"My Name is Lizzie Bennet": Reading, Participation, and Jane Austen Across Media Platforms

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The Lizzie Bennet Diaries is a digital update of Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, in which Austen's narrative is reimagined for the twenty-first century through its distribution across multiple media platforms. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (hereafter referred to as LBD) is centred on a series of YouTube video diaries by Lizzie Bennet and includes four complementary YouTube channels, thirteen interconnected Twitter feeds, Tumblr posts, Facebook profiles, and numerous social media interactions and 'conversations' between the narrative's characters and its readers.

This poster expands upon existing research conducted as part of a larger, ongoing PhD research project. It will present a visual overview of LBD and the specific modes of participation available to readers during the narrative's initial release in 2012 and 2013 (an important distinction, since the narrative was originally released as a serial story). Drawing from a sample of LBD reader comments on YouTube and Twitter (using MaxQDA to qualitatively code the comments), the poster will explore how readers participated in the LBD narrative and how their participation may have influenced or affected their reading habits. In addition, Aarseth's cybertext theory and McGann's radial reading theory will provide a foundation for discussing LBD's participatory elements in a theoretical context, with an emphasis on discussing how digital media have invited us to revisit and rework those theories.

According to Aarseth, cybertexts such as LBD invite and encourage readers to make deliberate and intentional choices as they navigate through the text, its multiple entry points, and its various narrative paths (1997). As a result, readers actively participate in shaping their individual reading experience. Thus, LBD reader must decide which elements of the narrative to consume, and in which order: does she choose to follow Lizzie on Twitter, but not Darcy? Does she watch Lydia's YouTube videos, or reblog Jane's fashion posts on Tumblr? Each choice leads the reader in a slightly different direction in the narrative, and provides additional information that offers context and meaning to the core series of YouTube videos. The choices made by readers are also indicative of McGann's theory of radial reading, where readers seek out additional information not immediately available in the core text (McGann 1991). The various modes of participation available to LBD readers, as well as the degree of interactivity implied by cybertext theory and radial reading, gives readers an avenue for active engagement with the narrative and helps reinforce the belief that their contributions to the narrative matter. This belief, what Professor Stephen Coleman calls "*the feeling of being counted*, or the affective character of an experience that renders it fulfilling for individuals" (2013), serves to strengthen a reader's engagement with the text.

Using Aarseth and McGann's theories as a foundation, the poster will consider how LBD's modes of participation might strengthen a reader's engagement with and immersion in the text, and whether immersive digital narratives like LBD can encourage engagement with traditional close reading techniques by prompting individuals to read (or re-read) Austen's original *Pride and Prejudice* novel. As Frank Rose, Henry Jenkins and others have pointed out, the Internet has changed readers' expectations from stories and narratives, to the point that many readers of digital narratives now expect some level of participation or interactivity. This poster (and the larger research project) is focused on exploring those participatory elements and their connection to overall digital reading practices.

Bibliography

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