the original *Star Wars* film from 1977, and "to study the relationships between them is to be concerned with intercompositional" transmedia (Dena, 2009, p. 105).

Dena readily admits that it is "not always clear" if a story is intra- or intercompositional (2009, p. 167), and she points out that many intercompositional transmedia narratives may be comprised of intracompositional transmedia components, making the boundaries even more muddled. One could argue, for example, that literary web series *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is both an intracompositional transmedia story *and* an intercompositional one. From one perspective, it is easy to see LBD as an intracompositional transmedia story. Elements of Lizzie's story are distributed across YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, and other digital media platforms; readers must navigate through the different platforms to bring the pieces together and create a complete narrative. At the same time, however, Lizzie's YouTube videos can function as a fully realised narrative on their own, with the material on Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, and other media sites acting as additional information that exists within the same fictional world. Readers who consume Lizzie's YouTube videos receive a complete narrative within those videos, while her tweets, Lydia's videos, Jane's fashion posts on Tumblr, and the other elements expand upon the YouTube videos and offer supplemental perspectives. Readers can choose to consume that content, but it will not prevent them from understanding and enjoying Lizzie's narrative. From this perspective, LBD would be an intercompositional transmedia story.

While Dena's theorisation of transmedia seeks to categorise transmedia stories based on their structure, Ryan's work focuses on the different relationships that might exist within a transmedia product. She does this by applying Saint-Gelais' concept of transfictionality to transmedia stories. According to Saint-Gelais, "two (or more) texts exhibit a transfictional relation when they share elements such as characters, imaginary locations, or fictional worlds" (2010). While this definition suggests significant overlaps with transmedia storytelling, Ryan contends that transfictionality typically refers to written texts, or texts in the same medium. Transmedia storytelling, meanwhile, "can be regarded as a special case of transfictionality… that operates across many different media" (Ryan, 2013, p. 366). Ryan suggests that transfictionality (and, subsequently, transmedia storytelling) can contain three different types of relationships: expansion, modification, and transposition. In transmedia stories with expansion relationships, for example, the original fictional world (or storyworld) is expanded by the addition of new characters, new locations, and/or prequels or sequels that "prolong the time covered by the original story" (Ryan, 2013, p. 366). According to Ryan, expansion is the most common type of

transmedia relationship and "much more world preserving… because it does not require changing any of the facts asserted in the original story" (2013, p. 367). Expansion is also akin to Jenkins' concept of additive comprehension, or "the degree [to which] each new text adds to our understanding of the story as a whole" (2011).

In *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, Gigi and Lydia's narrative threads serve as expansions of Austen's original novel. The producers of LBD significantly expanded upon Gigi and Lydia's characters to enrich and extend Lizzie's storyworld. Through their respective YouTube videos and Twitter feeds, these two characters offered new content to readers while maintaining the integrity of the fictional world created for LBD. Lydia's character in particular represents LBD's "most substantial 'addition' to the *Pride and Prejudice* story" because her unique storyline also extends and expands Lizzie's story (McNutt, 2013). Within LBD's storyworld, Lydia's story unfolds in parallel to Lizzie's, allowing readers to compare and contrast them, and eventually forcing Lizzie to acknowledge her own role in Lydia's crisis when the two sisters' paths reunite in episode 85, "Consequences" (Sarah T., 2013; Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2013c). The expansion of Austen's original story pushes LBD beyond simple adaptation and enriches the storyworld around the characters. In addition to providing alternative narrative paths for readers, transmedia expansions enable readers to identify and connect with characters other than the protagonist. Later chapters in this thesis (specifically, Ch. 5 and 6) will demonstrate that this was certainly true for LBD readers with regard to the character of Lydia.

The tandem release of vlogs from Lizzie and Lydia's YouTube channels in LBD is an example of parallel stories, which are one method for creating an expansion relationship in a transmedia story. According to Scolari, in addition to parallel stories, there are two additional methods of expansion: interstitial stories, and peripheral stories (2009). Parallel stories "unfold at the same time as the macrostory" and "may evolve and transform into spin-offs" (Scolari, 2009, p. 598). Interstitial stories, meanwhile, "take place between the instalments of a series" and often have a close relationship to the primary story (Ryan, 2013, p. 369). Jane's question-and-answer videos in *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre*, for instance, act as interstitial expansions of her primary narrative thread, and provide added content while remaining separate from the "episode" videos that push her stories forward (AOJE, 2013b). Similarly, in *Nothing Much To Do*, Ursula films

several "vox pop" videos that do not officially contribute to the narrative's progression, but still offer insight into the various characters (The Candle Wasters, 2014d).[13] Scolari's last method for expansion, peripheral stories, are "more or less distant satellites of the macrostory" and while they may "have a weak relationship to the macrostory," they nonetheless remain part of the transmedia storyworld (2009, p. 598). In *The New Adventures of Peter and Wendy* (a literary web series based on J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*), the storyworld is enriched through links to "The Kensington Chronicle," the fictional in-world newspaper for which Wendy works. The website and stories featured in the newspaper reinforce the storyworld, but do not contain content that influences or affects the outcome of the primary story.

Modification, the second type of transmedia relationship Ryan identifies, offers different versions of the same story or storyworld. In stories with modification relationships, readers are presented with "a counterfactual sequence of events" that suggest "a different destiny to the characters, one that in effect answers the question 'what if?'" (Ryan, 2013, p. 366). Modification relationships are not restricted to transmedia storytelling, of course; a significant subset of Jane Austen fanfiction, for instance, involves variations and twists on Austen's plots trying to answer that "what if?" question (Edwards, 2015; Leavenworth, 2015). Whereas expansion transmedia narratives usually preserve the original storyworld when adding to it, modification narratives are more likely to alter some fundamental aspect of the story to explore alternative scenarios. Literary web series *The Misselthwaite Archives* is one example of a transmedia narrative with a modification relationship. In Burnett's original novel *The Secret Garden*, Mary Lennox discovers the existence of her cousin, Colin Craven. *The Misselthwaite Archives* subverts audience expectations by modifying the male Colin into female Callie, resulting in a different relationship dynamic between Mary and her cousin. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* also offers some aspects of the modification relationship within the narrative and once again, Lydia is an obvious example. In Austen's novel, she marries Wickham and remains mostly ignorant of the consequences of her actions. Meanwhile, LBD envisions a different future for her, one which does not include Wickham, but does include renewed and improved relationships with her sisters. In fact, the resolutions of all three Bennet sisters' stories in LBD stand as examples of the

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[13] "Vox pop" is a shortened version of the Latin phrase "vox populi" which translates to "the voice of the people" (Oxford, 2019h).

modification relationship. Austen's novel, for example, sees Jane and Lizzie married (happily) to Bingley and Darcy, respectively. LBD, however, downplays the romance elements of Austen's story by having both Jane and Lizzie make choices that prioritise their individual careers. This allows LBD to "emphasize the importance of pursuing a career and finding a mate who supports that career" instead of linking Jane and Lizzie's happiness to a romantic relationship (Zerne, 2013). This choice is reflective of LBD's updated setting in the twenty-first century United States, where the average age for getting married has increased thirty-five percent since 1960 (Barkhorn, 2013). It also better enables readers to relate to characters like Lizzie, thereby reinforcing their sense of immersion in the narrative and making it easier for narratively-constructed digital intimacy to develop – a concept I define in detail later in Chapter 6.

The third and final relationship a transmedia story might have is transposition, which involves changing the temporal and/or spatial location or a story or storyworld. With transposition relationships, the transmedia narrative "preserves the design and the main story" but places it within a different time or place (Doležel, 1998, quoted in Ryan, 2013, p. 366). According to this definition, nearly every literary web series could conceivably serve as an example of a transposition transmedia relationship, since the majority of these narratives update their source materials' temporal settings to have the narratives occur in the twenty-first century (primarily to provide a believable justification for the characters having social media accounts). Many literary web series also change the location of the source material; *Nothing Much To Do* transposes the Italian countryside setting of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* into the suburbs of Auckland, New Zealand, while *Project Green Gables* takes L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* and moves it from Prince Edward Island, Canada, to Finland (The Candle Wasters, 2014a; Project Green Gables, 2015). For Ryan, transposition relationships in transmedia stories also overlap with the original storyworld (see figure 2.5 below):

Figure 1 Relations between storyworlds in transfictional and transmedial systems. (Shaded area is the storyworld of the original text.)
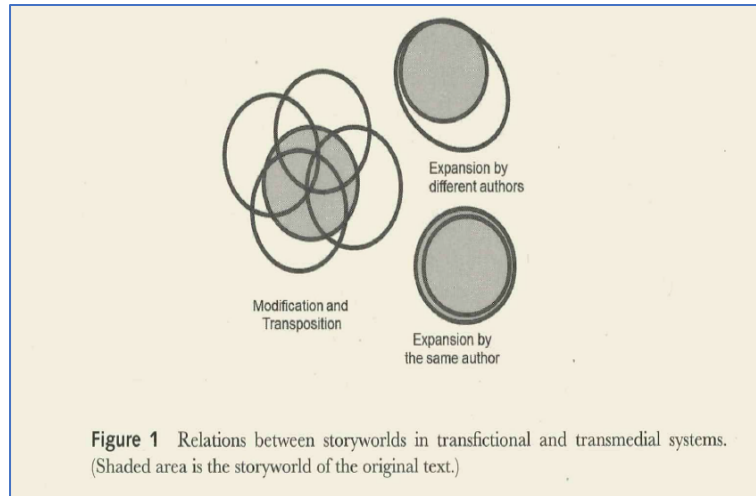
Figure 2.5 - Ryan's concept of relationships between storyworlds (2013, p. 368).

Ryan's taxonomy of transmedia relationships points to her belief in the term "transmedia storytelling" is "a misnomer: the phenomenon should rather be called transmedia *world-building*" (emphasis original; 2015b, p. 5). She argues that a transmedia storyworld "richly imagined from the beginning" can result in "more stories [being] told about it" while also offering "more discoveries to the user" (ibid). It is interesting, then, that she also claims that "there are no projects conceived as transmedia from the very beginning, no *native* transmedia projects that became great successes" (emphasis original; 2015, p. 17). Though Ryan is likely thinking of a specific, precise incarnation of a transmedia story, the genre of literary web series and the diversity of stories within the genre appear to contradict her claim. Consider, for example, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (LBD) in relation to Ryan's definition of transmedia. Her definition states that "transmedia storytelling is a deliberate attempt to make media converge around a shared narrative content," involving one or more type of transfictional relationship (as outlined above) and containing several "autonomous entities that can be consumed separately from each other," all taking place within the same storyworld (2015b, pp. 2-4). First, LBD was indeed deliberately conceived as a transmedia narrative from its initial stages. LBD's Transmedia Producer, Jay Bushman, stated that it was "always part of the plan" to create LBD as a transmedia narrative and the different pieces of the story on YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook were a part of LBD from the beginning (Blacker, 2013). Second, as described earlier in this section, LBD is an example of the expansion relationship in multiple ways. Last, the different components of LBD – Lizzie's YouTube videos, Lydia's Twitter feed, Jane's fashion

blog posts, etc. – can be consumed by readers separately while still existing within the same storyworld. Therefore, LBD does meet the criteria for a transmedia story set forth in Ryan's definition.

With regard to Ryan's contention that no native transmedia projects "became great successes," I argue that the mere existence of multiple literary web series – and, indeed, the evolution of the genre itself – can be termed a success. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, for example, received widespread attention from the mainstream press, as outlined in Chapter 1. Both *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Emma Approved* won Emmy Awards for Outstanding Creative Achievement in Interactive Media (Best Original Interactive Programme), honours that imply a certain level of success as well as recognition from the entertainment media industry. Additionally, during the last six years, several literary web series (including *Welcome to Sanditon* and *The New Adventures of Peter and Wendy*) have been nominated for International Academy of Web Television awards. Though it is possible that Ryan was unaware of the literary web series genre of transmedia narratives when she wrote her article, her statement that there are no native transmedia stories that have been successes is, nevertheless, not accurate. Though the literary web series may indeed be a niche genre, with a smaller audience than a transmedia franchise such as *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1997), the following chapters will illustrate that fans and readers of literary web series are deeply engaged with the narratives. Ryan's statement also underlines the need for increased scholarship in this field, while strengthening the value of existing research (e.g., Berryman, 2017; Seymour, 2015; Seymour, Roth, and Flegel, 2015; Stein, 2015; Stein, 2016a; Tepper, 2015), and validating the relevance and importance of the empirical research presented in this thesis.

Ultimately, defining and classifying transmedia narratives according to specific taxonomies or competing definitions is not as important as acknowledging the diversity of transmedia storytelling in the convergent media environment. Dena even contends that her concepts of intracompositional and intercompositional phenomena are meant to "challenge theories that define the [transmedia] phenomena according to the traits of one type of practice" (2009, p. 166). Jenkins, too, comes to the conclusion that the term "transmedia," in its broadest sense, is simply "a set of choices made about the best approach to tell a particular story to a particular audience in

a particular context depending on the particular resources available to particular producers" (2011, ¶ 28). It is also important to distinguish between large, wide-ranging transmedia franchises such as *Star Wars* (which distributes content and story across film, television, comics and graphic novels, books, and even theme parks), and smaller transmedia narratives such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, which was created with a limited budget and almost exclusively features digital content. While both properties can be accurately classified as transmedia, they use transmedia storytelling techniques in very different ways. By keeping the transmedia definition intentionally broad and expansive, Jenkins, Ryan, Dena, and other media scholars can include a larger and more varied range of narratives and stories under the transmedia umbrella. This includes rethinking "the adaptation exclusion arguments" found in transmedia research (Dena, 2019, p. 195), which is the subject of the following section.

II. Literary Web Series, Transmedia and Adaptation

In the earliest days of the twenty-first century, when transmedia storytelling started to receive increased attention from media producers and academic researchers alike, thanks in part to the rapidly developing capabilities of the Internet, Henry Jenkins presented some of his initial arguments about transmedia in the *MIT Technology Review*. There was, he claimed, a need for "a new model of co-creation – *rather than* adaptation – of content that crosses media" (emphasis mine; 2003 ¶ 5). Jenkins' contention that transmedia storytelling should not include adaptation was indicative of a more widespread "long-held view… that adaptation is not part of the [transmedia] phenomenon" (Dena, 2019, p. 195). Though Dena suggests this opinion is slowly changing, much of the existing research on transmedia storytelling still positions these narratives in opposition to adaptation. For example, many of the arguments in the "transmedia versus adaptation" debate centre on whether the narrative in question offers new, original, and/or unique content. Long suggests that "retelling a story in a different media type is *adaptation*, while using multiple media types to craft a single story is *transmediation*" (emphasis original; 2007, p. 22). Likewise, Scolari maintains that "transmedia storytelling is not just an adaptation from one media to another (2009, p. 587). Meanwhile, in *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins reasserts the "new content" argument and further claims that any narrative not "allowing new character background or plot development" is "redundant" (2006a, p. 105). The redundancy argument is another key

reason some scholars seek to separate transmedia and adaptation. According to Jenkins, "redundancy burns up fan interest and causes franchises to fail," which is why each component of a transmedia narrative "needs to be self-contained" and "offer new levels of insight and experience" (2006a, p. 96). Berryman (2017), too, strives to differentiate between transmedia narratives and adaptations, though she does so within the specific context of literary web series. Berryman claims that "the fictional worlds of literary adaptation web series cannot be perpetually expanded across multiple mediums [sic]" because they adapt already completed novels (2017, p. 48). She further maintains that literary web series restrict "the creators' ability to expand or alter the fictional storyworld in any substantial way" (2017, pp. 48-49).

Nevertheless, these various assertions are easily countered. First, Berryman bases her arguments on Jenkins' 2006 definition of transmedia; however, as the transmedia section presented earlier in this chapter has already demonstrated, that definition is merely one possible definition in a field that lacks general consensus on how to define transmedia storytelling, and overlooks Jenkins' own evolution towards a more expansive, inclusive description of transmedia that expands beyond his initial work (see Jenkins, 2011; 2019). Research from Dena (2009; 2011), Ryan (2013; 2015b) and Harvey (2014) further suggests that transmedia narratives can be categorised in any number of ways, by focusing on either narrative structure, relationship to the source material, or legal considerations. Harvey in particular concedes that "any attempt at a medium-led taxonomy [would be] hopelessly unwieldy" because of the extensive nature of transmedia (2014, p. 282). Consider the publication of *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies* (Freeman and Gambarato, 2019). This texts includes fifty chapters, each written by a different author and each exploring some aspect of transmedia – some of which are inherently contradictory. Thus, any argument or definition that excludes adaptations from a discussion of transmedia narratives is incomplete and outdated.

Second, Dena challenges Jenkin's claim that adaptations are redundant by pointing to the relative popularity of adaptations and franchises. "If we look only at the ticket sales of feature films," she says, "we can see that yes, adaptations do make money" (2019, p. 200). Data pertaining to 2018 film grosses certainly supports her argument. Of the top ten grossing films of 2018, six were sequels to previously released films, six were adaptations of material and stories previously

published in a different medium, and nine featured characters and/or plotlines that were associated with larger franchises and media properties ("2018 Worldwide Grosses"). The proliferation of literary web series within the last decade bolsters Dena's argument as well. One count indicates there have been more than "80 productions adapted from public domain novels and plays" since 2012 (Dena, 2019, p. 200; Lockwood, 2017), while a count of the master list of literary web series curated by Tumblr user *shaelit* reveals 128 different literary-inspired narratives (*shaelit*, 2015). The growing subgenre of literary web series suggests that, contrary to Jenkins' belief, audiences are not tired of adaptations or redundant content. While selecting a source text in the public domain eliminates any copyright issues, it also "alleviates the risk of such experimental ventures by promising to attract audiences already attached to the story" (Berryman, 2017, p. 40). After all, as Dena points out, "why invoke an existing property if you don't want fans of that property?" (2019, p. 200).

Third, Hutcheon provides the rationale for disputing the argument that adaptations merely retell a story, while transmedia adds new content. In her seminal publication, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon defines adaptation as a process that incorporates what she calls "creative interpretation" or "interpretive creation." According to Hutcheon, adaptation involves "taking possession of another's story, and filtering it, in a sense, through one's own sensibility, interests, and talents" (2013, p. 18). Thus, for Hutcheon, adaptation is not "just" a retelling of existing material or "slavish copying," but rather "a double process of interpreting and then creating something new" (2013, p. 20). Many literary web series demonstrate this "creative interpretation" by updating the original story for twenty-first century life and imagining these characters in new situations. By placing Austen's characters in a modern American setting, for instance, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* can use the events of the novel to offer commentary on contemporary media use and dating culture – something not found within Austen's original story.

Lastly, Berryman's arguments ignore the reality of many literary web series. For instance, she contends that literary web series cannot be "perpetually expanded" because they derive from finished source material, and yet literary web series such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Emma Approved* do just that. In LBD, the character of Lydia is significantly developed beyond Austen's

novel, and the publication of *The Epic Adventures of Lydia Bennet* book extends Lydia's story even further. LBD's success also led the producers to create two additional literary web series that also served as spin-offs of the LBD story. While *Welcome to Sanditon* was based on one of Austen's unfinished novels, it "replaced the novel's protagonist with LBD's Gigi Darcy" ("Welcome to Sanditon," 2019), thereby placing it within the same fictional storyworld as LBD and expanding Gigi's story beyond *Pride and Prejudice*. Similarly, *Emma Approved* (based on Austen's *Emma*) unfolded within the same fictional world; the narrative featured LBD's Caroline Lee in the role of secondary character Mrs. Elton and the 2018 *Emma Approved* revival included LBD's Mr. Collins in the story ("Characters - Emma Approved," 2019; Pemberley Digital, 2018a). Since Austen's novels were standalone narratives that did not connect or overlap, the inclusion of LBD characters in other Austen-inspired literary web series represents a substantial expansion of the seemingly "finished" source material.

Thus, literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* are neither redundant, simple retellings, nor restricted from expanding the original text, as per Berryman (2017). Rather, they challenge the transmedia-adaptation dichotomy by functioning as both adaptations of previously published work, and transmedia narratives that offer new content. For example, Hutcheon contends that "when we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work" (2013, p. 6), so LBD is clearly linked to Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and uses the novel's plot as its foundation. However, Hutcheon also proposes that adaptation can incorporate transposition, "(re-) interpretation and then (re-) creation" (2013, pp. 7-8), three characteristics that recall Ryan's transmedia relationship categories of expansion, modification, and transposition. Therefore, LBD is an adaptation, but one that does not rigidly follow the exact same plot of the novel, or shy away from expanding, modifying, interpreting, and/or re-creating parts of the story. Simultaneously, as a transmedia narrative, LBD offers the "expectation that this is something different" (Blacker, 2013) while acknowledging and embracing its literary heritage. Indeed, while literary web series are media objects closely associated with social and digital media platforms (e.g., YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr), they are also works of literature – more specifically, they share similarities with fanfiction and digital literature, as the next section of this chapter will show.

Literary Web Series as Fanfiction and Digital Literature

While the rise and development of media convergence and participatory cultures has proven beneficial for audiences and users of all types, it is, arguably, fans who have thoroughly embraced the possibilities and opportunities presented by these changes. For example, survey results from readers of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* indicate that many readers felt they were able to shape the direction of the narrative through their actions, so much so that some fans even attempted to launch a distributed denial of service (DDOS) attack at the website supposedly hosting Lydia's sex tape (Whyte, 2013a). In fact, according to Duffett, fans have historically been among the earliest adopters of new technology and as they "have supported the new medium [of the Internet], it, in turn, has made them more visible" (2013, p. 236). In the convergent media environment, these highly knowledgeable and articulate individuals, with "relatively deep, positive emotional convictions" about their objects of fandom, have better access to information, easy-to-use sharing tools, and the ability to connect with other fans based on interests, rather than geographic location (Duffett, 2013, p. 18). Consequently, Stein (2016, p. 170) argues fans are the "ideal cultural participant... within the increasingly decentred landscape of participatory culture" because they readily and eagerly engage with media objects and literary texts in a meaningful, collaborative fashion. One way they do so is through the practice of writing fanfiction. For instance, fanfiction database Archive of Our Own currently hosts more than two thousand stories pertaining to *Pride and Prejudice* (Organisation for Transformative Works, 2019b).

In its most basic sense, fanfiction is comprised of "stories and novels that make use of the characters and settings from other people's professional creative work" (Grossman, 2011).[14] Writing fanfiction involves the "social, communal, responsive" creation of stories within specific fan communities and spaces (Coppa, 2017, pp. 3-4). Most authors of fanfiction write for themselves or friends, circulating the stories in small groups and never intending to publish them beyond personal blogs or fanfiction repositories such as Archive of Our Own and Fanfiction.net,

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[14] While this section primarily refers to fanfiction as written and textual, the practice is by no means limited to words. Fanfiction exists in audio and visual forms, in podcasts, videos, and original artwork.

though there are, of course, some well-known exceptions. E.L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* series began life as *Twilight* fanfiction (Jamison, 2013) and many of the authors associated with the *Jane Austen Variations* community and website have self-published their Austen-esque fanfiction, made possible by Austen's novels being in the public domain (Reynolds, 2014; Fleishman, 2019). There are also numerous genres of fanfiction, from "what if" stories that speculate about different possibilities for favourite characters and "alternate universe" stories that radically re-imagine the temporal and spatial setting of a narrative (i.e., a Regency-era version of *Star Wars*) to mash-up stories that combine characters from often paradoxical source texts (such as Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*). The wide scope and diversity of fanfiction "shows the capacity of ordinary people to use the media as a resource... to meet their own specific needs and interests" (Duffett, 2013, p. 171).

Though literary web series are undoubtedly adaptations of a source text, inspired by existing literature, they can also be considered forms of fanfiction, because the boundaries between adaptation and fanfiction are increasingly blurry. Wilson suggests that "fanfiction can be a type of adaptation" since both adaptations and fanfictions can act as palimpsests, texts that have "been reused or altered while still retaining traces of its earlier form" (Wilson, 2018, p. 160; Hutcheon, 2012; Oxford, 2019d). Moreover, Jamison (2013, p. 42) asserts that "in the worlds of literary fanfiction, two names dominate: Jane Austen and Sherlock Holmes," a fact reflected in the literary web series genre. Austen and Sherlock author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle are among the top three authors with the most literary web series based on their work, with Austen-inspired narratives numbering 18 and Doyle-inspired narratives numbering five (*shaelit*, 2015).[15] While literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* usually transform their source texts in some way, they are still inextricably linked to the respective legacies of their original narratives and draw upon the resonance of those texts to help reinforce readers' sense of immersion in a literary web series and generate narratively-constructed digital intimacy. Additionally, narratives in the literary web series genre exhibit some of the same elements and characteristics of fanfiction. Busse (2017, p. 46) defines these as:

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[15] Austen and Doyle are second and third, respectively, to Shakespeare, who has inspired 34 transmedia narratives with his various plays (*shaelit*, 2015).

(1) fragmentation, the way fanfiction often tends to be part of an ongoing conversation; (2) intertextuality, a given story's dependence on community and fantext; (3) performativity, the conversational, community interaction component of many stories; and (4) intimacy, the emotional... openness and vulnerability readers and writers exhibit in the stories.

Whereas many fanfiction stories are often categorised as being "works in progress," several literary web series convey a similar impression of being somewhat unfinished. For example, though the one-hundredth video in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was titled "The End," the story nevertheless continued on in Twitter-thread epilogues, continuation novels, bonus videos, and two spin-off narratives incorporating supporting characters. Likewise, while the conclusion of *Nothing Much To Do* sees many of its main characters finish secondary school, several of those characters appear in NMTD's follow-up narratives, *Lovely Little Losers* and *Bright Summer Night*. These epilogues and sequel narratives help contribute to the sense that literary web series are continuous and ongoing; despite appearing finished and "closed," there is always the possibility for new or updated content. Fanfiction and literary web series also incorporate intertextuality. Both types of narrative are often "in conversation not only with the source text but usually also with other stories" (Busse, 2017, p. 51). *Carmilla*, for instance, is a vampire mystery literary web series based primarily on a novella by J. Sheridan Le Fanu. But it also integrates conventions from other popular vampire stories, such as Stoker's *Dracula* and even the popular television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Stein, 2016a). Meanwhile, in the first video of literary web series *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre* (an updated version of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*), main character Jane explicitly mentions *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and implies that viewing it has encouraged her to start her own vlog (AOJE, 2013c). Jane's comment creates an intertextual link between her own narrative and Lizzie's narrative, while also recalling academics and researchers who have examined Austen and Brontë in relationship to each other (see: Beer, 1974; Miller, 2010; Midorikawa and Sweeney, 2017).

In addition to fragmentation and intertextuality, literary web series can also be aligned with fanfiction through performativity because they are "part of a dialogue" that involves back-and-forth exchanges between the narrative and its audience (Busse, 2017, p. 54). Aside from a literal performance of narrative (through the vlogging format in which actors "perform" the characters from classic literature), the stories in this genre frequently communicate with readers and fans. In

Mina Murray's Journal, Mina uses her first video to participate in the "#5things" challenge, in which she shares five facts about herself with her audience. At the end of the video, she asks her viewers to do the same in the comments section, superimposing the words "tell us #5things about you!" over the video (MMJ, 2016). Mina's direct address to the audience creates a sense of conversation between the narrative and its readers, while her use of a specific hashtag "addresses the entire community of users who are tracking [that] hashtagged discussion" (Highfield, Harrington and Bruns, 2013, p. 316).[16] Lastly, fanfiction stories and literary web series both share what Busse calls "an intense emotional writerly investment" in the story (2017, p. 55). As previously mentioned, fanfiction is often shared in small communities of like-minded individuals and is not intended for publication. As a result, fanfiction is "purposefully tailored toward narrow audiences," with authors catering towards specific readers or interests or responding to specific challenges and prompts (Busse, 2017, p. 55). Literary web series have similarly niche audiences and engage intimately with their audiences. LBD co-creator Bernie Su has commented that he hoped LBD would appeal to the "untapped audience of young females who are literary" (quoted in Buenneke, 2014, ¶ 7). Meanwhile, fans of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* came to enjoy Mary Kate Wiles' portrayal of Lydia Bennet so much that Lydia's role in the narrative with expanded to please those fans (Green, 2012). Other narratives (including *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *Lovely Little Losers*, and *The New Adventures of Peter and Wendy*) relied on crowdfunding campaigns to reach their niche audiences, giving those fans the sense of having contributed to the content they loved.

While literary web series and fanfiction do share some similarities, they differ in one important way: literary web series are relatively recent (primarily digital) phenomena, existing almost exclusively online, whereas fanfiction has a long history that predates the Internet and can be consumed in analogue format.[17] For readers to consume and experience literary web series, they do need access to the various media platforms used to distribute these stories; consequently, because of this requirement, literary web series (and digital transmedia narratives in general) can also be categorised as electronic literature. Hayles defines electronic literature as literature that is

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[16] As previously explained at the beginning of Chapter 2, literary web series intentionally mimic the style of conversational or confessional vloggers, giving readers the impression of dialogue.

[17] Of course, much of contemporary fanfiction does circulate online, but the majority of these stories are text based, and therefore can be read outside of digital technologies.

"'digital born,' a first-generation digital object created on a computer and usually meant to be read on a computer" (2008, p. 3). Though "electronic literature" is the term that has dominated scholarly discussions in this area of research (e.g. Flores, 2019; Rettberg, 2018; Tabbi, 2017), some people prefer the terms "digital fictions" or "digital literature" (Bell, Ensslin and Rustad, 2014; Naji, 2019; Naji, Subramaniam, and White, 2019; Skains, 2010; Sloane, 2000).[18] Hayles also deliberately distinguishes electronic literature from print or analogue texts that have been digitised. Unlike the e-book format, which often retains the linear structure of printed books, or HTML texts such as those available via Project Gutenberg, literary web series are texts constructed and distributed in digital spaces, that "take advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the... networked computer" (Electronic Literature Organisation, quoted in Hayles, 2008, p. 3).

Thus, literary web series like *Emma Approved* or *Classic Alice* are not simply texts converted to digital format, but rather multimedia objects incorporating text, audio, video, and images. Electronic literature, according to Hayles, "is not just a Web 'version' but an entirely different artistic production" (2008, p. 23). While literary web series are, arguably, a genre of digital literature in their own right, they also draw on the different features of other digital literature genres (such as hypertext fictions, interactive narratives, and network fiction), integrating these aspects into their stories. Such features include hypertext links to help readers navigate through the story, interactivity options that provide a sense of control and choice to readers, and non-linear reading paths that allow readers to decide how and when to consume the parts of the narrative (see Dabek, 2017). Accordingly, digital literature "forces us to look anew at what a story is and does" because, unlike print or analogue literature, "it is fiction whose structure, form, and meaning are dictated by, and in dialogue with, the digital context in which it is produced and received" (Sloane, 2000, p. 9; Bell, Ensslin and Rustad, 2014, p. 4).

As this section demonstrates, it is clear that digital transmedia narratives in the literary web series genre function as literary objects, sharing significant similarities with both fanfiction and digital literature. However, as previous sections in Chapter 2 have illustrated, literary web series are also media objects found, dispersed, and consumed through social media platforms. The dual

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[18] For consistency, I will use digital literature throughout this thesis.

nature of literary web series is not necessarily a contradictory one, though. It simply means that any analysis of these texts should address both aspects and consider how they work in tandem. In a 2008 UNESCO report on the Social Sciences and Humanities that echoes Marshall McLuhan's seminal 1964 work, *Understanding Media* (and its well-known phrase "the medium is the message"), Egginton and Wegenstein point out that there is a

> growing consensus among literary scholars… that the meaning of literature cannot be properly studied or understood outside of the specific medium of its transmission… literary content and form can and often are deeply influenced by the media of their transmission as well as by the particular forms of media prevalent at the time and place of their production.

As multimodal texts that combine text, video, image, and audio (Skains, 2019a) and narratives that draw from media- and literature-based storytelling methods, literary web series are stories that occupy an intermedial space. A reader's experience of these stories is therefore both one of a user in a digital media space and of a reader in relation to a text. Consequently, any understanding of how literary web series' make meaning for readers must consider how readers-as-users navigate the various social and digital media platforms leveraged by these narratives *and* how readers interact and engage with the narrative's text. Accordingly, Chapter 3 will explore the features and affordances of social media platforms that literary web series use to create meaning for readers, through invitations to interact with and participate in the narrative. Then Chapter 4 will examine in detail how literary web series create immersive narrative experiences and capitalise on the resonance of the source material to strengthen readers' connection to the story.

Review

In this chapter, I presented an overview of literary web series and highlighted how their theoretical foundations and contexts have enabled these narratives to flourish in the convergent media environment. Using research from Berryman (2017), Kuhn (2014), Kuznetsova (2014), and Stein (2016a), I provided a definition for literary web series and emphasised how these narratives draw on conventions from a range of storytelling methods, from web series and broadcast television programmes, to transmedia narratives and adaptations. I then positioned

literary web series as texts created as a result of media convergence, and specifically textual and social convergence; as Jenkins (2001; 2006a), Meikle and Young (2011), and Murdock (2000) have illustrated, media convergence has fundamentally shifted how we currently understand media creation and consumption. In particular, media convergence has contributed to the formation of "produsers" (Bruns, 2006), participatory cultures (Delwiche and Henderson, 2013; Jenkins et al, 2009), and transmedia narratives. The discussion of transmedia narratives is important because many literary web series classify themselves as such, and work from Dena (2009; 2019), Harvey (2014), Jenkins (2007; 2011; 2019), and Ryan (2013; 2015b) has helped explain how and why these narratives adopt the features of transmedia storytelling, while simultaneously functioning as adaptations. I concluded Chapter 2 by linking literary web series to fanfiction and digital literature to argue that literary web series exist as both media artefacts and literary texts. This section used Busse's (2017) four characteristics of fanfiction (fragmentation, intertextuality, performativity, and intimacy) to compare literary web series to other forms of fanfiction. Hayles' (2008) definition of electronic (or digital) literature provided the foundation for the discussion of literary web series as digital texts. This final section showed why it is important to consider the dual purpose of literary web series when considering how they make meaning for readers; the following two chapters will explore meaning-making in literary web series in more detail.

Chapter 3: Agency and Affordances in Literary Web Series

Preview

This chapter begins by continuing the discussion of literary web series as digital literature. Using research from Murray (2017), I illustrate how the three primary methods of meaning-making in literary web series align with Murray's three "characteristic pleasures" or principles of digital literature: agency, immersion, and transformation. I then explore in detail the first method of meaning-making: the use of sociotechnical affordances to encourage audience participation and reader agency. I first offer a general overview of the concept of affordances, referencing the work of Gaver (1991), Gibson (1977), and Norman (2002). Then, using Bucher and Helmond's (2017) distinction between high-level and low-level affordances, I discuss boyd's (2014) four high-level affordances: persistence, visibility, spreadability, and searchability, before focusing on three categories of low-level affordances (sharing, conversing, and creating). Research from boyd (2014), Draucker and Collister (2015), and Stein (2016b) supports these sections. The chapter concludes with an exploration of how the sociotechnical affordances of social media platforms and the agency they provide to readers can lead to the creation of mediated intimacy, per Chambers' (2013) definition.

The "Characteristic Pleasures" of Literary Web Series

Chapter 2 provided a definition of literary web series and considered how they evoke the web soaps discussed by Murray in *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (2017). In that book, Murray also argues that digital literature offers specific "characteristic pleasures" or principles that distinguishes it from print literature, allowing us to interpret and understand digital texts in a way for which there is no direct analogy in analogue texts. As both media artefacts and literary texts, literary web series can be seen to exemplify these principles. Murray defines the first principle, agency, as "the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices" (2017, p. 159). According to Murray, agency can affect the meaning readers associate with digital literature when the narrative or story "is dynamically altered by our participation" (2017, p. 161). In this sense, agency is tied to a reader's navigation through a work of digital literature and the specific actions they take on different social media platforms. Many literary

web series offer readers agency; *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, for instance, distributes its narrative on YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, and a few smaller social media sites. Readers have the ability to choose which sites they want to visit, and in what order. One reader may prefer to watch Lizzie's YouTube videos, and then read any relevant tweets, while another may wish to jump between Lizzie's YouTube channel, Lydia's YouTube channel, and the Pemberley Digital YouTube channel as they each publish new content. These same social media platforms allow and invite readers to participate in the narrative through their respective sociotechnical affordances, again providing readers with agency as they choose whether to send Darcy a message on Twitter, reblog Jane's fashion photo sets on Tumblr, or share Gigi's latest music playlist from This is My Jam. In giving readers the ability to control their narrative experience, literary web series ensure that those experiences are highly individualised and subsequently, more meaningful, as this thesis will show.

The second principle Murray highlights is immersion, or "the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality" (2017, p. 124). Murray contends that the computer and narratives both offer "threshold experiences" or experiences in which individuals balance in a liminal space "between external reality and our own minds" (2017, p. 125). The digital environments created by computers, she says, offer users seemingly limitless resources and the ability to navigate through the space of the digital environment. When combined with narrative, this can create a threshold experience that immerses a reader in the narrative and presents the potential for that sense of immersion to alter or influence how a reader interprets and understands the narrative. As sections of Chapter 4 will later demonstrate, immersion (specifically, narrative immersion) is one of the primary methods of meaning-making in literary web series, and literary web series achieve this immersive quality by using social media platforms such as Twitter and Tumblr. On these sites, posts from Lizzie Bennet, Jane Eyre, or Anne Shirley appear "alongside the posts of nonfictional participants who use the sites to represent their own lives" (Stein, 2016, p. 171). Thus, a reader of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre*, or *Green Gables Fables* can view status updates and blog posts from fictional characters in the same feed as their real-life friends and family. The result is the threshold experience Murray mentions, where the boundaries between reality and fiction are blurred and each update to Lizzie's Twitter feed or Lydia's YouTube channel serves to "enhance the illusion of reality" within the narrative (Tepper,

2015, p. 47). The realism and authenticity projected by literary web series help reinforce readers' sense of immersion in the story, which can result in more meaningful, deeply personal interpretations of the narrative.

Lastly, Murray uses the metaphor of the kaleidoscope to define the third and final principle of digital literature, transformation. Digital literature, Murray says, can "rearrange the fragments [of the story] over and over again, allowing us to shift back and forth between alternate patterns" (2017, p. 198) and consider the narrative from multiple perspectives. Literary web series function in much the same way, as they are adaptations of classic literature that draw on the legacy and resonance of their source texts while simultaneously working to transform those texts, positioning iconic literary figures such as Elizabeth Bennett and Jane Eyre as "participants in online culture" (Stein, 2016, p. 171). Moreover, since readers of literary web series often have the agency to choose how they want to navigate through a particular text, these texts must offer multiple entry points into the narrative to account for the variety in readers' preferences. So, while *Pride and Prejudice* begins the same way for every reader (e.g., "it is a truth universally acknowledged…"), some readers may consume only Lizzie's YouTube videos, while others will follow Darcy and Charlotte on Twitter in addition to watching the videos. One reader may choose to consume the narrative in a linear fashion, while another may prefer to jump between the various platforms to consume only the parts of the narrative that include Lydia. The LBD narrative is therefore dependent on individual choice and will differ from person to person.

Murray also proposes that digital literature transforms because it "offers us the opportunity to enact stories rather than to merely witness them" (2017, p. 212). In the literary web series *Welcome to Sanditon*, for example, the creators "allowed the audience to become actual characters in the narrative by fleshing out the virtual town through their roleplaying" (Seymour, 2015, p. 110). Consequently, part of the *Welcome to Sanditon* narrative included fan-created role-playing accounts on Twitter, including ones for a Sanditon university, a record company, and a comedy club (SanStonesUni, 2013; longbournrecord, 2017; CanneditonLaugh, 2016). By transforming and adapting previously published works, literary web series are able to capitalise on the existing fan communities for these texts, while also encouraging readers to contribute to the transformation and adaptation. The resulting narrative experience is therefore more

meaningful for readers, because it enables them to recall prior memories of the source texts while discovering the story from a new perspective.

These "characteristic pleasures" or principles of digital literature directly align with the three primary methods of meaning-making in literary web series. The principle of agency, for instance, relates to a narrative's "participatory design" or how it enables readers to take certain actions and make certain choices – behaviours facilitated by the sociotechnical affordances of social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter and Tumblr. As narratives that leverage these social media sites, literary web series provide readers with a sense of agency created by a reader's ability to participate in and contribute to a narrative, thereby forming first method of meaning-making. The sections that follow discuss the general concept of affordances and trace the use of this term in digital media environments, before highlighting how a literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* draws on specific sociotechnical affordances to invite readers to share, converse, and create in the narrative.

Defining Affordances

According to Page, "storytelling is an interactive process" and the "conversational formats of social media" emphasise this interactivity (2014, p. 1). Literary web series leverage social media platforms by systematically disseminating different parts of their overall narratives across those sites. Most literary web series use YouTube as a central hub, uploading character vlogs and videos to a designated channel. Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, and Instagram then host accounts for various individual characters, depending on the needs of the story. The use of these particular sites is unsurprising; a 2018 survey of social media use among Americans 18-years and older found that Facebook and YouTube "dominated the social media landscape," with younger adults also gravitating towards Instagram and Twitter (Smith and Anderson, 2018). As previously discussed in Chapter 2, literary web series thrive in the convergent media environment because textual and social convergence enables these narratives to use multiple social media platforms, while also offering different perspectives and points of view on the narrative. Additionally, the participatory design of these platforms encourages readers to provide feedback on the narrative, either by commenting on a YouTube video, tweeting at a particular character, reposting photos

on Instagram, or adding narrative-specific tags on a Tumblr blog. Kuznetsova argues that this feedback then "becomes part of the literary text," bringing readers into the narrative's storyworld (2014, p. 272). The various behaviours of readers are enabled by properties of the different social media; embedded within the structure of these sites are the opportunities for certain actions. These actions are known as affordances and are features of the digital media platforms that invite social interactions and participation by users. Through these affordances, literary web series can create meaningful narratives for readers by encouraging and enabling reader engagement with the text, reinforcing readers' sense of agency and contributing to the creation of narratively-constructed digital intimacy.

The concept of affordances derives from Gibson's work in the field of ecological psychology. According to Gibson's initial definition, an affordance is "a specific combination of the properties of [an object's] substance and its surfaces taken with reference to an animal" (1977, p. 67). He further explains that the affordances of a particular object or environment "are what it affords animals, what it provides or furnishes, for good or ill" (ibid, p. 68). To illustrate the idea of affordances, Gibson offers the example of an object with a flat and sturdy surface meant to hold the weight of a human; whether known as a chair, stool, or bench, he says, the object is designed to "afford *sitting-on*" (emphasis original; ibid). In his 1988 book, *The Psychology of Everyday Things*,[19] Donald Norman expanded and updated Gibson's definition, describing affordances as "the *perceived* and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used" (emphasis mine; 2002, p. 9). Norman argued that there was a difference between visible affordances and perceived affordances. Visible affordances "provide strong clues to the operations of things" and do not require instructions or labels (ibid). Most people, for example, do not need guidance when presented with a chair; they know they can sit on it. Perceived affordances, meanwhile, "convey messages about… possible uses, actions, and functions" of objects and environments (2002, p. 82). Thus, for a person with the necessary strength, a chair could suggest – or afford – the possibility of throwing it, even if it is more likely that it will be used for sitting. While Gibson emphasised affordances as natural, observable relationships between an object or environment

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[19] In the updated and revised editions of Norman's book, including the 2002 edition quoted here, the title was changed to *The Design of Everyday Things*.

and an actor, Norman focused on affordances as properties that could be designed "to encourage or constrain specific actions" (Bucher and Helmond, 2017, p. 236). Tumblr, for instance, allows users to add tags to a blog post. While tags are meant to be used to "add user-generated labels for the purposes of annotating an online resource," in practice, many Tumblr users use tags to include commentary, opinion, or reactions to a blog post in a way that "indicates a logical or structural division in the post" that is not otherwise available through the affordances of the platform (Bourlai, 2018, pp. 46-47). Users are therefore transforming Tumblr's tag affordance into a function that better serves their needs and desires in using the platform, demonstrating a desire to control how they create and consume content online. For readers of literary web series, this sense of agency is an important component of their overall narrative experience; when they are able to participate and interact in ways of their own choosing, their sense of connection to the narrative strengthens.

Over time, as Internet-based technologies developed, Norman's definition of affordances became quite popular among computer scientists and software designers, who in turn adopted and appropriated the term for their own work. In 1991, William Gaver sought to define affordances with regard to social interactions, and specifically, human-computer interactions. According to Gaver, affordances "are properties of the world defined with respect to people's interaction with it" (1991, p. 2). He offers a computer's scroll bar as an example; at first glance, a user may perceive the ability to grab the bar, but "visual information probably does not indicate an affordance of dragging it or using it to scroll a window" (ibid). It is only after the user grabs the scroll bar that the ability to move it up and down becomes apparent. In rethinking affordances in terms of interactions with technology, Gaver hoped to prove that "social activities are embedded in and shaped by the material environment" (1996, p. 125, quoted in Bucher and Helmond, 2017). Gibson, Norman, and Gaver's work eventually led to communication and media scholars expanding the definition of affordances even further, with such variations as communicative affordances (Hutchby, 2001), social and sociotechnical affordances (boyd, 2014; Postigo, 2016; Wellman et al, 2003), and technological affordances (Postigo, 2016). Bucher and Helmond also point out that the concept of affordances has gained prominence in media studies and social media research specifically because it adequately incorporates "the new dynamics or types of

communicative practices and social interactions" that arise from various social and digital media platforms (2017, p. 239).

Each digital media platform exists as its own unique environment and, to recall Gaver, affords users certain features depending on the users' interaction with that environment. There are certainly similarities and overlaps between the platforms, but there are also differences. For the purposes of this thesis, and the discussion of agency and affordances in relation to literary web series, boyd's definition of sociotechnical affordances will be used: the "properties or characteristics of an environment [that] make possible – and, in some cases, are used to encourage – certain types of practices, even if they do not determine what practices will unfold" (2014, pp. 10-11). The properties or characteristics that boyd mentions in her definition are what Bucher and Helmond refer to as "high-level affordances" because they evoke certain "kinds of communicative practices and habits" that social media platforms can "enable or constrain" (2017, p. 240), and because these affordances may be present on multiple social media platforms. Bucher and Helmond contrast high-level affordances with "low-level affordances," which are "Gibsonian" features that "afford certain actions, such as clicking, sharing or liking" (ibid). The next sections of this chapter will discuss both high-level and low-level affordances in relation to literary web series.

I. High-Level Affordances

In her work, boyd identifies four primary, high-level affordances shared by most social media, which are persistence, visibility, spreadability, and searchability (2014). Persistence, according to boyd, means that social media content and interactions are enduring and lasting in a different way from analogue interactions. Messages sent through social media rarely expire and content published several years in the past can find its way to the present.[20] Facebook's "On This Day" and Memories features, for example, allow users to "see past status updates, photos, posts from friends and other things [they've] shared or been tagged in from one year ago, two years ago, and so on" (Gheller, 2015). Literary web series are similarly persistent; while many of these

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[20] There are, of course, exceptions to this. Snapchat's messages are specifically designed to "disappear, forever, in 1-10 seconds" (Colao, 2012).

narratives have reached natural stopping points, the content is still accessible and available.[21] For example, though the first episode of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was uploaded to YouTube in April 2012, it can be easily found with a simple search of YouTube in 2019. Literary web series are also persistent in the sense that many remain unfinished and open-ended (as previously explained in Chapter 2). In August 2014, Emma (of literary web series *Emma Approved*) posted a blog post announcing that she was "ready to move on to the next phase of my life" and was "going to take a break from posting for awhile [sic]" (Woodhouse, 2014), signalling the supposed end of her narrative. Nearly four years later, however, in May 2018, the *Emma Approved* Twitter account became active again, with a cryptic post about "[my] next big move" (EA, 2018a). Additional hints eventually led to the reveal of a collaboration with a storytelling mobile application and the *Emma Approved* revival (EA, 2018b; Pemberley Digital, 2018b).

Most content on social media is also easily accessible by diverse audiences across the world. As boyd points out, social media content is usually highly visible because "sharing with broader or more public audiences is the default" and users are required "to take active steps to limit the visibility" of their content (2014, p. 12). Literary web series trendsetter *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* received a visibility boost when co-creator Hank Green used one of his popular, personal YouTube channels to promote the narrative in its early days (Vlogbrothers, 2012). Subsequent literary web series then leveraged LBD's success and popularity to obtain visibility. The first instalment of *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre* specifically mentions Lizzie Bennet as a source of inspiration, while the independent producers of *The March Family Letters* signed a deal with LBD co-creator Bernie Su to use the Pemberley Digital YouTube channel to distribute the literary web series version of Alcott's *Little Women* (AOJE, 2013c; Buck, 2015). One reason for visible content is the ease with which users can share and spread social media content. The third affordance, spreadability, refers to the ability of users to circulate posts, photos, and videos between multiple accounts and networks. Furthermore, boyd argues, "even when [sharing] tools aren't built into the system, content can often be easily downloaded or duplicated and then forwarded along" (2014, p. 12). Both the visibility affordance and the spreadability affordance are illustrated by viral content, or "compelling online material which is seen by a large number

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[21] Again, there are exceptions. Literary web series *Classic Alice* was deliberately removed from YouTube by creator Kate Hackett in protest of YouTube policies (Hackett, 2018).

of people in a short time, being shared widely and voluntarily" (Chandler and Munday, 2016f). One example of viral content in a literary web series comes from *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. On 1 November 2012, Lizzie uploaded a video, which featured the first on-camera (and greatly anticipated) appearance of Darcy. The video was soon shared across Twitter and Tumblr, and many posts used the hashtag "#darcyday" as an identifier. The spreadability tools provided by Twitter enabled LBD readers to easily and quickly share the video across the Twitter platform, while the hashtag "#darcyday" increased the visibility of the video and allowed readers to find other users discussing the narrative. Moreover, these affordances helped expand the LBD fan base, and reinforced existing fans' connection to the LBD community. A Twitter user unfamiliar with LBD could use the hashtag to follow the conversation and learn about the LBD world, while a long-time reader could discover new friends who shared an interest in LBD. Co-creator Bernie Su commented on the increase in the narrative's audience, as seen in figure 3.1 below:

Bernie Su
@BernieSu

Follow ⌄

To say that @TheLBDofficial fandom has exploded since #DarcyDay would be an understatement. Awesome.

4:32 AM - 5 Nov 2012
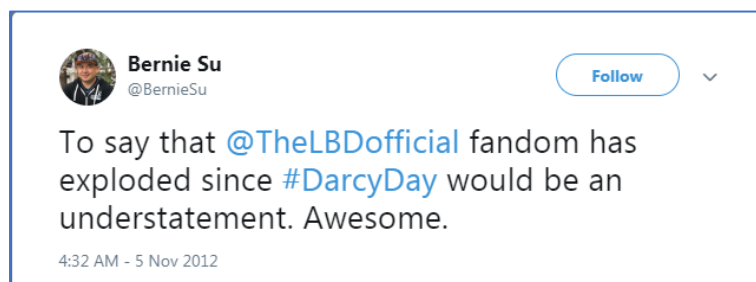
Figure 3.1 – Su's tweet about the "explosion" of LBD after Darcy Day (Su, 2012d).

The last affordance boyd mentions is searchability, which she links to the continual development of search engine algorithms. Most social media platforms have a search function and most sites also feed into third-party search engines such as Google or Bing. Thus, they "make it easy to surface esoteric interactions" and "uncover countless messages written by and about others" (boyd 2014, p. 12). Search functions allow users to find content relating to any keyword or phrase without having to follow or be connected to the author of that content. On Tumblr, for instance, "tags play a salient role for enhancing the searchability and visibility" of content (Bourlai, 2018, p. 47). Tags are descriptive terms and phrases users can add to a Tumblr post as a way of categorising the post. The ability to search by tag also enables Tumblr users to "reach [any] potential audience that may be searching" for a specific tag, whether that audience follows the user or not (Hoch, 2018, ¶ 2.6). For fans of literary web series, Tumblr's tagging system

helps connect them to other fans and allows them to discover new narratives they may have missed. Twitter user and literary web series fan *Shpindly* even attributes the overall popularity and growth of literary web series to Tumblr's "meticulous tag" system (*Shpindly_*, 2019). Twitter has also developed a robust search function to help users find specific content, primarily through the hashtag. Scott explains that Twitter's platform was designed "so that any string of characters which is preceded by a hash symbol [#] becomes a hyperlink, allowing users to search for any content that includes the same tag" (2015, p. 12). As previously explained, Twitter's hashtags proved especially useful during *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*' "Darcy Day" when readers used hashtags to express their excitement for the first on-camera appearance of Darcy. Readers searching for that particular term were able to take part in the "astronomical anticipation" of seeing Darcy for the first time in Lizzie's videos (Romano, 2012).

These high-level affordances (persistence, visibility, spreadability, and searchability) have broad definitions that can encompass a range of technical features that may be unique or distinguishable on individual platforms. For instance, Twitter uses hashtags to increase a tweet's visibility and searchability, while Tumblr has its tagging system. Facebook makes it easy for users to share and spread someone else's content, while "the ability to repost or indeed 're-gram' content posted to Instagram [is] only available through a series of plug-ins or separate applications" (Larsson, 2018, p. 2228). The more granular, platform-specific features of social media sites such as YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr might encourage "the sharing of links," provide "reblogging or favouriting tools that repost images or texts, or [make] it easy to copy and paste content from one place to another (boyd, 2014, p. 12). The next three sections of this chapter look at the different low-level affordances leveraged by literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, and illustrate how those affordances allow readers to share, converse, and create.

II. Low-Level Affordances: Sharing

Whereas Bucher and Helmond describe high-level affordances as the "dynamics and conditions enabled by technical devices, platforms and media," their definition of low-level affordances focuses on the design and the "materiality of the medium, in specific features, buttons, [and]

screens" (2017, p. 239; p. 240). boyd's four high-level affordances, for instance, positions the spreadability or sharing of social media content is a key feature found on many social media platforms. Each site, however, offers its own low-level affordances to enable spreadability. YouTube's website and mobile applications, for example, offer users multiple options for sharing videos, either by posting the video to their accounts on other social media platforms, by copying and pasting a hyperlink to the video, by directly emailing the video to an intended recipient, or by embedding the video on a blog or website. Literary web series including *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *Green Gables Fables*, and *The New Adventures of Peter and Wendy* leveraged YouTube's end screen function to encourage readers to share the videos with friends, subscribe to a specific YouTube channel, or follow official social media accounts. The end screen, which is also known as an end card or an "outro" screen, is an interactive frame at the end of a video, with hyperlinks to additional content on YouTube's platform or other websites. At the conclusion of each of Lizzie's videos in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, for instance, the end screen provided a tease of the next video, invited readers and fans to watch the previous video, included links to LBD's accounts on other social media platforms, and prompted readers and fans to watch Lydia's videos, or Darcy's (see figure 3.2 below). The end screen allows readers to choose for themselves what their next narrative step will be, much like hypertext fictions or "Choose Your Own Adventure" stories that offer "multiple reading paths" (Hayles and Monfort, 2012, p. 455). Readers therefore have the agency to decide how they will navigate through a literary web series' various parts.
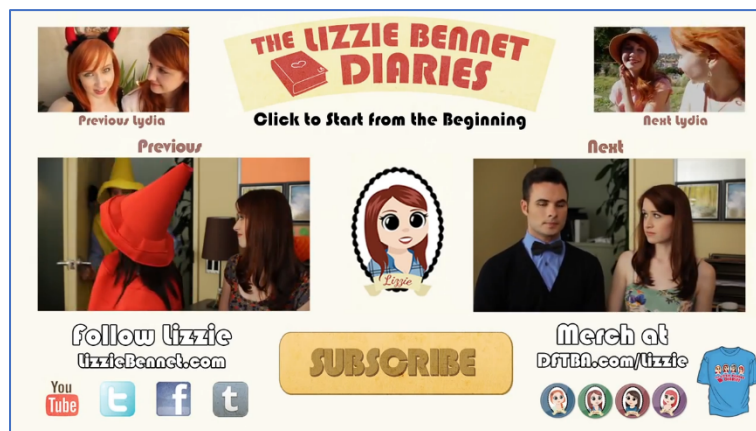
Figure 3.2 - An example of an end screen or "outro" from Lizzie's videos (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012c).

On Twitter, literary web series encourage readers to share the narrative's content through the retweet function.[22] Retweets encourage Twitter users to share and promote content from other users to their own individual networks, amplify certain messages across the media platform, or offer implicit approval of a tweet's content. According to boyd et al, "retweeting brings new people into a particular [conversation] or thread, inviting them to engage without directly addressing them" (2010). In the earliest years of the literary web series trend (2012 to 2014), Twitter users had two options when retweeting the narrative's content. The standard retweet tool reproduced an original tweet as it was, without any modifications or additional content. Draucker and Collister (2015) refer to this type of retweet as the "Preserving Retweet" since it preserves the original tweet's content and author (see figure 3.3 below).
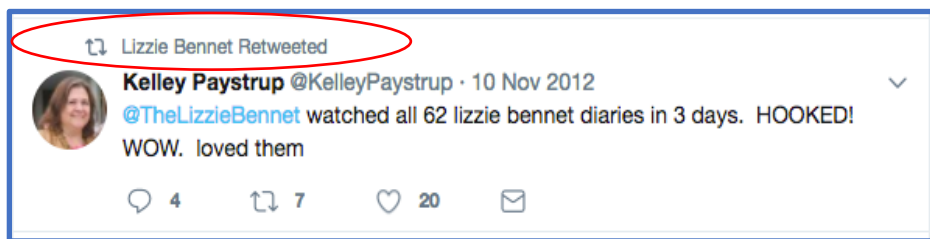
Figure 3.3 - An example of a Preserving Retweet, per Draucker and Collister (2015)'s definition.

Some users, however, continued to use an older style of retweeting, known as the "Adapting Retweet." This retweet required manual effort by a user and usually followed a specific formula: added or commentary text, followed by the letters RT (shorthand for "retweet"), the original author's username preceded by the @ symbol, and then the original tweet as it was published (Draucker and Collister, 2015). The Adapting Retweet allowed literary web series readers, as well as the narrative's characters, to add to the conversation in addition to sharing the original message (see figure 3.4 below). Tumblr's reblog button functions in much the same way as Twitter's retweets, by allowing users to share content created by other users on one's own blog, either as is, or with the addition of comments by the reblogging user. The different options for retweeting or reblogging narrative content contribute to readers' sense that they are able to control their narrative experience and make choices that align with their individual preferences.

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[22] Retweeting is "the practice of reproducing another user's tweet on one's own profile and distributing that tweet one's own followers (Draucker and Collister, 2015).
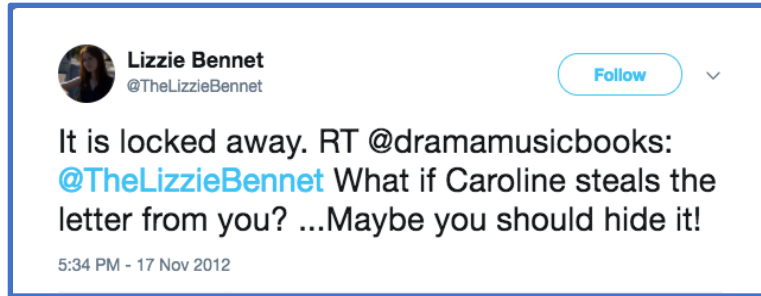
Figure 3.4 - An example of an Adapting Retweet, per Draucker and Collister (2015's) definition

In addition to affording users sharing tools, YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr also allow users to provide reactions to content shared on the platform. YouTube, for example, allows users to register their like or dislike of a particular video by clicking on icons that use well-known expressive symbols, the "thumbs up" for a positive reaction or the "thumbs down" for a negative reaction.[23] Twitter and Tumblr, meanwhile, invite users to click on a heart icon, changing it from white to red, to indicate a particular tweet or post is a "favourite." Moreover, all three platforms track the number of "liking" or "favouriting" reactions, allowing any user to see how other users may have reacted. Kuznetsova argues that these reader reactions "become part of [the] literary text" because they "directly influence how the text is perceived by others" (2014, p. 272). Though these reactions may seem small and insignificant compared to textual or video messages, Baym suggests that they can "reveal information about ourselves through the ways we behave" and therefore "can become inordinately influential" (2010, pp. 119-120). Thompson (2009) points out that while "each individual bit of social information is insignificant on its own," over time, social media posts can combine to provide intimate insight into an individual. Moreover, when readers retweet, like, and/or share content from a literary web series, they are publicly signalling to others their appreciation for the narrative as well as their identity as a literary web series fan. Thus, the retweets, likes, and shares can serve as a way to connect readers of literary web series to each other and can lead to the formation of relationships. Chambers refers to this as the "public display of connectedness" and contends that these displays can help "sustain [intimate] personal connections" on social media sites (2013, pp. 16-17).

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[23] In the event that the thumb icons are not familiar to an individual user, when someone hovers her mouse over the icon without clicking, a small pop-up message appears, letting the user know that the thumbs up means "I like it" while the thumbs down means "I dislike it."

II. Low-Level Affordances: Conversations

Another category of low-level affordances that contributes to a reader's sense of agency in literary web series are conversational tools, which enable readers to interact with various narratives' characters on YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr. YouTube's comments section, for example, gives readers the agency to offer their opinions on particular videos and converse with other readers and fans through replies. One reader might leave a comment, and another could reply by mentioning the first reader in her comment or by clicking the "reply" button, which would create a threaded comment chain of messages and responses. YouTube's comments section also allows the characters of a literary web series to respond to reader questions by either replying directly to the original message, or by incorporating answers into a future video. In *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, for example, "Lizzie" would answer questions directly in the comments section, answering specific reader questions about the video's content.[24] When several readers inquired about the whereabouts of Mary and Kitty (sisters of Elizabeth in Austen's novel that LBD chose not to include), Lizzie replied that she had "just two sisters, Jane and Lydia" and that she was the middle child, because "Lydia's the youngest, and Jane's older" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012l). Additionally, several literary web series, including *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre*, and *Project Green Gables*, incorporated audience feedback into their respective narratives, either as question-and-answer videos or as part of an otherwise story-focused video.

In episode 38 of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, for instance, Lizzie mentions that many readers and fans "keep asking in the comments" about her relationship with George Wickham (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012t), before sharing some details about the gentleman in question, giving the impression that she chose to discuss Wickham in her video specifically because readers left comments asking her to do just that. Chambers points out that the affordances of YouTube that allow readers to direct questions to literary web series characters (and have those questions answered) "brings together the technological and the emotional" because they "lend themselves to a particular emotional register or mode of articulation" (2013, p. 165). This degree of interactivity by literary web series is "a powerful indicator of the degree of intimacy involved"

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[24] Most likely, the questions were answered by production and writing staff acting as Lizzie.

because it "shapes social interactions as personal exchanges" (Chambers, 2013, p. 165). When a literary web series character answers their question in a video, readers are provided with the sense that they are being heard by the narrative; this helps reduce the perceived distance between audience and narrative, and strengthens the sense that a literary web series is not simply a story, but rather an experience that draws readers in and immerses them in the storyworld, a topic I explore in detail in Chapter 4.

Readers of literary web series also had the opportunity to interact and converse with literary personages on Twitter, where the majority of literary web series maintained accounts for their narratives' characters. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* oversaw thirteen Twitter feeds, including ones for Lizzie, Jane, Lydia, Darcy, Wickham, and others. Wendy Darling, her brothers John and Michael, and neighbour Peter Pan tweeted regularly throughout *The New Adventures of Peter and Wendy*, while *Classic Alice* characters Alice, Andrew and Cara frequently exchanged messages on Twitter as well. The conversations between literary web series characters are "public by default" allowing readers to "eavesdrop" and listen in (boyd, 2014, p. 13). Additionally, by using Twitter's mentions function (the @ messages and @ replies), readers could "converse directly with other specific users, drawing their attention to particular content or attempting to capture their attention in general" (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 36). Since, as Chen asserts, "mentions signal the start of a conversation," readers could send a Twitter message to Lizzie, Wendy, or Alice, who could then reply (2011, p. 757). One example of this is the tweets exchanged between the Lizzie Bennet account and Twitter user *@onceuponalyric* in June 2012, when *onceuponalyric* directed a tweet to Lizzie, posting, "*@TheLizzieBennet*, my mom started pitching guys for me to marry this morning. Starting to empathize with you!" (Bennet, 2012d; see figure 3.5 below).
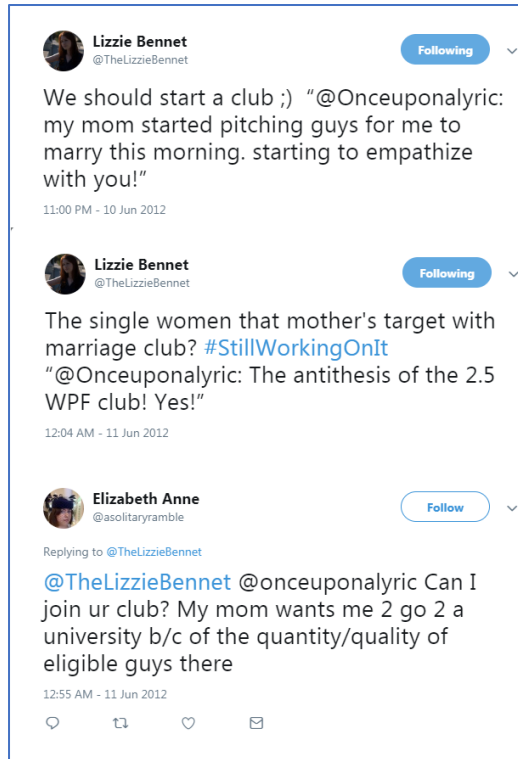
Figure 3.5: Screenshots of Lizzie's conversation with readers on Twitter (Bennet, 2012d).

The Lizzie account responded with "we should start a club," which led to a series of back-and-forth tweets pondering an appropriate name of the aforementioned club. In another example, *Classic Alice* protagonist Alice Rackham tweeted in December 2015 that she would be happy to provide Christmas gift recommendations to her followers (Rackham, 2015). Several readers responded with recommendation requests, which Alice then fulfilled. Moreover, since the tweets were publicly visible and any Twitter user who followed Lizzie or Alice on Twitter could see their replies, the conversation eventually expanded to include other readers. Abidin refers to exchanges like the ones mentioned here as "perceived interconnectedness" or interactions that "give the impression of intimacy" to followers of literary web series characters (2015, ¶ 2). The tweets published as part of a literary web series deliberately mimic and reflect actual, authentic tweets from real Twitter users and therefore blur the line between the narrative and reality. When a character such as Lizzie or Alice directly responds to a reader's message, the line is blurred even further; it demonstrates that the literary web series is reacting in real time to real messages and enables readers to view these interactions "as more personal, direct, swift, and thus intimate" (Abidin, 2015, ¶ 20).

III. Low-Level Affordances: Creations

Finally, in addition to the sharing and conversational low-level affordances that allow and encourage reader participation in a literary web series, YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr also offer low-level affordances that provide readers with a sense of creative agency. Literary web series narratives, through their use of social media platforms, invite readers to produce fan creations, such as GIF sets, parody and role-playing accounts, remix videos, and more. These sites provide users with "a series of tools to help [them] duplicate text, images, video, and other media" (boyd, 2010, p. 47). In conjunction with the sharing affordances mentioned earlier in this chapter, these creation-centred affordances and functions enable users to easily copy, alter, and distribute their fan creations. Tumblr, for example, is a microblogging platform that specifically allows "music, art, fashion, photography, videos, GIFs, graphics, quotes, and other types of text [to] fit into one single output (Ehlin, 2014, p. 3). Moreover, Tumblr's interface prioritises what Stein calls "infinite scrolling" or a "sensation of limitlessness; no need to click on an arrow or the word 'next' to see what else fans have created, just keep scrolling and the Tumblr posts keep coming" (2016b). Within this environment of infinite scrolling, one of the most predominant forms of creativity is the GIF set because Tumblr's "interface allows for easy juxtaposition of multiple animated or still gifs" (Stein, 2016b).[25]

A literary web series reader, for instance, might create a collection of these looping images to memorialise a favourite scene from a YouTube video. This method of participation, made possible by Tumblr's affordances, allows users to engage with others in the digital media environment in a way "that surpasses the limitations of the symbols on a keyboard" and provides them with an outlet for their creativity (Gürsimsek, 2016, p. 331). Twitter, meanwhile, limits users to a specific number of characters per tweet, which makes the platform particularly well-suited for parody and role-playing accounts because the length restrictions mean that users must demonstrate a "familiarity with the… norms of the platform" and employ the limited space strategically (Highfield, 2016, p. 2030). When a user only has 140 or 280 characters to make a "short, sardonic, and pithy remark," every character matters (ibid). During *The Lizzie Bennet*

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[25] GIF is an acronym for "graphics interchange format" and is a specific type of image file widely used online. GIF sets are "sets of images, sometimes animated, sometimes not, arranged in a grid of sorts to communicate as a whole" (Stein, 2016b).

Diaries' initial release, for instance, several readers created parody accounts of the narrative's secondary characters, and used the accepted conventions of Twitter's platform for humorous purposes. As a result, there are tweets from "Mrs. Bennet" referencing the entirely fictional "Meryton Housewives" (in the vein of the *Real Housewives* television shows) and from "Hipster Darcy" offering examples for users following the "how to get out of a conversation" hashtag.

Affording Intimacy

The various high and low-level affordances of YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr highlighted above allow readers to participate in literary web series through sharing, interactive, and creation behaviours.[26] They also provide readers with choice: the ability to choose how and when they want to participate, if they choose to participate at all. In this way, many literary web series function as cybertexts (Aarseth, 1997), where the structure and organisation of the narrative's multiple components, distributed across different media platforms, becomes a fundamental part of a reader's experience of the narrative. Each choice a reader makes when consuming *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *Carmilla*, or *Nothing Much To Do* results in a specific version of that narrative, which may differ from another reader's version. That same reader may even choose to navigate through the narrative differently each time she reads and consumes the text. This not only ensures that each reader's experience of a literary web series will be highly individualised, it also contributes to making the narrative experience a highly intimate one. According to Raun et al, "social media are inherently designed to emphasise and facilitate intimate practices and connections" between users (2018, introduction). Papacharissi (2010, p. 46), meanwhile, argues that social media "render our conventional understandings of public and private anachronistic, and public and private are constantly negotiated and modified in online interactions." Perhaps most importantly, Chambers points out that "social network sites have become an important forum for the disclosure and display of emotions" and as a result, individuals' social media posts

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[26] As the affordances of these digital media platforms continue to change, so too will the different ways in which users and consumers can participate in a literary web series, even though most of the content for the majority of literary web series remains available online. boyd suggests that "persistence enables different kinds of interactions" and this is certainly true of literary web series (2014, p. 11). The types of participation a narrative such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* affords readers now, several years after its initial release, are very different from the types that were possible in 2012 and 2013, partly because the platforms themselves had changed, and partly because asynchronous interactions offer a different experience than real-time ones.

"become a marker of authentic, *bona fide* intimacy in a broad sense (emphasis original; 2013, p. 47).

Just as textual and social convergence have led to new ways of creating media and thinking about how we communicate with others, the concept of intimacy has undergone a similar evolution, with Chambers arguing that "relationships being negotiated through… social media are forcing us to rethink and re-envisage the nature of intimacy" (2013, p. 40). Many other scholars have echoed her argument: Gardner and Davis, for instance, maintain that "courtesy of digital technologies, intimacy [has] been reconfigured significantly in recent decades" (2013, p. 3). Jamieson, meanwhile, contends that the Internet "can enable forms of intimacy and support that would not be possible face-to-face" (2013, p. 17), and Lomanowska and Guitton point out that the "widespread integration of Internet and mobile communication technologies… is changing the principal modalities through which we engage with others" (2016, p. 138). Traditionally, relationships described as "intimate" were considered private and personal, with "intimacy" serving as a euphemism for sex (Chambers, 2013). Over time, the meaning of the word has shifted to represent a broader range of connections between people. Contemporary definitions describe intimacy as the state of being "closely connected by friendship or personal knowledge" and "an awareness of the innermost reality of one person by another" (Oxford, 2019c; Sexton and Sexton, 1982, quoted in Baym, 2018, p. 21). For the purposes of this thesis, I draw specifically on Chambers' concept of mediated intimacy, which emphasises the "democratisation of interpersonal relationships" and "agency, autonomy, choice, and flexibility" (2013, p. 45). According to Chambers, intimacy in the twenty-first century has expanded beyond personal and familial relationships to include "new and diverse forms of social dependency based on friendship and 'families of choice' as well as blood relatives and current partners" (2013, p. 44). As the term suggests, mediated intimacy is intertwined with contemporary media (and specifically, social media sites) because it blurs the boundaries between public and private, while highlighting the "fluid, diverse and informal nature of contemporary personal interactions" that often take place, at least in part, online (2013, p. 45).

Mediated intimacy has three fundamental characteristics: a friendship discourse, the use of disclosures, and (as previously mentioned earlier), the promotion of choice and control. The

friendship discourse, for example, emphasises the bonds between friends, rather than romantic and family-centred relationships. Chambers expands upon Giddens' notions of the "pure relationship" and "confluent love" that emphasise "the mutual emotional satisfaction of partners" and equality (Tucker, 1998, p. 205). According to Chambers, while Giddens' ideas focus primarily on romantic relationships, mediated intimacy "promotes companionship and friendship, emphasising choice and compatibility" (2013, p. 44). Additionally, mediated intimate relationships are fuelled by mutual self-disclosures; as the relationship between two individuals evolves, "self-disclosure becomes a marker of intimacy as trust: a demonstration of love and affection through shared secrets" (Chambers, 2013, p. 46). Stahl links self-disclosure to the idea of knowing and being known; the disclosure and "sharing of experiences, thoughts, feelings, and so on" provides individuals with a deeply-rooted sense of not just being seen, but being known and understood by someone else (2008; Day, 2013, p. 5). Disclosures are, therefore, an essential element in the creation of intimacy because they signal "participants' willingness to continue [the relationship] because of [the] mutual pleasure" gained from this reciprocal sharing and understanding (Jamieson, 2013, p. 9). Disclosures strengthen the bonds between two people and allow relationships to grow and evolve over time.

The promotion of choice and control (what Murray would call agency) in building intimacy is especially important for those relationships formed through media and media technologies. While communication methods such as letters, telegrams, and phone calls certainly may have helped contribute to the development of intimate relationships prior to the Internet, historically, face-to-face interaction was prioritised as the principal means for creating intimacy. The advent of social media, however, has led individuals to find new ways of connecting with other people remotely and asynchronistically. Thus, the notion of choice, while integral to most forms of intimacy, gains greater consequence in digital and social media environments that may lack or explicitly exclude the possibility for face-to-face interactions. As Day explains it, "what we have not immediately shared with another person in the form of a mutual experience can only be shared through confession or reminiscence" (2014, p. 5). According to Chambers (2013; 2017), the sense of agency is a vital part of mediated intimacy because different social media platforms help facilitate different types of relationships, intimate or otherwise. She also argues that mediated intimacies are formed primarily through "polymediated communication" that supports

an individual as she "juggles several platforms [to] control the nature and extent of [her] intimate associations" (Chambers, 2017, p. 34). Chambers' argument essentially proposes that "the more media platforms [that] are involved in supporting the interaction, the more intimate the relationship" (2013, p. 165). For instance, as Chapter 2 illustrated, one defining feature of literary web series is their categorisation as transmedia narratives that distribute a story across multiple social media sites. Through the low-level sociotechnical affordances offered by YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr, readers gain a sense of agency over their narrative experience, which can help facilitate the development of intimacy. Moreover, the degree and intensity of that intimacy may very well depend on how readers choose to participate and the number of social media platforms they use to engage with the narrative.

These foundational elements of mediated intimacy – the friendship discourse, disclosures, and choice – are intertwined with the "affordances and modes of engagement" associated with social media (Chambers, 2013, p. 40). Mediated intimacy emphasises the formation of mutual friendships, while social media site Facebook similarly invites users to connect with "friends" through the site, using the term to cover all types of relationships, from casual acquaintances to spouses and children. Meanwhile, on Tumblr, users who follow each other's blog as informally referred to as "mutuals," indicating the decision on the part of each user to follow the other. Nearly all social media platforms allow users to publish content in some form, while also controlling who sees that content (usually through privacy settings, the block and mute functions, or user-created lists). Thus, users can decide what to disclose and to whom, providing them with a sense of agency. Users can also choose who they want to connect with, how often they want to see content from that person, and when and where they want to consume the content. Chambers suggests that these disclosures on social media accounts "act as a marker that defines authentic friendship and differentiates this relationship from 'artificial or superficial" friendships (2013, p. 47). Most importantly, social media sites provide individuals with "networked connectivity" that "functions as an *infrastructure of intimacy* [by] playing a key role in the creation and maintenance of friendships, sexual arrangements and affairs of the heart" (emphasis original; Paasonen, 2018, p. 103). This networked connectivity helps facilitate the formation of intimacy by connecting one person to another and providing a space for the relationship to grow and develop, regardless of physical distance. Consequently, mediated intimacy not only emphasises

choice, disclosures, and friendship as discussed above, it is also intricately linked to digital spaces and the affordances provided by different social media platforms.

As this chapter has demonstrated, literary web series, as works of digital literature, offer three readers "characteristic pleasures" or principles that separate these narratives from analogue ones, and these principles directly link to a literary web series' methods of meaning-making. For example, the principle of agency emerges, in part, from a narrative's participatory design, which then provides readers with the ability to interact with a narrative. Different digital and social media platforms enable these interactions through specific sociotechnical affordances, giving readers opportunities to share, converse, and create in and around their favourite literary web series. Furthermore, as the first method of meaning-making in literary web series, the various affordances of social media sites can contribute to the creation of mediated intimacy, allowing readers to form connections to the narrative. Murray also suggests that agency can reinforce a reader's sense of immersion in and the transformation of a narrative – the two other methods of meaning-making in literary web series. When we feel immersed in a story, she argues, "we are motivated to initiate actions that lead to the feeling of agency, which in turn deepens our sense of immersion" (Murray, 2017, p. 114). Additionally, when we are "invited to enact or construct [our] own stories" through the use of specific sociotechnical affordances, these stories "have a transformative power that exceeds both narrated and conventionally dramatized events because we assimilate them as personal experiences" (Murray, 2017, p. 203; p. 212). The next chapter will explore in detail immersion and transformation (which I also refer to as resonance) in relation to literary web series.

Review

This chapter offered a discussion of the first method of meaning-making in literary web series. Using Murray's (2017) principles of digital literature that can offer readers "characteristic pleasures," I outlined how these three principles (agency, immersion, and transformation) can also be found in literary web series. I then explored the concept of affordances in detail, starting with a general overview (per Gaver, 1991; Gibson, 1977; and Norman, 2002) before looking specifically at affordances in digital media spaces, as researched by boyd (2014). Per boyd, I

argue that these sites enable the narrative content of literary web series to be persistent, visible, spreadable, and searchable, thereby encouraging readers to participate in the narrative. I then distinguished between boyd's "high-level" affordances with more technical "low-level" affordances, as defined by Bucher and Helmond (2017). I suggested that the low-level affordances found in literary web series can be categorised in three ways: sharing affordances, conversing affordances, and creating affordances. The work of Chen (2011), Draucker and Collister (2015), Highfield (2016), Papacharissi (2014; 2015), and Stein (2016b) provided relevant support and evidence.

I then suggested that the various sociotechnical affordances of sites like YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr can contribute to the creation of what Chambers (2013) calls "mediated intimacy." I highlighted how the key features of mediated intimacy (a friendship discourse, disclosures, and choice) are frequently found on social media platforms and, due to their use of those platforms, in literary web series as well. This section referred to the work of Abidin (2013), Baym (2010; 2018), Chambers (2013), and Raun (2018) to offer examples. Moreover, a reader's ability to control her individual narrative experience through the sociotechnical affordances of a social media platform has the potential to make that experience more meaningful since it is based the reader's agency. I concluded the chapter with the assertion that the agency provided to readers by the sociotechnical affordances can also help reinforce narrative immersion and literary resonance, the two other methods of meaning-making in literary web series, which I discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Immersion and Resonance in Literary Web Series

Preview

Chapter 4 continues the discussion of the methods of meaning-making in literary web series that I began in Chapter 3. Here, I explore in detail the second and third methods: the creation of narrative immersion (per Ryan, 2015a) and the literary resonance of literary web series' source texts (per Stockwell, 2009a; 2009b). First, I define narrative immersion using Ryan's definition before analysing in detail how literary web series created three specific forms of narrative immersion: spatial, temporal, and emotional immersion. I also link these types of immersion with the intimate experiences of readers, drawing on research from Chambers (2013), Day (2013), Raun (2018), Reis and Shaver (1988), and Senft (2008). Examples from *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and other literary web series provide context. The second half of this chapter explains the concept of literary resonance according to Stockwell and illustrates how literary web series transform analogue texts while also celebrating the legacy of the source material. This section is supported by research from Brownstein (2011), Harman (2009), Hutcheon (2017), Johnson (2006), Looser (2013; 2017), McMaster (1996), and Szwydky (2018). The final section of this chapter will look at how literary resonance can contribute to the formation of intimacy in literary web series.

Defining Immersion

In Chapter 3, I illustrated how many literary web series leverage the specific affordances of social media platforms to provide readers with opportunities to participate in the narrative. According to Kuznetsova (2014, p. 275), readers' contributions to the story "blur the line between real people and fictional characters" since there is no obvious or inherent distinction between a real tweet and a fictional, literary tweet. By participating, readers "make the established communication between reality and literature part of the imaginary [story]world" (Kuznetsova, 2014, p. 275), which helps create and sustain a sense of narrative immersion, the second method of meaning-making for literary web series. In a formal sense, the word immersion refers to the process of being absorbed in some action or condition, of "plunging or sinking into a particular state of body or mind" (Oxford, 2019b). Murray argues for a

metaphorical definition when she describes immersion as "the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality… that takes over all of [your] attention" (2017, p. 124). Ryan, meanwhile, offers a very specific explanation of immersion in relation to the act of reading. She chooses to define immersion as "the experience through which a fictional world acquires the presence of an autonomous, language-independent reality populated with live human beings" (2015a, p. 9). Though the concept of immersion can be linked to a variety of media (such as video games or virtual reality experiences), it is especially prevalent in discussions of narrative because, as Murray points out, "our brains are programmed to tune into stories with an intensity that can obliterate the world around us" (2017, p. 123). Literary, or narrative, immersion in particular has deep historical roots. Ryan argues, for example, that narrative immersion can be traced back to the realistic "aesthetics of the nineteenth-century novel… [which] transported the reader into a virtual body located on the scene of the action" (2015a, p. 4). She cites Dickens as an example, since he drew from the world he knew to craft his stories (making it easier for readers to readily imagine life in Victorian London), and the serial release of the stories kept readers engaged over time.

Ryan emphasises the creation of realistic and authentic worlds, and the serial publication of a narrative as being two of the components of narrative immersion; perhaps not so incidentally, these are also, as previously discussed in Chapter 2, essential elements of literary inspired web series. Ryan's theory of narrative immersion centres on the idea of a textual world, or a storyworld. According to Ryan, immersion as it relates to narrative and narrative texts "is a purely mental phenomenon, the product of an act of imagination" (2015a, p. 61). When an individual is immersed in a story, she allows the story to take precedence in her mind and actively ignores (at least temporarily) anything that is not a part of the story. Narrative immersion, therefore, requires the reader's effort to mentally conjure the components of the narrative in her imagination, but Ryan also argues that narrative immersion requires texts to "offer an expanse to be immersed within" – that is, a textual world in which the narrative exists (2015a, p. 62). For Ryan, a textual world, or storyworld, serves as a boundary between the real world and the fictional, imagined world in which the narrative takes place.[27] Readers construct these worlds in their imaginations by pairing information about the world found in the text with

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[27] Ryan uses "textual world" and "storyworld" more or less interchangeably and so too will this chapter.

existing knowledge, real-life experience, and details gleaned from other texts. Just as storyworlds "invite the reader to imagine [the storyworld] as a physical, autonomous reality" (Ryan, 2015a, p. 64), so too do literary web series. Literary web series accomplish this through their use of well-known social media platforms with which many readers are already familiar. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* co-creator Bernie Su says LBD strove to "accurately represent [the] setting of contemporary America," which is why Lizzie's story used YouTube as the primary narrative channel (Su, 2012b).[28] Stein also suggests that another method for creating realistic storyworlds in literary web series is depicting the protagonists as fans of certain media. In her first "questions and answers" video, for example, Lizzie Bennet identifies herself as a fan of *The Hunger Games* books (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012o). Meanwhile, the first episode of *Carmilla* shows main character Laura drinking from a *Dr. Who* Tardis mug and the second episode has Laura referencing both *Harry Potter* and *Veronica Mars* (KindaTV, 2014a; 2014b). Stein proposes that this integration of media fandom into literary web series "becomes shorthand for the characters' seeming claim on the authentic" and embeds the characters "in the lived experience and mediated culture of their viewers" (2016, p. 174).

In addition to the creation of a realistic storyworld, literary web series achieve narrative immersion through the serial release of the story over time. Though scholars such as Gerrig contend that narrative immersion "serves as an invitation to the [reader] to abandon the here and now" (1993, p. 12), literary web series do the exact opposite – they create immersive experiences by drawing on and simulating the here and now (i.e., the present day), rather than abandoning it. Hamby, Brinberg, and Jaccard claim that stories are immersive if the characters "interact in a way that matches our understanding of social interaction, or [are] motivated to achieve goals that correspond with motives and goals that one might encounter in one's real world" (2018, p. 117). As explained in earlier in this thesis, literary web series frequently adopt the format of the vlog, which includes the weekly or biweekly release of YouTube videos. In doing so, literary web series match the expectations of their audience who, likely being familiar with YouTube and vlog conventions, would anticipate new content on a regular basis. According to Ryan, this serial release of content not only recalls the publication style of nineteenth-century literature, it also

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[28] According to the Pew Research Centre, YouTube is accessed on a daily basis by "nearly three-quarters of U.S. adults and 94% of 18- to 24-year-olds" (Smith and Anderson, 2018).

holds audiences "in constant suspense by the development of the plot" which in turn strengthens the sense of narrative immersion (2015a, p. 4).[29] Ultimately, narrative immersion is sustained successfully when the fictional storyworld retains some similarity with the actual world because then readers are able to recognise and relate to at least some of the features in the textual world. In taking inspiration from the actual world, either through media fandom or the vlog-style release of content, literary web series incorporate features of the actual world within their respective storyworlds that serve as reference points and reminders for the reader, helping reinforce the imagined reality of the textual world. Thus, for many readers of literary web series, the narratives are immersive precisely because they resemble the real world readers already know.

In the last chapter, I outlined how the various sociotechnical affordances of social media platforms can afford intimacy and specifically linked those affordances with the concept of mediated intimacy (per Chambers, 2013). However, the development of intimacy in a literary web series relies on more than a reader's use of affordances to form connections with the narrative. It also depends on the degree to which readers feel immersed in the narrative and its overall storyworld. Immersion can take many forms, from ludic or game-related immersion in computer and video games, to 4DX technology which claims to "draw you into [a] movie as if you're living inside its world" (4DX, LLC, 2019). For the purposes of this thesis, however, I draw on Ryan's three different "forms of involvement with narrative: spatial, temporal, and emotional" (2015a, pp. 85-86). According to Ryan, spatial narrative immersion, a reader's connection to a story's setting, and temporal narrative immersion, a reader's connection to a story's unfolding plot, can combine into a kind of hybrid spatio-temporal immersion as a result of a narrative's specific use of language. A reader's immersion in a particular story can be intimate as well; sincere appreciation for and engagement with a narrative can result in a reader feeling closely connected and emotionally attached to the story and/or its characters. Just as intimacy is often deeply personal, so too is narrative, with Martinez pointing out that the narrative experience is "a personally relevant enterprise that differs from individual to individual" (2014, p. 110). Additionally, Day (2013, p. 7) maintains that narratives can be "shared spaces within which fictional narrators and real readers… [can] experience a story

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[29] Ryan specifically calls this "what suspense" and it is a form of temporal narrative immersion, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of this chapter.

together" and therefore other types of sharing, such as the disclosures that occur in intimate relationships, are useful in terms of thinking about narratives and the kinds of experiences they offer readers. What follows in the sections below is an exploration of Ryan's forms of narrative immersion, how different literary web series create these forms of immersion, and how they help contribute to an overall intimate narrative experience for readers.

Spatial and Temporal Immersion

Ryan defines spatial immersion as "a narrative's ability to immerse readers in a place" or a specific location (2015a, p. 86). A narrative's place is often a crucial aspect of the story; according to *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, a narrative's place "is the environment in which story-internal characters move about and live" and often includes "the temporal dimension to which it is bound" (Buchholz and Jahn, 2010). There are few, if any, narratives that unfold without some indication of the story's place and many well-known places (such as Ancient Greece or "the Wild West") have achieved near-mythic status because of the stories and narratives associated with them. Ryan suggests that, in written media, where spatial immersion relies on the language used to create a sense of place within a reader's mind, the use of specific and general place names becomes especially important. The denotations behind place names such as Ireland or Los Angeles, for instance, may not carry much meaning for readers, but the connotations associated with these places can conjure "cultural associations, literary evocations, personal memories, and encyclopaedic knowledge" in readers' imaginations (Ryan, 2015a, p. 86). The events of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, are situated in the English countryside, including Hertfordshire, Kent, and Derbyshire, with characters also travelling to and from London. Though Shapard (2012, loc. 7574) contends that "place matters less to Austen than to many novelists," Austen nevertheless deliberately mentions specific locations throughout the novel, primarily to emphasise how the proximity of any given location "to other places facilitates the plot" (Shapard, 2012, loc. 7574). Consequently, many of the novel's events take place within a relatively short distance to London, which maintained a position of considerable influence and popularity for members of the aristocracy and gentry in Austen's time (Shapard, 2012).

Ryan argues that spatial immersion is typically stronger when the places in a narrative are previously known to a reader, "because it is always easier to build mental representations from materials provided by personal experience" (2015a, p. 89). However, readers can still experience spatial immersion with narratives that invoke widely known place names, even if they have never actually visited that place, due to broader cultural and global associations with those places. New York City, for example, frequently appears as a setting in a variety of narratives across all forms of media and readers may have a strong mental image of the city based on their experiences with other NYC-set narratives. Readers are then able to spatially immerse themselves in the story because they are able to use that previous knowledge to fill in any gaps in their mental picture of the storyworld. The key to spatial immersion, Ryan says, is "the instantaneous character of the act of reference" when "the use of a place name teletransports the reader to the corresponding location" (2015a, p. 89). Some narratives choose not to use specific or actual place names, but are still able to provide readers with a sense of spatial immersion. Narratives within the science-fiction and fantasy genres, for example, are often set in completely fictional locations: Middle-Earth, Narnia, or a galaxy far, far away. These narratives might rely on generalised place names to help readers achieve spatial immersion. Place names such as "urban metropolis" or "rural village" can still contribute to immersion because they "represent a stereotype, and readers construct the setting by activating the cognitive frame with which the text associates the name" (Ryan, 2015a, p. 90).

Many literary web series draw on both specific and generalised place names to help readers develop a sense of spatial immersion. Some incorporate specific, real-life locations into the plot of the narrative. For instance, in the first episode of *Mina Murray's Journal*, a "vladaptation" of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Mina discusses her upcoming work trip to Romania and even holds up a printed map to point out her exact intended destination within the country (see figure 4.1 below; 2016a). In *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, meanwhile, major American cities Los Angeles and San Francisco are explicitly mentioned as settings for some parts of the narrative, with San Francisco making a visual appearance in a series of images shared on Gigi's Twitter feed in the early months of 2013. A part of the so-called Pemberley arc of the narrative, these images showcase several distinctive features of San Francisco, such as the Golden Gate Bridge and Fort Mason (see figure 4.1 below; Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2013i).

Figure 4.1: Screenshots from Mina Murray's Journal and The Lizzie Bennet Diaries that exemplify spatial narrative immersion (Mina Murray's Journal 2016; Lizzie Bennet Diaries 2013i).

Other literary web series are intentionally vague and rely on generalised or stock place names to convey a sense of universality to the narrative. The official website for *The Misselthwaite Archives* (a modern adaptation of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*) informs readers that the narrative is meant to take place in the U.S. state of Oregon (Pencil Ink Productions, 2019). The YouTube videos for the narrative's primary thread, however, do not explicitly mention Oregon and only ever reference the fictional small town of Misselthwaite; this narrative choice invites readers to conjure their own mental images of a stereotypical small town and conveys the sense that this story could conceivably take place anywhere. Similarly, a significant portion of the LBD narrative unfolds in an unnamed small town, and the only indication of the town's location comes from a few small hints provided in Lizzie's videos. In episode 76, for example, Lizzie mentions that she will soon be "*up* in San Francisco" to shadow a media company, while previously in episode 58, she mentions fans asking about "how Jane is doing *down* in L.A." (emphasis mine; Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012y; 2012e).

Temporal immersion occurs when readers become invested in watching a narrative progress or unspool. Typically, at the beginning of a story, there are potentially an endless number of possibilities for how the narrative will progress. The famous opening paragraph of *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, informs readers of a recent new addition – a single, wealthy young man – to an English countryside town, but it also leaves several questions unanswered. Who is this young man? Why are residents so eager to meet him? What will happen when they finally are

introduced to him? As the narrative continues, the total number of possibilities for the story's progression decreases as events occur (eliminating alternatives) and increases as new possibilities arise. By following along with the events of a story as they happen "in real time" or what Ryan calls "a 'lived' or 'human' experience of time," readers are not simply experiencing the passage of time, but are immersed in "a process of disclosure" that turns narrative possibilities into actualities (2015a, p. 99). In this way, temporal immersion shares similarities with intimacy, in that they both emphasise the importance of disclosure and use this sharing of information to draw people deeper into a relationship or narrative. Many literary web series adopt a real-time progression of their respective narratives; as I've argued elsewhere in this thesis, seriality is a key component of these stories. For example, according to Page, web series pioneer *Lonelygirl15* "posted [videos] regularly over time… and many of the episodes contributed to ongoing storylines" (2013, p. 37). Likewise, during LBD's initial release in 2012 and 2013, Lizzie released her YouTube videos one at a time, twice a week. In between the videos, characters would publish updates on Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, and other social media platforms. Timestamps on the various videos, tweets, and posts on LBD's media platforms, as well as references made within the narrative itself, helped reinforce the real-time progression of Lizzie's story. A tweet on Lizzie's Twitter feed timestamped 13 May 2012 mentions that the next video will be posted "on Monday." The next day, Lizzie tweeted about a slight delay in uploading the video, followed by a tweet announcing the latest instalment (Bennet, 2012b; Bennet, 2012c). In 2012, 14 May was indeed a Monday, and therefore LBD readers who consumed the narrative during its original release were experiencing the story in real time.

In addition to keeping readers invested in the progression of the narrative, Ryan also suggests that temporal immersion involves a narrative's "ability to play with the reader's expectations" and narrative elements "that keep readers turning pages or spectators speculating about what will come next" (2015a, p. 100). This can be achieved by any number of storytelling techniques or narrative devices, but according to Ryan, the most important narrative effect (and therefore the key to temporal immersion) is the creation of suspense within the reader. Suspense is "a state of mental uncertainty, with expectation of or desire for decision" and, as Ryan points out, "not only a narrative effect, [but] also an experience provided by life itself" (Oxford, 2019f; Ryan, 2015a, p. 101). When a reader engages with a narrative and continuously wonders about how the story

will progress and unfold, she is experiencing suspense as she waits to find out what might happen next. And though suspense is most often associated with the mystery or thriller genres, any narrative is capable of creating suspense for its readers and thus creating temporal immersion. Moreover, suspense is also closely linked with a narrative's disclosure of information over time, and thus helps strengthen the sense of intimacy for readers. Just as individuals use the disclosure of personal information to develop and deepen the intimacy in their relationships, so too do narratives. Through the use of suspense, narratives can initially keep readers in the dark before gradually providing answers over time, creating both intimacy and temporal immersion. Viewers of *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre* experience suspense in episode 55, "The Lie," when Jane discovers Rochester is already married. Throughout the video, Jane is seen preparing for her upcoming wedding to Rochester, despite lingering doubts. The use of a static glitch effect and the sound of footsteps in the background creates an ominous atmosphere. At the end of the video, after Jane has temporarily left the frame of the camera to speak with another character, she returns sobbing hysterically, while another voice off-screen says, "I told her" (AOJE, 2014). Meanwhile, the end of episode 59 of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* features the appearance of Darcy's torso in the frame of the camera and a distinctly male voice saying "excuse me, Lizzie" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012s). This tantalising glimpse of Darcy created a great deal of suspense, anticipation, and expectation among LBD readers as it represented the first time Darcy appeared in person in Lizzie's videos and led to fevered speculation about what would occur in episode 60. Moreover, as previously mentioned, LBD was initially released serially, so readers experiencing the narrative in 2012 were left in suspense for three days before achieving any resolution, increasing the sense of temporal immersion.

While the general concept of suspense is a key component of temporal immersion, Ryan proposes that "the intensity of the reader's immersion depends on the focus of the suspense" and suggests that there are, in fact, four types of suspense that contribute to temporal immersion (2015a, p. 102). These types, which Ryan calls what suspense, how/why suspense, who suspense, and metasuspense, result in varying degrees of temporal immersion, with what suspense leading to the deepest sense of immersion and metasuspense leading to the shallowest sense of immersion. When experiencing what suspense, for example, readers are primarily concerned with discovering what will happen next in the narrative, and finding an answer to the

question "will good or bad happen to the heroine?" (Ryan, 2015a, p. 102). What suspense usually also evokes readers' feelings of anticipation or anxiety for the characters, with the text "allowing the reader to know more than the character" (ibid). What suspense is also the most common type of suspense, occurring in narratives belonging to all genres. The first instalment of the literary web series *Carmilla*, for instance, is titled "Disorientation" and depicts main character Laura waking up after a night out to discover her roommate Betty has disappeared. Laura, along with the audience, experiences what suspense as she tries to make sense of events and, as if to emphasise the point even further, her final statement before the video ends is the exclamation "what the what?!" (KindaTV, 2014a).

In contrast to what suspense, how or why suspense "adopts the form of the enigma" and "involves multiple possibilities converging toward the same point" (Ryan, 2015a, p. 103). Why suspense is closely related to curiosity, and is not necessarily concerned with the outcome of a narrative, but rather how or why the story (or its characters) arrived at a certain state. Why suspense can often be found in romance novels where, due to genre conventions, a happy ending for a hero and heroine is usually assured, but the reader's journey is in discovering how they reach that happy ending. In the first few episodes of *Nothing Much to Do*, viewers and readers are introduced to Beatrice and Benedick – and their mutual dislike of each other (The Candle Wasters, 2014b). By the end of the series, however, they have started a romantic relationship; the series as a whole provides readers (especially those with prior knowledge of the source material) with why suspense as they watch the story unfold and see how Beatrice and Benedick move from adversaries to romantic partners. Many LBD readers, meanwhile, experienced why suspense through Lydia's narrative arc. Lydia's YouTube channel and Twitter feed were considered extra or supplemental to Lizzie's content; readers did not have to consume Lydia's content in order to understand and follow Lizzie's story. Those who did, however, were provided with additional insight into Lydia's character and were better able to understand the series of events that led to the revelation of her sex tape.

Earlier in this chapter, I pointed out that Ryan's concept of narrative immersion emphasises the creation of realistic and authentic storyworlds, and both spatial and temporal immersion are key aspects needed to attain that realism and authenticity. References to either actual locations or

familiar stock locations, the serial, "real-time" release of content, and the creation and resolution of suspense through disclosures are all methods employed by literary web series to create authentic and immersive narratives. These methods also contribute to a narrative's sense of intimacy, by drawing readers into the narrative. When characters in a literary web series refer to actual, real-world places as part of their narrative (such as Lizzie or Jane mentioning Los Angeles or San Francisco in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, or Beatrice tweeting about going to Western Springs Park in Auckland, New Zealand in *Nothing Much To Do*), these characters present themselves to readers as authentic inhabitants of the same world readers inhabit. This helps reinforce both a literary web series' narrative immersion and the creation of intimacy between readers and the text. This realism can lead a reader to reason that it would be possible for her to become friends with Austen's Elizabeth Bennet or Shakespeare's Beatrice using the same techniques and social media platforms she already uses and, possibly, has previously used to form intimate friendships online. Moreover, when the fictional characters of literary web series present themselves as authentically real individuals, readers are more likely to "succumb with pleasure to the temptation to think and talk about these… creations as though they were real people… because in being more fully knowable, they seem more fully real (McMaster, 1996, p. 15).

The intertwined development of authenticity, narrative immersion, and intimacy in literary web series shares much in common with the concept of micro-celebrities. Originally conceived as "a new style of online performance that involves people 'amping up' their popularity over the Web using technologies like video, blogs and social networking sites" (Senft, 2008, p. 25), the concept has evolved to include vloggers, YouTubers, and social media influencers who "express, create, and share their identities online" (Raun, 2018, p. 104). As previously explained in Chapter 2, literary web series often intentionally mimic and reflect real vloggers as well as vlogging styles and techniques; in doing so, these narratives position their protagonists as vloggers whose small degree of fame "depends on a connection to their audience rather than an enforced separation from them" (Raun, 2018, p. 104). While spatial and temporal immersion help strengthen a literary web series' sense of realism through actual locations and real-time releases, the protagonist-vlogger contributes to a literary web series' authenticity by addressing the audience directly and inviting them into the character's life. For instance, like micro-

celebrities, vloggers often film their YouTube videos in private or domestic settings, such as a bedroom, and the videos frequently "feature close-ups on [vloggers] and their faces, creating a sense of intimacy between vlogger and viewer" (Werner, 2012, p. 50). Additionally, a vlogger is an individual "who speaks for and about herself, offering at her own discretion the details that may allow for an intimate relationship between her" and the audience (Day, 2013, p. 14).

This sharing of intimate details (which Werner calls confessions and Chambers, Jamieson, and others refer to as disclosures), is essential to the maintenance of a literary web series' sense of narrative immersion and the creation of intimacy within the narrative. In striving to be authentic and realistic, the protagonist-vlogger must be "responsive to an audience that expects transparency and openness" and they are "therefore expected to reveal personal information… in order to maintain their status" (Raun, 2018, pp. 104-105). For example, at the beginning of episode 60 in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, Lizzie openly addresses the difficulty she has experienced in deciding what (or what not) to share in her YouTube videos, saying

> So, here on my videos, we've had some crazy things happen on camera and there have been several moments that we didn't include. So this was not an easy decision to make. But it seems like these videos are bigger than me now. And though I'll probably regret this, I don't think you guys will ever forgive me if I don't show you what happened after my last video.
>
> (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012c)

Here, a reader's sense of temporal immersion is important. During the original release of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* in 2012, when content was published serially, the "last video" Lizzie references in episode 60 would have been uploaded to YouTube three days prior. Thus, most readers would have already seen the previous video and developed expectations for this one. With her opening words, Lizzie acknowledges the audience's expectations and desire for transparency; despite her own reservations, she still chooses to share the personal events captured in episode 60 on her YouTube channel, signalling to readers that she understands and accepts her role as both a narrator of her story and as a vlogger committed to authenticity. Similarly, in *Nothing Much To Do*, the circulation of rumours and false information about the events of Hero's birthday (which unfold on secondary character Ursula's supplementary YouTube channel) compel Beatrice and Benedick to make a video "so that everyone will be able

to know the truth" (The Candle Wasters, 2014c). Beatrice also makes an effort to remind the audience of the authenticity of Hero, declaring "everything you've seen of her on this channel is the truth! She really is that nice" (ibid). In strongly emphasising that they are providing "the truth," Beatrice and Benedick strives to establish themselves (and the YouTube channel hosting the video) as open and transparent sources of information regarding the events in question.

When spatial and temporal immersion combine with the distinctive vlogging style to create authentic, realistic literary web series that allow readers to engage with the narrative on an intimate level, these web series also become spaces in which readers can develop and strengthen emotional attachments to characters and stories. As the examples above show, when literary characters adopt the role of vlogger or micro-celebrity, there is an expectation that they will reveal or disclose details about themselves to their audience as a way of demonstrating their authenticity, but also as a way of fostering intimacy between themselves and the audience. Though the disclosures in literary web series are occasionally necessary as a means of pushing the plot forward and progressing the narrative, they nevertheless offer readers the chance to connect more intimately with the characters. The next section of this chapter explores Ryan's concept of emotional immersion and how the sharing of information by fictional characters can reinforce the sense of immersion and intimacy in a literary web series.

Emotional Immersion

Ryan's third and final category of narrative immersion is emotional immersion, or a reader's "emotional participation in the fate of imaginary characters" (2015a, p. 107). While emotional immersion can arise from any form of narrative, Ryan points out that fiction narratives (especially literary fiction) have a long history of evoking emotions in readers, from Aristotle's association of tragedy with catharsis to the reaction of Victorian audiences to the death of Nell in Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Ryan, 2015a; Walsh, 1997). Additionally, Keen suggests that "the timing and the context of the reading experience matters" when discussing emotional immersion (2006, p. 214). A reader who becomes emotionally immersed in a story during one stage of her life may find that same story less immersive years later. Just as the strength of spatial immersion can depend on a reader's familiarity or unfamiliarity with a narrative's setting,

so too can emotional immersion be strengthened or weakened "by chance relevance to particular historical, economic, cultural, or social circumstances" (ibid).

In her formulation of emotional immersion, Ryan suggests that some emotions are more conducive to immersion than others. Readers who experience "subjective reactions to characters and [make] judgements of their behaviour" often do so from a critical perspective, rather than an immersive one (Ryan, 2015a, p. 108). Readers who feel emotions *about* a character or characters are less likely to experience emotional immersion. In contrast, readers who experience empathy, or the "vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect" *for* a character, are more likely to experience emotional immersion (Keen, 2006, p. 208). Empathy is the ability to "feel *with* the character, rather than *about* the character" (emphasis mine; Cohen, 2001, p. 251). When a reader empathises with a character, she does not simply understand how a character feels, but rather she *becomes* that character and mimics the character's emotional state (Oatley, 1999; Busselle and Bilandzic, 2009). Empathy is also closely linked to sympathy, or the feeling of an emotion (such as fear, embarrassment, or pity) for or about a character. While "sympathy differs from empathy because [the reader] does not feel the same emotion as the character" (Busselle and Bilandzic, 2009, p. 324), both empathy and sympathy are integral parts of emotional immersion.

Furthermore, empathy is sometimes associated with identification, or "feeling for and identifying with characters" in a story (Bussell and Bilandzic, 2009, p. 341). Busselle and Bilandzic suggest that a reader often connects emotionally to a fictional character when she can relate to, or identify with, that character. Cohen defines identification as the "mechanism through which audience members [or readers] experience… the text from the inside, as if the events were happening to them" (2001, p. 245). When a reader imagines herself in a narrative or in the position of a particular character, she is no longer an objective observer of the story. She "ceases to be aware of her social role as an audience member and temporarily (but usually repeatedly) adopts the perspective of the character with whom she identifies" (Cohen, 2001, p. 251). Identification "makes the reader aware of a character's perspective and his or her interpretation of events… and by adopting a character's perspective, the viewer can understand and relive the character's emotions" (Busselle and Bilandzic, 2009, pp. 323-324).

For Ryan, empathy and identification are an essential part of the human condition that enable people to care strongly "not only for close friends and relatives but also for people they do not know personally, such as celebrities" or, in the case of readers of literary web series, fictional characters (Ryan, 2015a, p. 109). Ryan further argues that empathy and identification are "necessary conditions of emotional immersion" because it allows the reader to more fully embrace the textual world as real (2015a, p. 110). When a reader can accept the storyworld as realistic and authentic, it is subsequently easier for her to accept the fictional characters as real people, experiencing real emotions, and eliciting real emotional responses from the reader. Even if or when a reader retains awareness of a narrative's fictionality, she is still capable of feeling emotions for and with the characters. While subjective emotions about characters can result in a weak sense of immersion and empathy for characters can result is a strong sense of immersion, a third type of emotions, which Ryan calls self-centred emotions, "require the deepest immersion… [because] they are inextricably tied to a sense of presence" (2015a, p. 110).

These self-centred emotions arise when a reader is fully and completely immersed within a narrative and experiences emotions related to her cognitive presence in the storyworld. She might feel scared and anxious as the revelation of a murderer approaches, or excited and happy when Elizabeth and Darcy finally reconcile their differences. Self-centred emotional immersion can also arise when there is "a collapse of the distinction between the real and the fictional world" (Ryan, 2015a, p. 112). In this situation, the reader perceives the storyworld (as well as its characters) as real possibilities in the actual world; the reader's thought process then transitions from "if these [narrative] events can happen in the textual world, they can happen in reality" to "if these events can happen in reality, they can happen to me" (Ryan, 2015a, pp. 112-113). When a reader experiences self-centred emotions, her mind and imagination are wholly engaged in mentally simulating the events of the story. Thus, the reader's perspective and sense of awareness are focused on the narrative and she becomes immersed in the story.

While emotional immersion has the potential to offer readers the most meaningful narrative experience, Ryan (2009) has suggested that it can also be the most problematic type of narrative immersion, because it hinges on the development of interpersonal relationships between readers and characters – something that can be difficult to achieve when characters often appear in a

narrative fully formed and incapable of responding to readers. A reader can certainly become emotionally immersed in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, but she does so with an awareness that Austen has already determined the characters' trajectories and that they will not be able to interact with her. Literary web series, however, do have the capacity to encourage readers to develop interpersonal relationships with fictional characters – because the characters in a literary web series can respond back to a reader, thus reinforcing the sense of narrative immersion and providing readers with the feeling of being heard. As discussed earlier in this chapter, and in Chapter 2, the protagonists of literary web series use vlog-style videos to narrate their story, and additional social media accounts (such as Twitter feeds and Tumblr blogs) to convey a sense of authenticity to their audience. These various narrative channels also enable literary web series characters to share and disclose personal information. According to Chambers (2013, p. 43), disclosures are "a significant formative site for constructions of intimacy" because they indicate a degree of trust between the individual sharing the information and the individual(s) receiving it. Moreover, according to Reis and Shaver (1988)'s model of the intimacy process, disclosures are merely the beginning of a reciprocal cycle between individuals that helps build and develop a relationship. In their model, Reis and Shaver propose that someone's response to an individual sharing personal information is "as important as [the] initial disclosure" because "appropriate responses enhance feelings of connectedness, whereas inappropriate responses or deliberate non-responsiveness keep interactants at a distance" (1988, p. 379).

In episode 19 of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, for instance, Lizzie confesses to the audience that she has purposely avoided discussing her family's financial problems in her vlogs before confiding that she has overheard her parents arguing about money, saying "it seems to be getting worse" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012u). After listening to Lizzie's personal disclosure, some readers used YouTube's comments section to reciprocate, sharing their own concerns about family troubles; one commenter remarked that Lizzie's student loan worries "really hits home for a lot of us, including myself" while another commiserated with the Bennet's mortgage woes by pointing out that "the financial crisis [is] making things worse" (ibid). Reis and Shaver contend that appropriate responses to personal disclosures "engender a deeply reassuring sense of interpersonal trust and foster an intimate tie" between individuals (1988, p. 379). Therefore, in

taking the time to comment on her video, these readers demonstrate that they empathise and identify with Lizzie, which strengthens their sense of emotional immersion, and that they are listening and responding in a way that helps increase the sense of intimacy between reader and character. Of course, reciprocity extends in both directions, and at different points in the narrative during its initial release, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* strove to respond to reader comments and questions in a similarly appropriate way. Occasionally, this took the form of question-and-answer videos (as explained in Chapter 3) and occasionally, it involved Lizzie or another character directly addressing reader comments in a video. After Darcy's disastrous declaration of love in episode 60, he returns in episode 61 to give Lizzie a letter; the audience, however, does not see or hear the contents of the letter (see figure 4.2 below).

Figure 4.2: Lizzie holds up the letter from Darcy in episode 61 (Lizzie Bennet Diaries 2012z).

Consequently, in episode 62, Lizzie acknowledges that multiple readers have left comments specifically asking about the content of the letter. She responds to those comments by saying "I can't tell you [about the letter]" and admits that she knows this answer "goes against all previously established principles of these videos where I tell you guys every embarrassing little thing" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012h).[30] While this answer could appear contradictory to facilitating intimacy because it does not give readers what they asked for, in this case, the opposite is true. According to Reis and Shaver, for intimacy to develop, a response to an intimate disclosure "must register three qualities: understanding, validation, and caring" (1988, p. 380).

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[30] As explained in Chapter 1, the 2014 novel companion to LBD (*The Secret Diary of Lizzie Bennet*) provided additional content not seen in the YouTube videos or on any of the social media accounts. The contents of Darcy's letter are one such example of that additional content.

Though Lizzie does not reveal the contents of the letter as readers asked, she does demonstrate that she understands and appreciates readers' curiosity and interest. She then points out that

> The contents of the letter are not mine to share [because] some of it involves people I've never met and I don't want to spill secrets that could potentially hurt someone… I apologise.
>
> (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012h)

Thus, Lizzie conveys a sense of caring in her attempts to balance the desires of her audience with the well-being of others involved in the situation. Even though she does not reciprocate readers' comments with the preferred answer, she does directly address their requests and gives readers "the feeling of being counted… an affective experience that renders it fulfilling for individuals" (Coleman, 2013, quoted in Papacharissi, 2014, p. 25). A feeling of intimate connection develops between readers and the narrative because a literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* participates in the reciprocal intimacy process and signals to readers that their opinions about and contributions to the story matter. The feeling of intimacy is also sustained through readers' existing relationships to LBD's source material, which is the topic of the next two sections.

Defining Resonance

In addition to using the sociotechnical affordances of social media platforms to offer readers agency and creating immersive narrative experiences through spatial, temporal, and emotional immersion, literary web series often transform their source materials while simultaneously drawing on the resonance of those original texts. This transformation is also known as literary resonance and is the third method of meaning-making in literary web series. Resonance, according to Stockwell, is "the readerly feeling that certain powerful literary texts leave a long-lasting and ineffable sense of significance" (2009a, p. 27). To develop his concept of literary resonance, Stockwell expands upon this definition offered by writer and blogger Kathy Krajco:

> To "resonate" literally means to bounce back and forth between two states or places. Resonate comes from the Latin word for "resound." In sound, resonance is a prolonged response to something that caused things to vibrate… resonance in writing is something that affects us the same way. It's an aura of significance, significance beyond the otherwise insignificant event taking place. It's caused by a kind of psychic reverberation

between two times, places, states, or spheres — one common and the other extraordinary.

<div align="right">(2008)</div>

Stockwell takes Krajco's references to sound and vibration and uses those concepts to liken literary resonance to a tuning fork or string instrument. When an individual strikes the tuning fork or draws a bow across the strings of a violin, the sound produced often lasts longer than the action taken to make the sound. Similarly, when readers encounter certain literary texts, the story can "create a tone, an atmosphere in the mind that seems to persist long after the pages have been put down" (Stockwell, 2009b, p. 17). Continuing with the music metaphor, Stockwell also suggests that the degree of a text's resonance is determined by the intensity of the reading experience. As with a tuning fork or string instrument, the harder or more forceful one strikes the fork or moves a bow across the violin, the louder and longer the resulting sound will echo. Similarly, when a reader has a powerful, emotional experience with a narrative, the text is more likely to resonate strongly. Moreover, the intensity of a reader's narrative experience can either decay or persist, depending on external factors. For example, a musician can dampen the sound of vibrating violin strings by placing a hand over those strings, causing the resonant sound to fade and decay. Conversely, a resonant sound can also persist or echo if amplified in some way (Stockwell, 2009b). Thus, texts that offer intense narrative experiences that persist are more likely to be resonant than texts that provide weak or dampened experiences.

Stockwell envisions his model of literary resonance as a "conceptual space generated by reading a literary work" (2009a, p. 29). Within this space, different textual features can attract a reader's attention; Stockwell refers to these features as "attractors" and suggests that a text often has "more [attractors] vying for attention than can be assimilated in totality" (2009b, p. 20), which requires readers to choose to focus on one or two attractors over the others, in order to fully understand and experience the text. According to Stockwell, effective attractors are often "familiar and relatable items" that can more easily capture readers' attention, as well as textual features that emphasise activeness, positivity, and agency (Stockwell, 2009a, pp. 30-31). In contrast to attractors, the parts of a text or narrative "which are either no longer the focus of attention, were never prominent features, or have been deliberately backgrounded can be said to be relatively *neglected*" (emphasis original; Stockwell, 2009b, p. 21). Attractors can help

produce intense and persistent literary resonance, while neglected features may cause a text's resonance to decay. Thus, for Stockwell, "resonance seems to correspond with intensity" and the two concepts work together to create the lingering sense "of the tone of a literary text" (2009b, p. 54).

Though Stockwell primarily applies his model of literary resonance to poetry and poetic texts, any literary text can produce a sense of resonance. The source material for many literary web series, for instance, can be considered resonant. While the producers and creators of literary web series often choose to adapt and retell existing stories from literature for practical reasons,[31] they also choose these texts because they are considered "classic" or as having "the highest rank or importance… providing enduring interest and value" (Oxford, 2019a). Assigning the label of "classic" to a piece of literature is usually perceived as a mark of respect, because the literature in question "exerts a peculiar influence [and] refuses to be eradicated from the mind" (Calvino, 1986, ¶ 7). These are stories that linger, much like the sound made from the tuning fork or the string instrument. These narratives have literary resonance because "they persist in the memory long after the physical reading has taken place" (Stockwell, 2009a, p. 28).

The literature that inspires and provides the foundation for literary web series may also be considered resonant because of their cultural afterlives. Some literary works "are read, reread, and rewritten across decades and centuries," giving them an "afterlife" or continuation that lasts long after their initial publication (Erll, 2011, p. 3). Calvino, for example, would argue that classic novels have a particularly robust afterlife because they "come down to us bearing upon them the traces of readings previous to ours, and bringing in their wake the traces they themselves have left on the culture or cultures they have passed through" (1986, ¶ 10). For example, every performance of a Shakespeare play, or publication of a critical analysis of the play's text, contributes to the afterlife of Shakespeare's work and reinforces its resonance.

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[31] These stories are in the public domain and are therefore "not protected by intellectual property laws (copyright, trademark, or patent laws) - which means [they are] free… to use without permission" (Stim, 2016, p. 256). Here, I refer primarily to U.S. copyright law, as the vast majority of literary web series are produced, at least partially, within the U.S. and the social media platforms used to distribute the narrative are U.S.-based companies. Currently, in 2019, the public domain includes any and all materials published on or before 31 December 1923 (Fleishman, 2019).

Indeed, Hutcheon specifically suggests that adaptations (like literary web series) can help reinforce a text's sense of resonance by keeping "that prior work alive [and] giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise" (2013, p. 176). The concepts of literary resonance and textual afterlives both focus on "the continuing impact of literature [and] how it manages to 'live on' and remain… meaningful to readers" (Erll, 2011, p. 4). For scholars such as Hutcheon (2013), Leitch (2007), and Szwydky (2018), the resonance and afterlife of a literary text, its "cultural staying power," is linked to adaptation and remediation. Hutcheon, for instance, argues that because adaptations are not simply repetitions of previous works, they can help "stories evolve and mutate to fit new times and different places" (2013, p. 176). Thus, a literary web series adaptation like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* can help maintain a text's literary resonance by reminding audiences of the source text, even as it offers its own perspective on the original text. Leitch makes a similar argument, asserting that adaptations can "make prescriptive cultural touchstones widely accessible" (2007, p. 9) and proposes the concept of the "entry-level adaptation" which "assumes the elements that make a book a classic [and] can be made available to viewers who have limited interest or ability to enjoy the book itself" (2007, p. 70). For Leitch, literary web series adaptations such as *Frankenstein, M.D.* or *Mina Murray's Journal* can become gateways into literary resonant texts, easing a reader's journey into the narrative and strengthening the text's "long-term cultural viability" (Szwydky, 2018, p. 129).

Meanwhile, Szwydky contends that many works of classic literature have exhibited literary resonance because these "culture-texts" are texts that "exist beyond the scope of their respective 'original'" and "owe their widespread recognition and cultural visibility to regular adaptation" (ibid). In addition, Szwydky claims that "the vast majority of nineteenth-century novels that have attained culture-text status have rich adaptation histories dating back to their original publication" (2018, p. 136) – a statement that includes Jane Austen. Though Austen received little recognition and praise for her novels during her lifetime, she is now considered "a commercial phenomenon and a cultural figure" (Johnson, 2006, p. 232) whose literary accomplishments are consistently ranked among the best in English literature.[32] According to

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[32] The increase in Austen's popularity in the second half of the nineteenth century is largely attributed to a biography of Austen published by her nephew in 1870, as well as the efforts by her family to ensure her work was remembered. In 1882, Austen's publisher, Richard Bentley, sought to capitalise on growing interest in Austen by

Johnson, the efforts of her family and publisher to promote her work helped spark "Janeitism" or "the self-consciously idolatrous enthusiasm for 'Jane' and every detail relative to her" that has long been associated with Austen's most fervent fans (ibid).

Janeitism also helped stimulate the first adaptations of Austen's novels. Looser points to the "stunning frequency" of Austen adaptations produced as early as 1895 and continuing throughout the twentieth century as evidence of Austen's growing influence and resonance (2013, p. 180). She contends that "there is no doubt that these adaptations widened, deepened, and complicated Austen's cult status," arguing that one such adaptation – the 1995 BBC television miniseries written by Andrew Davies – was a "watershed moment for *Pride and Prejudice*" that "single-handedly transformed Austen's cultural stock" (2013, pp. 181-182). As the various adaptations (including *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*) and the near-continuous publication of the novels suggest, Austen and her novels are deeply resonant for many people. At the same time, however, Brownstein (2011, p. 10) maintains that "trying to account for the continuing appeal of the novelist and her novels" is a daunting task that "generations of Austen critics" have attempted without arriving at any consensus. Prominent Austen scholar Juliet McMaster suggests that this lack of consensus, despite decades of study about Austen and her books, is because "we all want to write about Jane Austen, but we each of us want to be the only one doing it" (1996, p. 14). McMaster's statement illustrates a key factor of Austen's literary resonance: many Janeites "want to think of Jane Austen as their special private friend… they want her to be their own particular Jane" (McMaster, 1996, p. 5). Ultimately, though many authors have offered explanations for Austen's literary resonance and the significant afterlives of her novels (Brownstein, 2011; Harman, 2009; and McMaster, 1996 among them), her legacy remains "so personal and… so intimately connected with our sense of ourselves" (Harman, 2009, p. 229).

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publishing "the first collected edition of Austen's novels" which included the previously unpublished novella *Lady Susan* (Johnson, 2006, p. 232).

Austen's Resonant and Intimate Legacy

One reason for the continued resonance of Austen's novels is that these texts are "treasured by those who have read and loved them" and because they are

> books that we find all the more new, fresh, and unexpected upon reading, the more we thought we knew them from hearing them talked about. Naturally, this only happens when a classic really works as such— that is, when it establishes a *personal* rapport with the reader.
>
> <div align="right">(emphasis mine; Calvino, 1986)</div>

Though here Calvino seems to be suggesting that some types of text, like classic literature, are more likely to have a sense of resonance, arguably any text can resonate because such categorisation is often "vague and subjective," and dependent on an individual's personal feelings and opinions about a text (Stockwell, 2009, p. 28). Literary texts that resonate can also create a sense of intimacy for readers. According to Cooke, "literary texts can portray intimacy by describing it; employ techniques that create or enhance the intimacy represented; or they can engage readers intimately by prompting emotional responses" (2013, p. 3). Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, includes glimpses into private situations and conversations that provide a sense of intimacy to readers. When Darcy first proposes to Elizabeth, readers act as invisible observers of the exchange, watching as the characters exchange "common, if not shared, feelings of rage, astonishment, incredulity, [and] contempt" (Yousef, 2013, p. 113). This emotionally charged scene results in the promotion of intimacy between readers and the narrative because Austen has written "characters who are intimate with each other and whose speech reflects their intimacy" (Fergus, 1987, p. 101). By describing intimate conversations in the narrative, Austen gives readers the impression that they are witnesses to deeply personal events.

Resonate literature also uses specific textual or storytelling features to develop a sense of intimacy for readers. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen provides insights into Elizabeth's mental ruminations as she explores Pemberley after rejecting Darcy's first proposal. Readers learn that Elizabeth viewed Pemberley "with admiration of [Darcy's] taste" before silently musing "and of this place, I might have been mistress! With these rooms, I might now have been familiarly

acquainted!" (Austen, 2012, loc. 4864). This use of narration "informs [readers] of states of mind and feeling that would never be spoken publicly" and therefore "draws [readers] into intimate confidence with the heroine" (Yousef, 2013, p. 118). Austen's use of letters produces a similar sense of intimacy for readers. According to Keymer, Austen's epistolary storytelling techniques are "central to the comic and dramatic effects of *Pride and Prejudice*" (2013, p. 4). Letters are traditionally seen as private modes of communication, especially in the era of media convergence and social media posts that are by default public. Bayer argues that epistolary narratives like *Pride and Prejudice* have the "potential to create great intimacy" because the reader is implicitly included "in the act of reading and… shared narrative intimacy" (2009, p. 176; p. 181). Literary web series reflect the tradition of the epistolary novel with their use of vlogs, which have also been called video diaries (Ackermans, 2015). While the diary has long been considered personal and confidential, Day contends that "fictional women diarists actively anticipate readers in spite of the ostensibly private nature of the diary form" (2013, p. 145). The protagonists of literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre* demonstrate an awareness of the public nature of their vlogs, and yet still disclosure personal information, share potentially embarrassing moments, and otherwise signal to the audience a sense of intimacy that serves to connect readers to the narrative on an emotional level.

Cooke alludes to this when she suggests that literature can create intimacy by provoking emotional responses from readers. Similarly, Calvino and Stockwell link literary resonance to readers' sense of "extraordinary pleasure" when reading the text, which Stockwell (2009a, p. 28) calls "the feeling of the affective power of an encounter with a piece of literature." This feeling is a key component of literary resonance, because "the degree of resonance in any given literary reading is not simply a matter of the stylistic power of the text, but is also a matter of the reader's… willingness to invest themselves emotionally in the experience (Stockwell, 2009b, p.22). Stockwell and Calvino's sentiments also mirror those of Grossberg, who argues (in the vein of Barthes) that a text or piece of literature does not necessarily have any inherent meaning. Rather, he suggests, readers "are constantly struggling… to make [a text] mean something that connects to their own lives, experiences, needs and desires" before pointing out that "the same text will mean different things to different people, depending on how it is interpreted" (Grossberg, 1992, p. 52). What Stockwell, Calvino, and Grossberg discuss can be termed

"personal resonance" or the emotions evoked when "a reader feels a literary work to be deeply relevant and personally meaningful to him or her (Seilman and Larsen, 1989, p. 167). Seilman and Larsen explain that personal resonance is intertwined with self-knowledge and memory, suggesting that personal resonance "occurs when pieces of this self-knowledge are mobilized during reading" of a specific text (1989, p. 169). According to Banks-Wallace, personally resonant stories also "support the development of intimate relationships" because they act as "touchstones… that remind people of a shared heritage and/or past" and "evoke [certain] feelings and memories" (2002, p. 411). A reader consuming *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, for instance, may watch Darcy's declaration of love in episode 60 and recall their experience of reading that scene in the novel for the first time, or seeing similar declarations play out in real life. This recollection of past experiences helps tie the reader's current consumption of a text (in this case, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*) with prior encounters with the same text, or a different version of the text. In creating that link between past and present, the resonance perceived by the reader reinforces her emotional connection to and intimacy with the narrative.

Before the proliferation of social media platforms, a reader's sense of personal resonance and deep emotional connection to a work of literature may have transpired entirely and privately within the reader's mind. More recently, however, the convergent media environment encourages people to share their feelings publicly. Chambers (2013, p. 23) points out that social media sites offer "a range of strategies… to express emotion," from the use of emoticons and emoji to reaction GIFs and selfies. Stein calls this phenomenon a "feels culture" in which individuals, especially those in the millennial generation, "thrive on the public celebration of emotion previously considered the realm of the private and emotions remain intimate but are no longer necessarily private" (2015, p. 156). Baym, too, contends that "the more technologically mediated society has become… the more value is placed on public embodied performances of authentic, natural feeling" (2018, p. 17). Indeed, many social media platforms emphasise and promote public displays of intimacy through "public by default" settings (boyd, 2014) and operate on the "expectation that people use always-on media to… make and maintain connections that resemble intimate relationships" (Baym, 2018, p. 9).

Stein suggests that a feels culture also encourages the creation of collectives and communities, in which individuals connect with one another through a shared sense of intimacy. This notion of an intimate community of like-minded individuals is what Berlant calls an "intimate public" or a community in which members "share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common… experience" (2008, p. xiii). Moreover, Berlant suggests that an intimate public can be "a place of recognition and reflection" through which "emotional contact, of a sort, is made" (ibid). Though Berlant's work focuses more generally on the development of a widespread women's culture, elements of the concept of intimate publics are visible in the Jane Austen fandom, particularly as Austen is often considered literature written by a woman for women (Johnson, 2006). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Austen and her novels have long conjured ardent displays of emotion from fans. Her works resonate because readers form strong personal attachments to these novels and author. Consider, for instance, the Janeite convention of referring to Austen as "dear Jane." McMaster points out that the use of her first name is a "claim to intimacy" (1996, p. 5). Even debates about Austen's place within literary culture are often personal. Though her novels appeal equally to the so-called popular masses and young adults (Looser, 2013; 2017) and to academic scholars and intellectuals (Looser, 2017; Peters, 2018), most Austen researchers concede that "there is never going to be an agreement on which novel is best… because the experience of reading Austen's novels is so *personal*" (emphasis original; Luetkenhaus and Weinstein, 2019, p. 2).

Austen's stories resonate precisely because each reader can decide for herself which Austen is "her" Austen. At the same time, while reading Austen is often deeply personal, a reader's connection to Austen can be shared with others in a community setting. Peters maintains that fans "use Austen's novels to make connections to other Janeites," thereby using the author "to construct both their individual identity and [a] reading community" (2018, p. 87). Reading communities enable Austen fans to continually engage with her texts, either through re-reading projects, adaptations, or fanfictions. Contemporary Austen-esque novels, such as Karen Joy Fowler's *The Jane Austen Book Club* or Shannon Hale's *Austenland*, may include questions to facilitate discussions among readers. Peters suggests these prompts encourage readers to "engage with Jane and her life in terms of an emotional bond" and challenge the boundaries that separate

author from reader as a means "to establishing a meaningful relationship with Austen" (2018, pp. 87-88).

Literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* operate in a similar manner; according to Stein, "*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was able to draw on the enthusiastic Jane Austen fan base, with its organized networks of appreciation and community" (2015, p. 162). As outlined in prior sections of this chapter and in Chapter 3, the sociotechnical affordances of LBD's media platforms and the sense of narrative immersion created by LBD contribute to the development of emotional and intimate connections between the narrative and readers. LBD prioritised "participation, interaction, and [the] sharing of seemingly authentic emotion" (Stein, 2015, p. 161) while also leveraging many readers' existing relationship with a resonant text like *Pride and Prejudice*, and actively encouraged the creation of a community of LBD fans around the narrative. In doing so, the literary web series promoted "intimate and sociable affiliations" based on shared interests, rather than geographic location or familial ties (Chambers, 2013, p. 145). A reader who sends a tweet to Lizzie may be seeking to strengthen her connection to the LBD character; since social media posts are inherently public, however, that tweet could be seen by a number of other readers, who could then connect with the author of the tweet and begin to form a friendship. Consequently, narratives like LBD can encourage the develop of intimate relationships that are "no longer defined by or confined to ties of duty, but entered into voluntarily in a context of mutual benefit" (Chambers, 2013, p. 52).

Review

In this chapter, I focused on the second and third methods of meaning-making in literary web series: the creation of spatial, temporal, and emotional narrative immersion (per Ryan, 2015a) and the resonance and cultural afterlives of the analogue source texts of literary web series. I drew on research from Chambers (2013), Day (2013), Raun (2018), Senft (2008), and Werner (2012) to argue that Ryan's concepts of spatial and temporal immersion help create authentic and realistic narratives in literary web series. I also asserted that the disclosures of the protagonists of literary web series can facilitate the creation of emotional narrative immersion and help kindle the creation of intimacy between readers and narrative. The second half of the chapter used

Stockwell's (2009a; 2009b) theory of literary resonance to propose that, as adaptations of previously published literature, literary web series are inextricably linked to the legacy and resonance of their source texts. In particular, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* emphasises its connection to Austen and the worldwide Austen fan community, as highlighted by Brownstein (2011), Johnson (2006), Looser (2013; 2017), and McMaster (1996).

The final section of this chapter examined how literary resonance contributes to the creation of intimacy in literary web series. Research from Calvino (1986), Cooke (2013), Fergus (1987), Grossberg (1992), and Yousef (2013) illustrated how literature like Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* can stimulate the sense of intimacy in a reader, either through specific textual features or by depicting intimate scenes. Additionally, I referred to work by Berlant (2008), Seilman and Larsen (1989), and Stein (2015) to argue that resonant, intimate narratives, like those found in literary web series, can contribute to the creation of fan communities, or what Berlant calls "intimate publics." Thus, readers can form intimate relationships with the fictional characters of a story, and with each other through their shared narrative experiences. As the next chapter will show, many survey respondents indicated that their LBD experiences were deeply meaningful and intimate because of their relationships to the narrative and other readers.

Chapter 5: Methodology and Data Analysis

Preview

This chapter presents the methods I used to collect data from readers of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and the analysis of that data. In the first section, I offer an overview of the research paradigms that serve as a foundation for this research. I position my work as arising from a social constructivist worldview, which emphasises individuals' subjective understandings and interpretations of their world, life, and experiences. The work of Creswell (2013), Crotty (1998), Guba and Lincoln (1998), and Lune and Berg (2012) provides support for this section. The chapter then explains in detail the survey of LBD readers that I conducted in the autumn of 2017. I discuss how I crafted the survey and justify my use of snowball, or network, sampling (per Elliot et al, 2016a) before analysing the quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative analysis highlights the key themes identified in the survey results: readers' participation and interactivity, the sense of immersion, the resonance and rediscovery of Austen, and readers' evolving perspective of LBD's characters. The third section of this chapter explores the semi-structured interviews I conducted with a select number of LBD readers in 2018. I draw from Elliot et al (2016b) to explain my rationale for conducting semi-structured interviews, before offering primarily qualitative analysis of interview data. Interspersed throughout this chapter are quotations from survey respondents and interviewees to highlight the key findings of this research.

Research Paradigms

Research is deeply rooted in philosophical ideas about the world and the ways in which we can understand the world. These ideas are often referred to as paradigms or worldviews. Paradigms, according to Killam, are "essentially ways of thinking about or viewing the world" (2013, p. 5). Guba and Lincoln suggest a more specific definition, proposing that research paradigms "define, for their holders, the nature of the 'world,' the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts" (1998, p. 200). Research paradigms offer frameworks for the work being conducted and insight into the intentions of the researcher. If, as Lune and Berg (2012, p. 15) contend, "the purpose of research is to discover answers to questions through

the application of systematic procedures," then research paradigms can provide codified strategies to help guide the researcher through the inquiry process. Moreover, research paradigms allow researchers to operate under certain assumptions about the world, which in turn helps them determine and explain how and why they will undertake their specific inquiry. For example, qualitative research studies, such as the one presented in this thesis, are primarily concerned with understanding "the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem," event, incident, or experience (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). Accordingly, qualitative researchers often operate under research paradigms that emphasise understanding and interpreting data, rather than testing hypotheses or theories through different variables.

One such research paradigm is known as constructivism or social constructivism and it is this paradigm that informed and guided the research undertaken in this project. When operating from a constructivist worldview, researchers

> believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences… and [therefore] the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied.
>
> (Creswell, 2013, pp. 24-25)

For constructivist researchers, the aim of inquiry is not the discovery of an objective truth, but rather the creation of the multiple truths that may exist, depending on an individual's perspective (Schwandt, 1998). In *The Foundations of Social Research*, Crotty suggests that "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (1998, p. 3). Thus, a constructivist's main focus is understanding these various meanings and the diverse experiences of different participants through the use of research methods that allow and encourage participants to express themselves as freely as possible. In addition, Crotty (1998), Creswell (2013), and Guba and Lincoln (1998) emphasise that the meaning humans construct from their respective experiences is grounded in their individual social and historical contexts. Consequently, constructivist research is also concerned with understanding and acknowledging the specific contexts in which participants exist.

The research presented in this thesis stems from a constructivist worldview because it is primarily interested in the experiences of readers of literary web series, and specifically *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. It is also concerned with understanding how these readers constructed subjective meanings of their individual experiences with this digital transmedia narrative. Each individual reader's narrative experience depended in large part on the choices she made as she consumed the narrative and, as a result, the meaning and importance each reader ascribed to her LBD experience was dependent on these choices. As previously mentioned, constructivists also consider the social and historical contexts of a study's participants and LBD readers' experiences varied widely depending on when and how they engaged with the text. While the data analysis will show that there were certainly broad themes and trends among readers' experiences, it cannot be argued that there is one objective experience of the LBD narrative or one objective meaning associated with a reader's encounter with the text. Moreover, though *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is certainly representative of a typical literary web series in many ways, it is still just one example of this genre. Therefore, the data presented in this thesis function as a framework of best practices for the literary web series genre, rather than a universal claim about all literary web series.

This data collected for this study and presented in this thesis came from a mixed methods online survey of LBD readers, which sought to understand broadly how and why readers experienced the LBD narrative as well as their thoughts on LBD in relation to *Pride and Prejudice*. One-on-one semi-structured interviews with a select number of LBD survey respondents further explored individual experiences of the LBD narrative and readers' specific attitudes and opinions about Lizzie's story. The survey and interviews are bound together by a case study of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. A case study can take many forms, with Boghan and Biklen (2003, p. 54) defining it as "a detailed examination of one… single subject" (quoted in Lune and Berg, 2012, p. 170) and Creswell and Poth suggesting that case studies occur over time, "through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (2018, p. 96). More specifically, the case study of LBD presented here is what Creswell has termed an "intrinsic case study," which is a case study undertaken "because of its uniqueness or ordinariness… [with] the intention of better understanding intrinsic aspects of the particular event" or subject (Lune and Berg, 2012, p. 175). Lune and Berg also suggest that case studies can be classified according to

their design: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. The case study of LBD presented in this thesis is an explanatory one, as it "attempts to discover and analyse the many factors and conditions that can help… build a causal explanation for the case" (2012, p. 176). As explained earlier in this thesis, LBD was one of the first literary web series to gain significant attention from mainstream press, and the continued development of the LBD fan community, even years after the narrative seemingly concluded, clearly indicates that "something important had happened" with LBD (Lune and Berg, 2012, p. 175). Thus, this project provided me with an opportunity to research LBD and its readers to better understand the features of literary web series and how and why those features contributed to the development of narratively-constructed digital intimacy for LBD readers.

In the following sections, this chapter offers an analysis of the mixed methods online survey and semi-structured interviews. The first sections that follow will describe the survey construction and structure, before introducing the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the survey responses. While the quantitative analysis will look at the demographics of the survey respondents and their basic reading habits, the qualitative analysis will focus on the broad themes and trends in the survey responses identified through the coding process. The next sections of this chapter will then shift to analyse the interview responses. This analysis will be primarily qualitative, with an emphasis on the individual experiences of each interviewee. The chapter will conclude by using the findings and analysis of the survey and interviews to lead into Chapter 6, which outlines narratively-constructed digital intimacy and a potential framework for other literary web series.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries Reader Survey

I constructed the survey of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (LBD) readers using Survey Monkey online software, which enabled the inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative questions in the same survey and offered easily accessible downloads of the survey data upon completion. Survey Monkey's software also allowed for the use of skip logic questions, which directed respondents to different sets of questions depending on their answer to one of the questions. Thus, LBD readers who completed the survey were divided into two groups, based on their answer to Q15:

"did you read, watch, and/or consume LBD during its original release in 2012 and 2013?" This division allows for the comparison of responses between those readers who read the narrative during its original release, and those readers who discovered the narrative in later months and years. As the analysis will show, this issue of timing was a significant factor for many readers in determining their level of participation in and interactivity with the narrative.

I launched the survey on 18 October 2017, recruiting respondents through snowball, or network, sampling techniques. This method involves using a study's initial respondents "to recruit additional respondents through their own social networks" (Chandler and Munday, 2016c). It is a particularly useful sampling method when "no sample frame exists" or "the population of interest is a hard-to-reach group" (Elliot et al, 2016a). As a literary web series, LBD was, and still is, accessible to anyone with an Internet connection, and consequently, LBD readers are located across the globe. At the same time, the overall population of LBD readers can be considered quite small, when compared to the total number of social media users, or the total number of Internet users worldwide. I first shared the survey with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* fan group on Facebook. I selected this group, which comprises a subsection of the larger LBD fan community, due to its active membership. Facebook users in this group frequently post comments and share opinions about LBD. By inviting these LBD fans to complete the survey and then encouraging those fans to share the survey within their own social media networks, I was able to reach a larger population of fans.

Following the initial release of the survey on Facebook, I then shared the survey on Twitter and specifically sought retweets from key, influential individuals associated with LBD, such as co-creators Hank Green and Bernie Su, Transmedia Producer Jay Bushman, Transmedia Editor Alexandra Edwards, Executive Producer Jenni Powell, and writers Kate Noble, Margaret Dunlap, and Rachel Kiley. I asked these individuals to share the survey with their own social media networks, again using snowball sampling techniques, and with the intention of expanding the reach of the survey to LBD fans who might otherwise be inaccessible or beyond the scope of my own social media networks. Furthermore, Twitter's functionality allows users to easily retweet and share content. Many of the tweets promoting the survey on Twitter's platform leveraged searchable hashtags, including #lbd5year (the official hashtag for the fifth-year

anniversary re-release), #thelbd, #TheLizzieBennetDiaries, and #JaneAusten. Some users also included the official LBD Twitter username in their posts, using the mention function (also known as the "@ reply") to tag the account in the tweet.

The survey accepted responses for four weeks and during that time, the dedicated hyperlink to the survey was shared dozens of times on Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr. Ultimately, the survey collected 488 total responses, of which 361 responses were marked complete by the system. It is these 361 completed responses that comprise the analysis presented below. Though each respondent provided a first name when completing the survey, to protect their anonymity, I assigned individual responses a random, unique alphanumeric identifier. I generated these identifiers using the random string generator on Random.org. Any responses used in this chapter to illustrate a particular theme or topic will be attributed to the alphanumeric identifier. Since the survey included both closed- and open-ended questions, I conducted qualitative and quantitative analysis on the responses.

I. Survey Quantitative Analysis

A. Demographics:

The vast majority of survey respondents identified themselves as female, with only 2.5% of respondents identifying as male and 2% of respondents identifying as gender-fluid, non-binary, or agender. There was, however, greater diversity in the ages of respondents. Individuals aged 18 years to 24 years (32%) and individuals aged 25 years to 34 years (46%) comprised the majority of respondents, while the remaining three age groups (35-44 year-olds, 45-64 year olds, and those aged 65 and older) formed the minority.
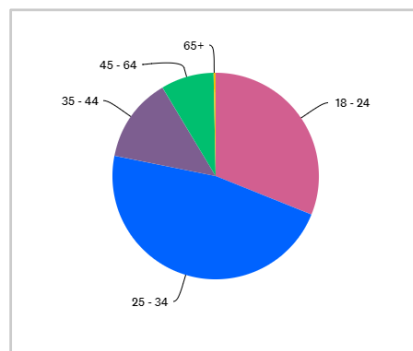
Figure 5.1 - A breakdown of the survey respondents' ages.

Survey respondents also overwhelmingly indicated that they resided in the United States (67%), while respondents from Canada (8%) and the United Kingdom (6%) composed a small minority. Twenty-eight countries in total were represented in the LBD Reader Survey, with respondents also residing in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Israel, New Zealand, and a number of countries in Western Europe (among them, Austria, France, Germany, Poland, Spain, and Sweden). The survey had a notable lack of respondents from any country in Africa and Asia; further research is needed to determine if that was a consequence of the snowball sampling method or LBD's international reach. I did not ask about respondents' race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation in the survey.[33]

B. Reading Habits:

Nearly all of the survey respondents are regular readers. With the exception of only two individual respondents who said they did not read for pleasure on a consistent schedule, the LBD readers who completed the survey disclosed a regular reading habit. Most respondents, approximately 75%, said they were daily readers, while slightly less than 20% indicated they were weekly readers. Moreover, the survey respondents read in a variety of formats, with print (physical books) and web-based content (fanfiction websites, online magazines, and/or HTML books) listed as the most common formats. Significant minorities of respondents also answered that they read e-books through a dedicated e-reader such as a Kindle or Nook (40%), on a tablet (30%), or on a mobile phone (48%).

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[33] This omission is an obvious limitation of this study and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Q8 Please indicate how you read for pleasure or fun. Check all that apply. If you answered "No" to Question 1, proceed to Question 3.
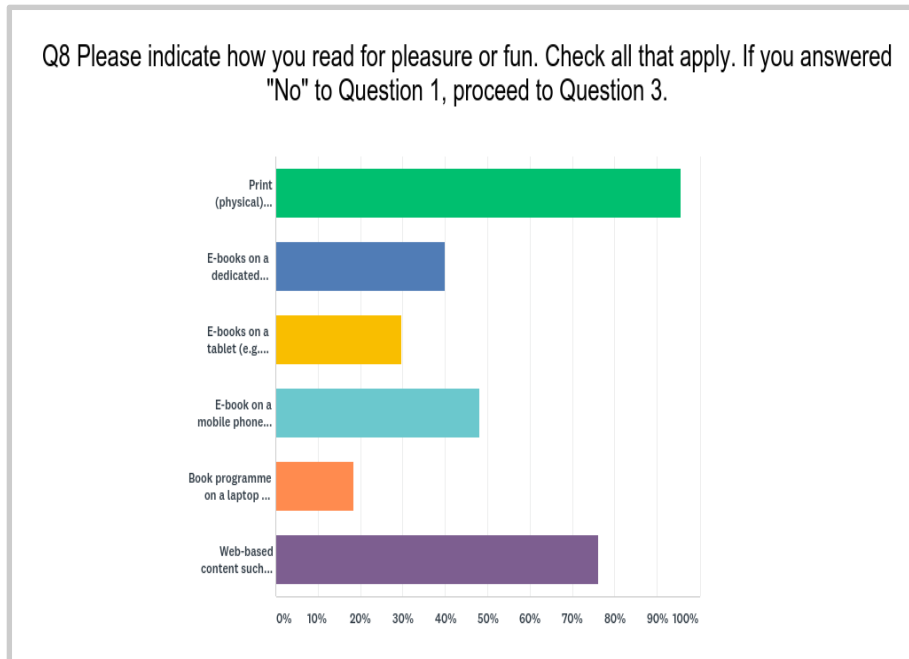
Figure 5.2 - The survey asked respondents to indicate which formats they most often used to read.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the survey respondents were also fans of Jane Austen, with 97% reporting that they had read *Pride and Prejudice*. A further 84% of those who had read Austen's novel did so before they encountered LBD. Survey responses also revealed that many participants had a strong familiarity with digital transmedia narratives in general, as well as specific literary web series. Roughly 80% of respondents said they were "extremely familiar" or "moderately familiar" with the concept of transmedia stories and 95% of respondents specified at least one other literary web series when asked if they were familiar with narratives other than LBD. From the choices provided, the majority of respondents listed *Welcome to Sanditon* and *Emma Approved* (the two spin-off sequels to LBD) as two literary web series with which they were familiar – a reasonable result expected, given that the production team behind LBD also created *Welcome to Sanditon* and *Emma Approved*. Survey respondents also had the opportunity to specify other literary web series not included on the list provided. Among the write-in suggestions, a majority of respondents mentioned *Nothing Much To Do*, a YouTube adaptation of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Green Gables Fables*, a digital, web-based version of L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*. These literary web series, which debuted after LBD reached its initial conclusion, share many similarities with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (particularly with regards to structure and features). However, they lack LBD's widespread

visibility and especially with regards to *Green Gables Fables* and L.M. Montgomery, this literary web series does not generate the resonance and deep emotional attachments that Austen's novels do.

C. Experiences with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*:

Many LBD fans first encountered Lizzie's story due to word-of-mouth advertising. When asked how they discovered LBD, a plurality of survey respondents selected "a friend suggested it" (30%) as the top answer. LBD's initial budget was quite small and did not include a significant amount of funds for advertising and marketing. As a result, LBD relied on its first ardent fans to recruit others by telling friends about Lizzie's story. While relying on the goodwill of fans to become word-of-mouth advertisers may seem inherently risky, there is precedent for its success. Steffes and Burgee (2009, p. 43) claim that "how well you know the source of the information can have a profound influence on the value that [you] place" on that information. Moreover, in the digital convergent media environment, where there is an incredible amount of information available to Internet users, "electronic word of mouth (eWOM), has become an important factor in shaping consumer… behaviour" (Cheung and Lee, 2012, p. 218). Many survey respondents (28%) also discovered LBD through The Vlogbrothers' YouTube channel. As one-half of the Vlogbrothers team, LBD co-creator Hank Green was already a fairly well-known YouTuber with an extensive, existing fan base when LBD debuted in 2012. As a result, "fans of Hank Green's vlogs flocked to 'The Lizzie Bennet Diaries' and become advocates for the series, spreading it around social media" (Poletick, 2013). Among the other avenues through which LBD readers learned about the narrative were online personality Felicia Day's vlogs, LBD's Facebook account, the Jane Austen Society of North America's social media accounts, and YouTube's Recommended Videos feature.

A number of survey questions sought to understand LBD readers' level of participation in the narrative and their feelings and opinions about how that participation (or lack thereof) may have influenced their overall experience with LBD. Question 13 asked respondents if they participated at all in LBD, and specifically defined participation for them, stating it "included but was not limited to, following characters of social media, leaving comments on videos, participating in the

fan community, and making fan creations." Approximately 62% of survey respondents identified themselves as participants, while 38% identified as non-participants (see figure 5.3 below).

Q13 Did you participate in the LBD story at all? Participation might include (but is not limited to) following characters on social media, leaving comments on videos, participating in the fan community, etc. Answer "No" if you only read or watched the content without engaging any further.
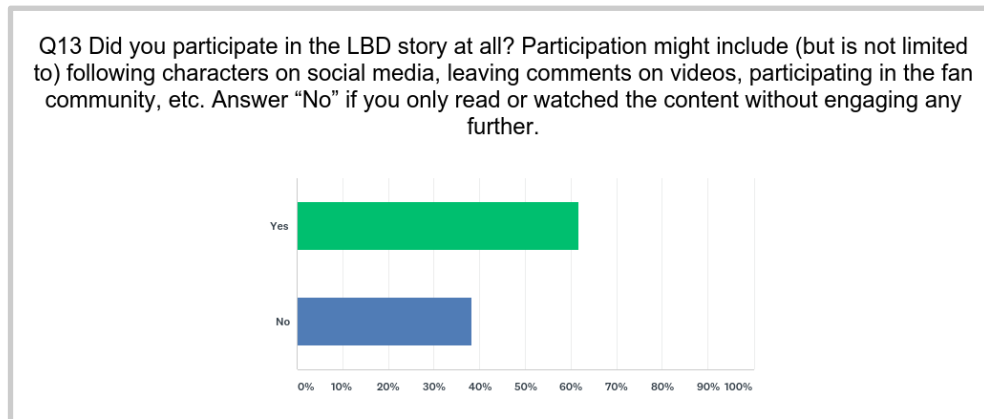
Figure 5.3 - Survey respondents were asked about their participation in LBD.

Further analysis of the participants versus non-participants, however, revealed some apparent confusion over the meaning of the term "participation." Among the 138 self-described non-participating survey respondents, 57 of them (roughly 41%) later provided answers to other survey questions that indicated some level of participation per the definition provided, such as following LBD characters on Twitter. This discrepancy may be attributed to an insufficient or poorly worded definition of participation in the survey, respondents not carefully reading and/or understanding the definition provided, or a sense of confusion between my definition of participation and a reader's own personal understanding. For instance, I included the act of following characters on social media as a participatory act. Some survey respondents may have considered following (but not interacting with) a character such as Lizzie or Darcy a passive activity, which in turn may have influenced their decision to answer "no" to the participation question. From my perspective, however, following specific accounts on social media platforms constitutes an active choice. It requires readers to create an account of their own and then manually click the "Follow" or "Subscribe" button. It is also possible that these respondents saw themselves as lurkers, content to simply consume the content and used the act of following a character on social media not as a means for interaction or participation, but as a convenient way to see and read the content. Though much of the existing research on participatory cultures (Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b; Van Dijck, 2009; Fortunati, 2012) suggests that audiences strive for

engagement and opportunities for participation in the digital media they consume, the answers provided by these "non-participating" survey respondents indicate that there are some individuals for whom participation means simply being present and consuming the content created by others.

Question 15, as previously mentioned, asked respondents if they had consumed LBD during its original release in 2012 and 2013; this distinction is important because most of LBD's opportunities for participation were the result of the narrative unfolding in real time across YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr. The ability to "talk" to Lizzie or Lydia, for example, is no longer an option for readers who encounter LBD for the first time in 2019. Conversely, readers consuming LBD in the present can watch all of the videos at once, without having to wait days or weeks for the next instalment. Thus, the 74% of survey respondents who answered that they did consume LBD in 2012 and 2013 had a different reading experience than the 26% of respondents who consumed LBD sometime after its initial ending in March 2013. Nevertheless, there was a small, but interesting overlap between survey respondents who self-identified as participants and those who identified themselves as post-original release readers. Approximately 9% of survey respondents indicated that they had participated in LBD *and* that they first encountered LBD after March 2013. This means that these respondents likely missed some or all of the original interactivity of the narrative, such as talking to Lizzie or Darcy on Twitter, asking questions for Lydia's Q&A videos, or reblogging Jane's fashion posts on Tumblr. Yet these respondents still engaged with the LBD narrative in such a way that they identified their behaviour as participatory. This challenges co-creator Hank Green's assertion that LBD "can never be as rewarding as it was right when it was occurring" (hankschannel, 2013). Though it is true that consuming LBD in 2019 is different from the 2012-2013 experience and lacks the same degree of interactivity the initial release provided readers, the survey responses show that LBD readers continue to find ways to engage with the narrative, even after it has seemingly ended. Moreover, it also highlights the ways in which the LBD fan community helps keep the narrative "alive" in a sense through their continued actions and behaviours, as well as through the bonds created and reinforced by the shared affinity for Lizzie's story.

Later questions in the survey asked readers to reflect on their frequency of participation (Question 36) and their sense of the importance of participation and interactivity to LBD overall (Questions 37, 38, and 39). Respondents' frequency of participation was varied, ranging from "always" (12%) to "never" (26%). Another 24% of respondents answered that they participated "sometimes." Though the terms provided as choices are imprecise and could be interpreted in multiple ways, these questions do offer insight into the wide range of participation that existed among LBD readers. As already detailed above, despite being provided with a specific definition, there was still variation among survey respondents as to what the term "participation" meant and there were also clear differences in how respondents viewed their own behaviour. Moreover, the answers to Question 36, while helpful, do not provide information about the form or content of an LBD reader's participation. Historically, online communities commonly operated under the 90-9-1 principle or the 1% rule, which states that

> the majority of content in an Internet community is produced by only 1% of the participants (referred to as 'superusers'), a minority of the content is produced by a further 9% of participants ('contributors'), and 90% of people observe the content of the community without actively participating ('lurkers').

> (Carron-Arthur, Cunningham, and Griffiths, 2014, p. 165)

However, media researchers have also challenged that theory, with Borgatti (2006, cited in Carron-Arthur, Cunningham, and Griffiths, 2014) and Carron-Arthur, Cunningham, and Griffiths (2014) arguing that the frequency of participation is not as important as the value of the participation – that is, an LBD reader may have answered that she participated "rarely" in the narrative, but the value of her participation could be worth more than sheer volume. Accordingly, questions 37 and 38 asked survey respondents for their opinions on the importance of participation to LBD. Question 37 asked respondents to indicate how important they thought participation was to LBD overall, with 63% replying that it was "very important" or "moderately important" and a further 14% replying that it was "extremely important," as illustrated by figure 5.4.
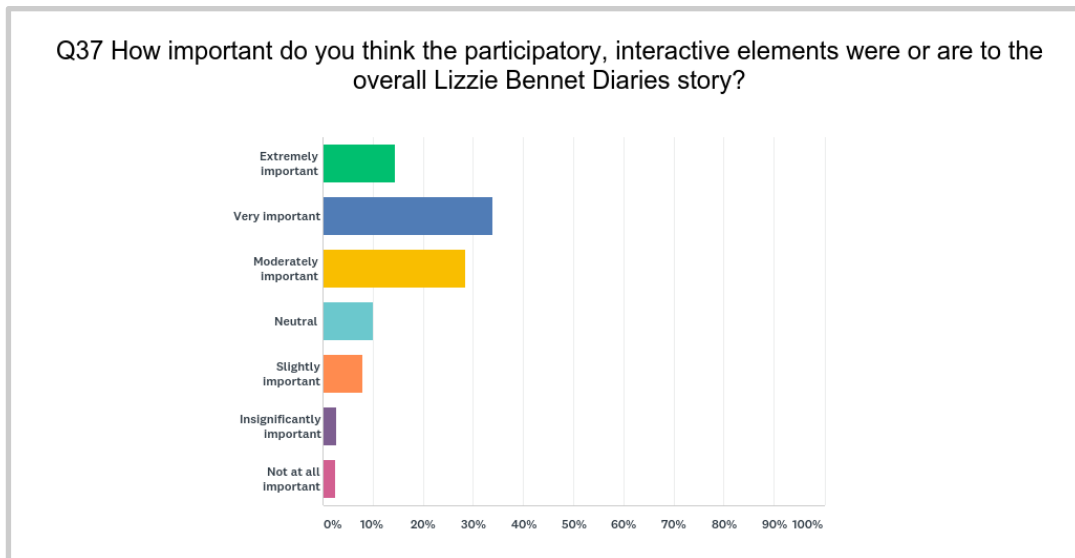
Figure 5.4 - The majority of survey respondents felt the participatory, interactive elements of LBD were important to the overall story.

Question 38 then asked respondents to indicate how important participation was to their individual experience of LBD. Here, 24% of respondents answered that participation was "moderately important" for their individual experience, while 17% said it was "very important" and another 17% said it was "extremely important." The results for both questions show that a majority of respondents found the participatory and interactive elements of LBD (such as exchanging messages on Twitter with Lizzie or Charlotte, leaving comments on Lydia's videos, or following Jane on Tumblr and Lookbook) important to some degree, indicating that these elements were an integral part of the narrative for many readers. Interestingly, though, it seems that participation and interactivity were slightly less important for a reader's individual experience than the overall LBD narrative. This aligns with the results from some of the qualitative questions (which will be detailed later in this chapter) in which a small subsection of respondents expressed a preference for lurking and silently consuming content, instead of active participation. Based on their answers, it makes sense that they might find the participatory and interactive elements important for the narrative overall (and, by extension, for other readers), but less important for their own individual experience.

Readers' participation in LBD took several forms, though the respondents who said they had not consumed LBD during its initial release were less likely to interact with LBD characters on

social media. Nearly 60% of survey respondents followed at least one LBD character on Twitter, while 24% interacted with at least one character on Twitter by sending or receiving messages to a character, retweeting a character's tweet, or joining a Twitter conversation between characters and readers. Survey respondents identified Lizzie, Darcy, and Lydia as the three characters they followed or interacted with most frequently. Interestingly, 42% of respondents also listed Darcy's sister, Gigi, as a character they followed. Compared to other characters such as Charlotte or Jane, Gigi is a relatively minor character in the LBD narrative who does not appear in many of Lizzie's videos, but she represents an important contrast to Lydia and LBD's writing team subsequently decided to build Gigi's character through her social media posts for months before she ever appears in Lizzie's videos (Blacker, 2013). Consequently, Gigi's Twitter account contained more content for LBD readers to consume than, for example, Mary or Maria's Twitter accounts and it is understandable that survey respondents would gravitate towards the accounts that offered more content. Readers also participated through YouTube; 78% of survey respondents indicated that they subscribed to at least one LBD channel, while 32% left at least one comment for one of the videos published by the LBD channels. Once again, respondents listed Lizzie, Darcy (through his purported company, Pemberley Digital), and Lydia's channels as the channels with the most subscriptions and comments. On average, those LBD readers who did comment on a YouTube video left between one to five comments over the course of the narrative.

Tumblr was the one LBD platform that did not attract as many followers and interactions, based on the answers provided by the survey respondents. Only 37% of respondents indicated that they followed an LBD character on Tumblr, and only about 14% interacted with Lizzie, Lydia, Jane, Charlotte, or Maria's Tumblr account. However, with the exception of Jane's fashion photo posts, the LBD accounts on Tumblr often recycled content from YouTube and Twitter, rather than creating entirely new content, which may explain why many survey respondents favoured YouTube and Twitter over Tumblr. Moreover, according to the Pew Research Centre's 2012 "Demographics of Social Media Users" report, during LBD's initial release, Tumblr was "significantly less popular among Internet users than other social networking sites" (Duggan and Brenner, 2012). In their answers to qualitative questions, many respondents mentioned not having a Tumblr account at the time they first encountered LBD, which could also explain the

platform's lower usage. Lastly, a minority of survey respondents, 19%, participated in the LBD narrative by contributing their own fan creations, which ranged from original fanfiction stories and fan reaction videos to GIF sets and parody role-playing accounts on Twitter and Tumblr.

The final set of quantitative questions asked survey respondents to reflect on their LBD experience and, more specifically, the effect their level of participation might have had on their narrative experience. Question 39 asked respondents if they thought their decision to participate (or to not participate) in the LBD narrative had altered their experience of Lizzie's story, and 45% answered "yes, significantly," or "yes, somewhat." The analysis of the survey's qualitative data in the next section will help illustrate why these respondents answered yes, though most answers suggest that respondents felt that their participation added a sense of reality and realness to the story, and connected them with the larger LBD fan community, enabling them to develop friendships. The idea that participation in the LBD narrative helped contribute to the story's authenticity was also reflected in the replies to Question 47. This question asked respondents to reflect on LBD's sense of immersion, by asking whether they believed the interactive and participatory elements of LBD helped create the sense that Lizzie and her world were real. 88% of respondents answered yes, indicating that the vast majority of respondents felt (either significantly or somewhat) that Lizzie and the world created by the LBD production team was realistic and immersive (as seen in figure 5.5).
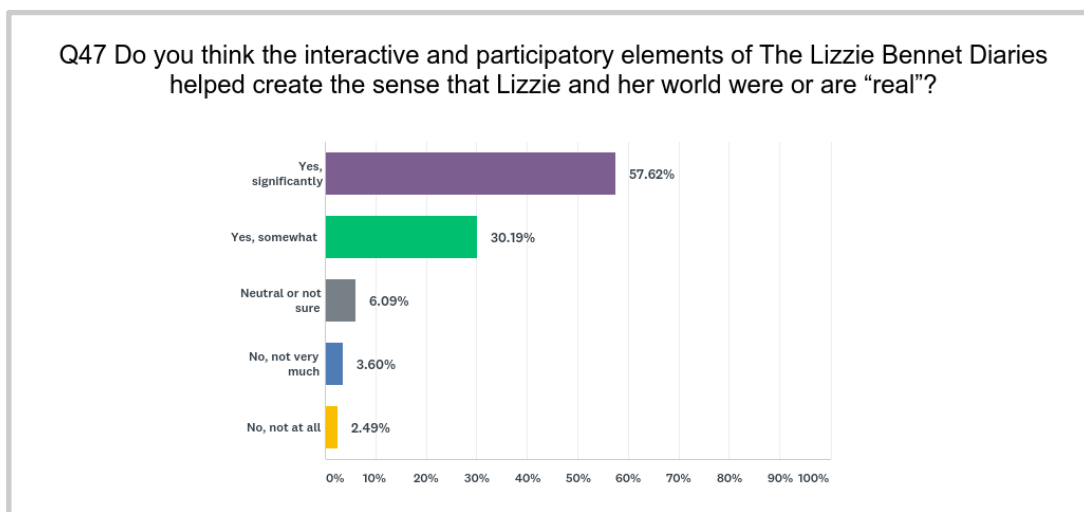
Figure 5.5 - The majority of survey respondents felt that Lizzie and her world were real, in part because of the interactive and participatory elements.

In the next section, a qualitative analysis of key survey questions will be presented, which will help provide context and explanation for several of the quantitative questions outlined above.

II. Survey Qualitative Analysis

The survey of LBD readers included seven open-ended qualitative questions, which often built upon a previous quantitative question with the aim of collecting more robust answers. The qualitative questions presented to survey respondents were:

Question 14	Please explain or describe WHY you chose to participate (or not participate) in the LBD story.
Question 24 and Question 35 [34]	If you made any fan creations (including, but not limited to, fanfiction, fan art, GIF sets, reaction videos, parody or role-playing accounts), please describe your creation.
Question 40	If you answered "yes, somewhat" or "yes, significantly" to the previous question, in what ways did your decision to participate (or not participate) in the LBD narrative alter or affect your experience of Lizzie's story?
Question 45	If you have read *Pride and Prejudice*, how has your experience reading the novel differed from your experience with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*?

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[34] The survey had two questions asking about fan creations due to the skip logic employed. Question 24 was presented to readers who indicated they had consumed LBD during its initial release and Question 35 was presented to readers who indicated they had consumed LBD after the first release.

Question 48	If you have ever thought that Lizzie and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* world were or are more "real" than the characters in Austen's novel, please explain why.
Question 50	In your opinion, how might the interactive and participatory elements of The Lizzie Bennet Diaries add to Austen's original story?
Question 51	In your opinion, how might the interactive and participatory elements of The Lizzie Bennet Diaries take away from Austen's original story?

These questions helped offer context and rationale to some of the quantitative questions that otherwise would not have provided much information beyond a percentage or statistic. For example, after Question 13 asked survey respondents if they had participated at all in LBD, Question 14 asked readers to explain and describe why they chose to participate (or not participate) in the LBD narrative. Meanwhile, Question 40 invited readers to reflect on whether their level of participation may have affected their experience of Lizzie's story. As I mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, the agency of readers through their participation and interactivity, enabled by sociotechnical affordances, comprises one of the three primary methods through which literary web series can create meaningful and intimate experiences for readers. Therefore, it was important to capture and understand readers' motivations for making the choices they made in relation to one specific literary web series. Similarly, Q45 and Q48 sought to specifically understand readers' experience of LBD in relation to Austen's source text, which is integral to understanding what literary web series might be able to offer readers that their original source material cannot.

I completed the analysis of the qualitative questions using MaxQDA software, assigning specific codes to the survey responses. According to Saldana, in qualitative research, codes are most

often "words or short phrases that symbolically assign a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute [to] language-based data" (2009, p. 3). Code types include descriptive codes, which summarise the main topic or idea of qualitative data; process codes, which capture expressions of actions or behaviours; in vivo codes, which use respondents' own words as the code; and pattern codes, which highlight various patterns in data such as differences, similarities, frequency, or causation (Saldana, 2009). The code system I devised for this research project consisted primarily of a combination of descriptive, process, and in vivo codes. The qualitative data generated by the survey resulted in eight first-level codes, twenty-five second-level codes, and one third-level code, as illustrated in the chart below:

First Level Codes	Second Level Codes	Third Level Codes
Novel	Perspective Preference - LBD Preference - Original Reading Habits	
Immersion	Format Interactive Contemporary Real - Relatable	Visual Media
Sentiment	Positive Negative Neutral	
Emotions	Insight & (Re)Discovery Expectation Excitement Care & Concern Affinity Nostalgia	

	Interest	
Criticisms		
Relationships	Lydia Friends Siblings Romantic	
Fan Community	Commentary Connections	
Timing	Different Choices	

The eight first-level codes listed in the table above also serve as broad themes for the survey as a whole. I applied the "Novel" code and its related sub-codes, for instance, to answers that referenced or mentioned *Pride & Prejudice*, Jane Austen, reading habits, or a specific preference for either the novel or LBD. Meanwhile, I used the "Immersion" codes for responses in which readers indicated they felt immersed or deeply involved in LBD, whether it was due to the narrative's format, its interactivity, modern adaptation choices, or a sense of reality to Lizzie's story. The survey segments coded with the "Emotions" code and its sub-codes highlighted a range of specific emotions and feelings LBD readers experienced during the narrative, while the "Relationships" code drew attention to the different relationships featured in LBD. The "Sentiment" and "Criticisms" codes share some similarities, as both applied to survey answers in which in the respondent indicated a particular opinion about the LBD narrative overall. Lastly, the "Timing" code drew attention to survey respondents who felt the timing of their LBD involvement (i.e., whether they consumed LBD during its initial release, or after the initial release) had an effect on their overall experience, while the "Fan Community" code reinforced existing research on the ways in which people come together online to form communities based on shared interests. Chapters 3 and 4 outlined how many literary web series create meaning and intimacy for readers, by encouraging participation and interactivity through sociotechnical affordances, through the creation of an immersive narrative, and through the resonance of the

source material. As this analysis will show, the qualitative survey responses provided by readers of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* support these methods of meaning-making.

A. Participation, Interactivity and Immersion

More than one-third of all answers from the survey respondents mentioned LBD's immersive quality, making the "Immersion" code and its related sub-codes the most frequently used codes in this analysis. One key sub-code was the "Interactive" code, which I applied to answer segments in which readers specifically mentioned the interactive and participatory nature of LBD and the ability to connect with characters through the sociotechnical affordances provided by YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr. Analysis of the survey responses revealed that the "Interactive" code shared at least one co-occurrence with nearly (80%) every other first- and second-level code. In qualitative data analysis, a co-occurrence is the overlap of two or more themes or topics for a segment of data (MaxQDA 12 Reference Manual, 2014). The overlap of the "Interactive" code with the majority of the other codes indicates that interactivity and participation were embedded into the LBD narrative, and contributed to readers' overall experience.

Many survey respondents cited LBD's interactivity and opportunities to participate as a factor that drew them to the narrative. Respondent DPNVI8 declared that "it was amazing to interact with [the] characters… [because] it made it feel like it was really happening, like we could help shape the story." Similarly, Respondent O3GXNW explained that she enjoyed LBD "bringing [the narrative] to a social media platform that I was actively using" since it enabled her to "follow every update [and] stay connected to the story." The "Interactive" code shared proximity with segments coded with "Real - Relatable" and "Contemporary." Whereas co-occurrence captures the overlap of two or more codes, codes can be identified as being near, or having proximity with, another code "if two codes are assigned somewhere in the same paragraph" or cell in a table (MaxQDA 12 Reference Manual, 2014). Thus, respondents who specifically mentioned LBD's interactivity also provided answers that discussed LBD's authenticity and modern setting, though perhaps not in the same sentence.

Most importantly, many survey respondents indicated that the ability to interact with LBD characters through YouTube, Twitter, and other social media platforms is precisely what helped strengthen their immersion in the narrative. Respondent N08ZPH described her sense of

immersion, saying "when you interact directly with someone, albeit a character, but who responds to you as a normal person might, it creates a connection that few books succeed in." Another respondent confessed that the ability to interact with LBD characters on Twitter "made the story that much more real to me. Somewhere, I felt, these characters were going about their day-to-day lives just like I was." The strong co-occurrence between the "Real-Relatable" sub-code and the "Contemporary" sub-code, both of which fall under the "Immersion" first-level code, illustrate that many respondents found LBD immersive because it was both a modern adaptation of Austen's novel *and* because they felt they could relate to Lizzie and her friends.

For example, many survey participants disclosed feelings of spatial and temporal immersion because of the vlog-style format of Lizzie's videos, the real-time, twice-weekly release of videos during LBD's initial release, and the posts on Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook in between videos. According to Respondent XHI87R, the LBD characters "didn't feel like actors so much as they felt like real people. I think that was in part because of the vlog format and the way the story was brought to life through a new medium." Another survey respondent pointed towards the visual aspect of vlogs, explaining that "the ability to see facial expressions and body language removed the layer of detachment that comes with reading print" (Respondent L0UTNG). Some readers suggested that the twice-weekly release of Lizzie's videos over the course of a year (during LBD's initial release in 2012 and 2013) "did a great job of creating the illusion that Lizzie and company were experiencing their lives one day at a time [because] that's how real life progresses" (Respondent 5L4BV0). For others, the addition of tweets and Tumblr blog posts in between the videos "gave the sense that the story was ongoing and unfolding even on days when videos weren't released" (Respondent DURNEK).

In addition to the sense of spatial and temporal immersion, some survey participants revealed their sense of emotional immersion in LBD due to their affinity for and connection to Lizzie, Lydia, and the other characters. Respondent O085U8, for instance, said "You could relate to them [the characters] more because LBD is set in modern times, and they have social media accounts just like us." Meanwhile, Respondent JEJLHF compared her experience with LBD to her experience with *Pride and Prejudice*,

reporting that "seeing a modern adaptation of [the story] made the characters feel even more relatable and made me more invested in their lives." This sense of emotional immersion LBD readers mentioned in their answers can be partially traced to the strong co-occurrence between the "Real - Relatable" code and the "Affinity" code. This co-occurrence suggests that many individuals who completed the survey felt a connection or attachment to Lizzie, Lydia, or another character, precisely because they seemed real and relatable. One survey participant pointed out that "it's hard for a lot of people to relate to having to get married or lose everything, but it's easy to relate to a girl trying to get a degree and struggling with what she's going to do with the rest of her life" (Respondent P8L381). Another disclosed that she identified with Lizzie because she, too, had a younger sister she struggled to get along with, saying "it is easier… when you can relate to them on a deeper level through the feelings of shared experiences" (Respondent K3JMA8).

Moreover, some LBD fans related to and felt an affinity for Lizzie and the other LBD characters because of the narrative's modern context. As one individual explained, Lizzie "dresses and speaks like I do and has similar life expectations to me. I feel like I know someone like her… so it's harder to feel like Elizabeth Bennet [from Austen's novel] is a friend of mine" (Respondent SSK37Y). A different reader felt closer to LBD Lizzie than Austen's Elizabeth because, as she pragmatically noted, "I'm never going to go to a ball or live in a rambling farmhouse in England" (Respondent 6T9VHQ). As the analysis of survey responses shows, many LBD readers enjoyed the opportunity to participate in the narrative and chose to do so, which further strengthened their sense of immersion in Lizzie's story. Additionally, readers' prior relationship to Austen's novel contributed to the creation of a meaningful narrative experience.

B. Resonance, Rediscovery and Perspective

In addition to the affordances that invite participation and the feeling of narrative immersion, literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* can leverage the legacy and resonance of classic literature to construct meaning for readers. Numerous answers provided by survey respondents included references to Jane Austen and the *Pride and Prejudice* novel, supporting the idea that the source texts for literary web series are often resonant. As reported in the previous section of this chapter, an overwhelming majority of survey respondents (97%)

indicated that they had read Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* prior to their LBD experience. For many respondents, this pre-existing knowledge of and, in most cases, appreciation for, the novel motivated their LBD experience. For Respondent PSSD0X, LBD represented an opportunity to "watch my favourite book unfold in real time [which] was the coolest thing I'd ever seen," while for Respondent 2ZQ5PF, who described herself as being "raised on Jane Austen," the LBD "story was both real and new and yet still familiar." Indeed, many of the LBD readers who completed the survey asserted that LBD's modern, contemporary version of *Pride and Prejudice* provided them with new and different perspectives on Austen's characters and plot, building upon readers' existing relationship with the narrative. Analysis revealed a strong co-occurrence between the "Perspective" code and the "Rediscovery/Insight" code, which suggests that LBD helped readers better understand or appreciate Austen's novel. One survey respondent explained that LBD's format, with both YouTube videos and text posts on Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook, helped

> Created more depth of character than can exist in print or video alone. It allowed you to reach beyond what we know as canon and further interpret who the characters are and what their motivations might be, particularly with Lydia, who we know little of in Austen's original work.
>
> (Respondent OW0F8G)

Other survey participants pointed out that the social media accounts (i.e., the accounts on Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, This is My Jam, and other platforms) for secondary characters such as Darcy, Gigi, and Charlotte enhanced and expanded Austen's novel because those accounts gave secondary characters a chance to "speak" for themselves. According to one such individual, the secondary characters' accounts "help us realise that Lizzie is a biased narrator, and we can view her vlogs knowing she doesn't have the whole story, and that she usually overlooks things… which is something that isn't present in Jane Austen's novel" (Respondent G160AS). LBD readers also expressed a new appreciation for the key themes in *Pride and Prejudice* because LBD enabled them to understand the significance of certain events. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, Charlotte decides to marry Mr. Collins for security and financial stability, something that many readers in the twenty-first century may not be able to understand. However, as one reader noted, "taking a job that might not be your dream in order to afford taking care of yourself and your family [as Charlotte does in LBD] is absolutely something many people can relate with today" (Respondent Q3RGGY). In these survey answers, the "Perspective" and "Rediscovery"

codes also overlapped with the "Contemporary" code since many readers highlighted the modern adaptations LBD made to Austen's story. As a result, the majority of LBD readers who completed the survey indicated that "LBD made it easier to connect with *Pride and Prejudice*" and in some cases, even compelled them to "re-evaluate parts of the book as well" (Respondent PHL1NN).

The pervasiveness of the "Perspective" and "Rediscovery/Insight" codes also implies that while LBD leveraged the resonance and legacy of *Pride and Prejudice*, it also provided information and content to readers that was not present in Austen's novel, thereby creating an enhanced experience of the story and contributing to a rich corpus of *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations, continuations, and retellings. In fact, LBD is part of a long tradition of transforming Austen's novels for screen or stage. Though "most of the early dramatisations [of *Pride and Prejudice*] strove for faithfulness to the original," the many different ways in which Austen's novel "have been imagined, used, and reinterpreted over the past 200 years have been far from uniform" (Looser, 2013, p. 174; p. 180). Moreover, researchers in the adaptation studies field generally challenge the idea of fidelity criticism, which seeks to measure "the success of an adaptation against the supposed value and meaning of the original" (Emig, 2018, p. 28). Based on the survey results, readers largely enjoyed LBD not because it was slavishly faithful to Austen's novel, but rather because it "does not try to compete with Austen's tale, but rather honours it," allowing fans of *Pride and Prejudice* "the freedom to enjoy LBD for what it is" (Kozak, 2016, ¶ 3). Indeed, one particular aspect of the narrative that clearly illustrates how LBD balanced its simultaneous celebration and expansion of Austen is the character of Lydia.

As previously mentioned earlier in this thesis, LBD's depiction and characterisation of Lydia, Lizzie's younger sister, was a significant departure from Austen's novel. By having Lydia create and publish videos on her own YouTube channel and maintain a separate Twitter account, LBD gave Lydia her own voice independent of Lizzie's narration and provided a narrative perspective other than Lizzie's. The modest co-occurrence between the "Lydia" code and the "Rediscovery / Insights" and "Perspective" codes indicates that readers appreciated the updates to Lydia's character as it allowed them to better understand her actions and motivations. As one survey participant explained, "we never got to see how Lydia made the decision to run away with

Wickham in the novel," but in LBD, with Lydia's YouTube videos and Twitter account, "we got to see how she was manipulated into it" by Wickham (Respondent 9DPD2N). Another individual said that she felt Lydia's story "added a layer of credibility" to LBD because "you could understand why Lydia fell for Wickham a lot better" after watching her videos and reading her tweets (Respondent XMV1HP). While the Twitter accounts of characters such as Darcy, Charlotte, and Jane also gave those characters a voice of their own, Lydia's story was expanded far beyond any of the characters besides Lizzie, and her popularity as a character rivalled Lizzie's among LBD fans. In fact, LBD co-creator Hank Green eventually confirmed that the expansion of Lydia's role in the narrative was "entirely… due to viewers' reaction to her" (Green, 2012). While readers do not have any influence over the course of Austen's novel, LBD presented an opportunity to participate in shaping the narrative, even if the overall plot remained basically the same. Survey respondent HNEYWX, when reflecting on how her level of participation affected her overall experience of LBD, said she felt more connected to LBD "knowing that Lydia's arc was changed due to the love given to her character by myself and others." Other fans pointed out that LBD readers "got to see things that didn't happen on the page in *Pride and Prejudice*" precisely because "the fans loved her [Lydia] so much, and [LBD] enabled us to see beyond Lizzie's POV" (Respondent XB31II).

C. Additional Survey Insights

In addition to highlighting the three primary methods of meaning-making for literary web series, analysis of the survey results uncovered two supplementary themes that contributed to readers' overall experience with LBD and their sense of having a meaningful, intimate narrative experience: the role of LBD's fan community, and the element of timing in relation to a reader's LBD experience. With regard to the fan community, survey answers reveal that many readers' experiences of LBD were connected not only to their interactions with the narrative and its characters, but also to their interactions with other readers, the broader fan community, and even the meta-analysis that many fans undertook. I applied the "Fan Community" code and its sub-codes to survey responses in which readers mentioned their experiences with other fans, or their own contributions to the LBD fandom. Though this code did not share any significant co-occurrences with other codes, the replies suggest that many survey respondents considered their

involvement in the fan community, and their interactions with fellow LBD readers, an integral part of their individual participation in the narrative.

Respondent W00XV2 explained that "participating in fan communities and analysing every single little thing that happened in the videos gave me a much deeper experience with LBD than I would have had otherwise." Another reader wrote about how LBD "created a community around the stories" which, in turn, "makes the story more immersive… since it's not just another story but an entire experience" (Respondent CWE3DW). Though the sociotechnical affordances of YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr helped enable connections between LBD readers, the LBD fan community itself developed as a result of organic contact between readers as they participated in the narrative. For one individual, "discussing interpretations of the show with other fans, some of whom had different opinions and insights, kept me thinking about the show even on days when there was no new content" (Respondent CFEZZG). By engaging with other LBD fans, especially on the same digital media platforms that distributed the narrative, readers of Lizzie's story increased their overall sense of connection to the narrative, making the formation of narratively-constructed digital intimacy much easier. Additionally, as Chapter 6 will show, readers' strong connection to the community of LBD fans enabled the literary web series to function as an intimate public.

The issue of timing also played an important role in the LBD experience, most especially for those survey respondents who indicated they did not consume the narrative during its original release. The majority of these respondents indicated that their lack of participation was due to timing, and their sense that opportunities for participation in the narrative were limited or non-existent after March 2013, with one person saying "by the time I found out about [LBD], all opportunities for current participation had past [sic]" (Respondent UAK7OC). Another individual revealed that she did not discover LBD until 2016, when "the story was already completed, so participating in it wasn't an option anymore" (Respondent G160AS). The identification of timing as a reason for not participating in the LBD narrative by some survey respondents is an indication that a small sub-section of survey respondents considers Lizzie's story to be closed or finished now that new content is no longer being released on a regular schedule. However, as previously noted earlier in this chapter, there were also survey

respondents who indicated they consumed LBD after 2013 and yet still identified as participants. While it is true that the LBD narrative is not as consistently active as it was in 2012 and 2013, when the story was first unfolding, there is still plenty of evidence that the narrative remains open. In October 2018, for example, the production team behind LBD and its follow-up, *Emma Approved* (EA), launched a revival of EA with brand-new content – and a surprise appearance by Mr. Collins from LBD. In the EA revival, Mr. Collins is seeking Emma's help as he transitions between careers, extending his story from where it had (apparently temporarily) ended at the initial conclusion of LBD in March 2013 (Gardner, 2018).

Among the survey responses that mentioned timing, approximately half of them were also coded with the "Different Choices" sub-code. This code was applied to responses in which the survey respondent declared that, upon reflection, they would have made different choices with regards to their level of participation. Further analysis shows that, of the individual respondents who had an answer coded with "Different Choices," the vast majority of them (about 90%) selected "yes, significantly" or "yes, somewhat" to Question 39, which asked if they thought their decision to participate or not participate altered or affected their experience of the LBD narrative. One reader suggested that she "would have gotten more out of the story if I had been able to participate in it during its run" (Respondent TKYYQK). Meanwhile, Respondent V946KR admitted that she felt "the whole experience would have been so much more valuable if I had been able to immerse myself from the start." It is important to note that while these readers did express a desire to make a different choice if they were given the chance, the majority still articulated an overall positive experience of the LBD narrative. In fact, only one respondent indicated a negative experience of LBD as a result of her decision to not participate in the narrative. In her answer reflecting on her level of participation, Respondent 6QRLNC confessed that "I always felt one step behind everyone else, or otherwise didn't feel as 'true' of a fan because I didn't fully participate in the story." Though Respondent 6QRLNC's experience seems to be an outlier, it does suggest that a reader's "full" or comprehensive experience of LBD was predicated on a certain degree of participation. Indeed, the "Different Choices" responses suggest this as well. While this subsection of responses is small, particularly in relation to the total number of survey responses, they are important to highlight because they help reinforce the idea

that participation in the LBD narrative offered readers a sense of immersion that ultimately provided readers with a deeply meaningful and intimate narrative experience.

Moreover, the declaration of timing as a barrier to participation in LBD by some survey respondents further highlights the apparent confusion over the term "participation" and the difference between my supplied definition and respondents' own understandings. Respondent S26OV5, for example, answered that LBD was "over after I found it" in 2015 and when asked about her frequency of participation, indicated "never." However, she also indicated that she wrote original fan fiction and shared it with the larger LBD fan community. Her answers imply that she does not see her contributions to the fan community as participation because it occurred long after LBD's initial release. But the continued existence of the LBD fan community and the continued creation of fan art, fan fiction, fan videos and more contradicts and challenges the more limited definition of participation. It is possible that the issue of timing as a barrier to participation was based on readers' perception of how they could participate in the LBD narrative, rather than any actual prevention of participation by LBD's production team or the digital media platforms utilised. In shifting away from the survey, in the following sections of this chapter, I present analysis of the semi-structured interviews that I conducted with a select number of survey respondents.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The final question on the LBD Reader Survey asked respondents to indicate if they were interested in participating in a follow-up interview with the researcher. Just under half of the survey respondents (46%) answered affirmatively. Brinkmann (2013, p. 58) has pointed out that "sometimes qualitative interviewers do not have the luxury of choosing a sampling strategy" and therefore must select interview subjects from the larger pool of individuals "they are able to recruit." Accordingly, the 165 of survey respondents who indicated a willingness to be interviewed comprised my population of potential interview subjects. I contacted 35 participants to confirm their continued interest and consent, and eventually conducted a total of nine (9) interviews. In deciding which survey respondents to contact and then interview, I operated from the perspective of information-oriented sampling, which strives "to maximise the utility of

information from small samples" and selects participants "on the basis of expectations about content" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230). With information-oriented sampling, the intent is not on selecting participants who had an average experience or will offer representative answers. Rather, the goal is "to achieve the greatest possible amount of information" by selecting outliers because "atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 229).

Consequently, the 35 participants I initially contacted were individuals who had provided particularly in-depth answers to the survey's open-ended questions, self-identified as either highly active participants or resolute non-participants, and/or provided diverse demographic information. For example, as previously detailed earlier in this chapter, the majority of survey respondents described themselves as female (95.5%) and residents of the United States (67%). Since I had a large pool of potential American female interview subjects, I intentionally sought out potential interviewees who classified themselves as male, non-binary/gender-fluid, and residents of countries other than the United States, in order to ensure a diverse group of interviewees. I also sought to ensure the interview subjects included those who identified as LBD participants and those who did not, as well as those who indicated they consumed LBD during its initial release and those who discovered LBD after March 2013. I organised half of the interviews by means of Zoom, a face-to-face video conferencing software that allows users to record the video conference. Due to conflicts in personal and employment schedules, in addition to time zone constraints, I arranged for the other half of the interviews to be completed through email, where I sent questions to the interviewee, provided them with a timeframe for returning the completed answers to me, and then followed up for clarification if needed.[35] Prior to all interviews, I provided the subjects with an information sheet and consent form, and the interviews took place after subjects returned the signed consent form to me. For data protection purposes, the interviewees will be referred to by a number (e.g., "Interviewee 1" or "Interviewee 3"), assigned to them based on the order in which they were interviewed.

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[35] Three of the interview subjects resided on the West Coast of the United States, which is eight hours behind Irish time. Between employment obligations and the time difference, it ultimately proved difficult to find a mutually acceptable time for a video interview.

I designed the interviews to be semi-structured, which "is more open, allowing new ideas to be raised during the interview by the interviewee" while still including "broad topics to be covered" (Elliot et al, 2016b). For each interview, I compiled a list of questions to ask each interviewee, some of which I presented to every interview subject. At the start of the interview, for instance, I asked all of the interview subjects to reflect on their first impressions of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, as well as asking if their opinions, thoughts, and/or feelings about the narrative had changed over time. Another question asked every interviewee to offer their opinions about what the LBD narrative did best, to understand readers' perceptions of Lizzie's story, how it unfolded, and its degree of success. I also tailored questions to individual interviewees based on their survey responses. For example, both Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 4 had self-identified as non-participants in the survey; during the interview, I asked them to discuss the choices they made and the rationale behind those choices, in order to better comprehend and appreciate the role non-participants played in a narrative that actively encouraged participation. Lastly, some questions were not planned, but rather arose in response to interviewees' answers. Interviewee 3, for instance, mentioned other literary web series in relation to LBD, which led to some impromptu questions asking about her opinion of literary web series in general, in addition to LBD. After completing each video interview, I transcribed the contents of the conversations using Inqscribe transcription software. Once I had text files for all of the interviews, I uploaded those files into MaxQDA for analysis.

I. Interview Demographics

Eight of the nine interview subjects identified as female, with one subject identifying as male. Given that the interview subjects were culled from the survey results, and 95.5% of survey respondents identified as female, the gender divide of the interview subjects does align with the survey responses. Three interviewees were between the ages of 18 and 24 years old, three were between the ages of 25 and 34 years old, two were in the 35 to 44 years old range, and one interview subject was in the 45 to 64 years old range, as seen in figure 5.6 below:
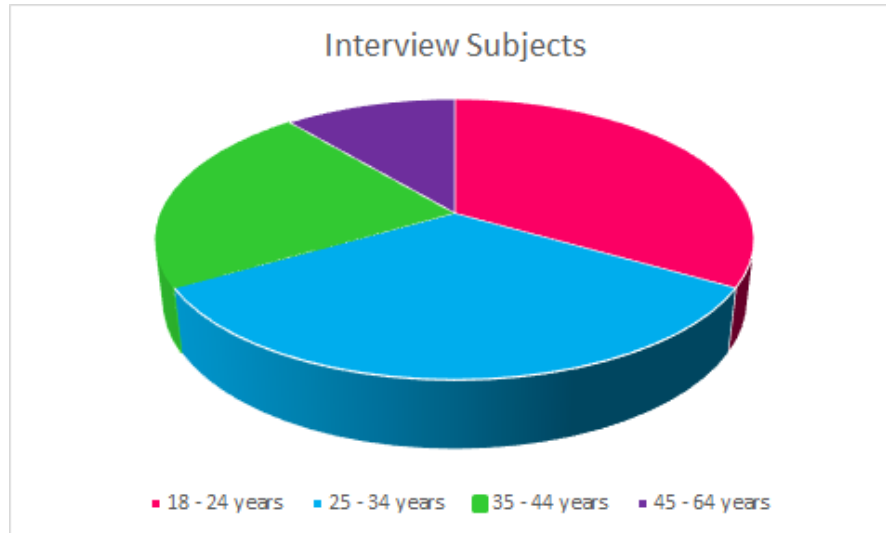
Figure 5.6: The breakdown of ages in interview subjects

Slightly more than half of the interview subjects (five out of nine) resided in the United States, while the other four interviewees were residents of Australia, Mexico, and Canada. Again, this aligns with the survey demographics, as the majority of survey respondents listed the United States as their country of residence, with Canada forming a small minority. Lastly, three of the interview subjects indicated in their survey responses that they had not participated in LBD, while the other six subjects did self-identify as participants. Additionally, three interviewees (although not the same three individuals) answered that they consumed LBD after its initial release, with the remaining six individuals replying that they had read and watched LBD in 2012 and 2013.

II. Interview Qualitative Analysis

A. Interactivity, Immersion, and Insight

I conducted my analysis of the interview data with the same MaxQDA software programme I used for the analysis of the survey's qualitative questions. My initial review of the answers provided by the interview subjects revealed themes and ideas that significantly overlapped with the dominant themes uncovered by the survey analysis. Thus, I chose to assign codes to the interviewees' answers using the same code system I devised for the survey responses. This allowed me to find patterns and similarities between the survey and the interviews. For example,

both survey respondents and interviewees alike mentioned LBD's interactivity as a key component of their overall narrative experience. However, whereas survey respondents linked LBD's interactivity to the contemporary authenticity of Lizzie's story and their sense of immersion in the narrative, the interview subjects focused more on LBD's specific format. Interviewee 6 described "the full scope of LBD" as "a feat, to be honest" because "the combination of personal vlog, social media, and books" helped reinforce the realism of Lizzie's world. Meanwhile, Interviewee 8 claimed that, as a transmedia narrative that leveraged multiple social media platforms, LBD "added layers and layers of depth to the characters, and therefore to the story as a whole" (Interviewee 8). Interview subjects did mention LBD's realism, sense of authenticity, and modern setting as contributing to their overall experience with the narrative, but in comparison to the survey respondents, they focused more specifically on format.

The interview subjects also spoke about how LBD's interactive format helped reinforce their sense of overall immersion in the narrative. Interviewee 7 described feeling "that there's more to these characters beyond the YouTube videos; they exist elsewhere on the Internet, just like everyone else." For this individual, the perception of the LBD characters as real people helped integrate the narrative into everyday life, so that "Lizzie became part of my world, rather than [LBD] trying to force me to become part of hers" (Interviewee 7). Interview subject 5 shared similar sentiments, conceding that while she knew LBD was a fictional narrative, the background awareness of LBD's fictionality ultimately "didn't matter" because "it *felt* like, if I were to have gone to San Francisco in January [2013], I might have run into Lizzie and Darcy" (emphasis original).

Interviewee 5's comments highlight an important part of LBD and, indeed, of other literary web series: a willingness to suspend disbelief in order to create and sustain immersion in the narrative. While most survey respondents and interview subjects found it easy to overlook parts of the LBD narrative that challenged the suspension of disbelief, a small minority of LBD readers discussed times when their immersion in the narrative was disrupted by aspects of the story. Interviewee 1, for instance, thought that LBD would have benefitted from "a better excuse for catching all the interactions on tape." She acknowledged the necessity of recording different events in order to progress the story, but admitted to occasionally having a difficult time

reconciling that necessity with LBD's pursuit of realism and authenticity. Interviewee 3, who described herself as being "quite immersed and quite obsessed" with LBD, found that some aspects of Lizzie's story interfered with her sense of disbelief. In particular, Interviewee 3 had trouble accepting the idea that Darcy, supposedly a CEO of a major digital media company, would not have searched online for information about Lizzie prior to declaring his love, saying "Are you kidding me? No, these are modern people. That's what they would do."

Of course, had LBD's Darcy tried to search for Lizzie, he would have likely encountered her YouTube channel and seen the multiple vlogs in which Lizzie disparages him. Since the overall LBD story is centred on the idea that Darcy is completely unaware of Lizzie's feelings for him until he declares his love, it is narratively necessary for characters to take or avoid actions that an actual person in their position would not take or not avoid. Whereas most of the interview subjects were willing to suspend their disbelief in order to fully immerse themselves in the narrative, Interviewee 2 actively tried to identify the boundaries of the narrative's realism. This individual grew up in the area of California where "LBD was ostensibly set" and as a result, "following up on those clues and where are they really set" became a game. Though this game intentionally disrupted the suspension of disbelief, the connection between LBD's various locations and Interviewee 2's childhood and current place of residence became a meaningful part of this interview subject's overall narrative experience.

Despite occasional gaps in LBD's veneer of authenticity, the majority of interview subjects mentioned that their sense of immersion in the narrative contributed to the development of strong, emotional connections to different characters. Interviewee 9 described staying awake into the early hours of the morning in order to watch Lizzie's videos because of time zone differences, sharing that "it became a priority to see" LBD when the videos were posted because she "felt invested in Lizzie's story. I cared about what happened to her… and I really did feel very emotionally attached" to the narrative. Interviewee 4 reported similar feelings, disclosing that "I cared about them [the characters] like they were people I actually knew because they acted like people I actually knew." While the interview subjects mentioned caring about and having an affinity for characters such as Lizzie, Darcy, Jane, and Charlotte, the interviewees referenced Lydia and her story most often. Interviewee 8 believes that LBD's expansion of

Lydia's plot "allows us to see the depth of Lydia's character" and provides her with "much more nuance." Meanwhile, Interviewee 3 declared that LBD "really redeemed Lydia for me" and further revealed that LBD's version of the character was "the most sympathetic portrayal of Lydia I've ever seen and it made me think of Lydia differently" when comparing the LBD version with Austen's novel. Indeed, interview subjects also frequently cited LBD's development and retelling of Lydia's story as a positive aspect of their overall narrative experience, and in relation to their perspective of the original text.

The resonance and legacy of *Pride and Prejudice* was, in fact, the strongest theme to arise from the analysis of the interviews, as the "Insight / Rediscovery" and "Perspective" codes shared the strongest co-occurrence. Throughout all of the interviews, subjects repeatedly spoke about understanding Austen in a new way as a result of their LBD experience. For example, Interviewee 4 referred to Lydia's plot, saying "while I can theoretically understand the scandal of an elopement in the 19th century, I *know* how a sex tape can destroy someone's reputation" (emphasis original). Interviewee 4 also appreciated LBD's inclusion of different characters' perspectives and points of view to provide readers with content not readily available in Austen's novel. According to this individual, "it's easy to fall in love with Mr. Darcy [in the book] because Lizzie is our point of view, but LBD made me fall in love with her too" by showing how Lizzie grows and evolves over the course of the story as well. Another interview subject, Interviewee 5, proclaimed the changes made to Charlotte and Mr. Collins "quite possibly the best modern adaptation of their story I've ever seen or heard," explaining that she felt it was "a perfect example of how LBD captured the *essence* of the story while making it their own" (emphasis original). For these interview subjects, the new perspectives and insights into *Pride and Prejudice* evoked by LBD formed an essential part of their narrative experience and helped strengthen their overall connection to the narrative and its characters. The result of their experience with LBD was deeply meaningful and intimate; as Interviewee 7 explained, consuming LBD "was the first time I felt like Austen was really meant for me."

B. Additional Interview Observations

While eight of the nine interview subjects provided answers that revealed connections to characters, immersion in the narrative, and prior knowledge of Austen's novel, Interviewee 1

was a noticeable outlier. This individual reported that she did not strongly relate to the characters or have a strong, sustained sense of immersion in the narrative. She also had not previously read *Pride and Prejudice*, but did say she was aware of the basic story from other adaptations. However, this individual did very clearly categorise her overall experience with LBD as being positive. Interviewee 1's answers suggest that some readers may be able to have an overall enjoyable narrative experience without a strong sense of immersion and intimate connection to the narrative, though this idea requires further exploration and research because it is equally possible that Interviewee 1's experience was unique. An additional idea that would benefit from further analysis is Interviewee 4's contention that LBD presented a narrative about learning to use social media responsibly. In her answer to an interview question about immersion, she mentioned being "interested in the way the story uses immersion to further impress its messages about social media and communication" before pointing out the potential dangers that come with "treating personalities on YouTube or Twitter as characters rather than people." Though these ideas do not fall within the scope of the research presented in this thesis, they are nonetheless worth considering in more detail in the future.

Review

In this chapter, I provided an in-depth look at the research paradigms, methodologies and tools I used to survey and interview readers of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Using the work of Creswell (2013), Crotty (1998), Guba and Lincoln (1998), and Lune and Berg (2012) as a foundation, I positioned my research from a social constructivist worldview, emphasising individual understandings of the world and personal, subjective meanings of experiences. I outlined the construction, distribution, and promotion of my online survey through snowball sampling (per Elliot et al's 2016b definition) and social media sites. I then moved to analysis of my data, collected from the aforementioned online survey and follow-up semi-structured interviews. Using MaxQDA software, I charted the trends and patterns in the data, which revealed that many LBD readers had an immersive, deeply meaningful experience with the narrative that resulted in the formation of emotional connections and intimate relationships with LBD's fictional characters and other readers. Specifically, both survey respondents and interview subjects pointed to LBD's interactive elements, the sense of immersion, and the resonance of Austen's

source novel, as key catalysts in the creation of intimacy. In the next chapter, I define and explain narratively-constructed digital intimacy, a type of intimacy that arises from literary web series and their methods of meaning-making. I then use the survey responses and interviews to illustrate and emphasise how and why readers felt intimately connected to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

Chapter 6: Narratively-Constructed Digital Intimacy in Literary Web Series

Preview

In this chapter, I develop my definition of narratively-constructed digital intimacy, and formulate the concept by positioning it as an amalgamation of mediated intimacy (per Chambers, 2013), para-social interaction (per Abidin, 2015 and Horton and Wohl, 1979), and narrative intimacy (per Day, 2013). I define the features of narratively-constructed digital intimacy using these three concepts, highlighting the key elements: a public, informal friendship discourse; the agency of readers to choose their preferred level of connection with a literary web series; para-social interactions that provide readers with an impression of intimacy; and specific narrative features that help readers suspend their disbelief and immerse themselves in the narrative (first-person narration, real-time serial release, and the sharing of protagonist vulnerabilities). Then, I specifically discuss narratively-constructed digital intimacy in relation to my case study, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, using the responses collected from my survey and interviews to demonstrate how LBD crafted an intimate, emotional, deeply meaningful narrative experience for readers. I also explore how the narratively-constructed digital intimacy found in LBD draws on the resonance and legacy of Jane Austen to enable readers to form an intimate public.

Defining Narratively-Constructed Digital Intimacy

For the purposes of this research, I propose that narratively-constructed digital intimacy is formed and shaped through fictional narratives in digital media spaces, and through literary web series in particular. Though it may be possible (or, indeed, likely) to find narratively-constructed digital intimacy in a variety of different digital narratives (such as interactive narrative games or virtual reality stories), investigating such a claim is outside the current scope of the research presented in this thesis. Therefore, the discussion that follows is restricted to considering narratively-constructed digital intimacy in relation to literary web series in general and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* specifically. Earlier in this thesis, Chapters 3 and 4 explored how literary web series make meaning for readers through the use of sociotechnical affordances found on social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr. These affordances also contribute

the development of narratively-constructed digital intimacy by enabling readers to connect with fictional characters through a public, informal friendship discourse, and to choose the intensity and degree of their connections through their choice of preferred platforms, followed accounts, and level of participation (Chambers, 2013). Narratively-constructed digital intimacy also provides readers with the impression of intimacy through para-social interactions, or the feeling of "perceived interconnectedness." Abidin (2015) defines perceived interconnectedness as "a model of communication" through which social media influencers and micro-celebrities provide their followers with an impression of intimacy through conversations that "appear informal, casual, and responsive" (2015, ¶ 2; ¶ 22). The interactions readers have with the characters of literary web series are similar because, though characters like Lizzie and Lydia Bennet use social media to converse with and reply to readers just as a real influencer or micro-celebrity would, their ability to react is limited by their fictionality and the boundaries of their source text.

The fictional characters of literary web series also adopt specific personas in response to the needs of the narrative, thereby presenting themselves to audiences as "ordinary" and "everyday" individuals sharing parts of their lives online. This, in turn, reinforces the impression of intimacy provided to readers through their interactions with literary web series characters. However, while narratively-constructed digital intimacy is primarily para-social, literary web series can incorporate narrative elements that help blur the line between fiction and reality in order to strengthen emotional bonds between readers and the narrative. Through the use of a first-person narrator, present-tense or real-time narration, and the disclosures and vulnerabilities of the narrator, literary web series offer readers in-depth insight into fictional characters, and with that insight comes the feeling of being deeply connected to the narrative and its characters. That feeling is narratively-constructed digital intimacy. The next three sections of this chapter will highlight the different features of narratively-constructed digital intimacy in relation to LBD, linking the concept to Chambers' (2013) theory of mediated intimacy, Abidin's (2015) notion of perceived interconnectedness (which draws from Horton and Wohl's theory of para-social interaction [1979]), and Day's (2013) understanding of narrative intimacy.

I. Elements of Mediated Intimacy

As previously explained in Chapter 3, Chambers' concept of mediated intimacy prioritises relationships formed through agency, choice and equality, and offers an explanation for contemporary online interactions that enable "new media technologies… [to] sustain personal connections" (2013, p. 17). Chambers further contends that mediated intimacy is "technologically and socially structured" by the sociotechnical affordances of social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and Tumblr (2013, p. 164). These sites allow users to create personal profiles, construct personalised feeds of content, select the people and accounts with which they want to connect, and choose how, when, and how often they will communication with others. Narratively-constructed digital intimacy mimics mediated intimacy in its use social media platforms and the sociotechnical affordances associated with those platforms. More specifically, narratively-constructed digital intimacy frames the connections between fictional characters and readers on social media sites as friendships, inviting readers of literary web series to follow (and interact with) characters such as Lizzie and Lydia. Readers are encouraged to conduct these friendships in a public and informal manner, while contributing to the narrative through conversations and fan creations.

Narratively-constructed digital intimacy also provides readers with the ability to determine the intensity of their intimate connections by choosing to how to consume the literary web series, which often leverages a variety of social media platforms. For instance, as mentioned in Chapter 3, readers of a literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* can use Twitter replies and mentions to start a dialogue with Lizzie, or readers might share GIF sets of a favourite scene on Tumblr's visually-focused site. Moreover, in choosing to distribute a narrative through digital media platforms that offer social affordances, literary web series "facilitate engagement in ways that are meaningful" by actively encouraging readers to participate in the narrative (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 20). This encouragement signals to readers that their contributions are welcomed and valued, which, in turn, can "convey a sense of immediacy that makes [readers] feel like [they] are *there*, wherever *there* may be" (emphasis original; Papacharissi, 2014, p. 4). By drawing readers into the storyworld through the affordances of social media platforms, literary web series

blur the boundary between fiction and reality and make it easier for readers to immerse themselves in Lizzie's story and form intimate connections with the narrative and its characters.

I. The Friendship Discourse

One feature of narratively-constructed digital intimacy is the use of a public, informal friendship discourse. According to Chambers, friendship is the "ideal relationship: entered into voluntarily and marked out as egalitarian by emphasising positive attributes of respect, mutual disclosure and companionship" (2013, p. 164). Narratively-constructed digital intimacy portrays the connection between readers and a literary web series' characters as friendships. As detailed previously in Chapter 3, the end screens of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* YouTube videos include links to Lizzie's accounts on Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, encouraging readers to become "friends" with her on different social media platforms. Additionally, the official Twitter account of the LBD narrative frequently reminded readers to follow character accounts or informed them of character and cast birthdays, as a means of promoting a sense of connection between readers and the narrative (see figure 6.1 below; TheLBDOfficial 2012a; 2012b). Most importantly, the narrative often retweeted or reblogged reader-created content on Twitter and Tumblr through character accounts or the official account, signalling respect for readers' contributions to the overall LBD storyworld (Su, 2012e). The result, for many readers, was the intimate feeling that "Lizzie wasn't just a character on a screen, [but] an actual person who we could ask questions to and make jokes with" (Respondent 2ZQ5PF).
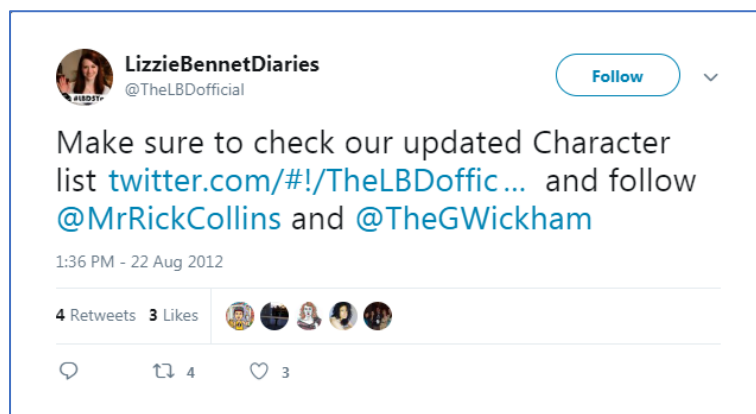

Figure 6.1: A tweet from the official LBD account urging readers to follow character accounts (TheLBDOfficial, 2012b).

While the friendship discourse found on most social media platforms contributes to the creation of intimate connections between individuals, the "public by default" nature of a platform such as Twitter or YouTube means these friendships and interactions are often highly visible as well. Narratively-constructed digital intimacy, therefore, offers "a new ritual of social connection" through "the practice of publicly proclaiming friendship" (Chambers, 2013, p. 166). For example, anyone can access Lizzie's Twitter profile and see which accounts she follows on that site, while the use of hashtags, mentions, and retweets on Twitter allow people to converse with one another, even if they are not connected as friends or followers (boyd, 2014; Chen, 2011; Scott, 2015). Social media friendships are also often conducted with a "casualness and spontaneity [that] typically frames the interactions" as informal (Chambers, 2013, p. 166). Early in the LBD narrative, for instance, Lizzie published a tweet asking followers if they would be interested in a "bonus" question-and-answer video; when Lizzie uploaded the first Q&A video a few days later, it provided readers with the sense that Lizzie was actually "reacting to what was going on in the moment" (Bennet, 2012a; Blacker, 2013). Chambers contends that the informality of social media friendships can evoke the "emotions and feelings associated with disclosing intimacy" (2013, p. 166), which can help strengthen the development of narratively-constructed digital intimacy.

In addition to informality, the public nature of social media friendships can also "generate distinctive social benefits" (Chambers, 2013, p. 166) that contribute to the formation of narratively-constructed digital intimacy. One survey respondent recalled asking Lizzie a question for one of the Q&A videos, saying it "added emotional depth and urgency to my experience" (Respondent WFFM8U), while another respondent felt that seeing other readers' questions answered and fan content retweeted was "a very powerful thing… [that] significantly improved my experience" (Respondent RTOR8E). *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* therefore not only provided readers with the ability to converse and interact with fictional characters through the sociotechnical affordances of LBD's chosen social media platforms, it also offered readers the ability to observe the informal exchanges between Lizzie, Lydia, and other characters with the audience through the publicness of those platforms. This helped drive the creation of narratively-

constructed digital intimacy, enabling readers to engage with the LBD story on a deeper, more immersive level.

II. Choice and Control

Beyond the use of the friendship discourse and an emphasis on public social media posts, narratively-constructed digital intimacy flourishes in environments where "mechanisms of communication… offer immense choice and personal control" (Chambers, 2013, p. 167). Facebook, for instance, allows users to customise their news feed, giving them the option to decide which posts they want to see first, which accounts to unfollow or block, and which accounts to hide temporarily (Mosseri, 2016). According to Chambers (2013, p. 167), the sociotechnical affordances of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube provide individuals with "a sense of control over the relationship" and enables them to manage their interactions with others and establish intimate connections on their own terms. For readers of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the ability to choose which social media platforms to use, which character accounts to follow or interact with, and which content to consume, ultimately helped strengthen their sense of connection to the narrative. One survey respondent said, "I found myself craving more story as I waited in between video instalments, so I followed the Twitter accounts and then engaged with the fandom on Tumblr which helped me feel more connected to the story and the characters" (Respondent EC32T7).

Moreover, choice is an important element in the allowing readers to determine the intensity of their intimate connections with literary web series. Chambers asserts that intimate relationships formed online often develop in a "polymedia environment," which she defines as an environment "in which several mediums [sic] are likely to be used regularly to keep in contact with intimates and selected according to the circumstances and emotional register required" (2013, p. 165). The term "polymedia" comes from Madianou and Miller's efforts to "describe the emerging environment of proliferating communication opportunities" (2013, p. 170) that arose from media convergence. According to Madianou and Miller, the convergent media environment has made it easier for individuals to choose from multiple different media to communicate with others. This also extends to using multiple different media to tell a story or narrative. For example, the majority of literary web series distribute narrative content through more than one social media

platform. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* published its narrative on YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook, primarily. Meanwhile, *Nothing Much To Do* leveraged the use of a music-focused platform called Bandcamp to highlight the original music in the narrative, and *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre* created accounts on Instagram and Pinterest (The Candle Wasters, 2014a; Hall and Aref, 2013). This variety enables readers to choose to engage with literary web series on social media platforms that align with their preferences and, often, their existing accounts.

It also gives readers the ability to control the intensity of their narratively-constructed digital intimacy by allowing them to decide how many platforms to use to create and maintain relationships with literary web series characters. Chambers suggests that this ability to pick and choose from multiple social media options gives individuals "a sense of agency over media technologies" because different social media platforms can support different types of interactions and relationships (2013, p. 33). Furthermore, Chambers argues "the more intimate the relationship, the more media platforms are involved in supporting the interaction" (2013, p. 165), because different social media sites offer different types of interaction and "differing social and emotional outcomes for the participants" (Chambers, 2013, p. 32). The results from the LBD reader survey certainly seem to support this claim. Among the 65% of LBD readers who self-identified as participants in the LBD Reader Survey (as presented in Chapter 5), 95% of them also indicated that they felt LBD was immersive and meaningful. In contrast, for the 38% of readers who self-identified as non-participants, only 77% thought LBD was immersive or realistic.

Narratively-constructed digital intimacy in literary web series shares important similarities with Chambers' concept of mediated intimacy. Both frame connections between individuals (or, in the case of literary web series, between readers and fictional characters) as friendships, positions the interactions that take place as public and informal, and emphasises the importance of choice and control in creating and maintaining an individual's preferred intensity of an intimate relationship. One key difference between narratively-constructed digital intimacy and mediated intimacy, however, arises from Chambers' notion of the "staged self" (2013, p. 166). According to Chambers, a fundamental element of mediated intimacy is the "staging and management of

identity through self-presentation" (ibid). Online and on social media platforms, "individuals are expected to cultivate their self-presentations" and "meticulously and conscientiously" manage multiple identities depending on the platform and the context (Chambers, 2013, pp. 168-169). In contrast, narratively-constructed digital intimacy does not share this emphasis on the "continual updating of the self" (Chambers, 2013, p. 169), because the identities of the characters of literary web series are *already* staged to some degree. Characters such as Lizzie and Lydia are intentionally crafted according to a literary web series' source material and the needs of the narrative. While readers are able to form friendships with Lizzie and Lydia through public and informal conversations, there are limits to how Lizzie and Lydia might behave. For instance, a reader may feel that she wants Lizzie to end the narrative in a relationship with George Wickham instead of Darcy. However, such an outcome would contradict Lizzie's expressed dislike of Wickham in the latter half of the LBD narrative, and ignore her anger at his treatment of Gigi and Lydia – aspects of Lizzie's identity drawn from Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Narratively-constructed digital intimacy does not focus on self-presentation because literary web series are still, ultimately, fictional narratives populated by characters invented by an author. Consequently, the narratively-constructed digital intimacy readers perceive in their LBD experiences is inherently one-sided and illusory, intentionally crafted to provide a sense of connection and closeness without the necessary reciprocity required to form a truly mutual intimate relationship. Narratively-constructed digital intimacy therefore also incorporates elements of what Horton and Wohl (1979) named para-social interaction and Abidin (2015) calls "perceived interconnectedness." In the next section, I outline the key features of para-social interaction found in narratively-constructed digital intimacy.

II. Elements of Para-social Interactions

In 1956, Horton and Wohl proposed that mass media had the potential to give audiences "the illusion of [a] face-to-face relationship with the performer" and specifically highlighted television as a particularly useful medium for crafting such relationships. They argued that television "makes available nuances of appearance and gesture to which ordinary social perception is attentive and to which interaction is cued" (1979, pp. 32-33). The formation of

these para-social relationships, as Horton and Wohl named them, is based on a "simulacrum of conversational give and take" they called a "para-social interaction," in which "the performer seems to adjust his performance to the supposed response of the audience" through the use of "direct address, [talking] as if he were conversing personally and privately" with the audience (1979, p. 33). Later, Horton and Strauss further developed the concept, asserting that para-social interaction often "resembles personal interaction" inasmuch as one half of the interacting pair "experiences the encounter as immediate, personal, and reciprocal" (1957, p. 580). One key characteristic of para-social interactions is that they are primarily "one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible to mutual development" (Horton and Wohl, 1979, p. 33). Though audiences may believe they have intimate knowledge of a performer, that feeling is not returned; despite the performer duplicating "the gestures, conversational style, and milieu of an informal face-to-face" relationship, it is, ultimately, an illusion and the performer cannot claim intimate knowledge of anyone in the audience (Horton and Wohl, 1979, p. 35).

While their use of YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr may provide readers with the sense that the LBD "characters are real people and experience the world as normal people do" (Respondent YI2RU6), Lizzie Bennet, her sisters, and her friends are still fictional characters. Though they appear online as average, ordinary twenty-somethings living and working in the United States, they are, ultimately, still creations of an author adapted from previously published source material and are therefore limited by the narrative in what they can do and how they can respond. No amount of tweets to Darcy will make him aware of Lizzie's videos (and her less-than-positive opinion of him) prior to episode 60, nor will multiple YouTube comments compel Lizzie to check in with Lydia until it is narratively necessary. Consequently, the feeling of narratively-constructed digital intimacy readers reported was essentially para-social.

In more recent years, Abidin (2015, ¶ 22) has used Horton and Wohl's 1956 theory of para-social interaction as the foundation for her concept of "perceived interconnectedness," a feeling that can arise from "explicit displays of intimacy mediated on blogs and social media platforms." Abidin positions perceived interconnectedness as a relevant update of para-social interaction; while Horton and Wohl envisioned para-social interaction as occurring through broadcast media, the widespread use of social media platforms in the twenty-first century has resulted in "implicit

expectations of intimacy" through personal social media posts and users who "perceive their interactions with [others] as more direct, personal, and authentic" (Abidin, 2013, ¶ 11). In addition, Abidin points out that, unlike broadcast media, social media platforms allow for more immediate and potentially more meaningful interactions between users. Though para-social interactions are inherently one-sided, Abidin suggests that perceived interconnectedness allows for a degree of reciprocity. Her research on Instagram influencers highlights how these micro-celebrities leverage the sociotechnical affordances of social media sites in similar ways to literary web series like LBD. Influencers and characters such as Lizzie and Lydia reply to, retweet, or like comments from fans and followers "as a sign of acknowledgement and appreciation" (Abidin, 2015, ¶ 17). As discussed in Chapter 3, the Lizzie Twitter account in LBD used the preserving retweet function to share and spread content from readers (which is illustrated by figure 3.3 in that chapter). Thus, perceived interconnectedness draws on specific social media strategies and affordances to convey a feeling of intimacy, just as para-social interactions arise from casual, conversational style modes of communication between a broadcast performer and the audience. Moreover, these intimacy-sustaining strategies and modes of communication are integral to the narratively-constructed digital intimacy found in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

I. Personas

One particular strategy that contributes to the creation of para-social interactions and perceived interconnectedness, as well as narratively-constructed digital intimacy, is the use of personas. These are "a special category of 'personalities' whose existence is a function of the media themselves" (Horton and Wohl, 1979, p. 34). In broadcast media, an individual may adopt the persona of game show host, news interviewer, or talk show confessor, while social media platforms in the convergent media environment see vloggers, micro-celebrities, and influencers take on different personas. In a narrative such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the characters of the story function as personas, primarily through the use of actors to portray Lizzie, Lydia, and the rest, but also through the characters' self-presentation as typical young adults. Both Horton and Wohl and Abidin emphasise the efforts of personas to portray themselves as ordinary and average, in an effort "to eradicate, or at least to blur, the line which divides [them]… from the audience" (Horton and Wohl, 1979, p. 36) and "to retain an impression of 'intimacy' and to

bridge the distance between [personas] and followers" (Abidin, 2015, ¶ 8). Accordingly, at the beginning of her first vlog, Lizzie declares, "my name is Lizzie Bennet and this is my life!" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012l). In striving to give readers "the impression of exclusive, intimate exchange" by presenting Lizzie's life "as lived" through her vlogs (Abidin, 2015, ¶ 14), the LBD narrative conveys to readers, as survey respondent 9JG0D2 said, "the sense that these people could exist" in the world, thereby strengthening the feeling of narratively-constructed digital intimacy.

One way personas achieve this realism and authenticity is through "a continuing relationship" in which the persona's appearance "is a regular and dependable event, to be counted on" (Horton and Wohl, 1979, p. 34), and through which the persona "documents the trivial and mundane aspects of everyday life" (Abidin, 2015, ¶ 19). Moreover, this continuing relationship seeks to provide the audience with "the impression that what is taking place… gains a momentum of its own in the very process of being enacted" (Horton and Wohl, 1979, p. 35). There is, therefore, a sense of immediacy and constancy associated with para-social interactions and perceived interconnectedness.[36] Particularly in a digital narrative such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the vlogs, tweets, Tumblr posts, and other social content are intended to be "amateur and raw," encouraging "interactivity and response from followers" (Abidin, 2015, ¶ 20). Instead of placing boundaries between themselves and the audience, the characters in literary web series instead "emphasise responsiveness to, rather than distancing from, [the audience] community" (Senft, 2008, p. 116).

The focus on immediacy and constancy in para-social interactions also recalls the serial, real-time release of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and other literary web series; as explained earlier in Chapters 2 and 4, this key feature of the genre reinforces readers' sense of temporal immersion in the narrative and positions characters like Lizzie and Lydia as real people with whom readers can connect. It also enables these narratives to "step out of the particular format of [the] show and literally blend with the audience" (Horton and Wohl, 1979, p. 36). For instance, in July 2012, the LBD narrative filmed two of Lizzie's vlogs at VidCon, an annual conference and

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[36] This sense of immediacy is also a byproduct of media convergence and convergence culture (per Bolter and Grusin, 2000 and Jenkins, 2006a).

convention dedicated to online video and co-founded by LBD co-creator Hank Green (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012x; Yurieff, 2019). By filming at a real industry event and incorporating actual conference attendees in background shots, LBD "made the plot come out of fiction and blurred the frontier between facts and fiction" (Respondent XNP1HU). This, in turn, helped strengthen the sense of narratively-constructed digital intimacy created by the narrative.

Though the narratively-constructed digital intimacy readers may perceive as a result of their LBD experience is inherently para-social, that does not mean it is inferior or unfulfilling. Horton and Wohl argue that para-social intimacy, or what Abidin calls perceived interconnectedness, is "extremely influential and satisfying for the great numbers who willingly receive it and share in it" because "the faithful audience is one that can accept the gambit offered" (1979, p. 34; p. 39). For those LBD readers willing to suspend their disbelief and embrace the narrative, they were able to "feel as though [Lizzie's story] was really unfolding before you, as though the novel really was coming to life online" (Respondent 1L9AF0). To help readers with the suspension of disbelief and reinforce the sense of narratively-constructed digital intimacy, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* also incorporated specific narrative features that helped blur the lines between fiction and reality. These narrative features include the use of a first-person narrator, present-tense or real-time narration, and the vulnerabilities of the protagonist. In the next section, I explore these specific features of narratively-constructed digital intimacy, which are also shared by Day's (2013) concept of narrative intimacy.

III. Elements of Narrative Intimacy

Narrative intimacy, as formulated by Day in her 2013 book, *Reading Like a Girl: Narrative Intimacy in Contemporary American Young Adult Literature*, refers to the imagined relationship that develops between a narrator and a reader. The concept stems from Day's research into popular novels for and about adolescent girls. According to Day, texts with narrative intimacy:

> reflect, model, and re-imagine intimate interpersonal relationships through the disclosure of information and the experience of the story as a space that the narrator invites the reader to share.
>
> (2013, p. 3)

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While narratively intimate texts may differ with regards to plot, setting, length, and other narrative features, these stories strive to create "an emotional bond [between narrator and reader] based on trust and disclosure" as well as the narrator's "willingness and ability to share thoughts, feelings, and experiences" with the reader (Day, 2013, p. 4; p. 6). Moreover, narratively intimate texts use specific story elements to blur the line between fiction and reality for the reader, making it easier for readers to form deeply meaningful, intimate connections with fictional characters. The narratively-constructed digital intimacy found in literary web series adopts some of these same elements, namely the use of a first-person narrator, present-tense real time narration, and the disclosures and vulnerabilities of the narrator.

I. Point of View

Alternatively referred to as narrative perspective, focalisation, or narrative orientation, a text's point of view determines how events and information are presented to readers, usually by aligning the text to one or more character's view of the storyworld (Jahn, 2010). A first-person point of view provides readers with the "subjective narration of a [specific] character in the plot – normally, but not always a major participant" (Chandler and Munday, 2016a). This type of narrator uses first-person pronouns (e.g., I, me, my) and describes events from her specific perspective, often filtering her observations through personally held opinions, judgements, and beliefs. First-person narration in literary web series is essential to narratively-constructed digital intimacy "precisely because it allows for insights into the choices" made by the narrator (Day, 2013, p.14). As previously explored in Chapters 2 and 4, most literary web series draw on the conventions of vlogging and position main characters as conversational and/or confessional vloggers, who take "the form of a talking-head… and address the audience in a Skype-style fashion" (see figure 6.2 below; Biel and Gatica-Perez, 2011, p. 33:3).

Figure 6.2: Examples of literary web series characters acting as conversational / confessional vloggers (clockwise from top left: Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012l; AOJE, 2013b; Mina Murray's Journal, 2016; and The Candle Wasters, 2014a).

In *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, for instance, Lizzie and Lydia act as first-person vloggers "who are the main characters of the stories they narrate, who act as their own subjects, and who focus on the presentation of their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences" (Day, 2013, p. 14). In doing so, Lizzie and Lydia give readers "access to a great amount of subjective information" that can cultivate "a greater sense of affinity and intimacy between narrator and reader" (Day, 2013, p. 20). Moreover, as Werner (2012, p. 50) points out, "vloggers [often] appeal to proximity, encouraging viewers to 'get closer' by including [the audience] within their 'intimate sphere'" and filming in intimate spaces such as a bedroom, as illustrated by figure 6.2 above. Additionally, Rutledge asserts that vlogs "use the camera to simulate the experience of eye contact [which] triggers mirror neurons that collapses the distinction between real and virtual" (2019, p. 356). By using a direct-address vlogging style and filming locations that evoke privacy and intimacy, literary web series characters like Lizzie and Lydia offer readers "'behind-the-scenes' portrayals of ordinary and relatable everyday life [that] gives [readers] the impression that they are privy to the private, usually inaccessible aspects" of the characters' lives (Abidin, 2015, ¶ 19). For example, Interviewee 7 spoke about bringing her existing knowledge of vlogs and vloggers to her LBD experience:

> I had spent two years watching vloggers before I came across LBD, so when I did [watch LBD], it felt like just another vlogger uploading regularly into my subscription feed. The production quality was much higher than a lot of other vloggers at the time, but the series never felt like it was scripted. The relationships, the random outbursts, the

jokes, and even the fact that the background of her bedroom changed from time to time made the story feel completely natural and real.

Thus, the use of vlogging techniques that echo real-world YouTubers helps position fictional characters as realistic and authentic and gives readers the impression that Lizzie or Lydia are real people. This can strengthen the narratively-constructed digital intimacy created by the literary web series, thereby reinforcing readers' overall connection to the narrative. The first-person narrator's direct addresses to the audience also "implicitly or explicitly signals an awareness and expectation of a reader" (Day, 2013, p. 4). Though conversational and confessional vlogs have the appearance of being monological and one-sided, in fact, they can "promote high participation, critique, and discussion" and "usually explicitly encourage ongoing dialogue in the form of comment threads, response videos and the like" (Biel and Gatica Perez, 2011, p. 33:4; Werner, 2012, p. 37). Consequently, literary web series characters like Lizzie and Lydia frequently demonstrate that they are clearly aware of their audience, and take steps to engage and interact with that audience (as outlined previously in Chapters 3 and 4). The resulting narratively-constructed digital intimacy provides readers with a deeper connection to the story. As one survey respondent explained, "while I adore the novel, it was so much fun seeing the story through vlogs. I found myself more invested in the characters and storyline and it felt more real" (Respondent 6P52WV).

II. Narration

In addition to the use of first-person narration, literary web series also usually offer present-tense narration, relating events to a reader in "real time" as they occur for the narrator or character. As a key characteristic of both convergence culture (see: Bolter and Grusin, 2000; Jenkins, 2006a) and narratively-constructed digital intimacy, this "concept of immediacy plays an important role in" literary web series, because it "allows for the impression that there is no distinction between the [protagonist's] experiencing and narrating selves" (Day, 2013, pp. 19-20). Thus, the present-tense narration can provide readers with a sense of solidarity with the narrator; though neither the reader nor the narrator knows what might happen next, they will find out together as the story progresses. As discussed in Chapter 5, the initial serial release of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* contributed greatly to readers' sense of temporal immersion in the narrative. Survey respondent

HDLM92 explained that "it was cool to have weekly updates and to have [Lizzie] answer questions real time." According to Day (2013, p. 20), present-tense narration is "immediate and engaging" in a way that "allows for the establishment of identification between narrator and reader" and, as explored in Chapter 4, identification and empathy are necessary for the formation of emotional narrative immersive, which subsequently contributes to the development of narratively-constructed digital intimacy.

Further analysis of the survey responses supports Day's contention that present-tense, real-time narration is linked to the creation of intimacy for readers. Approximately 74% of survey respondents indicated that they consumed the LBD narrative during its original, serial release in 2012 and 2013; among these LBD readers, 93% answered that LBD felt real and immersive. In contrast, from the 26% of survey respondents who consumed LBD after the narrative's initial conclusion, a smaller percentage (72%) found LBD to be real and immersive. In addition, readers who experienced the LBD narrative in real time were also more likely to say that the ability to participate in and interact with the narrative was important to their individual experience of Lizzie's story (67%, versus 35% of readers who consumed LBD later than 2013). Therefore, the present-tense, real-time serial release of literary web series is a crucial element in creating narratively-constructed digital intimacy. While it is certainly possible for literary web series to offer intimate and meaningful experiences to readers who discover these texts after an initial release, the sense of intimacy will likely be stronger and deeper for those readers who immerse themselves temporally in the narrative and follow the story in real time.

III. Disclosures

Finally, my definition of narratively-constructed digital intimacy emphasises the necessity for disclosure and vulnerability in creating emotional bonds between narrator and reader. Disclosures play an important role in all types of intimacy because the development of an intimate connection between two individuals is not only based on *how* information is shared, but also *what* is shared.[37] For example, according to Day, texts that feature narrators who "frequently reveal a desire to share personal, private feelings, questions, and struggles" are more likely to

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[37] See the sections on narrative immersion in Chapter 4 for more on disclosures.

create intimacy because the relationship between narrator and reader becomes "shaped by concerns about privacy, secrecy, and trust" and is therefore framed as "distinctly personalized and intimate" (2013, p. 4). Moreover, Stahl contends that listening to another person's disclosures can "bring with it the sensation of intimacy [and the] feeling that the telling and the listening are an exclusive exchange where we come very close to seeing each other's reality" (2008, p. xxxiii). In fictional narratives (such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*), disclosures also serve to provide readers with insight into characters' decisions; Day suggests that

> because the narrator is self-consciously disclosing not only experiences but also thoughts and feelings, the reader is given access to a great amount of subjective information, allowing in turn for a stronger "affinity" and a greater sense of intimacy between narrator and reader.
>
> (2013, p. 21)

Thus, the more insight readers have into a specific character, the more likely they are to feel emotionally, intimately connected to that character and the character's story, strengthening the sense of narratively-constructed digital intimacy. As survey respondent V946KR explained, the disclosures from Lizzie and Lydia in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* gave readers "a deeper understanding of the characters' motivations and behaviour."

Disclosures are not without risk, however; they necessitate a certain amount of vulnerability and trust from the person sharing the private information, who "must determine whether or not it is 'safe' to share certain information or feelings with others" (Day, 2013, p. 5). Consequently, the development of narratively-constructed digital intimacy in literary web series requires fictional characters like Lizzie and Lydia to be "willing to open [themselves] to the possibility of betrayal" and to understand "that the information, feelings, or experiences shared with another may be used as weapons" (Day, 2013, p. 6). The discussion in Chapter 4, for instance, highlighted Lizzie's vulnerability and uncertainty as she struggled to determine what to disclose about her family's financial situation and whether or not to share the video of her argument with Darcy in the first half of the LBD narrative. Her later videos, featuring the aftermath of discovering Lydia's sex tape, showcase a similar vulnerability. After confronting Lydia about the sex tape in episode 85 (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2013c), Lizzie uses the beginning of episode 86 to specifically address her decision to share such a private moment, saying

I'm sure a lot of you have been wondering why I posted that last video with Lydia… with what happened. I'd have asked Lydia, but she won't so much as look at anyone since she found out about the website. So I posted that to show you, in case there was any doubt, that my sister had *nothing* to do with putting that on the Internet. She's not making money from it. This was done without her consent… and to show you just how this whole thing is affecting my sister.

(emphasis original; Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2013g)

Later, in episode 87, Lizzie openly admits to the audience that she feels "like my sister [Lydia] is a person I've never met" and regrets her inability to "see her [Lydia] when she was standing right in front of me" (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2013a). For many LBD readers, these disclosures and vulnerabilities helped them "relate more to the characters on a personal level, which made the emotions… felt more intense" (Respondent PSSD0X) and reinforced the narratively-constructed digital intimacy created by the narrative.

While disclosures in literary web series frequently occur through characters' use of the conversational and confessional vlog formats, disclosures do not need to be verbal. Vlogs are visual media that can display emotions through the use of close-up shots of an individual's face or body (Werner, 2012). According to Ekman, "each emotion generates a unique pattern of sensations in our body and has unique signals, the most identifiable being in the face and voice" (2003, p. 15). Moreover, "emotions can, and often do, begin very quickly" (Ekman, 2003, p. 14), frequently registering on an individual's face before she is consciously aware of feeling that particular emotion. Biel, Aran, and Gatica-Perez (2011, p. 446) contend that nonverbal behaviours and expressions can "convey information that is generally difficult to control, which might differ from the content" expressed verbally. Consequently, a vlogger (like Lizzie or Lydia) may inadvertently disclose a feeling or emotion that she may not have intended to reveal, even after editing a video for its upload. One example of this occurs in Lydia's vlogs, when she makes a spontaneous decision to visit Jane in Los Angeles. In episode 13, "Runaway," Jane discovers that Lydia did not inform their parents about the trip, and tells Lydia that their mother was worried about her. Lydia rolls her eyes at this comment and sarcastically replies, "yeah she seemed pretty worried when she told me how selfish and irresponsible I was being and how I should be more like you and Lizzie" (The Lydia Bennet, 2012d). After this statement, however,

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Lydia's facial expression indicates frustration and sadness, giving LBD readers the impression that she is hurt by her mother's words and dislikes being constantly compared to her older sisters (see figure 6.3 below). For LBD readers like survey respondent L0UTNG, "the LBD experience was much more 'emotional' because of the… ability to see facial expressions and body language."
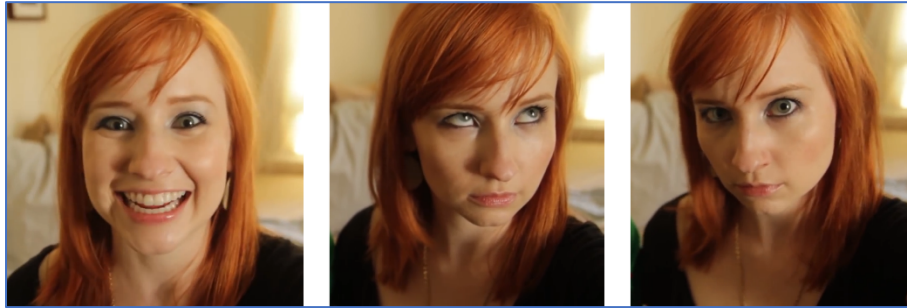

Figure 6.3: Screenshots of the range of Lydia's facial expressions throughout "Runaway – Ep:13" (The Lydia Bennet, 2012d).

Day's theory of narrative intimacy highlights the different features literary web series can adopt to help blur the line between fiction and reality. By using first-person narrators, sharing narrative content in a serial, real-time release, and having protagonists share disclosures and vulnerabilities, literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* can minimise the distance between the reader and the story, and help readers suspend their disbelief. However, it is important to note that narratively-constructed digital intimacy is not simply Day's concept of narrative intimacy shifted into digital spaces and narratives.

First, Day's book and her study of narrative intimacy is focused specifically and intentionally on the "the concept of the adolescent woman as white, middle class, and heterosexual" (2013, p. 10). She explains her rationale for this decision by arguing that it is a concept that holds "greater prevalence… in contemporary American culture" because "adolescent women as a market and audience have been understood as particularly receptive to literature in emotional (rather than intellectual or analytical) terms" (2013, p. 10; p. 23). In contrast, the narratively-constructed digital intimacy found in literary web series is not limited to female readers or dependent on female protagonists. While Lizzie and Lydia of LBD happen to share the same gender as the characters Day writes about, many literary web series feature main characters who identify or

present themselves as male. Examples include Benedick in *Nothing Much To Do* and *Lovely Little Losers*, Edgar Allan Poe in *A Tell-Tale Vlog*, and the multiple male characters that populate *The New Adventures of Peter and Wendy* (the titular Peter Pan along with John and Michael Darling and Jas Hook). Moreover, these individuals are protagonists in their respective narratives, and those narratives have the same potential to provide readers with narratively-constructed digital intimacy.

Second, the texts Day uses throughout her research are novels and nonfiction self-help books that are presented to readers as complete and whole. Though Day does reference a few diary-style novels (which mimic and suggest seriality), the examples she uses are texts that are published and offered to readers as finished and closed. Readers therefore have limited (if any) opportunity to contribute to the narrative. On the other hand, literary web series often appear fragmented and unfinished, as the discussion of these narratives as fanfiction in Chapter 2 pointed out. Moreover, previous chapters in this thesis (see: Ch. 2 and 4) as well as earlier sections of this specific chapter have emphasised the importance of seriality to literary web series and the creation of narratively-constructed digital intimacy. The serial release of a narrative like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* encourages and enables readers to contribute to the narrative as it unfolds, and heightens the illusion of reality depicted in the YouTube videos, tweets, and Tumblr posts. Thus, while readers can find themselves immersed in the texts Day mentions in her research, the participatory and interactive storyworld of a literary web series may allow readers to form deeply meaningful and intimate connections to fictional characters more easily.

Third, Day's concept of narrative intimacy does not consider at all the participation and interactivity that are essential to literary web series and narratively-constructed digital intimacy. While readers may feel a sense of affinity with the protagonists of novels such as Meg Cabot's *The Princess Diaries* or Sarah Dessen's *Keeping the Moon* (two books Day examines), those characters are unable to respond to or converse with readers. They are static on the page, existing solely as their respective authors designed them. Literary web series, however, leverage the participatory and interactive affordances found on various social media platforms to not only invite readers' questions and comments, but also to reply to readers through YouTube's comments section, question-and-answer videos, Twitter replies, and Tumblr reblogs (as

mentioned in Chapter 3 of this thesis). This interaction is crucial to the development of narratively-constructed digital intimacy because it further blurs the boundary between the fictional world of the literary web series and the reality in which readers reside. Moreover, as I explained in this chapter's section on narratively-constructed digital intimacy's elements of mediated intimacy, the use of interactive and participatory social media platforms allows readers to treat fictional characters like Lizzie and Lydia as friends. This, in turn, allows them to more readily immerse themselves in a literary web series' storyworld and experience meaningful, intimate connections with the narrative. Using data collected from the survey and interviews, the next sections of this chapter highlight narratively-constructed digital intimacy in relation to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and its readers.

Narratively-Constructed Digital Intimacy in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*

As the sections above have illustrated, narratively-constructed digital intimacy develops in digital narratives like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and other literary web series that leverage the sociotechnical affordances of platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr, to encourage readers to engage with fictional characters. This occurs through an informal, public, friendship-based discourse, and allows readers to choose the intensity of their connection through their social media platforms of choice. Narratively-constructed digital intimacy derives from interactions with and connections to fictional characters and is therefore intrinsically para-social due to the limitations of the characters imposed by the story. However, narratives like LBD can help readers suspend their disbelief and strengthen their sense of intimacy by using first-person narrators, present-tense, real time narrator, and by having the main characters share disclosures and vulnerabilities with the reader. In Chapter 5, I presented an analysis of data I collected from LBD readers through an online survey and semi-structured interviews. In the following sections, I return to that data to specifically highlight how many readers came to describe their narrative experience with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as emotionally meaningful and intimate. I also explore how LBD in particular leveraged the resonance and legacy of Jane Austen to encourage the formation of an intimate public, a community of LBD readers bound together by their narrative experiences.

I. Seriality, Choice, and Personalised Narrative Experiences

Previous discussions in Chapters 2 and 4, as well as the section on narrative intimacy earlier in this chapter, have emphasised literary web series' use of seriality. Ryan (2015a), for instance, has outlined the importance of a narrative's serial release in creating and sustaining temporal narrative immersion. Meanwhile, Page points out that serial narratives dispersed on social media platforms often "take place in near- concurrence with the time of events" and the structure of most social media platforms means that seriality is "well suited to the affordances of social media" (2013, p. 35). By posting Lizzie's YouTube videos twice weekly and distributing content on Twitter and Tumblr in between videos during its initial release in 2012 and 2013, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* "made it seem like the story was happening constantly and added to the sense of it being in real time" (Respondent 4GHZAT). This sense of realism and authenticity is important both for sustaining a reader's immersion in the narrative and creating narratively-constructed digital intimacy, because it allows readers to more easily suspend their disbelief and accept Lizzie as an actual person.

Additionally, some survey respondents linked LBD's serial release with their participation in the narrative and the fan community. Respondent UGBVK9 described the importance of seriality to her LBD experience, explaining that readers "were reacting, in real time, with an entire community as invested as you were." She also pointed out that "the entire Lydia's sex tape saga occurred in real time, which meant I was checking text messages to see if the site was down. REAL texts about a REAL website." Interviewee 2 shared similar sentiments about the importance of seriality, and went into detail recounting one specific experience with the LBD narrative (see figure 6.4 below):

> [Lizzie's] Twitter account tweeted something and I had replied to it on Twitter with a comment to basically say, "oh, you know, it would be really cool if you were following what's happening with Lydia's social media right now because it's actually really important to these issues that you're concerned about." And then I tweeted, "but of course you won't do that because, like a sensible person, you're probably in bed asleep now." And I was just about to go to bed myself, and as I was setting my phone down, I got a notification [saying] that the Lydia Twitter account had liked my tweet to Lizzie. And it just, kind of, blew my mind, like, oh, wow! … So I found that very compelling

and I don't think that was necessarily a planned thing. That was the creators of the show (or at least the writers involved in that kind of thing) doing this in real time.
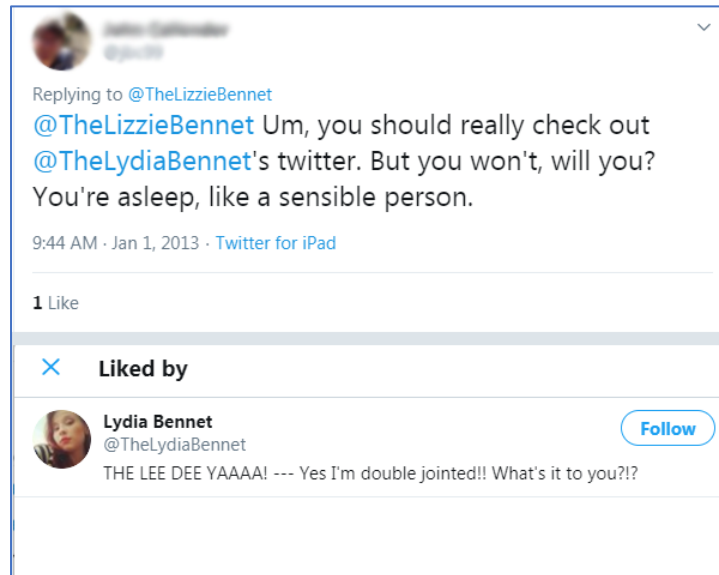

Figure 6.4: A screenshot of the tweet posted by Interviewee 2 and the notification that Lydia's account liked it.

As these examples show, the serial release of LBD, and the sense of temporal immersion that resulted from the serial release, were a vital part of the overall narrative experience for many readers and contributed to their sense of connection to Lizzie's story. Moreover, even readers who did not experience LBD as a serial narrative conceded that the real-time release of Lizzie's YouTube videos was important to the narrative as a whole. Roughly 26% of all survey respondents indicated that they discovered LBD at some point after its initial conclusion in March 2013. While only 35% of these respondents felt that the serial release of content and the ability to interact with Lizzie, Lydia, and other LBD characters was important to their individual narrative experience, 62% of them did indicate that the serial release and opportunities for interaction were important to the overall narrative. Consequently, it is likely that a reader's sense of meaningful connection to the narrative and the development of narratively-constructed digital intimacy is intertwined with the specific choices she made (or makes) during her experience with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. As previously outlined earlier in this chapter, an individual's ability to control the intensity and degree of interactions and relationships on different social media platforms is an essential part of narratively-constructed digital intimacy.

As transmedia narratives, literary web series use multiple media platforms to distribute narrative content. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, for example, dispersed Lizzie's story primarily through YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook. Interviewee 8 specifically pointed to LBD's myriad of options as a positive aspect of the narrative, saying, "We could listen to Gigi's playlists. We could pin Jane's outfits. We could retweet and like and share the character's posts on Twitter and Instagram and Facebook. As a result, LBD allowed a much greater depth to each of the characters." The use of multiple media platforms enabled LBD to offer readers multiple narrative paths and, according to Chambers, creates a "polymedia environment… in which people have a sense of *agency* over the technologies" (emphasis original; 2013, p. 18). Thus, readers could choose how and when they consumed the narrative (i.e., through preferred platforms), their individual level of participation, and the degree of intensity to their interactions with the narrative. Survey respondent MADRTL, for instance, reported that she specifically joined Twitter and Tumblr because she "wanted to keep track of these characters' 'lives' [and] it made me feel excited and more connected to the story." Another reader confessed that LBD "had me actually using Twitter and always looking for the next tweet… and I think that kept me more involved all the time [and] I'm not sure how much that would have been the case if I wasn't involved with the social media side of the story" (Respondent DF2Z0L). Meanwhile, in her recollections of her experience with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, Interviewee 9 discussed how the choices she made helped strengthen her connection to the narrative:

> The more I watched Lizzie's story, the more engaged I became with it… I remember watching and re-watching some of the best videos. Fairly early on, I would make sure I stayed up late enough to watch the video release in time (as I was in Australian time, it came out late). It became a priority to see it. I debated passionately plot points with my friends. It spurred me to also engage with a fan world, which continued after the story ended… I really did feel very emotionally attached and invested in the story.

In making specific choices with regards to the LBD narrative, individual readers ensured that their narrative experiences were highly personalised, which contributed to their sense of narratively-constructed digital intimacy. However, some survey respondents (about 20% of the total number of respondents) made a choice *not* to participate in the narrative. Unlike those readers who did not discover LBD until sometime after its initial release, these readers had the opportunity to participate, but everything from "shyness" and "lack of time" (per respondent

KEJ4SP) to "unwillingness to join Twitter" (per respondent CAIHLF) meant that their individualised narrative experience differed from the experiences of participants. While some of these non-participating readers expressed indifference or happiness with their choices, others admitted to some degree of regret. Respondent OFG079 confessed that she had wanted to participate, "especially when Sanditon came out. The role-playing aspect seemed like a ton of fun. It was only because I was too busy at work that I didn't do it." One specific survey respondent even likened her lack of participation to "watching a television show while cooking in a different room [because] there are large chunks of content you don't get." She then acknowledged that her "investment in the show was absolutely affected by my lack of a Twitter account" (Respondent EY724I). Just as the choices made by participating readers altered and influenced their experience of LBD, the choices made by non-participating readers also resulted in specific, personalised narrative experiences. The key point of connection between these two groups of readers was choice; each reader had the agency to decide how to (or even whether to) engage with Lizzie, Lydia, and the narrative. For those who ultimately decided to engage in a significant way, the result was a deeply meaningful, intimate experience.

Furthermore, in providing readers with the tools necessary to control their narrative experiences and make choices according to their personal preferences, literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* can "connect people [to the narrative] in ways that make them feel like their views matter" (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 32). Survey respondent O3GXNW, for example, mentioned leaving "comments on videos to express what I liked about the episode" before sharing that she "would also comment as if the characters… listen[ed] to what I'd say." Many readers also pointed to the question-and-answer videos as a key part of their personalised narrative experience. Among the 74% of survey respondents who consumed LBD during its initial 2012-2013 release, about a quarter (approximately 25%) indicated that they had specifically asked Lizzie or Lydia a question for a Q&A video. According to survey respondent AX2IV1, watching Lizzie answer reader questions made LBD feel "more immersive [because] we sort of become characters within the narrative." In addition, readers' ability to craft unique narrative experiences can help "activate and sustain latent ties" and "empower individuals by enabling them to connect with lots of friends" (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 310; van Dijck, 2013, p. 34). Certainly, many LBD readers formed friendships with each other through the LBD fan

community, and this will be addressed later in this chapter. At the same time, many readers mentioned a sense of friendship with the characters of the narrative, most notably Lizzie and Lydia. The next section illustrates how engaging with the fictional characters of LBD through an informal, public friendship discourse contributed to and reinforced narratively-constructed digital intimacy in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

II. (Perceived) Friendships with Fictional Characters

One of the most important conclusions drawn from the analysis of the survey data was the fact that 88% of survey respondents felt Lizzie, Lydia, and the storyworld they inhabited were authentic and realistic. Respondent 72V2HW, for instance, commented that she thought of Lizzie as a real person "because [she] was a direct reflection of my own life and the lives of my friends." Another respondent (XNUZS4) pointed out that "having [the] characters retweet or respond to your tweets and jokes like normal people added a real energy and dimension… to the story." Respondent V6Z4DZ, meanwhile, mentioned the importance of LBD's interactive and participatory features when she expressed a desire "to be friends with these characters" and pointed out that "in participating, you sort of were." As outlined earlier in this chapter, narratively-constructed digital intimacy arises in literary web series that use the sociotechnical affordances of social media platforms to provide readers with opportunities to participate in the narrative and interact with the characters, and to connect and identify with those characters through an informal, public, friendship discourse. The discussion of emotional narrative immersion in Chapter 4 highlighted how empathy and identification are necessary for the creation of intimate, emotional bonds between readers and fictional characters, and many readers connected LBD's sense of authenticity to their ability to identify with Lizzie. Respondent M6L6HF explained that "it's more of a leap to say that I identify with a woman from a few hundred years ago than to say that I identify with a grad student paying back her student loans, especially when she answers questions about it!" Similarly, Respondent XMV1HP indicated that she had "identified with all three [Bennet] sisters at different points based on their attitudes, language and demeanour in different situations."

Readers' participation in the LBD narrative also helped strengthen their sense of narratively-constructed digital intimacy by enabling them to view characters like Lizzie and Lydia as friends. Respondent UW4MRF, for example, said that "interacting allowed me to fully engage with the story, making it real, [and] making the characters like friends." For Respondent SSK37Y, the participatory elements of the narrative available to readers through the sociotechnical affordances of YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr "allowed you to feel like the characters are friends, like you know them." Respondent 8D3VKA described comparable feelings, saying she felt "incredibly immersed in the story [because] for all intents and purposes, the characters were my friends – I interacted with them regularly, got replies, [and] got updates on their life." Moreover, many LBD readers indicated that their sense of friendship with Lizzie, Lydia, and the other characters was a positive feeling. Respondent 9484DY declared that she "loved feeling connected to the characters and engaging with them like I would with my real friends." Crucially, some readers specifically mentioned that their attachments to LBD's characters and the narratively-constructed digital intimacy that arose from those attachments did not cease when the narrative did. Respondent 9DCCV0 explained that she "felt closer to the characters, almost as if they were [real] people" and, consequently, "to this day, I wonder about what Lizzie & Darcy are doing in San Francisco, if Jane is the owner of a huge fashion line now, etc."

According to Chambers, friends and "friend-like ties are important and often unacknowledged sources of social support, happiness and well-being" (2013, p. 50) and, importantly, "being able to conduct and maintain intimacy [and friendships] at a distance [can be] a great comfort in times of discord" (2013, p. 167). While the examples here illustrate that many LBD readers developed friendships with the fictional characters of the narrative, two LBD readers in particular shared personal stories that exemplify the importance of the friendship discourse in narratively-constructed digital intimacy. In her response to a survey question, Respondent DF2Z0L confided that "towards the end of the [LBD] series, I was involved in an emotionally abusive relationship, and [had been] identified by my friends as the 'Lydia' of my group." She went on to explain that LBD, in updating Lydia's character and expanding her story beyond Austen's novel "gave me someone who I could see myself in." For Respondent DF2Z0L, the sense of kinship and intimacy she felt with Lydia Bennet proved to be an integral part of her narrative experience: "by

sending messages of support to Lydia, even though I knew she was fictional, it was similar to giving messages of support to myself, and [it] helped me through that time." Though her experience differed in specifics, Interviewee 5 reported a similar feeling of intimate connection to the LBD characters:

> LBD started airing at the end of my senior year of high school, and the bulk of the story happened during my freshman year at college. I was three states away from my home and knew no one on campus before school started. It was really easy to feel alone, but when I received a Twitter notification that Lizzie was bantering with Charlotte or Darcy was being melodramatic with Caroline, I felt like I had these friends I could communicate with for a little bit. Eventually, I made friends online who also watched the show, and they became the friendships that got me through that year, through graduation and up until now. LBD gave me a community when I was desperately lacking one.

These examples show that the narratively-constructed digital intimacy experienced by Respondent DF2Z0L and Interviewee 4 (and, indeed, many other LBD readers) was inextricably linked both to the friendship discourse and the affordances of social media platforms that enabled readers to interact with fictional characters, and to readers' perceptions of being connected to LBD's characters. Earlier sections of this chapter discussed how narratively-constructed digital intimacy relies on the disclosures and vulnerabilities of the protagonists to foster intimacy between readers and narrative. When Lizzie or Lydia shared private thoughts and details about their lives, readers had the perception of being connected to them through those disclosures. Though this perceived connection was inherently para-social (and indeed, many readers indicated that they understood this), it was realistic and authentic enough to emotionally immerse readers in the story and reinforce their sense of narratively-constructed digital intimacy.

Survey respondent Q3RGGY, for example, wrote about how "Lizzie's story became very real for me" despite being "always aware that the story was fiction, of course." She further explained her sense of immersion in the narrative, saying, "every day of my life from the second I started watching to the day it ended became dedicated in part to what LBD was doing that particular day... When Lydia live-tweeted her trip to Vegas, I was waiting by my phone and tweeting her regularly, despite knowing that no such person was *actually* in Vegas" (emphasis original). Some readers specifically mentioned that the ability to participate in the narrative helped reinforce their

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sense of immersion, connection, and intimacy. Respondent XB31II admitted that "the interaction actually made me feel like I could influence the story and be a participant of it and a few times I had to remind myself that it was a pre-set story that I could not change." For another reader, the timing of her participation was crucial to strengthening her feeling of narratively-constructed digital intimacy. Respondent BO3RMV shared her experiencing, saying "when the Lydia [sex] tape scandal came out, I emailed the company begging them not to post it. Then when Darcy took care of it, I felt like I had a play in that action, even though logically I know it was all scripted and recorded before I ever interacted."

These examples, as well as many of the other responses from survey respondents and interview subjects alike, highlight another common and recurring theme: a connection to Lydia. Though the narrative is *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, and Lizzie is indeed the main character, a significant portion of readers mentioned the changes to Lydia, her personality, and her narrative arc as positive and meaningful facet of their narrative experience. Survey respondent CFEZZG confessed that LBD "was the first adaptation I'd seen that made me think about Lydia differently, and question Austen's judgements. I had never cared about Lydia's fate before." Respondent 0Z8B80 shared similar sentiments, saying "watching [Lydia] learn to know herself, love herself, and stand up for herself was just about the best thing that happened in LBD." Meanwhile, respondent DPNVI8 recalled how she and other readers were "screaming at Lydia in the comments near the end of her arc, because she seemed real and we cared and we could see Wickham draining the life out of her, and of course she couldn't respond." Respondent DPNVI8's comments are illustrative of the fact that many readers readily acknowledged the fictionality of the narrative and the limitations of the characters to respond to reader interventions, yet also described deep emotional attachments to the characters (specifically, Lizzie and Lydia) and a sense of narratively-constructed digital intimacy that was strong enough to immerse them in the narrative and override any concerns about logic or authenticity.

Indeed, for some readers, their overall investment in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* occurred precisely because they were already familiar with the story. Survey respondent CFEZZG pointed out that "some fans tried to affect the story by tweeting at Lizzie and Lydia (or commenting on their videos), to try to head off the inevitable… [because] they know Lizzie's future and can tell

her about it." While she ultimately felt that "characters could not avoid their fates," other readers expressed feeling more empowered. Respondent 0Z7TGV explained that her ability to interact and converse with Lizzie and Lydia, thanks to the sociotechnical affordances of YouTube and Twitter, created "a sense that maybe you can do something… you can maybe plead with Lydia and reason with Lizzie… just enough that maybe, maybe you can get them to their happy ending FASTER!" Meanwhile, in sharing her experiences, Interviewee 5 mentioned the sense of foreboding that accompanied Lydia's relationship with Wickham, because "we were aching for Lydia, knowing that some kind of hurt was coming for her" before adding that she "saw people send tweets encouraging Lydia to break up with Wickham, as though that were actually an option in the story, when we knew how the plot had to unfold." Upon further reflection, Interviewee 5 suggested that her level of engagement with and immersion in the LBD narrative, particularly with regards to Lydia's narrative thread, was directly linked to her previous knowledge of Austen's novel:

> On the one hand, we were playing the role of concerned viewers of Lydia's videos, but we were coming from the perspective of knowing her future, in a way. If the show were real, we might not have sent any tweets her way, because we wouldn't have known that Wickham was going to do anything to her. But because we did know her narrative, we sent tweets and felt like we were speaking to a real person, making her upset and further encouraging her relationship with the person we were warning against, even though we knew that we would never actually change what was coming… it feels like a very specific form of immersion where the situation felt real but was only happening because we all knew that it was fake.

Consequently, despite an underlying awareness of the fictionality of the narrative and the para-social nature of the interactions with LBD's characters, readers, like Interviewee 5 and the others mentioned here, described having a narrative experience that was significant and meaningful, due to the sense of agency provided by the sociotechnical affordances of LBD's media platforms, the friendship discourse that encouraged them to view Lizzie and Lydia as friends, the use of first-person, real-time narration, and the disclosures and vulnerabilities of the main characters – in other words, the creation of narratively-constructed digital intimacy. At the same time, however, the legacy of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* must not be discounted. As previously discussed in Chapter 4, the resonance and transformation of literature is one of the

primary methods of meaning-making in literary web series. Though the definition of narratively-constructed digital intimacy does not explicitly include the resonance of the source texts for literary web series, readers' prior knowledge of and connections to the original novels and stories remain an integral part of their narrative experiences, particularly with regards to the formation of fan communities, or what Berlant (2008) calls "intimate publics." In the next section of this chapter, I highlight how readers' existing relationship with Austen's work contributed to the creation of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* fan community and how that community operated as an intimate public, providing members with a sense of connection to both the LBD narrative and other readers.

III. The LBD Fan Community as an Intimate Public

According to Berlant, intimate publics develop "when a market opens up to a bloc of consumers, claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people's particular core interests and desires" (2008, p. 5). These groups and communities provide people with "a *sense* that there is a common emotional world available to those individuals who" share knowledge and/or experiences and have the ability to "be emotionally literate in each other's experience[s]" (emphasis original; Berlant, 2008, p. 5; p. 10). Additionally, Berlant suggests that intimate publics provide members with a method of self-identification "that promises a certain experience of belonging" (2008, p. viii). The worldwide Jane Austen fandom, for instance, could be classified as an intimate public. People who self-identify as Janeites often find themselves drawn to other Austen fans, either through casual conversation or formal membership in an organisation such as the Jane Austen Society. Janeites are also eager producers and consumers of Austen's work and Austen-related products, from the prolific community of Austen fanfiction writers (Jamison, 2013; Organisation for Transformative Works, 2019a; Reynolds, 2014) to the seemingly never-ending list of Austen screen adaptations (Oak, 2017; Welsh, 2013).

As a subsection of the broader Austen fandom, the LBD fan community offered readers an opportunity to connect with other Austen and LBD fans through the friendship discourse found in narratively-constructed digital intimacy. While this discourse enabled and encouraged readers to view the fictional characters of LBD as friends, it also helped readers develop and strengthen

friendships with other readers. Particularly in digital and social media spaces, "the term 'friendship' is being used to bridge the boundaries between intimate personal relationships and public, networked community relationships" (Chambers, 2013, p. 49). Accordingly, for many readers, their LBD experience was a communal one that resulted in deep, meaningful connections to both the narrative and the fan community.

Survey respondent O4ZOUH attributes the LBD fan community with making her consumption of LBD "all the more enjoyable [because] you feel like you are part of a family that completely gets you. They are also interested in what your [sic] passionate about and they provide insight and thoughts that you are not aware of." Respondent 18NKHT found that she especially enjoyed interacting with other fans in the LBD community because "it made me feel validated and helped me explain my points of view about the video." Meanwhile, for survey respondent 72V2HW, LBD became "a larger and more significant part of my life" because of her conversations with other fans. As a result, she says, "I felt like part of a larger community and that was incredibly important to me at a very difficult time in my life." Per Berlant's definition of intimate publics, the experiences of these readers emphasise how the LBD fan community acted as an intimate public by providing readers with a "common emotional world" based on their shared knowledge of and experiences with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. The result was, according to respondent JXPGY0, "more immersive and more personal" because the "fan community surrounding [LBD] was incredibly supportive and shared many of the same interests."

The shared commonalities that unite members of an intimate public can also offer individuals an avenue for self-identification, which, in turn, can create a sense of belonging and connection. By engaging with the fan community and participating in the LBD narrative, survey respondent 3JFUHY felt that she "was no longer a reader or audience member, but a part of one of my very favorite [sic] stories in a way I never was before." MTLP80 realised that she loved "learning from other people's perspectives and experiences, especially with Lydia's storyline" and added that those connections and discussions "were empowering as a woman." For Interviewee 3, her identity as an LBD fan and engagement with the fan community even led to the discovery of a new skill and career:

After [LBD] was done, I did get a little bit deeper into the community, in terms of making friends within the community. I really loved a fanfic story that someone was writing and I became friends with her. And [now] we talk, like I talk to her more than my best friend because we're just always online. I became her beta [reader][38] and because of that, I started getting involved in the *Pride and Prejudice* community and fanfic community and started beta-ing for other people. And [then I] started a business editing because I was editing for people online and they were like, "you're pretty good at this. You should do this." So I'm, like, okay!

As this anecdote from Interviewee 3 shows, the LBD fan community, by functioning as an intimate public, provided some readers with a sense of identity and belonging, which also enabled them to craft intimate connections with other fans. Respondent 11IWXN, for instance, indicated that the community aspect of LBD was an essential part of her overall narrative experience, because "P&P [*Pride and Prejudice*] is not a really popular novel where I live, so it was difficult to interact with some people who knew about it." With LBD's use of social media platforms, however, "it was so much easier and it really added to my experience." Respondent MAFW6T appreciated "having a community to discuss with when Elizabeth is making ridiculous choices or Darcy is failing spectacularly or Lydia is misbehaving" and mentioned that she also preferred the more social, communal reading experience provided by LBD because it gave her "someone else to commiserate with or rejoice with while reading it." For respondent FMC0FE, "participating with other fans… really made the story more personal and relatable to me. The experience of watching it with other fans is really what made it so special."

According to Berlant, "participants in [an] intimate public *feel* as though it expresses what is common among them" (emphasis original; 2008, p. 5), and as these comments from LBD readers illustrate, the LBD fan community did indeed allow readers to celebrate their shared affinity for the narrative. Additionally, many readers have sustained these friendships beyond the initial narrative; respondent 6W6M5Q reported that she "still chats with [LBD friends] on a daily basis five years later" and was even able to meet one of those friends in person "although we live at opposite sides of the planet." With its creation of narratively-constructed digital intimacy and the formation of an intimate public of readers, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* offered readers the opportunity to engage deeply, meaningfully, and significantly with the narrative. Consequently,

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[38] In fanfiction communities, beta readers "act as pre-readers, sounding boards and editors for fic writers. All their labor is volunteer and… they lavish time and attention on work on short notice" (Jamison, 2013, p. 279).

for many readers, LBD "created a community of new and old Austen fans [who could] interact and participate from all over the world in an adaptation of a classic story" (Respondent XNUZS4).

Review

In this chapter, I defined my concept of narratively-constructed digital intimacy, which combines elements of mediated and narrative intimacies with para-social interaction to describe the reading experiences that can be found in literary web series. Existing research from Abidin (2013; 2015), Chambers (2013), Day (2013), and Horton and Wohl (1979) provided the foundation for narratively-constructed digital intimacy. This type of intimacy forms when literary web series leverage the sociotechnical affordances of social media platforms (such as YouTube, Twitter, or Tumblr) to invite readers to connect with fictional characters through a public, informal friendship discourse. Readers are also encouraged to control the degree and intensity of their narrative experiences; narratively-constructed digital intimacy offers readers a sense of agency and choice, allowing them to decide how, when, and how often they receive and interact with content from the narrative. Narratively-constructed digital intimacy is, at its core, para-social because the fictional characters of literary web series are limited by their source texts and therefore may not be able to respond or react exactly as a reader might wish. However, through the use of a first-person narrator, real-time narration that contributes to temporal immersion, and the disclosures and vulnerabilities of a literary web series' protagonist(s), narratively-constructed digital intimacy can help blur the lines between fiction and reality, encouraging readers to participate and immerse themselves in the story.

Additionally, the literary resonance of a literary web series' source text complements and helps strengthen narratively-constructed digital intimacy by facilitating the development of a fan community that functions as an intimate public. While the friendship discourse discussed earlier in this chapter contributes to the creation of narratively-constructed digital intimacy and readers' connections to fictional characters, that same discourse helped readers form friendships with fellow LBD fans. Per research from Berlant (2008), intimate publics enable readers to come together, bound by a shared narrative experiences, while also providing them with a sense of

identity and belonging. Several readers spoke about the importance of the friendships they formed through their narrative experience and the intimacy generated by the LBD fan community. I incorporated responses from survey participants and interview subjects throughout the chapter to illustrate the concepts of narratively-constructed digital intimacy and the LBD intimate public, and showcase the deep emotional attachments readers had and still have with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

In May 1920, the leading headline for the *New York Times Review of Books* featured a dramatic proclamation that Jane Austen was an "unread 'classic'" and the ensuing article's opening statement expressed relief that there was "still… some one [sic] who has the leisure and the inclination to read and write about Jane Austen" (Atherton, 1920). Whether the author was being sincere or sarcastic with her remarks is unknown, but it is difficult to imagine someone making a similar claim in 2019. Though there are, undoubtedly, numerous individuals across the globe who have not read, viewed, or otherwise experienced Austen for any number of reasons, the author has nevertheless become so ubiquitous that her likeness can be found on everything from tee-shirts and greeting cards to a ten-pound bank note (Malcolm, 2015; Morris, 2017). Moreover, "the number of books *about* Austen has long surpassed the number of her original works" (emphasis mine; Luetkenhaus and Weinstein, 2019, p. 1). Even if someone readily admits to not having read one of Austen's novels, she may very well still be able to converse competently about the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* or the main characters in *Persuasion*, having obtained her knowledge from the multitude of Austen screen adaptations in existence. In fact, this was true for Interviewee 1, who displayed considerable knowledge of *Pride and Prejudice* based solely on her consumption of film and television versions of the story.

The widespread prevalence and general awareness of Jane Austen in contemporary popular culture suggests that Austen should no longer be classified as an "unread classic;" indeed, "we [now] live in a time when cult-like activity around [Austen] has a far greater reach than in previous eras" (Looser, 2013, p. 185). Interest in Austen and her novels remains constant, with a new television adaptation of her unfinished novel, *Sanditon*, airing on ITV in the fall of 2019 and *Rational Creatures*, a literary web series update of *Persuasion*, debuting on YouTube in September 2019 (Hughes, 2019; Rational Creatures, 2019). Moreover, Austen fanfiction authors are consistently publishing new stories and the broader cultural and media environment has led to "practices across social, convergent, and participatory media [that] enable… niche and experimental forms [to] flourish and find their audiences" while also creating "a cultural environment ideal for [the] creation and consumption of digital fiction" (Skains, 2019b).

One such niche form of digital fiction that has flourished in the convergent media environment is the literary web series. The introduction to this thesis presented in Chapter 1 provided an overview of literary web series, pointing out that web series in general date back to the mid-1990s and the earliest days of the World Wide Web. Literary web series, however, are more recent phenomena, outputs of media convergence and participatory cultures as well as the fanfiction and digital literature industries. Chapter 1 also linked the literary web series genre to early web television pioneers such as *Lonelygirl15* and *The Guild* and highlighted how these series helped develop the features and conventions for literary web series. The introduction also suggested that literary web series have, historically, been understudied by academic researchers, despite often having active, engaged communities of fans and readers. In consuming literary web series, these fans and readers often demonstrate how media consumption and creation continues to shift and evolve as new forms of narrative develop. The work of scholars such as Baeva (2015), Berryman (2017), Jandl (2015), Kuznetsova (2014), Seymour, Roth, and Flegel (2015), Stein (2015; 2016a), and Tepper (2015) has usefully positioned literary web series in the broader contexts of adaptation studies and discussions of authorship in digital spaces. However, this thesis addresses two specific omissions in the existing literature: the collection of empirical data from readers of literary web series and a qualitative exploration of readers' feelings and opinions about their encounters with literary web series. Through an online mixed-methods survey and semi-structured interviews, the research presented in this thesis emphasises the reader's experience of one particular literary web series, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Chapter 1 of this thesis provided an overview of LBD, highlighting its unique production and creation as well as its narrative structure.

Chapter 2 defined literary web series as a genre that combines conventions and elements from a variety of storytelling methods, such as broadcast television, vlogs, web series, adaptations, and transmedia narratives. Literary web series also update and transform previously published literature from the Western canon (specifically, works in the public domain as a means of bypassing copyright issues), and distribute the narrative online, usually through multiple social media platforms. Chapter 2 therefore positioned literary web series as media artefacts emerging from media convergence (referencing Jenkins 2001, 2006a; Meikle and Young, 2011; and Murdock, 2000), participatory cultures (per Delwiche and Henderson, 2013 and Jenkins et al,

2009), and transmedia storytelling techniques (drawing on scholarship from Dena, 2009, 2019; Jenkins, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2019; and Ryan, 2013, 2015a). At the same time, literary web series are also literary texts and Chapter 2 illustrated the connections between literary web series and fanfiction (using work from Busse, 2017). This section also linked literary web series to digital literature (as defined by Hayles, 2008). I have argued that the dual nature of literary web series as both literature and media is an important aspect of these narratives to consider when outlining how a narrative like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* can create meaning for readers.

Chapter 3 introduced the three primary methods of meaning-making in literary web series, aligning them with Murray's (2017) "characteristic pleasures" or principles of digital fiction. The first characteristic pleasure and meaning-making method, agency, arises from literary web series' leveraging the sociotechnical affordances of specific social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr to actively invite and encourage reader participation and interactivity. After providing an overview of affordances and their historical roots, I referenced Bucher and Helmond's (2017) distinction between high-level affordances and low-level affordances. boyd's (2014) research provided support for Chapter 3's discussion of high-level affordances, defined as persistence, visibility, spreadability, and searchability. Following this, I drew from the work of Chen (2011), Draucker and Collister (2015), Highfield (2016), Papacharissi (2014; 2015) and Stein (2016b) to illustrate the three categories of low-level affordances found in literary web series: sharing, conversing, and creating. I closed Chapter 3 by linking the sociotechnical affordances of social media with Chambers' (2013) theory of mediated intimacy. This section was supported by the scholarship of Abidin (2015), Baym (2010, 2014), Berlant (2008), Raun (2018), and Stein (2015). I suggested that the primary elements of mediated intimacy (a friendship discourse, disclosures, and choice) are also embedded within platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Thus, readers of literary web series who leverage their sense of agency and the affordances of these sites also have the opportunity to craft narratives that are more meaningful and intimate.

Chapter 4 continued my discussion of the primary methods of meaning-making in literary web series. This chapter focused on the second and third methods: narrative immersion and literary resonance. With immersion, literary web series use different techniques to create immersive

experiences for readers. According to Ryan (2015a), these experiences can be categorised according to three different types of narrative immersion: temporal, spatial, or emotional. For instance, literary web series might rely on the serial release of content to cultivate suspense and temporal immersion, include mentions or images of real-world locations to encourage spatial immersion, and/or promote the formation of emotional immersion by facilitating connections between readers and the narrative. Chapter 4 also emphasises how this immersive engagement can help readers empathise with fictional characters, which in turn strengthens their sense of emotional, intimate connections to the narrative (referencing Chambers, 2013; Day, 2013; Raun, 2018; Reis and Shaver, 1988; and Senft, 2008).

The second half of Chapter 4 focused on the third and final method of meaning-making in literary web series: transformation and resonance. In adapting and updating classic literature, literary web series draw on the literary resonance (per Stockwell 2009a, 2009b) and cultural afterlives (Hutcheon, 2013; Leitch, 2007, and Szwydky, 2018) of their source materials, while also transforming those texts for contemporary audiences. As an adaptation of Jane Austen, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* joined a larger universe of Austen fans across the globe. Furthermore, in engaging the existing fan base for a text such as *Pride and Prejudice*, literary web series like LBD contribute to the creation of intimacy by encouraging readers to share their feelings of connection with others. This section of Chapter 4 included references to Calvino (1986), Cooke (2013), Grossberg (1992), and Stein (2015). I then concluded the chapter by arguing that the intimacy and resonance found in literary web series can result in an intimate public. Using Berlant's (2008) definition, I described how the fan communities of literary web series and readers' relationships with fictional characters can function as an intimate public.

The first four chapters of this thesis used *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as the principal example for my discussion of the specific aspects of literary web series. Chapter 5 shifted the focus of this work to highlight the individual experiences of readers of LBD. In this chapter, I presented the research paradigms and methodologies that supported the investigation that followed, before analysing the data collected from the online survey of LBD readers and the follow-up semi-structured interviews. Conclusions drawn from the quantitative data included the overall importance of the serial release of a literary web series like LBD, a link between the ability to

participate and interact with a literary web series and readers' individual narrative experiences, and the key finding that a significant 88% of survey respondents felt Lizzie and her story were realistic and authentic. The qualitative data collected provided additional, deeper insights into readers' narrative experience with LBD, and specifically highlighted LBD's immersive quality, the ability to participate in the narrative, and the resonance of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as dominant themes and trends. Throughout Chapter 5, I included comments from survey respondents and interview subjects to further support my conclusions that a majority of readers described their LBD experience as deeply meaningful and intimate, and that this sense of intimacy and connection was significant and long-lasting.

LBD reader comments were also an essential component of Chapter 6, in which I proposed that the three methods of meaning-making in literary web series can provide readers with a sense of being deeply connected to the narrative, its characters, and other readers, and thus contribute to the creation of narratively-constructed digital intimacy. I defined narratively-constructed digital intimacy as an amalgamation of mediated intimacy, as outlined by Chambers (2013), narrative intimacy per Day (2013), and Abidin's (2015) theory of perceived interconnectedness (which is itself an extension of Horton and Wohl 1979's concept of para-social interactions). I argued that narratively-constructed digital intimacy forms when readers perceive a connection with fictional characters through a public, informal friendship discourse and control the degree and intensity of their intimate relationships with a narrative. At the same time, storytellers can use a first-person narrator, present-tense or real-time narration, the serial release of content, and the vulnerabilities and disclosures of a narrative's characters to present fictional people as realistically ordinary and average. Moreover, I suggested that the impression of intimacy readers receive from the narratively-constructed digital intimacy found in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* can also contribute to the formation of a fan community as an intimate public (Berlant, 2008), enabling readers to form meaningful relationships with each other as well as the narrative. Ultimately, Chapter 6 concludes that literary web series like LBD can offer readers the opportunity to engage deeply and emotionally with a narrative in a way that provides those readers with significant and long-lasting narrative experiences.

As this thesis demonstrates, these meaningful experiences and readers' deep engagement with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* are indicative of contemporary media consumption and creation practices, which emphasise the use of digital tools and platforms, allow users to participate and interact in a variety of ways depending on their preference, and blur the lines between media producers and media users. As digital media, literary web series like LBD build upon the foundations of media convergence and participatory cultures to update classic, analogue literature for the twenty-first century. LBD also provides us with a particularly useful example of a successful literary web series, while the experiences of LBD fan-readers helps emphasise the value of the literary web series genre's methods of meaning-making, as previously outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. Therefore, the research presented herein serves as an exploration of best practices for other literary web series and offers a framework creators and authors can follow, should they wish to convey some other story in a similar way. Furthermore, as the first empirical study to collect data from fan-readers of LBD and literary web series, this thesis contributes to the growing corpus of fan studies research and specifically highlights the fan experience of one particular digital transmedia narrative. Meanwhile, the variety of experiences evident in the survey and interview data helps illustrate two important facets of fan studies field, which is that "there is no such thing as a typical group of fans" and "the label 'fan' can mean very different things in different contexts" (Duffett, 2013, p. 19).

At the same time, Chapter 4's discussion of how literary web series like LBD use narrative immersion to engage readers offers insights into how we experience digital and immersive narratives, drawing from and adding to the work of Bell et al (2019), Ensslin et al (2019), Murray (2017) and Ryan (2015a). As literary artefacts, these narratives help expand our definitions of fanfiction and electronic (digital) literature, as well as our understanding of what it means to read in digital spaces. Indeed, readers' active participation in and emotional connection to literary web series challenge the reports that suggest close reading, reading for pleasure, and reading habits in general are declining among adults, adolescents, and children. For instance, though a September 2018 report from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in the United States concluded that "novel and short-story reading [levels]… have fallen below historical levels," the same research also found that nearly a quarter of adults engaged with "one or more books on e-readers, tablets, computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices" (NEA Office of

Research and Analysis, 2018). Meanwhile, research conducted by the Pew Research Centre in early 2019 found that "roughly a quarter of U.S. adults (27%) say they haven't read a book in whole or in part in the past year, whether in print, electronic, or audio form" (Perrin, 2019b, ¶ 1). However, that same study also provided evidence that the percentage of Americans reading in digital formats in 2019 was roughly the same as it was three years prior in 2016, while the consumption of audiobooks had increased (Perrin, 2019a). Dowling (2014, ¶ abstract) has even argued that "online culture has actually enhanced and accelerated the appreciation of longer richer works" through the creation of online reading communities – communities like the ones that develop around literary web series. Perhaps most importantly, a report from the U.K.'s National Literacy Trust

> showed that being given opportunities to read e-books could be particularly effective for children with the lowest levels of reading engagement, such as reluctant readers and boys. For these children, reading enjoyment increased not only in relation to reading on screen, but also reading in print, indicating that reading digitally had the potential to provide a route into wider reading.
>
> (Clark and Picton, 2019)

Despite the general handwringing over reading habits, it seems the underlying issue is not that adults and children are reading less, but rather that they are reading *differently*, with more emphasis on digital literacies and digital reading skills. Furthermore, as Clark and Picton point out, digital or screen reading may help students engage more closely with print texts as well. Hayles makes a similar point when she suggests that the overlapping skills associated with both digital and print reading (as per Morris, 2015) can serve as "obvious sites for new kinds of reading techniques" (2012, p. 59). She also argues that focusing "exclusively on print close reading" has the potential to alienate those individuals who find "difficult print texts… 'boring' or not worth the trouble" (Hayles, 2012, p. 60). Literary web series are uniquely positioned to help bridge this gap between print reading and digital reading, by reworking the print texts for digital spaces and distributing content on social media platforms individuals may already be using.

With audio, video, image, and textual components of the narrative distributed across multiple media platforms, literary web series encourage readers to skim, scan, browse, search, and peruse

– that is, to engage in digital reading skills that "differ significantly from typical print reading" (Hayles, 2012, p. 61). As literary texts, however, literary web series invite comparison with their analogue source materials and can serve as "entry-level adaptations" (Leitch, 2007) that bring readers closer to classic, print literature. In fact, 76% of survey respondents indicated that their experience with LBD motivated them to re-read to *Pride and Prejudice*. One reader shared her belief that "LBD created a safe space to re-discover a classic" while another reader admitted that LBD "made me fall in love with the story again because it made the story more relevant."

Literary web series are also appearing in educational contexts and lesson plans. Survey respondent 56EWJ2 said that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* "inspired me to teach the novel… [and] helped me (and my students) work through Austen's narrative style." Meanwhile, Respondent 9N37KZ mentioned "developing a curriculum [based on LBD] for use in the high school classes I teach," while Respondent 975EPP explained that LBD's "Lydia storyline helped [me] explain to my undergrads the gravity of the original Lydia's disgrace." These responses exemplify how "the vast diffusion of digital technologies and new social practices around them has led to the emergence of new concepts in the academic and professional conversations about media literacy" (Scolari, 2019, p. 323). That conversation includes the exploration of using transmedia storytelling methods and digital narratives in education.

Teixeira Tárcia contends that transmedia storytelling "is consistent with a variety of child development theories and discussions regarding how learning takes place" because transmedia narratives allow learners to "play, explore, experiment, remix, make connections, tell stories in different ways, and communicate visually, orally, or aurally" (2019, p. 315). Transmedia projects such as *Inanimate Alice*, *Robot Heart Stories*, and *Cosmic Voyager Enterprises* have received acclaim for "placing students in the centre of the learning process and motivating them to learn (Teixeira Tárcia, 2019; Gambarato and Dabagian, 2016, p. 229). Consequently, with their ability to encourage deep engagement with the narrative and to allow readers to craft meaningful and individualised reading experiences, literary web series can also motivate readers by "operating synergistically" with analogue texts (Hayles, 2012, p. 73) and encouraging individuals to (re)connect with analogue literature. After all, as one survey respondent noted, "not many of us are princes of Denmark or have parents in the Marshalsea because of debt. While you can

absolutely connect with those stories, it's a different experience when a story [like LBD] meets you halfway."

Limitations and Future Research

In *The Annotated Pride and Prejudice* (2012), Shapard writes that Austen's worldview was such that "she never supposes that any person can be perfect" and, as proof, points to a letter she wrote to her niece wherein she proclaims "pictures of perfection as you know make me sick" (loc. 9883-9905). With Austen's self-professed dislike for perfection in mind, this section that follows addresses the challenges and limitations of this research project. Though the research presented in this thesis draws from a wide range of scholarly work to support its arguments, the survey and interviews only collected empirical data from readers of one specific literary web series, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Thus, while the discussions presented in the early chapters is relevant to the literary web series genre overall, the discussion of narratively-constructed digital intimacy offered in Chapter 6 is limited to the experiences of LBD readers. Additional research would be necessary to draw conclusions about the intimacy-generating potential of other literary web series. Most importantly, however, the survey and interviews did not collect data about the race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation of LBD readers. This omission unfortunately reinforces "mainstream American culture's default to whiteness and…engagement with default-white media" (Stanfill, 2018, p. 305) and participates in a discourse that prioritises white, middle-class, and heterosexual perspectives as normative and anything else as "other" (Morimoto, 2018). Though Day contends that this discourse "has shaped and continues to shape concepts about… womanhood in contemporary American culture, particularly in terms of interpersonal relationships and intimacy," it also highlights the way in which narratives may problematically ignore the "lived experiences of people of colour, lesbian/bisexual/transexual/questioning teens, or working-class readers" (2013, p. 10; p. 12). For instance, LGBTQ readers of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* consume a narrative which includes only one example of a character who represents their experience: the secondary character of Fitz is gay and has a boyfriend, a detail that is mentioned in passing but not explored in any depth (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012p). Moreover, as Fitz is presented as a cisgender gay man, LBD's representation of the LGBTQ is inherently limited and does not include insight into the experiences of lesbian, bisexual,

pansexual, or transgender individuals. In contrast, heterosexual cisgender readers may see their experiences reflected in no less than three different examples (Lizzie and Darcy, Jane and Bing, Lydia and Wickham).

This lack of representation in LBD, as well as the lack of survey and interview data on readers' sexual orientation, is important because, as Duffett points out, "when communities… are shaped by the concerns of one social group, those in a minority have to inhabit a world in which the cultural conventions may be different to what they desire" (2013, p. 201). Additionally, by omitting demographic questions that asked survey respondents and interview subjects to disclose their racial and ethnic identities, this thesis was unable to discuss and understand "the ways fans may (or may not) experience marginalization on the basis of race, class, language, or other structures" (Stanfill, 2018, p. 305). For example, LBD features two white women (e.g., Lizzie and Lydia) as the narrative's main protagonists, and I argue elsewhere in this thesis that many readers expressed a sense of affinity and identification with Lizzie and Lydia that strengthened their perception of intimacy within the narrative. However, without the requisite race and ethnicity data, I am unable to draw any conclusions about *which* readers mentioned this feeling of connection or intimacy. Moreover, according to Pande, fan communities, like the one that developed around *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, "are not immune to hierarchies structured by privilege [arising from] income, class, racial, ethnic, and cultural identity, [and/or] disability" (2016, p. 210), while Wanzo suggests that "a different kind of fan, as well as different issues of concern to fans, might be visible if we focus on African Americans" or other non-normative groups (2015, ¶ 1.6).[39] It is therefore possible that LBD readers and fans who are marginalised by the dominant discourse may have different narrative experiences than those who align with the white, middle-class, heterosexual default, but aforementioned lack of data pertaining to LBD readers' race and ethnicity means this thesis cannot sufficiently consider this aspect of the reader

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[39] Perhaps the most famous (or infamous) exploration of race in Austen's novels came from Edward Said, in his collection of essays *Cultural Imperialism* (1993). In one essay, Said explores Austen's *Mansfield Park* and its references to Britain's colonies and plantations in the Caribbean and, by extension, the slave trade that sustained the wealth of the gentry, including the Bertrams of Mansfield Park. Austen herself only ever included one "person of color in her surviving fiction" (Baugh, 2018, p. 449): the character of Miss Lambe in her unfinished novel, *Sanditon*. While Baugh contends that "Austen refuses to sentimentalize Miss Lambe" and instead challenges "conventional representations of mixed-race women" in early 19th century literature (2018, p. 449), Salih points out that, in comparison to Austen's other heroines, Miss Lambe is "so tantalizingly incomplete" (2006, p. 330) and highlights the fact that Miss Lambe never speaks in the novella.

experience. While the omissions mentioned here do not invalidate the experiences of LBD readers described in this thesis, they do emphasise that researchers studying the readers of literary web series (myself included) need to be mindful of our inherent privileges and unconscious biases, while also actively working to identify and resist hegemonic assumptions about race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

The limitations and challenges outlined above do, however, provide useful starting points for future research that expands upon and extends the work presented in this thesis. For instance, in addition to asking participants to disclose their own race and ethnicity, a future study might seek to determine if the race or ethnicity of a literary web series protagonist alters or changes the degree to which readers feel connected to the character and her narrative. This would be valuable because, as Brooks and Hébert argue, mainstream media have frequently been criticised for "the various ways the media construct monolithic notions of race and gender," their privileging of white femininity, and their reinforcement of the "Westernized beauty ideal of lighter skin, long hair, and blue or green eyes" (2006, p. 229; p. 301). Moreover, Mastro contends that "the manner in which racial/ethnic groups are characterized in the media can harm or benefit different groups, depending on the nature of these depictions," pointing out that exposure to positive representations of different races and ethnic groups is beneficial not only to the races or ethnic groups portrayed, but also to white audience members as well (2017, p. 1; p. 12).[40] A future study could ask readers to reflect on *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and Lizzie and Lydia as white protagonists in comparison with *Emma Approved*, which features Asian-American actress Joanna Sotomura as main character Emma Woodhouse, or *Project Green Gables*, in which main character Anne Shirley is portrayed by Laura Eklund Nhaga, a Finnish actress of African descent ("Characters - Emma Approved," 2019; Project Green Gables, 2015).

The exploration of readers' experiences of other literary web series besides LBD could also be an important avenue for future research because most of the existing literature pertaining to the literary web series genre focuses exclusively on *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. While there are

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[40] Additionally, Article 17 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* states that signatories should provide children with "access to information and material from a diversity of national and international [mass media] sources" (United Nations, 2010).

certainly valid justifications for that focus (including my own presented in the introduction of this thesis), the broader discussions about digital literature and transmedia narratives would benefit from the examination of other literary web series, particularly those that adapt and update lesser-known classic works of literature. Literary web series *Carmilla*, for instance, is based on a novella written by J. Sheridan Le Fanu and though its publication predates that of Stoker's *Dracula*, it has long been overshadowed by Stoker's story (Saler and Ziegler, 2005). As this thesis contends that the literary resonance and legacy of a literary web series' source material is a key method of meaning-making and contributes to the creation of narratively-constructed digital intimacy, it would be worthwhile to consider readers' experiences of literary web series that do not necessarily have particularly robust cultural afterlives the way Austen's novels do.

Looking beyond the qualitative analysis of literary web series and their readers, sentiment analysis methods offer an opportunity to quantify (or attempt to quantify) the characteristics of literary web series that draw readers in and immerse them in a narrative. In a 2016 study, Reagan et al. analysed the content of more than a thousand books from Project Gutenberg in an effort to chart "the reader-perceived emotional content of written stories as they unfold on the page" (p. 1), eventually suggesting that most of the fictional narratives analysed could be categorised according to one of six broad emotional arcs. While Reagan et al. intentionally limited their corpus to written, linear texts, the depth and diversity of the digital literature genre (which includes literary web series, among other types of narrative) presents an opportunity to apply similar analytical tools to multimodal texts such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. This thesis has discussed the importance of narrative immersion and emotional connections to fictional characters in the creation of narratively-constructed digital intimacy, a contention Reagan et al. echo when they conclude that some emotional arcs are more successful than others because "the emotional experience of readers strongly affects how stories are shared" (2016, p. 10). Sentiment analysis of a multimodal, digital text like LBD could help researchers like myself isolate the specific features of a literary web series that are most likely to engage readers or highlight the factors most likely to lead to a literary web series' success.

Final Thoughts

In his 1936 essay, "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin argued that storytelling was "a participatory art" and contended that "listening to a story… meant taking part by actively responding" and contributing to "a two-way communication rather than a monologue" (Christie and van den Oever, 2018, p. 12). With his essay, Benjamin seems to have predicted the convergent media environment and its cultivation of participatory cultures and participatory media. More than eighty years after the publication of "The Storyteller," readers of literary web series are indeed engaging in two-way communication with narratives like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Through their active contributions to the text in the form of comments, tweets, and reblogs, their development of a robust and productive fan community, and their deep and intimate connections to fictional characters, these readers have embraced the "immersive online reading habits" that "inspire rather than silence discussion… and socialize rather than isolate the pastime of media consumption" (Dowling, 2014, ¶ 4; ¶ 13). Moreover, the deep engagement these readers have with the literary web series text offers a useful counter-argument to those scholars who liken digital and social media use with declining reading rates. Contemporary practices of digital media production and consumption do not need to be set in opposition to more traditional close reading techniques. Rather, the texts of literary web series can work in tandem with their original analogue source novels, enabling readers to engage with classic literature in a new way while expanding our understanding of both the act of reading and the definition of literature.

At the same time, as digital media continue to evolve, technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) applications and programmes are becoming more readily available to the average consumer. Shin (2019, p. 1212) contends that this will lead to immersion "becoming a major attraction point" for video game players and AR/VR users. Meanwhile, Elmezeny, Edenhofer, and Wimmer (2018, p. 1) argue that narrative and technical types of immersion can "support each other to strengthen [overall] immersion" in 360-degree video storytelling. The technologies that support immersion will no doubt change and develop over time, and immersion will likely remain "a form of awareness in the eye of the beholder" (Shin, 2019, p. 1213; see also: Ensslin et al, 2019). What will probably not change is our interest in

immersive experiences, and our desire "to be swept away and out of the present by an immersive story" (Allen, 2018, ¶ 16). Rose has argued that, if a narrative truly wants to engage its readers, "a superficial encounter won't leave them satisfied. They'll want to go deeper. They'll want to imagine themselves in it, retell it, [and] make it their own" (2012, p. 97). Literary web series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* offer readers deeply meaningful narrative experiences that are distinctly unlike monomodal texts and narratives. These media-literary hybrid artefacts leverage the sociotechnical affordances of social media platforms to afford readers the agency to participate and interact with the narrative. They also create and sustain narrative immersion to draw readers into a fictional storyworld and evoke the literary resonance and legacy of their source texts, enabling the development of intimate fan communities or publics. The result is an experience that provides readers with narratively-constructed digital intimacy, a long-lasting sense of being intimately connected to the story and its characters.

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Appendix A: The LBD Reader Survey

1. About This Project

Researcher: Meredith Dabek, PhD Candidate
Department: Media Studies, Maynooth University, Co. Kildare, Ireland
Contact: meredith.dabek.2015@mumail.ie

This research study is being undertaken as part of the researcher's PhD dissertation, which aims to understand how the structure and details of digital media influence, affect, and/or change the way readers approach a story. In particular, this project is studying the potential consequences of interactive and participatory elements in digital narratives such as The Lizzie Bennet Diaries (LBD).

LBD is an updated version of Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, in which Elizabeth Bennet's story is told through digital and social media networks (including YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, and others). LBD uses transmedia storytelling methods to enhance the narrative and expand Lizzie's fictional world by dispersing parts of the story across different media platforms and websites. Doing so provides LBD readers with multiple entry points into Lizzie's story, as well as opportunities to participate and interact with the story's characters. This project seeks to understand the different interactive and participatory choices a reader can make, how those choices might affect her digital reading experience, and how digital technologies might influence current reading practices.

Support for this research is provided by a Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship from the Irish Research Council and the Department of Media Studies at Maynooth University.

Participant Requirements:

Participants must be at least 18 years old to participate in the survey. Additionally, participants are asked to:

- Provide a valid email address to complete the online survey;
- Read the consent form and indicate their consent before proceeding to the survey questions;
- Agree to have their survey responses used in publications, including (but not limited to) the final PhD thesis, journal articles, and blog posts; and
- Answer the survey questions as completely as possible.

Please click here to download a copy of the complete information sheet, which includes important information about data protection and confidentiality.

NOTE: This survey will close on Thursday 16 November 2017. Thank you.

Click "Next" to continue to the next page.

2. Consent Form

Participants must read the Information Sheet and this consent form in full and indicate their consent by selecting YES to proceed to the survey questions.

Please click here to download a copy of the consent form for your records.

Participants may choose to withdraw their consent and participation in this study at any time, including up to the point of publication. They should do so by contacting the researcher directly at the email address provided on the previous page. Once a participant withdraws, his or her responses will be discarded and deleted. Participants can also request access to their individual contributions by contacting the researcher. As explained on the Information Sheet, every effort will be made to keep participants' information private and confidential.

Any questions regarding the specific content of this study should be sent to the researcher. If during your participation in this study, you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

The survey takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Required questions are marked with an asterisk (*).

By checking the YES box below and continuing to the survey, you:

- Acknowledge receipt of the Information Sheet and Consent Form;
- Confirm that you are at least 18 years old;
- Understand the details disclosed about this research project and its objectives;
- Understand that survey responses will be kept anonymous and will be referenced with an alphanumeric identifier; and
- Understand that the information you provide will be held privately and securely and will not be shared or sold to any other party.

By providing consent, you also agree to:

- Participate in this survey by completing the questions following this page;
- Be contacted by the previously-named researcher and/or her supervisor regarding your participation in this study if needed; and
- Have your responses deposited in the Irish Qualitative Data Archive following the completion of Maynooth University's ten-year data storage period.

Do you consent to participate in this survey? You must select YES in order to take the survey.

☐ Yes, I consent.
☐ No, I do not consent.

Click "Next" to continue to the survey.

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3. Demographic Information

The information collected on this page will not be shared or sold with any outside entities. The demographic information will be used to ensure a diverse sample.

What is your first name? _____

What is your email address? You must provide a valid email address: _____

How old are you?

☐ 18 – 24 years old   ☐ 45 – 64 years old
☐ 25 – 34 years old   ☐ 65 or older
☐ 35 – 44 years old   ☐ Prefer not to say

What is your gender?

☐ Female   ☐ Prefer not to say
☐ Male
☐ Other (please specify):

In what country do you currently reside?

(Drop-down list provided by Survey Monkey)

Click "Next" to proceed to the next section.

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4. Reading Habits

Do you read for pleasure or fun on a regular basis?

For the purposes of this question, "reading" refers to reading print books, e-books on a tablet, mobile phone, or computer app, or web-based content such as online magazines or HTML books.

☐ Yes – Daily   ☐ Yes – Monthly
☐ Yes – Weekly   ☐ Yes – Bimonthly
☐ Yes – Biweekly   ☐ No

Please indicate how you read for pleasure or fun. Check all that apply. If you answered "No" to Question 1, proceed to Question 3.

☐ Print (physical) books

☐ E-books on a dedicated e-reader such as a Kindle or Nook

☐ E-books on a tablet (through a Kindle or iBooks app)

☐ E-books on a mobile phone (through a Kindle or iBooks app)

☐ Book program on laptop or desktop computer, such as Kindle for Mac, iBooks, or Adobe Digital Editions

☐ Web-based content such as fanfiction sites, magazine articles and stories, and/or HTML books (i.e., Project Gutenberg)

A transmedia story is a story in which different parts of that story are distributed between multiple media, usually digital and social media sites. Please indicate your level of familiarity with transmedia stories in general.

☐ Extremely familiar
☐ Moderately familiar
☐ Somewhat familiar

☐ Slightly familiar
☐ Not at all familiar

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries is one example of a transmedia story. Please indicate your level of familiarity with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

☐ Extremely familiar
☐ Moderately familiar
☐ Somewhat familiar

☐ Slightly familiar
☐ Not at all familiar

Please indicate if you are familiar with any other literary-focused transmedia stories (that is, transmedia stories based on classic novels). Check all that apply:

☐ Welcome to Sanditon
☐ Emma Approved
☐ Frankenstein, M.D.
☐ The March Family Letters

☐ The New Adventures of Peter and Wendy
☐ Other (please specify):

☐ The Autobiography of Jane Eyre
☐ Mina Murray's Journal
☐ Carmilla
☐ I am not familiar with any other literary-focused transmedia stories.

Click "Next" to proceed to the next section.

5. The Lizzie Bennet Diaries, Part 1

For the purposes of this section, the researcher will use the verb "read" to refer to any action a user might take with LBD, whether it means watching a video, reading a Twitter feed, viewing art on Tumblr, or some other activity. Additionally, users or fans will be referred to as "readers."

How did you discover LBD? Please check all that apply.

☐ Vlogbrothers YouTube videos   ☐ Bernie Su's Tumblr blog
☐ YouTube's Recommended Videos   ☐ LBD Official Tumblr blog
☐ Hank Green's Twitter feed   ☐ A friend suggested / recommended it
☐ Bernie Su's Twitter feed   ☐ A friend's Twitter feed
☐ LBD Official Twitter feed   ☐ A friend's Tumblr blog
☐ Hank Green's Tumblr blog   ☐ A news article
☐ Other (please specify)

Did you participate in the LBD story at all? Participation might include (but is not limited to) following characters on social media, leaving comments on videos, participating in the fan community, etc. Answer "No" if you only read or watched the content without engaging any further.
- Yes
- No

Please explain or describe WHY you chose to participate (or not to participate) in the LBD story.

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Did you read, watch, and/or consume LBD during its original release in 2012 and 2013?

- Yes
- No

Please click "Next" to proceed to the next section.

[NOTE: At this point in the survey, skip logic was employed. Respondents who answered "yes" to the above question were directed to the questions in Section 6A. Respondents who answered "no" to the above question were directed to the questions in Section 6B.]

6A. The Lizzie Bennet Diaries, Part 2

For the purposes of this section, the researcher will use the verb "read" to refer to any action a user might take with LBD, whether it means watching a video, reading a Twitter feed, viewing art on Tumblr, or some other activity. Additionally, users or fans will be referred to as "readers."

Did you follow any characters on Twitter? If yes, please check which ones. If no, check no.

☐ Lizzie
☐ Jane
☐ Lydia
☐ Charlotte
☐ Darcy
☐ Bing
☐ Caroline

☐ Gigi

☐ Fitz
☐ George Wickham
☐ Ricky Collins
☐ Maria Lu
☐ Mary
☐ Kitty
☐ No, I didn't follow any characters on Twitter

Did you interact with any characters on Twitter? If yes, please check which ones. If no, check no.

Interactions are defined as sending and receiving @ messages to LBD characters, retweeting or being retweeted, quote-tweeting a character, or replying to messages from characters on the Twitter platform.

☐ Lizzie
☐ Jane
☐ Lydia
☐ Charlotte
☐ Darcy
☐ Bing
☐ Caroline

☐ Gigi

☐ Fitz
☐ George Wickham
☐ Ricky Collins
☐ Maria Lu
☐ Mary
☐ Kitty
☐ No, I didn't follow any characters on Twitter

Did you subscribe to any of the LBD YouTube channels? If yes, please select which channels you subscribed to. If no, select no.

☐ Lizzie
☐ Lydia
☐ Pemberley Digital

☐ Collins and Collins
☐ Maria of the Lu
☐ No, I didn't subscribe to any LBD YouTube channels

Did you leave any comments on a video posted on one of LBD's YouTube channels? If yes, please select whose video(es) you commented on. If no, select no.

☐ Lizzie
☐ Lydia
☐ Pemberley Digital

☐ Collins and Collins
☐ Maria of the Lu
☐ No, I didn't subscribe to any LBD YouTube channels

If you did leave comments, on average, how many comments did you leave on any of the LBD YouTube videos? (If you did not leave any comments, please proceed to Question 6.)

☐ 1 – 5 comments on average
☐ 6 – 10 comments on average
☐ 11 – 15 comments on average

☐ 16 – 20 comments on average
☐ 21 or more comments on average

Did you follow any characters on Tumblr? If yes, please indicate which characters. If no, please select no.

☐ Lizzie
☐ Jane
☐ Lydia

☐ Charlotte
☐ Maria
☐ No, I didn't follow any characters on Tumblr

Did you interact with any characters on Tumblr? If yes, please indicate which characters. If no, please select no.

Interactions are defined as sending asks to characters through the Tumblr platform, reblogging content or being reblogged, or tagging LBD accounts in your original posts.

☐ Lizzie
☐ Jane
☐ Lydia

☐ Charlotte
☐ Maria
☐ No, I didn't interact with any characters on Tumblr

Did you make any fan creations (including, but not limited to, fanfiction, fan art, GIF sets, reaction videos, parody or role-playing accounts)?
- Yes
- No

If you answered "yes" to Question 13, please describe your fan creation. If you answered "no," please proceed to Question 10.

Did you ask Lizzie any questions for her Q&A videos?

☐ Yes, and she answered one of my   ☐ No
questions in her videos!
☐ Yes, but it wasn't answered in her
videos.

Please click "Next" to proceed to the next section.

6B. The Lizzie Bennet Diaries, Part 2

For the purposes of this section, the researcher will use the verb "read" to refer to any action a user might take with LBD, whether it means watching a video, reading a Twitter feed, viewing art on Tumblr, or some other activity. Additionally, users or fans will be referred to as "readers."

When did you first read, watch, and/or consume LBD?

[ ]

Did you ever or do you still follow any characters on Twitter? If yes, please check which ones. If no, check no.

☐ Lizzie   ☐ Fitz
☐ Jane   ☐ George Wickham
☐ Lydia   ☐ Ricky Collins
☐ Charlotte   ☐ Maria Lu
☐ Darcy   ☐ Mary
☐ Bing   ☐ Kitty
☐ Caroline   ☐ No, I didn't / don't follow any characters
                                        on Twitter
☐ Gigi

Have you ever interacted or attempted to interact with LBD characters on Twitter? If yes, please check which ones. If no, check no.

Interactions are defined as sending and receiving @ messages to LBD characters, retweeting or being retweeted, quote-tweeting a character, or replying to messages from characters on the Twitter platform.

- ☐ Lizzie
- ☐ Jane
- ☐ Lydia
- ☐ Charlotte
- ☐ Darcy
- ☐ Bing
- ☐ Caroline

- ☐ Gigi

- ☐ Fitz
- ☐ George Wickham
- ☐ Ricky Collins
- ☐ Maria Lu
- ☐ Mary
- ☐ Kitty
- ☐ No, I didn't interact or attempt to interact with any characters on Twitter

Did you subscribe to any of the LBD YouTube channels? If yes, please select which channels you subscribed to. If no, select no.

- ☐ Lizzie
- ☐ Lydia
- ☐ Pemberley Digital

- ☐ Collins and Collins
- ☐ Maria of the Lu
- ☐ No, I didn't subscribe to any LBD YouTube channels

Did you leave any comments on a video posted on one of LBD's YouTube channels? If yes, please select whose video(es) you commented on. If no, select no.

- ☐ Lizzie
- ☐ Lydia
- ☐ Pemberley Digital

- ☐ Collins and Collins
- ☐ Maria of the Lu
- ☐ No, I didn't subscribe to any LBD YouTube channels

If you did leave comments, on average, how many comments did you leave on any of the LBD YouTube videos? (If you did not leave any comments, please proceed to Question 6.)

- ☐ 1 – 5 comments on average
- ☐ 6 – 10 comments on average
- ☐ 11 – 15 comments on average

- ☐ 16 – 20 comments on average
- ☐ 21 or more comments on average

Did you ever or do you still follow any characters on Tumblr? If yes, please indicate which characters. If no, please select no.

- ☐ Lizzie
- ☐ Jane
- ☐ Lydia

- ☐ Charlotte
- ☐ Maria
- ☐ No, I didn't follow any characters on Tumblr

Have you ever interacted or attempted to interact with LBD characters on Tumblr? If yes, please indicate which characters. If no, please select no.

Interactions are defined as sending asks to characters through the Tumblr platform, reblogging content or being reblogged, or tagging LBD accounts in your original posts.

☐ Lizzie	☐ Charlotte
☐ Jane	☐ Maria
☐ Lydia	☐ No, I didn't interact with any characters on Tumblr

Did you make any fan creations (including, but not limited to, fanfiction, fan art, GIF sets, reaction videos, parody or role-playing accounts)?
- Yes
- No

If you answered "yes" to Question 9, please describe your fan creation. If you answered "no," please click "next" to proceed to the next page of the survey.

[   ]

Please click "Next" to proceed to the next section.

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7. Participating in The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

For the purposes of this section, "participation" refers to deliberate actions taken by readers and fans of LBD, such as:
- Following (subscribing) and interacting with LBD characters on social media (e.g., YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr);
- Leaving comments for and/or asking questions to LBD characters on social media (e.g., YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook);
- Creating fanfiction, fan art, GIF sets, reaction videos, parody or role-playing accounts, or other fan-related media objects; and/or
- Communicating with other LBD fans specifically about LBD.

The "participatory, interactive elements" of LBD are those elements of the story that enabled and encouraged readers and fans to participate, including LBD character replies to YouTube comments, the LBD character Twitter accounts, Tumblr blogs, and the other social media platforms used by LBD as part of the story (such as Jane's fashion posts on Lookbook or Gigi's This is My Jam posts).

Please indicate how frequently you participated, or continue to participate, in any way, in the LBD story.

| ☐ Always | ☐ Rarely |
| ☐ Often | ☐ Never |

☐ Sometimes

How important do you think the participatory, interactive elements of LBD were or are to Lizzie's overall story?

☐ Extremely important   ☐ Slightly important
☐ Very important   ☐ Insignificantly important
☐ Moderately important   ☐ Not at all important
☐ Neutral

How important do you think the participatory, interactive elements of LBD were or are to your individual experience of Lizzie's story?

☐ Extremely important   ☐ Slightly important
☐ Very important   ☐ Insignificantly important
☐ Moderately important   ☐ Not at all important
☐ Neutral

Do you think your decision to participate (or to not participate) in the LBD narrative affected or altered your experience of Lizzie's story?

☐ Yes, significantly   ☐ No, not very much
☐ Yes, somewhat   ☐ No, not at all
☐ Neutral

If you answered "yes, somewhat" or "yes, significantly" to the previous question, in what ways did your decision to participate (or to not participate) in the LBD narrative alter or affect your experience of Lizzie's story?

If not applicable, please proceed to the next page of the survey.

Please click "Next" to proceed to the next section.

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8. Pride and Prejudice

Please indicate your level of familiarity with Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

☐ Extremely familiar   ☐ Slightly familiar
☐ Moderately familiar   ☐ Not at all familiar
☐ Somewhat familiar

Have you read Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*?

☐ Yes, parts of it or the whole novel ☐ No, and I don't plan to read it.
☐ No, but I have considered reading it.

If you have read *Pride and Prejudice* (in part or the whole novel), did you read it prior to watching, reading and/or consuming The Lizzie Bennet Diaries?

☐ Yes, parts of it
☐ Yes, the whole novel
☐ No

If you have read *Pride and Prejudice* (in part or the whole novel), did your experience with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* encourage or motivate you to either re-read Austen's novel or read it for the first time?

- Yes
- No

If you have read *Pride and Prejudice*, how has your experience reading the novel differed from your experience with LBD?

If you <u>have not</u> read *Pride and Prejudice* but you are considering it, has your experience with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* motivated or encouraged you to consider reading Austen's novel for the first time?

☐ Yes, parts of it   ☐ No, I had no prior plans to read the novel
                                        and LBD did not change my position

☐ Yes, the whole novel   ☐ N/A (I have already read *Pride and Prejudice*)

☐ No, I already had prior plans to read the novel

Please click "Next" to proceed to the final section.

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9. Comparing *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* with *Pride and Prejudice*

For the purposes of this section, "participation" refers to deliberate actions taken by readers and fans of LBD, such as:

- Following (subscribing) and interacting with LBD characters on social media (e.g., YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr);
- Leaving comments for and/or asking questions to LBD characters on social media (e.g., YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook);
- Creating fanfiction, fan art, GIF sets, reaction videos, parody or role-playing accounts, or other fan-related media objects; and/or
- Communicating with other LBD fans specifically about LBD.

The "participatory, interactive elements" of LBD are those elements of the story that enabled and encouraged readers and fans to participate, including LBD character replies to YouTube comments, the LBD character Twitter accounts, Tumblr blogs, and the other social media platforms used by LBD as part of the story (such as Jane's fashion posts on Lookbook or Gigi's This is My Jam posts).

Do you think the interactive and participatory elements of LBD helped create the sense that Lizzie and her world were "real"?

☐ Yes, significantly   ☐ No, not very much
☐ Yes, somewhat   ☐ No, not at all
☐ Neutral

Have you ever thought that Lizzie and the LBD world were more "real" than the characters in Austen's novel?

☐ Yes, significantly   ☐ No, not very much
☐ Yes, somewhat   ☐ No, not at all
☐ Neutral

If you answered "yes, somewhat" or "yes, significantly" to the previous question, please explain why. If not applicable, please proceed to Question 4.

In your opinion, how might the interactive and participatory elements of LBD <u>add</u> to Austen's original story?

In your opinion, how might the interactive and participatory elements of LBD <u>take away from</u> Austen's original story?

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Please click "Next" to complete the survey.

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Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Following the conclusion of this survey, I will be conducting one-on-one interviews with LBD readers. These interviews will take place beginning in January-February 2018, and will be conducted though video chat programmes (FaceTime, Skype, Google Hangout, etc). I will work with interview subjects will arrange a mutually suitable time for the interview. Interview subjects must be at least 18 years old.

If you are interested in being interviewed and willing to be contacted by me about an interview, please indicate so below and re-enter a valid email address where I can reach you.

Are you interested in participating in a one-on-one interview with the researcher? Select "Yes" to indicate your interest and to consent to being contacted by the researcher about a possible interview.

- Yes, I am interested in a one-on-one interview.
- No, I am not interested.

Email address: _____

As a reminder, you may choose to withdraw from this study at any time. To do so, please contact me at the following email address: <u>meredith.dabek.2015@mumail.ie</u>.

Please click "Done" to exit the survey and ensure your answers are recorded.

Appendix B: Anonymised Survey Data

The anonymised data from The Lizzie Bennet Diaries Reader Survey, presented in this thesis, is available at the following URL, through the Maynooth University Research Archive Library (MURAL) repository: http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/12635/.

Appendix C: Information Sheet for Interview Subjects

Project Title: Reading Digital Narratives in Convergence Culture: *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as Cybertext
Researcher: Meredith Dabek, PhD Candidate
Department: Media Studies, Maynooth University, Co. Kildare, Ireland
Contact: meredith.dabek.2015@mumail.ie

ABOUT THIS PROJECT:

This research study is being undertaken as part of the researcher's PhD thesis, which aims to understand how the structure and details of digital media influence, affect, and/or change the way readers approach a story. In particular, this project is studying the potential consequences of interactive and participatory elements in digital narratives such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

Currently, media exist in what is known as a convergence culture, where information is spread out across the Internet and can be accessed from a variety of different media platforms. This has altered the way readers (and, especially, *digital* readers) consume classic literature. In a 2013 article for *Adaptation*, an international arts and humanities journal, Chris Louttit declared, "The classic novel adaptation has, much like other genres, been changed utterly by the shifting media landscape." *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (LBD) is one such example of a classic novel adapted, altered, and reimagined for the digital media environment.

LBD is an updated version of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, in which Elizabeth Bennet's story is told through digital and social media networks (including YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, and others). LBD uses transmedia storytelling methods to enhance the narrative and expand Lizzie's fictional world by dispersing parts of the story across different media platforms and websites. Doing so provides LBD readers with multiple entry points into Lizzie's story, as well as opportunities to participate and interact with the story's characters. Each individual reader can therefore create her own unique reading experience of LBD in the digital environment, an experience that differs significantly from the experience of reading Austen's original analogue novel. This project will seek to understand the different interactive and participatory choices a reader can make, how those choices might affect her digital reading experience, and how digital technologies can influence current reading practices.

This project will have three phases: following a detailed and critical analysis of LBD by the researcher, the second phase will collect opinions, thoughts, and ideas from readers of digital narratives and LBD through an online qualitative survey. The third phase will involve the researcher conducting one-on-one interviews with LBD readers, producers, and writers to gain a deeper understanding of the specific choices made when reading the narrative.

PARTICIPANT REQUIREMENTS:

Participants will be asked to complete an online qualitative survey and provide their opinions about the LBD reading experience. Survey respondents will also be able to indicate if they are willing and interested in participating in an one-on-one interview (conducted via Skype or a similar video conferencing programme) following the survey. All participants will have the opportunity to choose to participate in the survey, the interviews, both, or neither. Participants will be asked to sign a consent form and will be given a copy for their records. Specific requirements for each phase of the study are listed below.

Survey Participants

Survey participants will be required to:
- Provide a valid email address to complete the online survey;
- Read and sign a consent form in full before proceeding to the survey questions;
- Agree to have their survey responses used in publications, including (but not limited to) the final PhD thesis, journal articles, and the researcher's website; and
- Answer the survey questions as completely as possible.

Interview Participants

Interview participants will be required to:
- Read and sign a consent form in full prior to the interview;
- Agree to arrange a mutually convenient time for a video conference interview;
- Consent to have the video conference recorded for archival purposes;
- Provide open and honest answers to the questions posed;
- Agree to have their survey responses used in publications, including (but not limited to) the final PhD thesis, journal articles, and the researcher's website; and
- Allow for follow-up phone calls or emails if needed.

DATA PROTECTION:

This study will generate qualitative data in the form of opinions, thoughts, ideas, and attitudes collected from the survey and the interviews. Participants will also be asked to provide voluntarily some demographic data, such as gender, age, and nationality, to ensure a diverse range of responses. This demographic data will only be used collectively to identify trends and patterns and will not be used to personally identify any individual participant. Each participant will be assigned an alphanumeric identifier to provide anonymity and confidentiality, and no contact information will be published or sold.

Due to the public nature of *The Lizzie Bennet* Diaries, interview participants with a previous existing association with LBD (specifically, the writers and producers of the narrative) may be identified by their names in the final PhD thesis. Fans interviewed for the project will not be identified by their names. All interview subjects will have the opportunity to request a

pseudonym. Transcripts of the interviews will use alphanumeric identifiers in place of names where appropriate. Additionally, the recordings of the video conference interviews will only be used for archival purposes and will not be published or sold.

All data from the survey and the interviews will be stored on a secure, encrypted external hard drive. Per Maynooth University policy, this data will be maintained for a minimum of ten years in accordance with the Research Integrity Policy. After the ten-year duration, the data will be transferred to the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA) and deleted from Maynooth University's servers. The IQDA is a central repository or archive of qualitative social science data generated in or about Ireland, and provides standards for archiving qualitative data within the Irish research community. All survey and interview participants will have the opportunity to give consent for their information to be deposited in the IQDA.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Every effort will be made to ensure the confidentiality of study participants and their information. However, it must be recognized that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.

Appendix D: Consent Form for Video Interview Subjects

Project Title: Reading Digital Narratives in Convergence Culture: *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as Cybertext
Researcher: Meredith Dabek, PhD Candidate
Department: Media Studies, Maynooth University, Co. Kildare, Ireland
Contact: meredith.dabek.2015@mumail.ie

Supervisor: Dr. Jeneen Naji, Media Studies
Contact: jeneen.naji@nuim.ie

Prior to participating in this interview, all participants must read the Information Sheet and sign this consent form.

Participants may choose to withdraw their consent and participation in this study at any time, including up to the point of publication. They should do so by contacting the researcher directly at the email address provided above. Once the participant withdraws his or her consent, all video conference recordings and transcripts will be deleted. Participants can also request access to their individual contributions by contacting the researcher. As explained on the Information Sheet, every effort will be made to keep participants' information private and confidential.

Any questions regarding the specific content of this study should be sent to the researcher. If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

I, _____, acknowledge receipt of the Information Sheet and Consent Form. I have fully read both forms and understand the details disclosed about this research project and its objectives. I consent to be contacted by the above-named researcher and/or supervisor regarding my participation in this study. I acknowledge that the information I provide will be held privately and securely and will not be shared or sold to any other party. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for my own records.

Please check ALL that apply:

☐ By checking this box, I agree to participate in the interview and consent to be video recorded as part of the interview. I understand that the interview recording will be used solely for archival purposes, and will not be shared or sold to any other party. I understand that individuals with a previous existing association with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* may be referenced by name in

research outputs and that I have the opportunity to request a pseudonym. I understand that every effort will be made to protect my privacy and confidentiality.

☐ By checking this box, I agree to participate in the interview and consent to be audio recorded as part of the interview. I understand that the audio recording will be used solely for archival purposes, and will not be shared or sold to any other party. I understand that individuals with a previous existing association with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* may be referenced by name in research outputs and that I have the opportunity to request a pseudonym. I understand that every effort will be made to protect my privacy and confidentiality.

☐ By checking this box, I consent to having my interview responses deposited in the Irish Qualitative Data Archive following the completion of Maynooth University's ten-year data storage period.

Print Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E: Consent Form for Email Interview Subjects

Project Title: Reading Digital Narratives in Convergence Culture: *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as Cybertext
Researcher: Meredith Dabek, PhD Candidate
Department: Media Studies, Maynooth University, Co. Kildare, Ireland
Contact: meredith.dabek.2015@mumail.ie

Supervisor: Dr. Jeneen Naji, Media Studies
Contact: jeneen.naji@nuim.ie

Prior to participating in this interview, all participants must read the Information Sheet and sign this consent form.

Participants may choose to withdraw their consent and participation in this study at any time, including up to the point of publication. They should do so by contacting the researcher directly at the email address provided above. Once the participant withdraws his or her consent, all video conference recordings, transcripts, and/or documents will be deleted. Participants can also request access to their individual contributions by contacting the researcher. As explained on the Information Sheet, every effort will be made to keep participants' information private and confidential.

Any questions regarding the specific content of this study should be sent to the researcher. If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

I, _____, acknowledge receipt of the Information Sheet and Consent Form. I have fully read both forms and understand the details disclosed about this research project and its objectives. I consent to be contacted by the above-named researcher and/or supervisor regarding my participation in this study. I acknowledge that the information I provide will be held privately and securely and will not be shared or sold to any other party. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for my own records.

Please check ALL that apply:

☐ By checking this box, I agree to participate in an email interview and consent to answer the questions posed by the researcher as part of the email interview. I understand that my answers will be used solely for research and archival purposes, and will not be shared or sold to any other party. I understand that individuals with a previous existing association with *The Lizzie Bennet*

Diaries may be referenced by name in research outputs and that I have the opportunity to request a pseudonym. I understand that every effort will be made to protect my privacy and confidentiality.

☐ By checking this box, I consent to having my interview responses deposited in the Irish Qualitative Data Archive following the completion of Maynooth University's ten-year data storage period.

Print Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____