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From Elizabeth Bennet to Bridget Jones: the changing face of the romance heroine

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FROM ELIZABETH BENNET TO BRIDGET JONES:
THE CHANGING FACE OF THE ROMANCE HEROINE

Thesis

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By

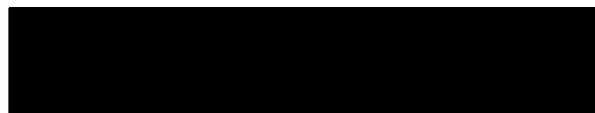
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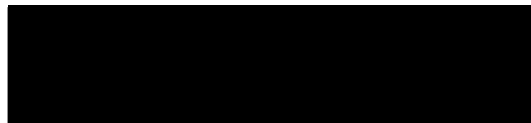
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ABSTRACT

FROM ELIZABETH BENNET TO BRIDGET JONES: THE CHANGING FACE OF THE ROMANCE HEROINE

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By analyzing some of the most conventional archetypes, we will see how Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennet both fits the expectation of a conventional heroine, but at the same time challenges their dominance. My argument is that this paradox is part of what makes Elizabeth an appealing modern heroine. It is her unexpected, rather unorthodox ways that modernize her and make her into a round character. An analysis of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones' Diary*, both the novel and the film adaptation, in comparison to Austen's novel, will show the continued tension between romance and realism in present day works of fiction. We will see that Bridget, like Elizabeth, both fits and breaks the archetypes of her genre. For Bridget these characteristics include her desire to be independent, but at the same time find fulfillment in a romantic relationship. While Bridget Jones is far different from Elizabeth Bennet, the two still stand together as examples of what a fictional heroine should be—a surprising character that it is not flat, but grows and changes from the beginning of the novel to the end.

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INTRODUCTION

The incidents may vary, but the story is quite familiar. It begins with a virtuous woman waiting for her prince to come and ends with a happily ever after. Such heroines have had endearing appeal in romance novels and film. There is something mythical about these heroines, a perfection that is lacking in everyday society. These maidens, in their ethereal beauty and perfection, set a standard that can never quite be met. Jane Austen recognized this, as she began writing in 19th century England. She saw the appeal of a romance heroine on a quest for true love, but at the same time, saw the need for a more down-to-earth heroine. Her novels showcase heroines that still uphold the mythical qualities of romance but also meet modern expectations of readers. *Pride and Prejudice's* Elizabeth Bennet is one of the best examples. While Elizabeth fulfills the archetype of the heroine on a quest for true love, she also exhibits unexpected qualities such as a quick wit and an independent spirit. In Elizabeth, Austen modernizes the myth.

This paper examines how Elizabeth fulfills the role of a conventional romance heroine. In this sense, Austen upholds certain expectations held by readers of her day regarding female protagonists. According to Rebecca Dickson, this heroine: "was invariably an ingénue, a young naïve virgin who had to find a husband while maintaining her chastity" (30). Elizabeth is young, naïve, chaste, and in search of a husband. At the same time, while Elizabeth is woven into convention, she is also drawn from the every day. Austen makes Elizabeth realistic by making her resemble women in her society. What is intriguing in Austen's work is the pull between romance and realism; I will be looking at the tension between archetypal and modern qualities in Elizabeth.

Then I will discuss the endurance of Austen's characterization by looking at a contemporary adaptation. Helen Fielding, using Elizabeth Bennet as a model, portrays a heroine who does not fit into expected categories. This modern-day heroine portrayed in Fielding's chick lit novel, *Bridget Jones' Diary*, illustrates how Elizabeth Bennet is transplanted into the chick lit genre, and has come to represent a kind of stock character in contemporary literature. Bridget is a surprising romance heroine with deplorable speaking habits and misguided judgments. Just the same, her quest for true love, in spite of the odds, is what makes her a conventional romance heroine. An analysis of Fielding's work, both the novel and the film adaptation, in comparison to Austen's novel, will show the continued tension between romance and realism into present day works of fiction. We will see that Bridget, like Elizabeth, both fits and breaks the archetypes of their genre.

CHAPTER 1: THE CHANGING FACE OF THE ROMANCE HEROINE

Beauty, innocence and chastity are all qualities commonly found in a romance heroine (Dickson 30). Women characters that exhibited such traits were considered angels according to Gilbert and Gubar (20). This angel was "perfect in every way. Having lost all human weaknesses, they [were] nothing but objects," adds Anke Werker (27). In traditional, medieval romances, a heroine becomes so angelic that she lacks any real weaknesses. The famous fairytale heroine Snow White serves as a perfect example of this angel (Gilbert and Gubar 36). Snow White is young, beautiful, passive, and virtuous (36). She is an "ideal" example of "contemplative purity" (39). Snow White is the kind of virtuous heroine that young girls can aspire to be like. Such girls dream of being the most beautiful woman in the land and marrying their fairytale prince. The problem is that this romance heroine has no agency and no ability to change because she is already perfect. Such a character has lost her ability to become round; she has become a cypher for a predictable plot. Without the ability to change and grow, she is the expected romance heroine who must sit idly by, whether in a castle, in a forest, or in a tall tower, and wait for her prince to come and rescue her. She is little more than an "object to be displayed and desired" as Snow White, in her glass coffin exemplifies (Gilbert and Gubar 41). This is the kind of romance heroine that Austen was working from when she wrote *Pride and Prejudice*. The "Snow White" image had been written and rewritten in literature. Austen's task was to modernize this image and give readers a realistic portrayal of a romance heroine.

Through Elizabeth, Austen questions this typical characterization of women in literature. She presents her novel *Pride and Prejudice* at a time of much unrest.

Questions were being asked by Austen and other authors concerning the role of women, both in literature, and in society, which Sandra Guardini Vansconcelos addresses: "Living in the same class-bound and male-dominated society, Austen presents in her work the same conflicting views on marriage and on the nature and place of women which were so characteristic of fellow novelists and women writers" (10).

As a romance heroine, Elizabeth follows several expected archetypes that are prevalently found literature; these archetypes are used to identify certain character-types.¹ In doing this, the presence of an archetypal character generates expectations in the reader. But, in her novels, Austen also takes the archetypes associated with romance heroines and stretches their meanings. She uses her characters as a vehicle for challenging social norms. In doing this, she is addressing a problem in traditional literature. Anke Werker believes "The archetypal female characters in male literature did not agree with reality: they did not show reflections of real women" (30). Austen, then, is attempting to show "reflections of real women" in her work. Through Elizabeth Bennet, Austen presents a well-rounded, intelligent character that changes from the beginning to the end of the novel. This is far different from Dickson's passive, perfect 18th century heroine: Austen offers a woman with flaws while she still plays out the fairy-tale plot.

One typical way for literary critics to differentiate between an archetypal heroine and her more believable cousin in literature is captured in E. M. Forster's concept of flat

¹ Northrop Frye defines an archetype as a "symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience" (91-92). In poetry, these symbols connect one poem with another and help us, as readers, to make associations. Frye goes on to say that archetypes are symbols that people understand at first glance: these "learned associations . . . are communicable because a large number of people in a given culture happen to be familiar with them" (95). Symbols such as a cross being associated with Christ or the color green associated with Irish pride are well known archetypes (Frye 95). The same idea can be applied to narrative as well. In most early romance novels, the heroines had common values and traits. These traits became so inherent to what it means to be a heroine that they became archetypes for all such characters. From this point on, when I use the term archetype I mean values and traits commonly associated with a romance heroine such as beauty, virtue, and a desire for happiness in marriage.

and round characters. Forester says, "The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is a flat pretending to be round" (118). Surprising characters change, make decisions, and seem realistic in nature; they make unexpected choices throughout the novel. Austen's characters can be considered in this sense, for most of them are round in nature (114). Elizabeth Bennet, in particular, is intriguing in her complexity. Instead of living out the expected life of a romance heroine, she is unique in her strengths and flaws.

Elizabeth's roundness develops in the moments when she breaks from the normal mold of a romance heroine. In this sense, she serves as a foil to the very romance heroine she portrays. Anke Werker believes that Austen "did not invent women characters as she wanted them to be. And she did not create character the way the audience expected them to be either" (4). Werker is only partially right here. I believe that Austen was intentional in the way she created her characters; it is hard to believe that such an author would not be intentional in her creations. Just the same, Austen does give her audience something different from what they were expecting. Audiences were expecting a traditional heroine like Ellena di Rosalba in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*.² Instead, Austen creates a surprising paradox by giving Elizabeth imperfections. She is not perfect in beauty or in action. She does not always respond to situations the way readers would like. Instead, she makes surprising mistakes. It is these very imperfections that endear her to her audience. These qualities are what make her real. John Wiltshire writes, "Few, very few, actual people, one ventures to assert, are present to us as 'real', their feelings and motives as fully and unequivocally known to us as those

² First published in 1797, Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* revolves around a maiden named Ellena, the man she is in love with, Vivaldi, and an evil monk named Schedoni. Ellena is an excellent example of the archetypal romance heroine. Ellena is a weak, innocent, virtuous young woman who does not recognize evil, even when it is right in front of her. She possesses all the qualities of a mythic heroine, but none of the modern qualities that Elizabeth Bennet exemplifies.

of the protagonist of a novel, as Elizabeth Bennet" (103). Wiltshire may be correct on this account. But it is the combination of Elizabeth's real and fictional qualities that make her such a popular character.

By analyzing some of the most conventional traits of a romance heroine, we will see how Elizabeth both fits these expectations, but at the same time challenges their dominance. One of the expected traits of a romance heroine is that she is beautiful. Elizabeth Bennet, in one sense, is a mythic beauty symbolic of the heroine of romance. She and her sisters are known throughout the countryside for their beauty; Mr. Collins and Mr. Bingley attest to this (Austen 9,70). When Mr. Collins visits the Bennet family, he compliments Mrs. Bennet on having such "fine daughters" and says that in this case, "fame had fallen short of the truth," the Bennet girls were even more beautiful in person (Austen 64-65). Although Mr. Collins' tendency toward flattery needs to be considered here, the compliment to the Bennet sisters is still present. It can still be determined that they are pretty. In addition, at the Meryton Ball, Mr. Bingley says that Elizabeth is "very pretty, and I dare say, very agreeable" (Austen 11). Later in the novel, Darcy gives Elizabeth the ultimate compliment when he describes her as being one of the "handsomest women of [his] acquaintance" (Austen 271). To Darcy, Elizabeth's beauty surpasses all others. By taking these various observations from characters in the novel, it would seem like Elizabeth fulfills the beauty archetype to perfection, but this is not so. While Elizabeth is beautiful, she is not perfect in her beauty.

By making Elizabeth less than perfect, Austen is playing with the definition of beautiful. Elizabeth's lack of perfect beauty is admitted from the very opening of the novel. Elizabeth's own mother admits that her second eldest is "not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good humoured as Lydia" (Austen 4). A declaration this early in the novel is certainly intentional on Austen's part. She wants her readers to know, right away, that Elizabeth Bennet is less than perfect. It is also important to note that Darcy,

who is enraptured with Elizabeth by the end of the novel, did not always believe her to be the "handsomest" of women. In fact, the first time the two characters meet, Darcy refuses to dance with Elizabeth, proclaiming that she is "tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men" (Austen 12). Elizabeth had been sitting out of the dances, for lack of men present at the party. Darcy was not attracted to her enough to offer his hand for a round. He finds her pleasant, but not beautiful in appearance, commenting that Jane Bennet is the only beautiful one in the room (Austen 11). It is only over time that he comes to see her as beautiful. While he admits that her form is less than perfect in symmetry, he is soon drawn by her intelligent, dark eyes, her "light and pleasing" figure, and her playful nature (Austen 23). This adds to the moment, at the end of the novel, when he proclaims her the "handsomest women of [his] acquaintance" (Austen 271). Elizabeth's lack of perfect beauty makes her realistic, and thus, more relevant to modern readers. In creating such a character, Austen broadens the definition of beautiful. Elizabeth has her imperfections, but still finds someone who loves her and finds her beautiful. In the eyes of Darcy, she may be a mythical beauty, but in the eyes of society, she is realistically modern in her beauty.

Elizabeth fulfills other important qualities of a romance heroine as well. One important aspect of a traditional romance heroine is that she is refined. Werker writes, "During the eighteenth century, the angelic creature was personified by the proper lady. From a popular genre at the time, the so-called book of etiquette, we can create an image of the proper lady. These books taught young women how to behave to become the, in every way, ideal woman" (27).³ While Elizabeth's younger sisters are

³ One such book of etiquette, James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*, is mentioned by name in *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen 68). Mr. Collins attempts to read the book to the Bennet sisters, but the younger girls appear disinterested (Austen 68). Laura Vorachek discusses the connections between Fordyce's *Sermons* and *Pride and Prejudice* (129). She notes that some of

unpropitious, Elizabeth is decorous. Often, it is she and Jane who try to keep their younger sisters in line (Austen 213). While their mother seems to have little sense of propriety and their father is more than happy to just sit and laugh at his foolish young daughters, Elizabeth and Jane take it upon themselves to try to curb their younger sisters' manners (213). Even at this, Elizabeth sees the case as a fruitless one: "Catherine, weak-spirited, irritable, and completely under Lydia's guidance, had been always affronted by their advice; and Lydia, self-willed and careless, would scarcely give them a hearing. They were ignorant, idle, and vain" (213). As ladies, Elizabeth and Jane have a sense of propriety which their younger sisters do not show. The younger girls run around with the officers embarrassing Elizabeth and Jane in social settings such as the Netherfield ball. At the ball, Elizabeth observes her family, acknowledging "that had her family made an agreement to expose themselves as much as they could during the evening, it would have been impossible for them to play their parts with much more spirit, or finer success" (101-102). In instances such as the Netherfield ball, it is not only Lydia and Kitty that embarrass Elizabeth, but her parents as well. All show a certain lack of class. Darcy voices his concern on their classlessness, admitting that it was one of the reasons he encouraged Bingley to break off his relationship with Jane:

The situation of your mother's family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison of that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father . . . Let it give you consolation to consider that, to have conducted yourselves so as to avoid any share of

Fordyce's major issues, maintaining virtue, the reading of novels, practicing and performing music, marriage and money, and the definition of an attractive woman, are either affirmed or confronted in Austen's work (Vorachek 130-135). For instance, Austen agrees with Fordyce on the merit of a woman maintaining virtue, but differs on the definition of an attractive woman (the example being Elizabeth) (Voracheck 130,135).

like censure, is praise no less generally bestowed on you and your eldest sister, than it is honourable to the sense and disposition of both. (198)

While Darcy criticizes the lack of propriety in Elizabeth's family, he pays a great compliment to Elizabeth and her sister Jane. Darcy recognizes that such faults do not lie with the two eldest Bennet daughters. They, unlike the rest of their family, are "honourable" in "disposition" (198).

An extension of the romance heroine's refinement is her virtue. So just how important is it for the heroine to be virtuous? As a romance heroine, it is certainly what readers expected, along with beauty and refinement. According to Rachel Brownstein, for a heroine in a domestic novel like *Pride and Prejudice* "one of two courses of action is possible: she will either get virtue's earthly reward, a rich husband, or be seduced and die of it" (81). For Brownstein, a heroine's virtue is linked to marrying well. And maybe there is something to this. For Elizabeth Bennet to marry well, she must aspire to live a virtuous life. She must be desirable to the rich, unmarried bachelors of her day. Such men were looking for a young, virtuous woman to become their wife, bear their children, and create a comfortable home.⁴ Elizabeth Bennet is young, approximately 20 years of

⁴ An interesting contrast can be made between Elizabeth and her sister Lydia. While Elizabeth is virtuous, Lydia flaunts her sexuality. She does not exhibit any qualities of refinement. When Lydia is invited to Brighton to visit her friends the Foresters, Elizabeth is appalled, believing that the occasion will only serve to make Lydia a greater flirt than ever. She tells her father as much:

If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. Her character will be fixed, and she will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt that ever made herself and her family ridiculous. A flirt too, in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation; without any attraction beyond youth and a tolerable person; and from the ignorance and emptiness of her mind, wholly unable to ward off any portion of that universal contempt which her rage for admiration will excite. (Austen 231)

Elizabeth sees a great lack of refinement in Lydia, and attempts to warn her father about the kind of empty-headed person that Lydia is slowly becoming. Lydia proves Elizabeth right, with her own thoughts on Brighton. Like Elizabeth suspects, her younger sister is looking forward to being the "object of attention, to tens and scores of them at present unknown" (232). She imagines herself there in Brighton, surrounded by attentive soldiers, "tenderly flirting with at least six officers at once" (232). Lydia's small world revolves around flirtation. She shows little refinement when it actually comes to conversing with others. For example, consider the scene at Netherfield, when

age, so she fulfils the image in that regard (Austen 166).⁵ In addition, she remains virtuous, upholding the angel image so often associated with women:

In the Middle Ages, of course, mankind's great teacher of purity was the Virgin Mary, a mother of goodness who perfectly fit the role Ortnor defines as 'merciful dispenser of salvation.' For the more secular nineteenth century, however, the eternal type of female purity was represented not by a Madonna in heaven but by an angel in the house.

(Gilbert and Gubar 20)

As an angel, Elizabeth must exhibit a large amount of restraint. Her angelic nature must be an example to other girls who will read about her. Sokol writes, "In [Austen's] world, public displays of affection were considered vulgar, and intimate touching and kissing were behaviors reserved for the bedroom" (Sokol 101). While it may be surprising today, Austen extolled this purity in her novels. In remaining virtuous, Elizabeth is the expected angel of the house. In this aspect, Elizabeth is the conventional heroine who protects her purity at all costs. She is an angel of purity, just like all other early romance heroines.

While Elizabeth is virtuous, she is not perfectly so. Here, Austen once again is challenging the archetypes associated with the ideal romance heroine. While she shows a respectable amount of propriety, Elizabeth can be quite surprising in her moments of impropriety. For instance, when Jane becomes ill, Elizabeth walks three miles to

she and her mother come to visit Jane. This lack of refinement would not have made her a very desirable marriage partner. Although she is only fifteen, she views herself as "very equal" to address Mr. Bingley and remind him that he promised to hold a ball (Austen 45). In this scene she appears very impertinent in her address to an elder. This is only one of many cases where Lydia's lack of refinement is shown. Her lack of refinement makes her a great foil for her older sister Elizabeth.

⁵ In the 19th century, there were not many decent opportunities for women (Brownstein 81). Marriage was one of the few choices in life, if a woman was of a virtuous mindset. After a woman reached a certain age, she was seen as being an old maid. Men wanted to marry young women who were strong, could work hard, and bear them children. Thus, Elizabeth needed to fit into this expected frame to be authentic. Otherwise, it would be highly unlikely that she would end up with someone like Mr. Darcy.

Netherfield, after a rainstorm (32). As she walks toward Netherfield Park, she acts rather unladylike, "crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ancles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise" (Austen 32). This image of a romance heroine with "dirty stockings" and a "glowing" face is rather unexpected. With these images, Austen portrays a modern young woman who puts her love of her sister, and her enjoyment of the out of doors, above propriety. Before leaving for Netherfield Park, Elizabeth acknowledged that she probably would appear rather unpropitious, but she did not care: "I shall be fit to see Jane," she tells her mother, "which is all I want" (Austen 32). Elizabeth is going to visit her sister, and could care less about how she will appear to others. In putting the needs of her sister above appearing refined in front of her peers, Austen confronts the archetype of a refined romance heroine. This lack of refinement is criticized by the ladies at Netherfield Park. Mrs. Hurst later recalls that Elizabeth appeared "almost wild" with her flushed cheeks and dirty petticoat (Austen 35). Miss Bingley agrees, and adds to the criticism: "To walk, three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above her ancles in dirt, and alone, quite alone! what could she mean by it? It seems to me to shew an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country town indifference to decorum" (Austen 36). The two sisters, Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley, are appalled by Elizabeth's "conceited independence" (Austen 36). To these ladies, independence is a weakness in Elizabeth. Rather than leading the reader to question Elizabeth's fitness as a romance heroine, Austen is using this scene to question the necessity of refinement for her heroine.

Thus, in *Pride and Prejudice* she creates a character that both upholds and challenges the ideal of refinement. My argument is that this paradox is part of what makes Elizabeth an appealing modern heroine. It is her unexpected, rather unorthodox ways that modernize her and make her into a round character. In the moments when

she breaks from tradition, Elizabeth shows a certain amount of independence that I would argue is a great strength rather than a weakness. Another example of Elizabeth's independence occurs when Lady Catherine de Bourgh shows up unexpectedly at Longbourn. This scene reveals a lack of refinement on Elizabeth's part which actually proves to be a strength. In the scene, Lady Catherine confronts Elizabeth, demanding to know if she is engaged to Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth refuses to answer at first. She tells Lady Catherine, "I do not pretend to possess equal frankness with your ladyship. *You* may ask questions, which / shall not choose to answer" (Austen 354). Elizabeth addresses Lady Catherine in a rather impertinent way, but she is right in doing so. Lady Catherine is being quite rude to Elizabeth. Elizabeth stands her ground as an independent woman, not giving in to Lady's Catherine's threats. She refuses to make any promises concerning Mr. Darcy and the possibility of a future engagement (357). She takes control of the situation and demands that they must return inside, declaring that Lady Catherine has "insulted [her], in every possible method" (357). This is one case where Elizabeth's independent nature actually served her well. Traditional heroines would have cowered under Lady Catherine's threats. Elizabeth, with her independent nature, is able to stand up and assert her own rights in the situation. She recognizes how uncouth it was for Lady Catherine to address her in that manner and does not allow the lady, no matter her class, to treat her as such. In her individualism, Elizabeth challenges the archetype of a propitious romance heroine.

Romance heroines of the 18th century were not traditionally known for their wittiness or aggressivity. Instead, they were expected to remain passive, waiting idly for their prince to come. Elizabeth, on the other hand, shows independence through her witty nature. While she may have shocked readers in the 19th century, her wit serves her well, allowing her to express her feelings, even to those higher up on the social ladder, such as Lady Catherine. According to Brownstein, Elizabeth's "distance from convention

is what distinguishes her. The 'quickness' that her father loves and her mother dislikes her for separates her from what's dead and enables her to be intellectual mistress of it" (124). Elizabeth's "quickness" makes her an interesting character. She surprises readers with her quick responses to barbed remarks. One example of this occurs when Lady Catherine asks Elizabeth her age. Elizabeth replies, "With three younger sisters grown up . . . your Ladyship can hardly expect me to own it" (Austen 166). Lady Catherine had just been criticizing the Bennet household for allowing all the girls to be out in public at once. Elizabeth did not appreciate this, and so she bravely stands up to Lady Catherine. She forms a good response to the lady's criticisms: "But really, Ma'am, I think it would be very hard upon younger sisters, that they should not have their share of society and amusement because the elder may not have the means or inclination to marry early.— The last born has as good a right to the pleasures of youth, as the first" (Austen 165). While she handles the matter respectfully, Elizabeth stands her ground against this aristocratic woman. This wittiness is an admirable trait in Elizabeth, something women still aspire toward today; it showcases Elizabeth's intelligence.

While her wit is rather uncommon in a romance heroine, it allows her to be tactful in awkward situations. Gilbert and Gubar write,

Neither fainting into silence nor self-destructing in verbosity, Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, and Anne Elliot echo their creator in their duplicitous ability to speak with the tact that saves them from suicidal somnambulism on the one hand and contaminating vulgarity on the other, as they exploit the evasions and reservations of feminine gentility. (183)

Austen has given her main characters brains that they can use to make discerning decisions. This keeps them from becoming boring and gives them memorable qualities that set them apart as individual characters. Elizabeth's wit and intelligence serve her well in situations where she needs to speak her mind, as with Lady Catherine. Her

abilities also help her to remain tactful in tough situations, as is seen with her younger sister Lydia. The youngest Bennet daughter causes much embarrassment to her family when she runs away with Wickham. Instead of showing remorse when she returns to Longbourn, Lydia acts as if she was in the right: Austen writes, "It was not to be supposed that time would give Lydia that embarrassment, from which she had been so wholly free at first. Her ease and good spirits increased" (317). In fact, Lydia seems to lord her new married status over her sisters. While sitting around in the breakfast room, Lydia comments that she hopes her sisters only have "half [her] good luck" in finding a husband (Austen 317). She tells her sisters that they must come to Brighton where she will find husbands for them as well (Austen 317), to which Elizabeth replies, "I thank you for my share of the favour . . . but I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands" (Austen 317). There is no mention of the response to this comment. There was no outbreak, no uproar, the narration just continues on to the next scene. Elizabeth had spoken her mind, thoughtfully, and Lydia had no ready response for her. Before this time, Elizabeth had remained silent on her thoughts; after this she does not mention them again to Lydia. This example shows the strength of Elizabeth's character and affirms her virtue. She is a proper lady, who disagrees with the disgraceful conduct of her sister. According to Anne Ruderman, Elizabeth's "strong objections . . . indicate a purity of principle about marriage itself, not just extramarital sex" (147). Ruderman goes on to say Elizabeth not only has a problem with her sister having sex outside of marriage, but for the reasons she married as well (147). As a virtuous heroine, Elizabeth is waiting for her true love to come along. She does not like the fact that her sister has sold herself short, and had to marry to preserve what was left of the family's dignity. She recognizes how little "permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue" (Austen 312). Elizabeth's confrontation with Lydia (if it can be called such) is only one example of

multiple instances when Elizabeth allows her discerning spirit to guide her actions. Most of the time, her intelligence serves her well, helping her out of rather awkward situations.

At times, though, her ability to make quick decisions does not work in her favor. In this sense, her greatest strengths become her greatest weaknesses. While Elizabeth's intelligence allows her to make reasoned decisions and her wit helps her to succeed in conversations, these traits also hinder her ability to be discerning.

Sometimes Elizabeth's quick judgments allow her to form a better opinion of the person than they deserve, such as with Mr. George Wickham. When Elizabeth first meets Wickham, she is struck by his charming appearance. He is described as having "all the best parts of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and a very pleasing address" (Austen 72). Mr. Wickham, unlike Mr. Darcy, is very personable. He can easily charm everyone in the room with his smooth talking. The narrator notes that the "agreeable manner in which he immediately fell into conversation, though it was only on its being a wet night, and on the probability of a rainy season, made [Elizabeth] feel that the commonest, dullest, most threadbare topic might be rendered interesting by the skill of the speaker" (Austen 76). Elizabeth is drawn to this witty man who can make the dullest of subjects appealing. This intriguing man shows interest in her, which causes her to easily believe his lies. Wickham tells Elizabeth that Darcy's jealousy denied him his inheritance (Austen 79). Apparently Darcy's father privileged Wickham over his own son, which made the young heir extremely jealous (Austen 80). Elizabeth easily believes this lie, because it fits her judgment of Darcy, although she admits that she had not thought it possible that Mr. Darcy could act this ill toward another (Austen 80). After Wickham's tale, she views him as amicable. She later tells her aunt that he is the most "agreeable man [she] ever saw" (Austen 144). Here, Elizabeth's ability to make quick decisions serves her wrong. She believes the man who flirts with her and tells a good story, not necessarily the man who is telling the truth.

This shows an imperfection in Elizabeth's character. This weakness gives Elizabeth an area for growth, and thus gives her the ability to become round. Without this weakness Elizabeth would be an unrealistic, unsurprising character.

At other times Elizabeth thinks worse of people than she should, as with Mr. Darcy. After meeting Mr. Darcy for the first time, Elizabeth determines that he is an "ill-tempered man" (Austen 78). Her only reason for determining this is because he refuses to dance with women at the ball, including her (Austen 20). Her assumptions about Mr. Darcy only grow after hearing Wickham's tale. Instead of seeing Mr. Darcy's kind-hearted nature, she is blinded by prejudice, taking Mr. Wickham's side in the matter. She resents the cruel way that Mr. Darcy treated Wickham. The first time Mr. Darcy proposes to Elizabeth, she tells him that he is the "last man in the world whom [she] could ever be prevailed on to marry" (Austen 193).

Darcy's first marriage proposal reveals Elizabeth's flaws working against her. One evening, while Elizabeth is visiting Charlotte at Hunsford, Mr. Darcy stops by to talk to her. He professes his deep love for her, in spite of her inferiority and embarrassing family (Austen 189). He admits that he had tried ever so hard not to love her, but the feelings could not be overcome (189). Elizabeth, aghast at the proposal, tells Mr. Darcy why she would never marry him. She attacks Darcy for his part in destroying Jane's happiness with Mr. Bingley: "do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the man, who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister?" (190). Because of the way he treated Jane, Elizabeth feels that she has "every reason in the world" to dislike him (191). In addition, she criticizes him for the role he has played in Mr. Wickham's unhappiness: "You have reduced him to his present state of poverty, comparative poverty. You have withheld the advantages, which you must know have been designated for him. You have deprived the best years of his life, of that independence which was not less his due than his desert" (192). In both of

these cases, Elizabeth is making judgments; judgments she will eventually have to come to terms with. At this point she believes she is in the right in seeing nothing but his "arrogance," "conceit," and "selfish disdain of the feelings of others" (Austen 193). Eventually, she will have to recognize that she misjudged the situations. She did not know all of the facts when she made these judgments. This scene serves as an excellent example of Elizabeth's flaws as a character. At times, she misjudges the motives of others.

Her very weaknesses are what take her out of expected archetypes and give her that realness that is so attractive to Wiltshire. The moment when she recognizes her errant ways is a crucial one of the novel. At this point, Mr. Darcy sends Elizabeth a letter in which he apologizes for his rude behavior in the past. He also explains his relationship to Mr. Wickham, and the role he played in Jane and Bingley's relationship (Austen 196-203). After reading Mr. Darcy's letter, Elizabeth says,

How despicably have I acted . . . I, who have prided myself on my discernment!— I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust.—How humiliating is this discovery!—Yet, how just a humiliation!—Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly.—Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either was concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself. (Austen 208)

At this point, Elizabeth recognizes how she had placed great value on her ability to show "discernment," but "vanity" clouded her judgments. She had enjoyed the fact that Wickham was attracted to her, and so she favored him over Darcy, who had offended

her with his comment at the Meryton Ball. Because Wickham flirted with her, she listened to every word he said against Darcy. She allowed vanity to get in the way of her good sense. In the process, reason and discernment, her very strengths, were "driven away." With this revelation, Elizabeth sees herself in a new light. She is changing as a character.

By highlighting Elizabeth's weaknesses, Austen is challenging the archetype of the flat romance heroine. She is creating a round character in Elizabeth, one that has weaknesses and must learn from her mistakes. Elizabeth's weaknesses continue to confront the archetypes commonly associated with a romance heroine.

Elizabeth Bennet's story, like that of all traditional romance heroines, revolves around a marriage plot. This, also, could be seen as an archetype. As a romance heroine, Elizabeth spends the majority of the novel searching for happiness in marriage. Her story is conventional in that it begins with this search and ends when that love is found. Rachel Brownstein comments on the marriage plot:

The marriage plot most novels depend on is about finding validation of one's own uniqueness and importance by being singled out among all other women by a man. The man's love is proof of the girl's value, and payment for it . . . When, at the end, this is done, she is transformed: her outward shape becomes her inward self, she is a bride, the very image of a heroine. For a heroine is just that, an image; novel heroines, like novel readers, are often women who want to become heroines. (xv)

Elizabeth's story does revolve around this marriage plot. While she is independent in nature, there is still a part of Elizabeth Bennet who is searching for "validation" in marriage.

Elizabeth finds her match in Mr. Darcy. In him she finds someone whose "disposition and talents would most suit her" (Austen 312). She only realizes how perfect

a pair they would have been after turning him down the first time. She recognizes that "by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved, and from his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefits of greater importance" (Austen 312). In searching for an intellectual equal, Elizabeth is, yet again, a rather unconventional romance heroine. Because she is intelligent, she desires someone who will compliment her strengths and her encourage her independent mindset. These desires modernize her as a romance heroine.

In this, a paradox arises. While Elizabeth does desire these traits, she still exhibits qualities of the traditional romance heroine. Her desire to be married is an important part of the novel. Upon accomplishing her true love quest, Elizabeth fulfils her role as a romance heroine. When she and Darcy marry at the end of the novel, readers are left with no doubt that the two of them will live happily ever after. Brownstein writes, "Elizabeth Bennet, who attains perfect happiness, is, for all her defiance of the ideal of woman, a novel heroine after all: her love story figures forth the novel's fantasies, that character determines fate, that virtue is rewarded, that to know oneself is to know and control one's destiny" (134). In this sense, Elizabeth is a traditional romance heroine. Her virtuous nature and determination to marry only for love are rewarded in the end. She fulfills the dreams of all young girls, living happily ever after. Of her newfound happiness, Elizabeth says, "It is settled between us already, that we are to be the happiest couple in the world" (Austen 373).

One 19th century American girl completed her diary with the following statement: "And now these pages must come to a close, for the romance ends when the heroine marries" (qtd. in Brownstein 32). Like many traditional romances, Elizabeth's story ends with a wedding. It is what goes on during the process, the changes within Elizabeth that get her to this point, that make her story such an interesting one. While Austen followed the conventions of her day by giving her characters "happily ever afters," she pushes the

boundaries with what she does beneath the surface of her novels. Elizabeth's story is traditional in that it revolves around a marriage plot, but surprising because Elizabeth does not settle for less than true love. Elizabeth is holding out for an "intellectual equal" relationship (Stewart-Beer, par. 25). She is searching for someone whom she can meet on an equal level. She recognizes that Mr. Collins would never be this person, and so she rejects his proposal (Austen 107). Mr. Collins would have offered her a life of security and convenience but not satisfying company. Elizabeth's search for true love is all the more noble when the risks are considered. Elizabeth is putting her own security on the line by denying Mr. Collins, and later Mr. Darcy as well (Austen 190). Her search for happiness in marriage risks her support system. Although Elizabeth does not express this fear, those around her tell her of the great risk she is taking, her mother being one of them; Mrs. Bennet says, "But I tell you what, Miss Lizzy, if you take it into your head to go on refusing every offer of marriage in this way, you will never get a husband at all—and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your father is dead.—I shall not be able to keep you—and so I warn you" (Austen 113). As Elizabeth considers the consequences, she must wonder about her future safety. Her mother notes that, if Elizabeth does not marry well, she will have nothing upon her father's death. She will have no one to take care of her.

Recognizing this, Charlotte Lucas takes an opposite course of action—directly in opposition to the conventions of romance. She picks stability over happiness in marriage. Charlotte believes that "happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance" (Austen 23). For Charlotte, marriage is a convention that will keep her safe. "I am not romantic, you know," she tells Elizabeth (Austen 125). All she desires is a "comfortable home" (Austen 125). Although Mr. Collins is not a catch in the least, Charlotte at least knows that she will be cared for. And so she settles for the realistic choice. Elizabeth, on

the other hand, takes the choice of a romance heroine, and waits for a love relationship to come along.

For Elizabeth, marriage is more than a social arrangement that will keep a woman safe, but a relationship built on love and respect. Catherine Stewart-Beer says that it is the "privileging of personal over social, Austen's charting of the psychology of two young people falling in love, which has ensured the novel's enduring popularity" (par. 25). According to Stewart-Beer, it is Austen's focus on personal relationships that has made *Pride and Prejudice* such a lasting success. Instead of focusing on the society as a whole, *Pride and Prejudice* centers on Elizabeth's quest for true love. This personal story makes Elizabeth a relatable character. Her desire for personal happiness causes her to hold out until the love comes along, no matter the risk. Elizabeth tells Lady Catherine, "I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to *you*, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me" (Austen 358). Elizabeth is thinking about her own happiness when it comes to love; she is not worried about the needs of others. This individualistic nature makes her a rather modern character. While the traditional romance heroine did not often have a will of her own that she acted upon, Elizabeth uses her intellect and virtue to claim what she believes is rightfully hers; she claims the right to choose her destiny. She recognizes that this destiny will more than likely include marriage but does not have to, and so she takes the initiative to choose her future mate. She knows that Mr. Collins will not do, and her prejudice keeps her from seeing Mr. Darcy as her soul mate at first. Instead of taking the expected path, Elizabeth believes that marriage is not to be had at any cost.⁶

⁶ According to Ann Ruderman, Austen indicates "that her heroines would be capable of happiness even if they did not marry" (141). This idea falls right in line with Elizabeth's independence. She is willing to hold out for happiness in marriage, with the acknowledgment that

Brownstein, in *Becoming A Heroine*, believes that "what makes a heroine a heroine is her difference from most women" (100). In *Pride and Prejudice* Austen is out to prove that this is not always the case. While Austen sets up her characters in an imaginary world, she gives them realistic characteristics, blurring the boundary between the imaginary and the real. In doing this, Austen creates heroines that could be real, every day women. She creates modern romance heroines with rounded personalities. While Elizabeth does fulfill the characteristics of a conventional romance heroine, she has modern, realistic qualities as well. Gilbert and Gubar write, "While ridiculing ludicrous literary conventions, Austen also implies that romantic stories create absurd misconceptions . . . they are shown to prove manipulative roles and hypocritical jargon which mask materialistic and libidinal egoism" (115). I want to argue here that Austen does not completely discard misconceptions of romance novels. Instead, she works within the framework of her genre and broadens the definition of a romance heroine. She places Elizabeth Bennet in a realistic world in which hardships are prevalent; it is not always easy for the heroine to win the hero's heart, and the heroines do unexpected things (Gilbert and Gubar 115). While romance novels by men tended to mold women into predictable, unwavering archetypes, Austen challenges this way of thinking (Werker 30).

Austen portrays a realistic woman in Elizabeth Bennet as Vansconcelos asserts, "Elizabeth, and behind her Jane Austen, go beyond the parameters of their time and resist the generalized ideal of womanhood. Never transgressing what was considered to be proper feminine behavior, Elizabeth challenges traditional views of woman" (15). As previously discussed, there are certain times when Elizabeth does not completely adhere to "proper feminine behavior." Elizabeth does go beyond the generalized ideal of

this man may never come along. She is not willing to risk unhappiness in marriage for the safety it affords.

womanhood. But, there is more to it than these critics recognize. By giving Elizabeth weaknesses, Austen complicates the image and critiques some of society's expectations. Elizabeth's weaknesses, in turn, are the very strengths that enable her to fulfill the marriage plot. It is Elizabeth's unexpected qualities, the ones that are not supposed to be appealing to men of her day, that help her in the end. Darcy marries her because of her quick wit, which is surprising for Austen's day. One of the final scenes of the novel exemplifies this point. Elizabeth asks Darcy why he fell in love with her: "For the liveliness of your mind, I did," Darcy replies (Austen 381). Elizabeth then says,

You may as well call it impertinence at once. It was very little less. That fact is, that you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with women who are always speaking and looking and thinking for *your* approbation alone. I roused and interested you, because I was so unlike *them* . . . in your heart, you thoroughly despised the persons who so assiduously courted you (Austen 381).

It was Elizabeth's liveliness of mind, the very quality that appalled Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley, that appealed to Mr. Darcy (Austen 36). In her independence and witty nature, Elizabeth stood out as something unique to a man who was bored with women who spent their every second seeking for his approval. Because of her unexpected qualities, Elizabeth ends up fulfilling the marriage plot.

By creating a character intricately made up of both strengths and weaknesses, Austen succeeds in making Elizabeth into an appealing character. Although Elizabeth will never completely jump the boundary between the world of the imaginary and the world of reality, such a thing being impossible for fictional characters, her complexity helps form a lasting impression with readers. It is her ability to make both wise and unwise judgments that makes her lifelike. Because of her complexity, she stays with readers. This legacy is seen in many modern adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*. Time

and again, authors and screenwriters have taken Elizabeth's story and rewritten it into modernized versions. They, too, see something lasting in the character of Elizabeth Bennet.

CHAPTER 2: AUSTEN'S LEGACY IN BRIDGET JONES' DIARY

An example of Austen's legacy is Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, first published in the United Kingdom in 1996 and the United States in 1998. This novel was at the forefront of a genre that would later be termed "chick lit." According to A. Rochelle Mabry, chick lit "focuse[s] not on the romantic travails of an impossibly beautiful undeniably wholesome heroine and her strong, hypermasculine hero but on the romantic escapades of contemporary young women similar to the novels' intended readers" (193). The chick lit genre, written primarily by women for women, features the every day work and romantic struggles of single women in their twenties and thirties. These women heroines are in no way perfect, yet as Ferris and Young note in the introduction to their book, such heroines "deploy self-deprecating humor that not only entertains but also leads readers to believe they are fallible—like them" (3-4).

It is interesting then, to consider the connections between the heroines in modern chick lit genre and those in Austen's novels. For Austen, too, was interested in portraying flawed heroines. Ferris and Young note the intentional connection between Fielding and Austen: "Bridget Jones is a direct literary descendant of Austen's Elizabeth Bennet. Considering the relationship between the two characters and the two texts allows us to focus simultaneously on chick lit's ancestry and its contemporary nature" ("Introduction" 5). A comparison between Bridget Jones and Elizabeth Bennet will show that romance heroines are still expected to consist of certain archetypal characteristics. In both cases, the main characters have traits that are unexpected in a romance heroine. For Elizabeth this was her quick judgments and sharp tongue, for Bridget these characteristics include her desire to be independent, but at the same time find fulfillment

in a romantic relationship.⁷ By containing these qualities, both women show an interesting take on the image of a fictional heroine. In present day society, Bridget is the average, overweight woman in her thirties who is not exceptionally beautiful or a virgin for that matter. Sarah Gamble notes that, when trying to portray a "new kind heroine . . . the literary forms of the past are not quite appropriate" (63). Women today are not looking for a heroine who is exceptionally beautiful or talented; they are looking for an everyday woman with foibles, someone who is not perfect by any length of the imagination. They are not expecting an angelic beauty, as those in the 19th century were looking for. The heroine no longer has to be the angel of the house, virtuous and pure. Instead, readers are looking for realistic characterizations. Thus, Bridget does not need to be beautiful or overtly talented to appeal to her audience. She just needs to be average. Cecilia Salber notes, "By 'modernizing' Austen, Fielding not only honors her model, but also validates her perceptions in a new century" (par. 19). While Bridget Jones is far different from Elizabeth Bennet, the two still stand together as examples of a surprising character that it is not flat, but grows and changes from the beginning of the

⁷ A problem with chick lit, according to modern feminist writers, is the continued desire for romantic fulfillment. Gamble writes,

The mass-produced literary genre now widely known as "chicklit" contains many of postfeminism's conventions as well as its problems: the most notably, it is similarly concerned with defining the aims and aspirations of the modern woman who has grown to maturity in a world inescapably influenced by second-wave feminism and who thus sees herself as facing dilemmas which lie outside the experience of previous generations of women. However, she can also be regarded as a lamentable kind of heroine for whom happiness depends upon the most limited and hackneyed of objectives: romantic fulfillment. (62-63).

Bridget Jones exemplifies this problem. Despite her freedom as an independent woman in her thirties, her ultimate objective is to find fulfillment in love. Like Gamble mentions above, for all of Bridget's independence, she still finds herself being defined by a man. There is still a part of Bridget who believes she is somehow void of true happiness and fulfillment if a man is not in her life. In this sense, she is the "lamentable kind of heroine" that present day women still enjoy reading about. She is little different from Elizabeth Bennet, whose story centers on finding a mate. When Bridget falls for Daniel, she describes herself as feeling all "smug about being a real woman—so irrepressibly fecund!" (Fielding 102). In this statement, Bridget insinuates that she was not a "real" woman until she had a man in her life. Even in present day Britain, Bridget is ultimately looking for a man to complete her, which says something about romantic fiction. Present day readers are still looking for a story where the heroine finds her knight in shining armor. Without this fulfillment, the story, and the heroine would somehow be incomplete.

novel to the end. Their qualities, both archetypal and modern, are meeting expectations of the marriage plot.

One archetype Bridget and Elizabeth challenge is that of the beautiful heroine. In Austen's novel, this perfect woman was beautiful and decorous. Elizabeth challenged this image with her realistic beauty, and lack of refinement, such as when she arrived at Netherfield with a flushed face, and dirty stockings (Austen 32). In doing this, Austen reveals a character who is not content with society's image of perfection. The same could be argued for Bridget Jones as well. Much like Elizabeth, Bridget is fighting against expectations pertaining to how she should look.

In Kelly Marsh's analysis of *Bridget Jones*, she makes an interesting comparison between Bridget Jones and Emma Woodhouse. Marsh believes that, while *Bridget Jones* plot has much in common with *Pride and Prejudice*, the actual characterization of Bridget is closely related to the main character in Austen's *Emma* (63). One thing Emma and Bridget have in common, according to Marsh, is the determination to reject the "polished image of [their] rivals" (65). While Bridget does struggle with "image" issues, Marsh argues that she ultimately is happy just the way she is: "Each time Bridget has the opportunity to compare herself to the perfect image she envisions, she likes herself better" (62). I would argue that Bridget has more in common with Elizabeth than Marsh gives her credit. In both Bridget and Elizabeth's stories, the women are fighting against societies' expectations on how they should look. As Marsh notes, when Bridget achieves her desired weight, she feels victorious, at first (62). Bridget writes in her journal, "Today is a historic and joyous day. After eighteen years of trying to get down to 119 lbs. I have finally achieved it. It is no trick of the scales, but confirmed by jeans. I am thin" (Fielding 90). Once Bridget goes out in public though, she finds that her friends are not that impressed with her weight loss. One friend, Tom, even admits out loud that Bridget "looked better before (91-92). After receiving Tom's input, Bridget recognizes that her life

of dieting has not achieved the expected effect. She was fine before she tried to lose all the weight. She writes in her journal:

Now I feel empty and bewildered—as if a rug has been pulled out from under my feet. Eighteen years—wasted. Eighteen years of calorie- and fat-unit-based arithmetic. Eighteen years of buying long shirts and sweaters and leaving the room backwards in intimate situations to hide my bottom. Millions of cheesecakes and tiramisus, tens of millions of Emmenthal slices left uneaten. Eighteen years of struggle, sacrifice and endeavor—for what? Eighteen years and the result is 'tired and flat.' I feel like a scientist who discovers that his life's work has been a total mistake. (92-93)

Bridget now sees her dieting lifestyle as leading her nowhere. She could have spent the last eighteen years eating whatever she liked, instead of being constantly concerned about every pound of weight and inch to her waist. She has been trapped in a society where body image is somehow related to importance. At this point, Bridget begins to reject society's image of the perfect woman, and accepts herself the way she is. This rejection is one way in which Bridget is an appealing, modern heroine. Other incidences also arise in which Bridget does the unexpected thing. Often, these occasions arise because of her weaknesses.

Suzanne Ferris, in her essay on *Pride and Prejudice* and *Bridget Jones' Diary*, writes, "The chief delights of the novels are those moments when we recognize the female character's lack of insight in herself and others" ("Narrative" 75). Here, Ferris says that it is the very weaknesses of the characters, the "lack of insight," that gives readers and viewers such "delight." It is the weaknesses that humanize both Elizabeth and Bridget. These weaknesses are what make modern heroines out of them. Much like Elizabeth Bennet, Bridget Jones' weaknesses endear her to her audience. Instead of

being witty, Bridget stumbles over her words in public situations. For example, at the launch party for the book *Kafka's Motorbike*, Bridget tries to convince herself that she is the intellectual equal of everyone else. This is proven wrong the first time she opens her mouth. Instead of entering into the conversation, the wittiest thing she can come up with is "Do you know where the toilets are?" (Fielding 86). While Elizabeth Bennet would have entered right in the conversation, Bridget has nothing important to say. Other characters are quick to agree that intelligence is not one of Bridget's greatest qualities. In the movie adaptation of the novel, Mark Darcy even admits that there are "elements of the ridiculous about her," that she is an "appalling public speaker" and that she "tend[s] to let whatever is in [her] head come out without much consideration of the consequences." Bridget is appealing to audiences because of these very failings. She is not a character who is larger than life. Instead, she is quite normal, with failings like every other thirty-something woman in modern day society.

Besides Bridget's deplorable public speaking skills, she is also quick to misjudge. Her independent nature leads her to assume the wrong thing about Mark Darcy. After hearing Mark Darcy criticize her in public, Bridget determines that he must be a horrible individual. While in the novel Mark only describes Bridget as being "bizarre" (Fielding 182), the attack is made stronger in the film adaptation. In the film version, Bridget overhears Mark talking to his mother at the Curry Buffet. He says, "Mother, I do not need a blind date, especially from a verbally incompetent spinster who smokes like a chimney, drinks like a fish and dresses like her mother." Her pride is hurt when Mark calls her a "verbally incompetent spinster." This causes her to form a strong dislike for the man. Also, the film adaptation gives an additional plotline that helps to strengthen Bridget's prejudice. While in the novel, Darcy is only a "stupid nerd" that Daniel Cleaver knew in college, in the film adaptation Bridget learns that Darcy supposedly slept with Daniel's fiancée (Fielding 89). This serves as an intentional correlation to Wickham's tall tale

concerning Fitzwilliam Darcy and his inheritance. Bridget, like Elizabeth, judges someone without knowing all the facts. Because of the way Mark Darcy mistreated Daniel, Bridget determines that she hates Mark Darcy and wants nothing to do with him. The film then, even more than the novel, shows Bridget's weaknesses. Ferriss notes, "In both instances these revelations show that Elizabeth/Bridget's prejudices are without foundation and pave the way for romance with Darcy" ("Narrative" 74).

Bridget may have deplorable speaking skills and a quickness to judge, but in that same token she lives her life very independently. This aspect of independence is a deviation of the expected romance heroine. Instead of desiring weak, submissive female protagonists, present day readers are looking for characters that exhibit confidence and independence. While Bridget does speak stupidly at times, she is in control of her life. She makes her own decisions everyday and is unwilling to settle for anything less than the best in love. Sharon, Bridget's friend says, "We women are only vulnerable because we are a pioneer generation daring to refuse to compromise in love and relying on our own economic power" (Fielding 18). Bridget and her friends are unwilling to "compromise in love," they are waiting for the real thing. Bridget fulfills her role as romance heroine because she is willing to live life independently until romantic fulfillment comes along.

While Bridget's independence is evident in the original novel, an analysis of the film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* comes back with even greater return. In the adaptation, there are multiple instances where Bridget speaks out on not settling for anything less than the best in love. These examples extenuate Bridget's modern qualities as a romance heroine. For instance, when Bridget ends her relationship with Daniel she tells him: "I'm not going to gamble my life on someone who's not sure. Because like you said, I'm looking for someone more extraordinary than that." With this statement, Bridget leaves Daniel behind and determines to make her own way in life. As an independent woman, she is not willing to "gamble" her life away on someone who

does not truly love her. She is confident that she can face life alone before she ends up with a man who does not deserve her love.

Bridget's appealing nature is that she is an independent woman in her thirties who still believes in the idea of true love. According to Salber, Fielding's novels, *Bridget Jones Diary* and its sequel *Bridget Jones: Edge of Reason*

show the tenuous position of women who accept the fact that they must be married to achieve social acceptance. As an observer of contemporary mores, Fielding shows how the problems of a socially mobile youth culture have not really changed in two hundred years. Finding mates in a world where single women outnumber available men is just as important for Bridget's coterie as it was for Elizabeth Bennet's sisters, friends, and acquaintances. (par. 18)

And Salber seems to be right on this account. In the end, Bridget is still a mythic romance heroine looking for a man to love her. Sitcoms like *Sex in the City* and *Friends* show this thirty-something independent, successful woman who has accepted the fact that she may never meet Mr. Right. Just the same, they trip their way through life, trying out relationship after relationship, hoping that love will come along. Jenny Bicks, writer and executive producer of *Sex in the City* says, "Helen Fielding put out there somebody who we'd never head the voice of before. Which was basically all of us. The typical single girl who was completely convinced that she was alone. Before *Bridget Jones* and *Sex in the City* the single woman was a sidekick. And in this case she was not only the lead, she won in the end" (*Bridget Jones' Diary* "Behind the Scenes" featurette). For isn't that what women are looking for when they go to read a romance novel? Yes, they're looking for real-to life characters, but just the same, they expect the heroines to find their love in the end. Real life is not always quite so easy.

But thankfully, Bridget's story is fictional, so she does find her happily ever after. Just as Elizabeth's story began with the search and ended with a wedding, Bridget's story ends when she has found this fulfillment. With Mark Darcy, she finds someone who loves her "just the way she is." The movie adaptation of Fielding's novel makes this point even more explicit. In the following excerpt, it is Bridget who takes the initiative to tell Mark Darcy how she feels:

You once said that you liked me just the way I am and I just wanted to say, likewise. I mean, the stupid things your mom buys you, tonight another classic. You're haughty and you always say the wrong thing in every situation. And I seriously believe that you should rethink the length of your sideburns. But you're a nice man and I like you. So if you wanted to pop by some time that might be nice. More than nice.

Here, Bridget displays her modern independence, by taking the initiative to tell Mark Darcy how she feels. She also invites him to "pop by some time," a forward move that Elizabeth Bennet would never have considered. This shows her strength as a modern woman. Just the same, vulnerability is present in this moment when Bridget admits that she wants Mark Darcy in her life. At this moment, she sets aside her independent nature and admits that she wants a man in her life. With this, she fulfills her role as a romance heroine. She finds her true love.

CONCLUSION

It is intriguing how far romance heroines have come since the days of Elizabeth Bennet. Independent Bridget with her love of cigarettes, alcohol and sex is a far cry from the angel of the house figure. She is anything but virtuous and pure. Just the same, her characterization owes much to 19th century writers such as Jane Austen. The question arises, then, as to where we would be today without Jane Austen? Her legacy can be seen everywhere we turn. It was Austen's portrayal of a realistic female protagonist that helped set a new precedent in literature. This precedent calls for true-to-life portrayals of female characters. With this change, romance heroines are no longer confined to a predictable plot in which they have to sit idly by waiting for their prince to come and rescue them. Instead, they can now take initiative and grow and change throughout their story. While characters such as Elizabeth Bennet meet certain expectations of their society, they also challenge the dominance of certain archetypal qualities through their strengths and weaknesses. As seen with Elizabeth, it is her moments of weaknesses that make her endearing. In those moments where she misjudges or acts rather unpropitious, she comes to life as a character. Instead of remaining as a stock character, her individuality shines through. Elizabeth's unique nature is why we cheer for her success when she finds true love with Darcy in the end. And that is why her story lives on to this day in works such as *Bridget Jones' Diary*. Austen's legacy is a great one. And so, for now, I'll simply give my regards to Jane Austen, who changed the face of the romance heroine.

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