



4-29-2019

# Rewriting Women: A Feminist Examination of Lolita's and Pride and Prejudice's Costume and Revisionist Adaptations

Courtney A. DuChene Ms.  
*Ursinus College*, [coduchene@ursinus.edu](mailto:coduchene@ursinus.edu)

Adviser: Carol Dole  
Second Adviser: Alice Leppert

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/english\\_hon](https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/english_hon)

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

**[Click here to let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)**

---

## Recommended Citation

DuChene, Courtney A. Ms., "Rewriting Women: A Feminist Examination of Lolita's and Pride and Prejudice's Costume and Revisionist Adaptations" (2019). *English Honors Papers*. 10.  
[https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/english\\_hon/10](https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/english_hon/10)

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at Digital Commons @ Ursinus College. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Honors Papers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Ursinus College. For more information, please contact [aprock@ursinus.edu](mailto:aprock@ursinus.edu).

Rewriting Women: A Feminist Examination of  
*Lolita's* and *Pride and Prejudice's* Costume and Revisionist Adaptations

Courtney DuChene

April 21, 2019

Submitted to the Faculty of Ursinus College in fulfillment of the requirements for  
Interdisciplinary Honors in English and Media and Communications Studies.

## Abstract

This project examines costume and revisionist media adaptations of *Lolita* and *Pride and Prejudice* to see how adapters have altered the texts in order to increase the agency of the female characters. It consists of four chapters: one on the 1962 and 1997 cinematic costume adaptations of *Lolita*; one on the 1995 BBC mini series and the 2005 film costume adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*; one on the *Pride and Prejudice* revisionist adaptations, *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) and the 2012-2013 Youtube series *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*; and one on the revisionist film adaptations of *Lolita*, *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* (2015) and *Una* (2016). The texts reflect the choice adapters have made to change the original novels by incorporating some feminist themes, but they ultimately expose the ways in which the media works to contain radical feminism.

## **Introduction**

*Pride and Prejudice* and *Lolita* are two of the most well known texts written in the English language. Their popularity has inspired numerous adaptations and reimaginings. With each subsequent version, the texts are altered to fit the cultural context of the times. One of the major ways adapters update these two families of texts is through their portrayal of women and the agency that the female characters have over their lives. In this project, I will examine costume and revisionist adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Lolita* to see how they update their source texts in order to increase the agency of the female characters in response to audience ideologies and cultural sensibilities. Each of these texts will be examined using adaptation theory, textual analysis, and cultural and historical contexts to see how a variety of factors influence the adapters as they create their own versions of these familiar characters.

## **Adaptation Theory**

Film adaptations of literary texts engage in a process of reinterpretation that brings new meaning to the source material. Adaptation theorist Timothy Corrigan writes that “adaptations should be considered as extended and multiple variations of core myths [and] stories... that accumulate meanings through their numerous social and material incarnations” (30). In this view, film adaptations are taking core stories from the culture and building new meanings into them with each subsequent version. These accumulated meanings build on what existed in the original text while simultaneously imparting new interpretations based on the ways they have altered the original. The relationship between the texts is, therefore, not that of an unalterable source text to which adaptations must remain faithful, but rather two texts that speak to each other over time. The idea that a source text and its adaptations produce new meaning through

their joint dialogue can be understood through Dennis Cutchins' idea of interdetermination which is "the recognition that all texts... are constantly in dialogue with other texts" (75). Consequently, when viewers see a new adaptation of a source text it can change the meaning of the original and, likewise the reputation, criticism, and story of the source text affect a viewer's understanding of the adaptation.

Adaptations often alter their source texts in ways which fit the cultural sensibilities of the current time period and, as a result, they have the ability to reshape the ways in which we understand the original. Adaptations take on their "meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment" and they therefore "cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads" (Bakhtin qtd. in Cutchins 74). In this quote, Mikhail Bakhtin demonstrates that adaptations are not only in dialog with their source texts, but that they are also influenced by the time period and culture that surrounds them during their creation. Twentieth and twenty-first century adaptations can make Jane Austen's proto-feminist themes seem like a greater challenge to patriarchal structures of the time, or they can give their female protagonists complete apparent control over their situations and mask the need for feminism in the first place. Similarly, adapters can choose to accept Humbert's depiction of Lolita as a sexually promiscuous 12-year-old or they can search for her voice within the original text and translate her pain onto the screen.

Costume adaptations, which are bound to the period, characters, perspective, and storyline of the original text, must look for creative ways to update novels whose values differ from those of twentieth and twenty-first century audiences. Part of this fidelity to the source text is the result of the fact that costume adaptations are meant to be direct interpretations of the originals and,

consequently, audiences expect to see few changes. Another reason for this emphasis on fidelity to the source text, however, results from the potential for feminist gains to be undermined within the texts by a revising of history. Austen critic Rebecca Dickson writes about the dangers of representing Jane Austen's female heroines as having more agency than was actually available to them in costume drama adaptations. She notes that films can "[mislead] viewers about the nature of women's roles in the early nineteenth century" and goes on to describe how that undermines the beginnings of the feminist movement (Dickson 45). In other words, if costume adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* make it seem like Elizabeth Bennet has complete agency over her life they run the risk of making it seem as though the feminist movement was unnecessary. Similarly, if *Lolita* costume adaptations make it seem like Lolita has control over her sexual relationship of Humbert Humbert, they run the risk of diminishing the role sexual abuse plays in the lives of women. Adapters, therefore, who are updating these texts to appeal to modern women who have more control over their lives, must be sure to balance a desire to increase the female characters' agency with the reality of their historical situations.

Revisionist adaptations, on the other hand, can change and produce new meanings of the texts by updating the time period and changing the perspective to give the female characters more of a voice. In his essay "Revisionist Adaptation: Transtextuality, Cross-Cultural Dialogism, and Performative Infidelities" Robert Stam explains how revisionist adaptations have the power to "dramatically transform and revitalize their source texts through provocative changes in locale, epoch, casting, genre, perspective, performance modes, or production processes" (239). This radical transformation of source texts allows adapters to reinterpret the themes of the original stories and update them for more modern cultural and political sensibilities.

Additionally, revisionist adaptations can manipulate the perspectives of the text in order to retell the story from another character's point-of-view. While *Pride and Prejudice* revisionist adaptations have used diary formats to center the female protagonists' voices, this is not a far cry from Austen's novel which, though written in the third person, hardly strays from Lizzy's perspective. *Lolita* revisions have much more to gain, therefore, because they often shift the perspective from that of Humbert Humbert to Lolita herself. As a result of this shift, the texts are more fully able to grapple with both the damage Humbert inflicted on Lolita as a result of his sexual abuse and the amount of agency, if any, she had in their relationship.

### **The Texts**

This project will examine costume and revisionist adaptations of both Jane Austen's 1813 novel *Pride and Prejudice* and Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel *Lolita*. The first chapter, will analyze the two existing costume adaptations of *Lolita* directed by Stanley Kubrick in 1962 and Adrian Lyne in 1997. After analyzing the *Lolita* costume adaptations, the project will then turn to *Pride and Prejudice* costume and revisionist adaptations. Chapter two will consider the 1995 BBC mini-series adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* as well as the 2005 film adaptation directed by Joe Wright, as they are two of the most popular of several adaptations.

For revisionist adaptations, chapter three will examine how postfeminist media sensibility affected two revisionist adaptations of Austen's novel: the 2001 film *Bridget Jones's Diary* which is based on the 1996 novel of the same name, and the 2012-2013 YouTube series *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Among the many revisionist *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations, these two were selected due to the fact that they remain set in a Western culture and update the story of the novel for the twenty-first century. The fourth chapter will then look at revisionist adaptations of

*Lolita* that depict the story from her point-of-view and which began emerging in the 1990s and have seen renewed interest in the 2010s. This project will examine the only two of these texts which have been adapted into film: 2016's *Una*, which is based on David Harrower's 2005 play *Blackbird*, and *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*, a 2015 film based on Phoebe Gloeckner's 2002 graphic novel.

While these may seem like unlikely texts to study in conjunction, the female characters in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Lolita* experience a lack of control over their lives due to decisions made by men. Due to nineteenth century, patriarchal values, the women of *Pride and Prejudice* have little real or apparent control over their lives. Fathers, brothers, or husbands controlled their financial security and women had little voice in matters outside of the home. The only form of control women during that time period had was the ability to accept or reject a marriage proposal and even that small amount of control over one's future could be undermined if a father or brother forced her to change her answer. This lack of control over their lives causes real consequences for the Bennet daughters because their father mismanaged their money and, as a result, they must marry in order to have any sense of financial stability. Humbert Humbert has a similar all-encompassing control over Lolita. As her legal guardian, Humbert controls Lolita's housing situation, her education, and the financial assets her mother left to her. This total control over her life allows him to constantly move her across the country and prevent her from going to school so that he can continue his abuse of her. Even after Lolita escapes from him, she has to write to him to get permission to access the inheritance her mother left her.

Despite the fact that these female characters have little control over their lives, many of them take action to increase their agency over their situations. Elizabeth Bennet refuses two marriage

proposals over the course of *Pride and Prejudice*. Lolita manipulates Humbert Humbert until she has the opportunity to run away from his abuse. The ways these characters defy the men who control their lives provides adapters with the potential to impart new meanings on their source texts by increasing the agency of the female characters. They can manipulate the perspectives, plots, and characters of the originals to produce texts with alternative, feminist readings.

Furthermore, these two families of texts explore how patriarchy is oppressive in either abusive or ordinary situations, and therefore the project will allow me to examine how female characters are able to find agency for themselves in both their everyday lives and in cases of extreme abuse. The story of *Lolita* is a story of both extreme abuse and supreme control. After he assumes the role of her legal guardian after the death of her mother, Humbert Humbert becomes the ultimate ruler of Lolita's life. He has unmonitored access to her every night and he pulls her out of school and forces them to move whenever he thinks that an outsider suspects that he is abusing Lolita. The Bennet sisters in *Pride and Prejudice*, on the other hand, do not experience a lack of control over their futures due to the extreme abuse of the men in their lives, and consequently the novel depicts the ways in which patriarchy manifests itself in the lives of ordinary women. This is especially true of the revisionist adaptations which remove many of the more overt forms of patriarchal oppression due to their modern settings.

Both costume and revisionist adaptations of these novels were made during the 1990s, the 2000s, and the early 2010s, and they therefore responded to the demands of similar audiences. In 1995, BBC aired its costume adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in a six-part miniseries and a 2005 film adaptation directed by Joe Wright soon followed. Similarly, *Lolita* returned to the screen in Adrian Lyne's 1997 film after Kubrick's 1962 version failed to capture the complexity

of the novel. Revisionist adaptations of both texts followed with the 1996 novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* and its 2001 film which famously rips the plot of Austen's novel and sets it in 1995 London. A slew of print, drama, and media revisionist adaptations of *Lolita* appeared in the 1990s and early 2000s in response to a widespread cultural panic around child sex predators. The mid to early 2010s also saw a renewed fixation on both texts with the films *Una* and *Diary of a Teenage Girl* bringing *Lolita* back to popular attention in 2016 and 2015 respectively. Likewise, *Pride and Prejudice* found itself adapted into the Emmy award-winning YouTube series *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* from 2012-2013. The fact that many of these adaptations arose during similar times means that they had to respond to similar ideologies and cultural sensibilities. Both costume and revisionist adaptations of *Lolita* and *Pride and Prejudice* made during these time periods would have to respond to postfeminism's relegation of sexism to a thing of the past, women's increasing control over their lives, and the media's renewed sexualization of women and girls.

### **Cultural and Historical Contexts**

The 1990s saw an increase in women's control over their bodies, financial circumstances, and voices and, therefore, adaptations of these texts must respond to those changes in cultural norms. By the 1990s and early 2000s, many more women were employed than in previous decades. According to the United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics report, 76.3 percent of women aged 25 to 34 were employed in 1998 as compared to 34 percent in 1950 ("Changes in women's labor force participation in the 20th century"). Furthermore, women were increasingly speaking out against workplace sexual harassment. Inspired by Anita Hill's allegations against then-Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas, "many women... came

forward with accusations against [sexual] harassers” (Serrienne 212). The 1990s also brought an increased advocacy for women’s reproductive rights. In the spring of 1992, there was “a massive pro-choice demonstration in Washington... [and] the birth of dramatically effective feminist PACs like Emily’s List” (Fauldi qtd. in Serrienne 197). Despite women’s increasing vocalization about these issues, there was not a lot of government or legal action and “cases [advocating for women’s rights] that came to trial did not inspire hope that progress could be made through the courts” (Serrienne 197).

While 90s women were using public discourse as a means to advocate for themselves, media culture was also saturated with the postfeminist sensibility that continues to reinscribe women back into the patriarchy’s predetermined roles through emphasizing individualization and de-emphasizing collective political action. In her essay “Post-feminism and popular culture,” media critic Angela McRobbie argues “that post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism... to suggest that equality is achieved... [and to] emphasize that it is no longer needed” (255). As a result, postfeminism creates a “double entanglement” which results in “the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life... with processes of liberalisation in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations” (McRobbie 255-256). The postfeminist sensibility emphasizes women's ability to have careers and to control their sexuality. However, it also focuses on their heterosexuality and emphasizes heterosexual romance. The postfeminist sensibility also downplays collective feminist action in favor of individualism. Media critic Rosalind Gill notes that “a focus on individualism, choice, and empowerment” is a key characteristic of the postfeminist sensibility (149). This emphasis of individualization as a source of empowerment allows postfeminism to

suggest that personal choices create female empowerment rather than collective actions where women advocate for both themselves and each other.

As a result of this emphasis on individualization, a new type of sexually available woman emerged in the media who supposedly used sex as a cite of female empowerment. This form of feminist representation has been dubbed “do-me” feminism. According to L.S. Kim, the “do-me” feminist figure is characterized by “a sense of power and liberation from her sexual difference” (Kim qtd. in Genz 107). Additionally, she “rejects the concept of group oppression and subjugation and instead she favors and valorizes individual effort and choice” (Genz 107). The figure of the “do-me” feminist, therefore, embodies the double entanglement of postfeminism by portraying an essentially conservative representation of a woman who uses sex as a form of power over men as a figure of female empowerment because she also emphasizes feminist choice. This portrayal of feminism as a site for female sexuality leads to an increase in women appearing partially clothed in advertisements and in the media. Angela McRobbie identifies how this works in media culture when she writes, “the composition of... [these types of] image[s] [have] such a textbook ‘sexist ad’ dimension that one could be forgiven for supposing some familiarity with... feminist critiques of advertising” and that the ads take “feminism into account by... provocatively enacting sexism” (McRobbie 258). By positioning sexualized ads as a source of empowerment, rather than objectification, advertising practices were able to continue positioning women as an object of the male gaze.

The increased sexualization of young women in the media, however, also contributed to the child sexual predator panic of the 1990s. During the 1990s, there was an increase in media discourse and legislation surrounding child sex offenders. This movement started in the 1980s

and by 1990 there were 85,000 pedophiles in American prisons which was a “47 percent increase in just three years” (Jenkins 190). This increase resulted from an “overwhelming public pressure to do something about sex offenders, to increase penalties and intensify incarceration and supervision of criminals for whom treatment was futile” (Jenkins 191). This increase in attention toward child sex offenders also led to more critiques of the ways in which the media sexualizes young women and girls. Journalism and Mass Communications scholar M. Gigi Durham tellingly dubbed this phenomenon “the Lolita effect” which she defines as “a widespread cultural shift” in which “very young girls are becoming involved in a sphere of fashion, images, and activities that encourage them to flirt with a decidedly grown-up eroticism and sexuality” (Durham 21). The increase in fear about child sexual predation, coupled with an increased sexualization of girls, exemplifies the same issue adapters face when creating depictions of Lolita. Is she a sexually promiscuous child or an abused child? The fact that both these representations of children occurred in the 1990s explains the presence of costume adaptations and the boom of revisionist adaptations of the novel during the time.

### **Project Overview**

The first chapter of the project will look at the 1962 and the 1997 costume adaptations of *Lolita* in order to examine how both the novel and the films use Humbert Humbert’s perspective to portray Lolita. I will argue that while Nabokov’s novel allows the reader to glimpse Lolita’s perspective and show the damage the abuse has done to her, the two existing costume adaptations of the novel diminish Lolita’s pain by either downplaying the sexual abuse, as Stanley Kubrick’s 1962 adaptation does, or through endorsing Humbert Humbert’s portrayal of her as a sexually manipulative nymphet, as is seen in Adrian Lyne’s 1997 adaptation. This

depiction leaves the character of Lolita voiceless and, as a result, a call rose for revisionist adaptations that retell the story from her point-of-view.

The second chapter will consider how the 1995 BBC mini series and the 2005 film costume adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* alter their historical settings in order to appeal an increasingly independent late twentieth and early twenty-first century audience. As a result, the *Pride and Prejudice* costume adaptations will have to address the more overt forms of oppression in their stories in a way that appeals to a female audience that has been liberated from many of the visible forms of patriarchy. The films consequently employ different strategies in order to make their female protagonists seem more liberated. In the case of the BBC mini-series, added scenes between the female characters emphasize the ways in which sisterhood can make space for women's interiority. The 2005 film adaptation, on the other hand, emphasizes the apparent agency of the female characters through focusing on the novel's romance plot.

Chapter three will consider revisionist adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* in order to demonstrate the ways in which the postfeminist media sensibility worked to re-inscribe women into the patriarchy. Unlike the female characters in *Una* and *Diary of a Teenage Girl*, the protagonists of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* do not experience as many overt forms of patriarchal oppression. The protagonists are independent, they have careers, and they have agency in their romantic lives. In the attempt to portray women as unencumbered by the patriarchy, however, these texts expose a desire for collective forms of feminism that would allow them to address the ways in which sexism still persists.

The final chapter examines two revisionist film adaptations of *Lolita* that portray the story from her perspective: *Diary of a Teenage Girl* and *Una*. These adaptations, which are both based

on source texts from 2002 and 2005 respectively in addition to *Lolita*, are both influenced by the child-sex panic of the 1990s and early 2000s and do-me feminism. As a result of these influences, *Una* portrays its Lolita-character as a victim while *Diary of a Teenage Girl* depicts its female protagonist as being in control of her relationships. While each of these depictions portrays an extreme, it signals a discontent overall with the ways men tell women's stories and highlights the ways feminism continued to find a space within media discourse.

## Works Cited

- “Changes in women’s labor force participation in the 20th century.” *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, Feb. 16, 2000, <https://www.bls.gov/opus/2000/feb/wk3/art03.htm>. Accessed 10 April 2019.
- Corrigan, Timothy. “Defining Adaptation.” *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, edited by Thomas Leitch, Oxford University Press 2017. pp. 23-35.
- Cutchins, Dennis. “Bakhtin, Intertextuality, and Adaptation.” *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, edited by Thomas Leitch, Oxford University Press 2017. pp. 71-86.
- Dickson, Rebecca. “Misrepresenting Jane Austen’s Ladies: Revising Texts (and History) to Sell Films.” *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, edited by Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, University Press of Kentucky, 2001, pp. 44-57
- Durham, M. Gigi. “Introduction: Sexy Girls in the Media.” *The Lolita Effect*, The Overlook Press, 2008. pp. 21-41.
- Genz, Stéphanie. "Singled Out: Postfeminism's 'New Woman' and the Dilemma of having it all." *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2010, pp. 97-119. *ProQuest*, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/53341645?accountid=26986>, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2010.00732.x>.
- Gill, Rosalind. “Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a Sensibility.” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 10 no. 2, May 29, 2007, pp. 147-166.
- Jenkins, Phillip. “Full Circle: The Return of the Child Sexual Predator in the 1990s.” *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America*, Yale University Press, 1998, pp. 189–214. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hk0vf.13](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hk0vf.13). Accessed 10 April 2019.
- McRobbie, Angela. “Post-Feminism and Popular Culture.” *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 4 no. 3 2004, pp. 255-264.
- Stam, Robert. “Revisionist Adaptation: Transtextuality, Cross-Cultural Dialogism, and Performative Infidelities.” *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, edited by Thomas Leitch, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 239-250.
- Serrienne, Nina Esperanza. “LGBT and Women’s Rights.” *America in the Nineties*, Syracuse University Press, 2015, pp. 197–235. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1j1nt2w.14](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1j1nt2w.14). Accessed 10 April 2019.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

“How did they ever make a movie of Lolita?” This question was asked on the posters for Stanley Kubrick’s 1962 adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov’s famously controversial 1955 novel. While this question was surely a tease to the well known story of Humbert Humbert, a man who is sexually obsessed with young girls, it is also a practical question for filmmakers. How can adapters of the novel replicate Humbert Humbert’s seductive, highly comic and sympathetic first person perspective using the objective camera? Furthermore, how can they recreate Nabokov’s portrayal of Humbert Humbert and still maintain the condemnation of pedophilia that audiences both in the 60s and in the 90s, when Adrian Lyne produced his film version of the novel, would have expected? While the 1962 and 1997 cinematic adaptations do not merely reproduce Humbert Humbert’s fantasy of Lolita as a sexually promiscuous nymphet, the films still fail to capture Nabokov’s complex portrait of her interiority due to their reliance on Humbert’s perspective and their need to appease either the Production Code of classical Hollywood, in Kubrick’s case, or 1990s child pornography laws, in Lyne’s case. As a result, of these approaches both of these films fail to fully empathize with the pains of child sexual abuse and they reinforce patriarchal depictions of young girls as irresistibly sexy.

In order to appease both the Production Code and the audience tastes the Code developed, Stanley Kubrick’s 1962 adaptation focuses on the rivalry between Humbert Humbert and Clare Quilty, the playwright who eventually steals Lo from him. Consequently, the adaptation downplays the novel’s sexual abuse and presents Lolita as one-dimensional. Adrian Lyne, on the other hand, produces an inconsistent characterization of Lolita where she appears as

both a seductive temptress and an abused child at different points in the film. While these depictions are inconsistent with one another, they were in line with the United States' growing awareness and condemnation of child abuse in the 1990s and the novel's scandalous, sexy reputation.

Adapters of *Lolita* have to contend with condensing the novel's massive plot into the length of a typical film. When Nabokov was first assigned to write a draft for a *Lolita* screenplay, he wrote nearly 400 pages and Stanley Kubrick told him that it "would take about seven hours to run" (Connolly, "Lolita's Afterlife" 159). The length of this draft is indicative of just how much content Nabokov's novel contained. *Lolita* features two road trips across America; a complicated detective-style plot as readers attempt to trace Humbert's references to Clare Quilty, a playwright who is stalking Humbert and Lolita and who will eventually steal her from Hum; Humbert's sprawling backstory in Europe; his relationship with Mrs. Haze, Lolita's mother; his taxonomic fascination with nymphets; and his relationship with Lolita. Nearly all of these elements could be a film on their own. As a result, filmmakers attempting to adapt the novel must make strategic decisions about what to include and what to leave out. These decisions, however, can drastically change the contents of the story. If adapters focus on the relationship between Humbert and Quilty, for example, the film could be more of a detective story. This leaves the potential for adapters to either emphasize or ignore Lolita's portrayal when they select what to include and what to exclude.

One of the primary problems filmmakers face when adapting *Lolita* is how to translate Humbert Humbert's seductive, first person narration to the more objective perspective of the screen. *Lolita* is written almost entirely from the highly playful perspective of the erudite

professor and pedophile Humbert Humbert. Throughout the novel, Humbert's voice weaves allusions, language games, and parodies through his telling of his relationship with Lolita. When he introduces his history with Annabel, the girl he was in love with as a boy, for example, he writes that they met "in a principedom by the sea" (Nabokov 9). This line and the character's name, Annabel Leigh, set up a string of 22 allusions to Poe and his poem "Annabel Lee" which the reader can follow throughout the novel (Appel in Nabokov 330 n 9/2). Scholars have written extensively about the seductive, playful quality of Humbert's voice. Literary scholar Barbara Straumann even described the book as "first and foremost a text about the erotics of language" (87). These games showcase Humbert's at times playful attitudes towards his pedophilic actions and the seductive nature of his voice allows him to paint the girls he desires as "demoniac... nymphets," rather than children (Nabokov 16). In the novel, this playful voice works because it is clearly a subjective, first-person perspective which readers can clearly distinguish from an objective point of view.

This same perspective is impossible to achieve in cinema due to the objective role of the camera. In his work "The Creative Camera," film theorist Béla Balázs writes "what we see on the screen is a photograph... it was not created on the screen as a painting is created on the canvas but was already previously existent and visible in reality" (126). What Balázs articulates in this sentence underscores an important point about the way viewers perceive cinema. For audiences, what happens before the camera, whether fictional or documentary, is seen as objective rather than subjective. In other words, it is portraying the events that unfold from the gaze of the camera rather than from a particular character's subjective worldview. Humbert's first person perspective is, therefore, impossible to replicate in cinema.

The sexual relationship between Lolita and Humbert Humbert is particularly difficult for filmmakers to portray because Humbert Humbert's seductive narration paints Lolita as an all encompassing seductress. He describes Lolita, and all nymphets, as possessing "perilous magic" throughout the novel, he accuses her of being the one "who seduced" him after their night at the Enchanted Hunters hotel, and he claims that he "was not even her first lover" (Nabokov 134 132 135). This view of Lolita poses a problem for filmmakers because, if they work from Humbert's perspective as the novel does, they are in danger of presenting an objective viewpoint of a hyper-sexualized 12-year-old child to the audience. This is problematic for filmmakers because audiences, who rightfully condemn pedophilia, would not have accepted this objective viewpoint. Additionally, presenting Lolita as objectively sexualized obscures the way Humbert's fantasy is juxtaposed against his monstrous deeds in the novel.

This same problem does not occur in the novel because Nabokov manipulates Humbert Humbert's position as an unreliable narrator in order to expose Lolita's perspective on her situation and force the audience to critique what they're consuming. In the chapter "Who Was Dolly Haze?" from the book, *A Reader's Guide to Nabokov's Lolita* asserts that *Lolita* isn't really about the girl at all but is rather about "the obsessive dream of Lolita which captured the actual child and took her away" (Wood qtd. in Connolly, "Who Was Dolly Haze?" 53). The idea that Lolita's character is largely a fantasy conjured by Humbert is exposed throughout the novel by the multiple versions of her that Humbert puts forward. From the opening lines he describes her as "Lo, plain Lo, in the morning," "Lola in slacks," "Dolly at school," and Lolita "in [his] arms" (Nabokov 9). Additionally, Lolita is characterized differently based on Humbert's moods and through the perspectives of other characters. During one of their fights he describes her as "any

vulgar, untidy high school girl” but after they make up she becomes “a very good little girl” for using French and an “adorable school-girl” (Nabokov 204 207). Similarly, Lo’s mother, Mrs. Haze describes her as “ill mannered” and “homely,” whereas Humbert views her as a “fairy princess” and “beautiful, beautiful, beautiful” (Nabokov 51 65 52 40). This exposes the fact that Humbert’s perspective is not always reliable to the reader.

Humbert’s position as an unreliable narrator draws attention to the ways his version of events differs from Lolita’s. A close reading of the ways they discuss sex, for example, highlights the fact that she may not be as sexually experienced as Humbert leads the reader to believe. When she supposedly seduces him, for example, she says “you never--” and “you never did it when you were a kid” (Nabokov 133). This vague language is a far cry from how Humbert believes Lolita understands sex and her preparedness for it. In his narrative of the events, he tells the reader that Lolita and the other girl “copulated” with Charlie Holmes, the camp mistress’ son (Nabokov 137). The use of “copulated” in this section is of particular interest because of the ways it differs from Lolita’s direct speech. “Copulated” has clear and direct sexual implications whereas Lolita’s “did it” could be kissing or fondling rather than sexual intercourse. Additionally, it is hard to imagine that Lolita, who the reader is told is obsessed with pop culture, celebrities, and slang, would use a word that sounds so technical to describe her activities. A comparison of Lolita’s direct voice with Humbert’s narration therefore reveals that she likely implied an encounter between Charlie and herself which Humbert extrapolated to mean sexual intercourse in order to fit his corrupt fantasy.

As a result of these discrepancies, scholars have warned against the dangers of relying on Humbert’s voice and have encouraged a search for Lolita’s perspective which the adaptations are

in danger of obscuring. Early reviewers were often caught up in the voice of Humbert Humbert. In his 1958 review for the *Atlantic*, Charles Rolo wrote that “above all *Lolita* seems to me an assertion of the power of the comic spirit to wrest delight and truth from the most outlandish materials” and another review called it “just about the funniest book I remember having read” (Hollander qtd. in Connolly, “*Lolita’s Afterlife*” 142). Both of these reviews, which praised the book’s humor also noted that *Lolita* was “depraved” or that she did not deserve the reader’s sympathy (Rolo). In their appreciation of the book’s humor, however, early reviewers became drawn into Humbert’s seductive voice and, consequently, they accepted his version of *Lolita* as the whole truth. One reviewer wrote that *Lolita* was “a dreadful little creature, selfish, hard, vulgar, and foul-tempered” (Parker qtd. in Connolly, “Who Was Dolly Haze?” 54). This seductive quality of the first-person narration caused later scholars, such as literary scholar Linda Kauffman, to emphasize that “it is up to the feminist critic to ‘resist [Humbert’s] seductions’” and to “[dismantle] the misogyny of traditional critical assessments of *Lolita’s* wantonness” (Kauffman qtd. in Connolly, “*Lolita’s Afterlife*” 152). In order to break down *Lolita’s* misogynistic portrayal, readers have to understand that Humbert’s perspective is a subjective fantasy rather than an objective viewpoint. It is only through a close examination of the discrepancies in his narration that her perspective can be found. This same close examination cannot exist in film adaptations of the text which must present a version of the novel’s events that is objective.

While Connolly refers to this search for *Lolita’s* thoughts and emotions as a quest for the “real” or “authentic child,” this language is unsuitable because the novel deals with fictional characters rather than real people (“Who Was Dolly Haze?” 55, 53). There is no real *Lolita* just

as there is no real Humbert. They are both characters constructed by Nabokov's imagination. Nabokov's prose, however, seemingly anticipated the problem critics would encounter when writing about Lolita's subjectivity and he worked into his prose a method that can be used to discuss the discrepancy between Humbert's fantasy of Lolita and the character's own emotions and identity. The opening lines where Humbert details all the different versions of Lo and gives them different names can also be used to differentiate his fantasy depiction from the way Lolita, as her own character, thinks and feels about her situation. In this essay, I will use her legal name "Dolores" or "Dolores Haze" when referring to moments in the text and its adaptations when I believe Humbert's perspective gives away her emotions and feelings rather than his fantasy. Lolita and Lo will, consequently, be reserved for talking about Humbert's nymphet fantasy of the character. The decision to use Dolores for talking about what Connolly calls the real Lolita was based on the fact that, in the opening of the novel, the only name Humbert does not prescribe a specific attribute to is Dolores. He says only that she is "Dolores on the dotted line," meaning that it is her legal name (Nabokov 9). Additionally, in his annotations Appel notes that Dolores is derived from the Latin noun meaning sorrow and pain: "dolor, doloris" (Appel qtd. in Nabokov 332 n 9/5). This also makes Dolores a fitting name for discussing where Lolita's true emotions can be found in the text and its adaptations. When referring to the equally subjective versions of the character of Lolita constructed by the filmmakers Lyne and Kubrick, I will use Kubrick's Lolita and Lyne's Lolita, respectively. This language will allow the essay to clearly differentiate between the filmmaker's, Humbert's, the other characters' perspectives, and Dolores' own identity as a character.

Since filmmakers cannot reproduce this complex critique using a first-person narrative due to the objective nature of the camera, they will out of necessity have to produce their own subjective versions of the character Lolita. In this essay, I will explore how the 1962 Kubrick adaptation and the 1997 Lyne adaptation create their versions of Lolita in conjunction with audience expectations at the time. In the Kubrick version, I will discuss how Code-Era audience expectations caused him to exclude much of the novel's sexual content and he, therefore, had to focus more on Humbert and Quilty's relationship rather than Humbert and Lolita's. This led Kubrick's version of the character Lolita to read as more one-dimensional. In Lyne's version, I will discuss how he tries to balance a depiction of the abuse Dolores Haze suffered with Humbert's fantasy of Lolita the nymphet and will analyze how his camera further sexualizes his version of the character. These two opposing versions of Lolita are responding to different audience expectations of their times. The first is that Lyne, a filmmaker known for his sexy films, such as *Flashdance* and *Fatal Attraction*, would obviously make a highly sexualized adaptation of this famously scandalous novel. The other expectation he had to contend with was the growing awareness of child abuse in the 1990s, which led to an even stronger condemnation of child sexual abuse in the U.S. and a new wave of legislation to prevent child pornography.

### **1962 Kubrick Adaptation**

Kubrick chooses to do away with many aspects of Nabokov's Dolores Haze in order to meet the expectations of audiences who were used to the strict rules of the Production Code. From roughly 1934-1955 American studio films were overseen by Joseph Breen, who enforced the Production Code. The Code, which sought to protect Americans from the influence of morally objectionable films, was particularly strict about sexual content. Under the Code, the

American film industry underwent a “desexualization of its atmosphere, language and bodies” (Doherty 337). Hollywood’s costumes became more conservative, according to Thomas Doherty, and sex, especially the kind of scandalous abuse of *Lolita*, was unacceptable. While the Code remained strong for many years it began to decline after Breen’s tenure ended. When Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* was made in 1960, many considered that the end of the Code’s strict control over Hollywood; however, the Code was still officially enforced until 1968. While *Lolita* was made in 1962, remnants of the stricter Code era can still be seen in Kubrick’s adaptation. Kubrick, for example, removes much of the film’s sexual content and reduces it to implication. Instead of the kiss that appears in the novel when Lolita says to Humbert “you haven’t kissed me yet” in the car, the film simply cuts to the car speeding away which implies, rather than visualizes, Humbert’s desire for her.

The Code also meant that the scenes before, during, and after their stay at the Enchanted Hunters hotel had to be removed or extensively revised due to their explicit content. In the book, the scenes at the Enchanted Hunters hotel are critical because they feature the beginning of Humbert’s sexual abuse of Lolita and the novel’s most explicit sex scenes. Due to the constraints of the Production Code, Kubrick’s version of the Enchanted Hunter’s sequence is reduced to a humorous bit where Humbert tries to set up a fold-up bed so that he doesn’t have to share the provided hotel bed with Lolita, a short conversation about her sexually suggestive camp games, and a shot of Lolita whispering in Humbert’s ear. Afterwards, it is implied they have sex only by her suggestion that they tell her mother to get a rise out of her. In the scene after they leave the hotel, lines of dialogue from the novel, such as the accusation that Humbert “had torn something inside her,” are replaced in the film with small talk about the blarney stone, a dead cat, and what

Lolita and Humbert should eat for lunch (Nabokov 141). This new dialogue deemphasizes Humbert's abuse of Lolita and reduces the novel's sexual abuse to innuendo.

In the novel, these scenes provided key moments where Dolores' perspective was able to be seen through the discrepancies in Humbert's narration. A close examination of both Humbert's prose in the scenes at the Enchanted Hunters hotel reveals that she is not as sexually experienced as Humbert leads the reader to believe. In his prose, Humbert admits there are gaps between his idea of sex and hers and he says that "she was not quite prepared" for these differences and that he eventually had to take over when he could no longer "bear" her clumsy maneuvers (Nabokov 134). Later, when he reflects on how he would create a painting for the Enchanted Hunters Hotel, he notes that, amongst other sexually suggestive imagery including a "last throb," he would include a "wincing child" (Nabokov 135). In these moments, Humbert hints at the idea that Lolita may not have understood sex, that she may have been a virgin before their encounter, and that sex may have been painful for her. Due to the fact that these moments are not included in Kubrick's film the audience is less able to grasp the nature of the abuse Kubrick's Lolita experienced.

Kubrick also removed one of the key tools readers had to access Dolores' point of view during the Enchanted Hunter's scenes: her dialogue. In the novel, Dolores' dialogue is the only direct tool the reader has to access her point-of-view and it indicates both that she was not ready for sex and that her understanding of it was different from Humbert's. In the novel, the car ride after their stay at the Enchanted Hunters hotel, features dialogue in which Dolores tells Humbert Humbert that she "was a daisy-fresh girl" before their night together and that she "ought to call the police and tell them you raped me" (Nabokov 141). These lines suggest that Dolores felt that

she was a virgin before her encounter with Humbert and that she did not want to have sex with him. This interpretation of her dialogue is further supported by the instances where she rebuffs Humbert's advances saying "don't drool on me" and "you dirty man" when he tries to kiss her neck (Nabokov 115). All of these lines, which Kubrick removed from his adaptation, highlight the fact that Dolores was being abused by Humbert Humbert. By removing these critical lines, Kubrick removes Dolores' specific accusations of sexual abuse and instead makes it seem as if his Lolita really did seduce Humbert.

In addition to changing her dialogue, Kubrick also changed the age his Lolita and makes it seem as if she was just as interested in Humbert as he was in her. Rather than a 12-year-old the film casts Sue Lyon, who was 15 and "looked a few years older" (Connelly, "Lolita's Afterlife" 162). By casting an older looking girl, Kubrick removes much of Humbert's pedophilic obsession and instead leaves him as a man in love. Lolita's actions also make it seem as if she was just as interested in Humbert. In the scene where she leaves for camp, Kubrick's Lolita embraces Humbert as the music swells and she tells him "don't forget me." In another scene, she makes Humbert promise to never leave her in a home for "juvenile delinquents" as he holds her and she cries. These scenes suggest that their relationship is not one of sexual abuse, but is instead a consensual romance.

The more consensual nature of Humbert and Lolita's relationship in the 1962 adaptation was largely due to the constraints placed on Kubrick by the Code. The first draft of the screenplay for Kubrick's adaptation, which was written in 1959 by Calder Willingham, was heavily constrained "constrained... so gravely [by the Code]... that [the writer] contemplated an eventual marriage between the nymphet and her insatiate pursuer" (Trubikhina 143). Kubrick

rejected this addition and asked Nabokov to consider joining the project to maintain the novel's character. Even with Nabokov as a screenwriter, the film was still constrained by the Code and Kubrick even said that he "wasn't able to give any weight... to the erotic aspect" of their relationship (Connolly, "Lolita's Afterlife" 162). As a result, Kubrick said that he believed that in the film "[Humbert's] sexual obsession... was assumed too quickly" to be love (Connolly, "Lolita's Afterlife" 162). While the Code played a large role in many of Kubrick's alterations, they also lead to a removal of any hint of Dolores' perspective on the abuse that existed in the novel.

By aging Lolita and removing much of the novel's sexual content, the film diminishes the role Humbert's abuse played in the life of Kubrick's Lolita. Aging Lolita and making her relationship with Humbert more consensual makes her seem more independent and, therefore, Humbert seems to have less control over her life. When Humbert is quizzing her about her after school activities after their move to Ramsdale, for example, he seems less like a controlling and abusive predator and more like an underappreciated lover. As he asks Lolita to account for her absences, for example, he lists everything he does for her including buying things, cooking, and cleaning. In the novel, these things are used as bribes for sexual favors, and therefore, serve as an extension of the sexual abuse. In the film, however, these references to abuse are gone and Humbert seems to be doing these tasks purely out of love for her. Lolita remains ungrateful towards his kindness throughout the scene as she flirts with him and refuses to spend time with him. This portrayal of Humbert as a servant at the mercy of an ungrateful Lolita is aided by the action-- Humbert painting her toenails-- that takes place during the scene. This task has Humbert literally on his knees while he serves her and Lolita proves her ungratefulness when she runs out

of the room and Humbert yells after her, “and don’t smudge your toenails.” This line shows that, rather than being controlled by Humbert, Lolita has manipulated him into serving her.

Given that Kubrick reduces many of the scenes of abuse to innuendo and removes any mention of the pain Lolita feels, the audiences would not have seen her as a sympathetic character. One reviewer from the time described her as both a “shallow, heartless girl” (Crowther, “Screen: Lolita”), as “a vicious little tease” (Crowther, “Girls Will Be Girls”) in two separate reviews. This transformation of Nabokov’s more sympathetic Lolita to Kubrick’s self-involved one is most clearly seen in the scene in the hotel after Lolita learns that her mother has died and that she is at the mercy of Humbert. Nabokov’s rendering of this scene is harrowing. He writes only two sentences: “in the middle of the night she came sobbing into [my room] and we made it up very gently. You see, she had absolutely nowhere else to go” (Nabokov 142). While Lolita still cries in Kubrick’s version, the sense of dread found in the “nowhere else to go” line is gone and is instead replaced by superficial concerns such as what will happen to her records when they move to Ramsdale. Additionally, Lolita does not seem trapped with Humbert in this scene due to the fact that she asks him to stay with her and says “I’d rather be with you.” This scene, therefore, removes the dread that is present in Nabokov’s novel and replaces it with dialogue that reinforces the idea that Kubrick’s Lolita is a selfish brat who did not care about her mother. The annoyingness of her character is aided by the “wa-wa-wa-wa” musical motif that accompanies shots of Lolita throughout the film. The tone of the singer’s voice in this is rather high pitched and its repetitive nature can be grating. Additionally, the popular style of this musical cue reinforces the idea that Lolita has only superficial concerns. By pairing her with this musical motif frequently, Kubrick is signalling to the audience that, like the

song, Lolita is superficial and annoying. By removing references to the abuse, he leaves the audience with no reason to feel sympathy for her.

As a result of the annoying characterizations Kubrick gave his Lolita, the film aligns more easily with the perspective of Humbert Humbert and his rivalry with Clare Quilty. In a major departure from the novel, the film opens with Humbert's murder of Quilty rather than Humbert's description of his obsession with nymphets or Dr. Ray's forward. By placing this bizarre scene at the forefront, Kubrick's adaptation suggests that it is the relationship between Humbert and Quilty rather than the one between Humbert and Lolita that the audience should be paying attention to. His dramatic opening primes viewers for the references to Quilty throughout the film and heightens their awareness of him as a rival to Humbert. In the scene when Humbert lies in Lolita's room after she leaves for camp, for example, the audience sees a photo of Quilty watching Humbert from the side of her bed. Later, we see Quilty follow Lolita and Humbert to the Enchanted Hunters, to Ramsdale, and on their road trip through America. As Quilty follows them, he continually expresses his interest in Lolita. When he dances with Mrs. Haze, Lolita's mother, at a school dance he says, "didn't you have a daughter with a lovely name"; after he meets them at the hotel, he tells Humbert "you had a lovely, pretty, little girl with you"; and during the scene where he poses as a German psychologist he says "she is a lovely girl," while gesturing to indicate breasts. Quilty's continued interest in Lolita positions him as a rival to Humbert and, as Hum and Lolita's relationship is greatly diminished, the rivalry between the men becomes the focus of the film.

This depiction of the rivalry between Humbert and Quilty was aided by the star power of both actors. During the 1950s, James Mason often played both villains and brooding romantic

heros. He played characters positioned between good and evil. In the essay, “James Mason: A Star Is Born Bigger Than Life,” Amy Lawrence writes that he “was called upon to play lovers who were willful, driven, cold, arrogant, and disdainful” (Lawrence 88). As Humbert Humbert, he reprises this type and he plays Nabokov’s obsessive pedophile as more of a jilted, conflicted lover. Peter Sellers, on the other hand, was known for his improvisation and his dark comedy. A review of one of his performances praised him for his “talent for [making] mimicry and impersonation into an art form as salable as any in the entertainment world today” (Johnston qtd. in Baron). In *Lolita*, both men play to these types and as a result Mason appears even more the jilted lover and Quilty the deranged stalker. In the film, Kubrick gives Sellers numerous opportunities to showcase his humor in pursuit of Lolita through different characterizations, including the scene where Quilty impersonates a German psychiatrist and the extended scene at the Enchanted Hunters hotel which did not appear in the novel. These wild impersonations show how far Quilty, as a character, is willing to go in his pursuit of Lolita. In the novel, Quilty’s wildness, which is only showcased in the final murder scene, is meant to serve as a parallel to Humbert’s own madness. Mason’s performance as Humbert Humbert does not portray him as a repeatedly institutionalized man with an obsession with nymphets. In fact, the only time the film really shows him going wild is after Lolita runs off with Quilty. This decision to leave out Humbert’s madness not only allows Mason to play to his type, it also emphasizes that Humbert is a jilted lover whose girl was taken by the deranged sex freak Clare Quilty. This further alienates the viewer from Humbert’s abuse of Lolita and, therefore, it prevents the audience from seeing him as an abuser.

### **1997 Lyne Adaptation**

In Lyne's version he attempts to capture glimpses of Dolores Haze through heightening the audience's sense of Humbert as an abuser and Lolita as a victim. This is accomplished through both the heightened sense of Humbert as a violent abuser and through the actions Dolores takes in the film to show she is unhappy with her situation. After Humbert is seen rubbing himself against Lolita while she reads the comics, for example, Lyne moves to a scene where Dolores' pain shows through as she cries alone in one of the hotel beds while Humbert looks on. In another scene, the audience sees a naked Dolores scramble to collect her money as Humbert tries to force her to continue having sex with him. Lyne pairs this image with a voiceover narration from Humbert that indicates that he believes she is saving money to run away. Furthermore, in Lyne's film, Dolores tells that "anyone would try to run away from you" and begs Humbert to murder her during one of their arguments. These lines show that she was deeply unhappy living with Humbert and that death or a life alone on the streets seem preferable. During this argument, Humbert also hits Lolita, as he also does during the bedroom scene where she tries to collect her money, which suggests that he is both physically and sexually abusive towards her. These scenes show the audience moments where Dolores, a sexually abused child, shows through and leave both Humbert's and Lyne's fantasy versions of Lolita to fall to the side.

This depiction aligns with the values of 1990s audiences who would have viewed Humbert Humbert as a pedophile. When Stephen Schiff was working on the first draft of his screenplay for what would become Lyne's adaptation, he was told that "in this political climate, any version of *Lolita*... [will] never get made" (Schiff xi). Lyne and Schiff did, in fact, experience an enormous amount of difficulty getting their film made. While the film was being edited, the U.S. Senate passed the Child Pornography Prevention Act of 1996 which targeted

online pornography that edited children's heads onto adult bodies. This law, which was created in response to a growing awareness of child sexual abuse due to cases such as the Megan Kanka case, made "any visual depiction that was 'or appeared to be' a child having explicit sex" (Hatch qtd. in Schiff xix) illegal "whether or not a child was actually involved" (Schiff xix). This led to the film being edited in the presence of a child pornography lawyer who had formerly represented an underage porn actress. In addition to the law confining the edit of the film, Lyne also had to contend with the fact that no studio would distribute it due to early newspaper reviews which compared it to "kiddie porn" and child murder (Dunleavy qtd. in Schiff xxv). As a result, the film was released theatrically in Europe and premiered in America on television through the Showtime network. With these contemporary attitudes towards pedophilia, it would have been impossible for Lyne to make a version like Kubrick's where the audience sympathizes only with Humbert. It is, therefore, practically a requirement that he include scenes that show the terribleness of Humbert's abuse.

While he heightens the audience's sense of abuse, Lyne also allows his Lolita to laugh, joke, and smile about her situation at inappropriate times, which suggests that she has some kind of magical nymphet control over Humbert. In the scene after their stay at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel, for example, Lyne's Lolita smiles and laughs as she tells "I was a daisy fresh girl" and "I should call the police and tell them you raped me you dirty old man." By having her character smile and laugh while making these serious accusations, Lyne makes it seem like his Lolita is in control of her sexuality. While Humbert describes Lolita's accusations of pain and rape as "silly" the novel also notes that her tone of voice was "hysterical" and "ominous," which gives readers the sense that Dolores Haze was actually upset by what happened at the Enchanted Hunters hotel

(Nabokov 141). This sense is furthered by the fact that after the initial rape accusation the novel notes that Dolores kept accusing Humbert of hurting her and calls him “an ugly name,” both actions which are removed from the Lyne adaptation (Nabokov 141). Another one of these inappropriate laughs occurs during the scene after Humbert accuses Lolita of being unfaithful to him. According to screenwriter Stephen Schiff’s *Lolita: The Book of the Film*, this scene was commonly referred to by the crew as the rape scene; however, it is Humbert, not Lyne’s Lolita, who cries and seems uncomfortable. Furthermore, Lyne’s Lolita weaponizes her sexuality in other scenes. When she wants to be in the school play while at Beardsley, for example, she places her head between Humbert’s legs and rubs his crotch with her hand. From this position, she successfully negotiates permission to be in the play and a two dollar raise to her allowance. All of these actions suggest that, rather than feeling violated by Humbert, Lyne’s Lolita is manipulating him. While this move gives her character a sense of agency in a situation where she did not have any control over her life, it also allows audiences to dismiss the abuse because it seems like she thinks it’s funny and that it is not negatively affecting her. Furthermore, unlike in Nabokov’s novel where Dolores’ manipulation of Humbert is clearly derived from her desperate need to escape the abuse and live a normal childhood, Lyne uses the film’s musical score and lighting decisions to make it seem as if his Lolita is a demonic vixen whose nymphet magic controls Humbert’s desire. In the scene where she laughs while Humbert abuses her, for example, sinister sounding music accompanies shots of Lolita while Humbert cries helplessly. By oscillation between this depiction of Lolita as either a victim or a vixen, the film produces a confused version of its Lolita.

This depiction of Lolita as an all-powerful nymphet who controls Humbert's desire has a basis in the novel; however, readers would be able to see that Humbert Humbert's perspective is not entirely truthful due to several moments where Nabokov hints that Dolores Haze is being abused and in fact has no control over her situation. Throughout Nabokov's novel, Humbert rants about nymphets and their obsessive power. He says, "between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who... reveal their true nature which is not human but nymphic" and "a greater endeavor lures me on: to fix once and for all the perilous magic of nymphets" (Nabokov 16 134). His fixation on them as fantasy creatures, rather than actual children, is what allows him to rationalize his abuse. The reader, however, is able to see through Humbert's seductive prose due to the harrowing scenes of abuse Nabokov constructs. In one of these scenes, Nabokov writes that Dolores "came sobbing" into Humbert's room and made up with him after he revealed her mother died because "she had absolutely nowhere else to go" (Nabokov 142). While this harrowing scene is included in this version of the film, Lyne's adaptation moves immediately into a silly montage of Lolita playing children's games in the car. This move de-emphasizes the terribleness of the future that awaits Dolores and instead makes it seem that living with Humbert is not so terrible. As a result, the adaptation loses the dread of Nabokov's original line.

The characterization of Dolores as an abused child is also lost in the film due to Lyne's decision to constantly shoot his Lolita as a sexualized object from an objective perspective rather than from the point of view of Humbert Humbert. Leg shots, cropped costumes, and her wild dance moves lightly sexualize Lyne's Lolita in early parts of the film. After the scene at the Enchanted Hunters hotel she becomes even more of an object for the audience's gaze. There are

numerous shots of her extended legs being tracked by the camera, her neck extended, as if in sexual pleasure, and her legs spread wide-- inviting sexual advances. The final cut of the film was not even as sexualized as Lyne had intended it to be. The lawyer who oversaw the editing of the film insisted that any "crotch shots" and "breast shots," which were filmed with an adult body double, be removed from the final cut. These shots, and others Lyne included or intended, are not shown exclusively through Humbert's perspective, but rather through the objective point of view of the camera, and as a result, they show Lyne's Lolita as a sexual object. In her essay "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey outlines how women's bodies function "as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium" due to the objective nature of the camera (Mulvey 719). Lyne takes advantage of this and, by shooting his Lolita in a sexualized manner from the objective position rather than from Humbert's subjective point of view, he suggests that she is in fact highly sexual and that, perhaps, she does contain that nymphet magic Humbert raves about. This is problematic because the viewer is not able to distinguish these shots from the film's glimpses of Dolores. As a result, such shots suggest that she is in control of a grown man and his sexuality while dialogue and other elements of the film show her as a damaged child.

Additionally, Nabokov's critique of Humbert, which is exposed through the novel's gameplay, is largely lost in the film where voice over narration encourages the reader to feel sympathy for Humbert Humbert. Schiff notes that Lyne believed audiences "have to sympathize with and, yes, love [Humbert] even though his deeds revolt" them (Schiff xvi). As a result of this mindset, Schiff says that he took several approaches including making Humbert "funny, charming, ironic, and roguish" (Schiff xvi). Additionally, Schiff believes that, by the end of the

story, Humbert is “profoundly remorseful” for sexually abusing Lolita and missing out on any part of her identity that exists outside of his fantasy. The attempt to find balance between audiences feeling sympathetic for Humbert and revolted by him is reflected, in some ways, by the decision to cast Jeremy Irons, a British actor whose roles are described as “characters with tortured inner lives” by a 1992 *New York Times* profile (James). This experience playing damaged characters and finding ways to make them sympathetic was valuable for Schiff and Lyne who wanted to portray Humbert as damaged and tortured by his guilt in order to draw out sympathy for him.

In the film, Humbert’s guilt is shown through his increasing paranoia that they will be caught, wild editing patterns that indicate he is experiencing nightmares and physical distress, and later his alcoholism. His abuse of Dolores, however, is also justified through the trauma he experienced when his childhood love, Annabel, died, and his voiceover is repeatedly used in the film to draw in sympathy for his character. This is seen from the beginning of the film where the audience sees the grainy, sepia-toned love story of a teenaged Humbert and Annabel while the narration of an adult Humbert tells the audience, “the shock of her death froze something in me.” His relationship with Annabel, therefore, asserts that Humbert is no ordinary, vile pedophile, but rather a deeply damaged man. The rest of Humbert’s narration draws on this initial sympathy. In one of the voiceovers he laments the fact that he didn’t leave the Enchanted Hunters “that very night” as a convention of priests reflects on the fact that “the Lord forgives all.” In another moment of the film, he asks Lolita if she “can ever forget” what he did to her. These lines and voiceovers show that Humbert feels guilt for what he has done; however, they also both invoke the idea that he should be forgiven and indirectly remind the viewer of his own damaged

childhood. The film, therefore, continues to swing audience sympathy to the side despite the fact that it shows him as more of an abuser than either the Kubrick film or Nabokov's novel.

As a result, the film produces a confused version of events where the audience never knows whether to view Lyne's *Lolita* as a corrupt child or a victim of sexual abuse. Watching Lyne's adaptation is jarring because, sometimes within the same scene, viewers are asked to see Lolita as both abused and as an all-powerful, sexually promiscuous nymphet. During the scene where Humbert rubs himself against her while she reads the comics, for example, she is seen sighing in pleasure and laughing at the stories and then immediately afterwards, she is in bed crying. This is confusing for the viewer because it implies that Lyne's Lolita enjoys their sexual encounters, but also suggests that Dolores is damaged by them. Many other incidents, including the film's rape scene, also produce this confused effect. Consequently, the film does not produce a true portrait of Dolores Haze because it constantly conflates her with Humbert's fantasy of Lolita.

## **Conclusion**

Both Kubrick's and Lyne's versions, therefore, fail to adapt *Lolita* in a way that exposes Dolores Haze due to their commitment to telling the story from Humbert Humbert's perspective. Kubrick's version gives way to Humbert's perspective entirely and, as a result, the film produces an annoying Lolita. In Lyne's version, moments of Dolores sneak through, but they are overshadowed by his portrait of her as a nymphet. Both of these depictions are the result of trying to tell the story in the same way the novel did-- from Humbert's perspective. They fail, however, because the objective nature of the camera makes it impossible to produce an unreliable narrator in the same way that Nabokov did so masterfully. While Kubrick's version may have appeared suitable to 1960s audiences, one review commented that the "passion of the

hero” was “more normal and understandable,” it was not acceptable to Lyne’s audience who viewed child sexual abuse as one of the most heinous crimes a person could commit (Crowther, “Screen: Lolita”). As a result, the film was criticized as another “project for which the “male gaze” was particularly inapt” and audience members called for another version helmed by a female director (Sharp). This sharp criticism of the male gaze and the cry for better representation of women shows how by the 1990s audiences were beginning to demand representations of women that did not merely duplicate patriarchal fantasies of sexy girls.

## Works Cited

- Balázs, Béla. "The Creative Camera." *Critical Visions in Film Theory*, edited by Timothy Corrigan, Meta Mazaj and Patricia White. Bedford/St. Martins, 2011, pp. 126-127.
- Baron, Cynthia. "Peter Sellers: A Figure of the Impasse." *New Constellations: Movie Stars of the 1960s*, edited by PAMELA ROBERTSON WOJCIK, Rutgers University Press, 2012, pp. 115–138. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hhzk9.10](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hhzk9.10). Accessed 9 Dec. 2018.
- Connolly, Julian W. "Who Was Dolly Haze?" *A Reader's Guide to Nabokov's "Lolita"*, Academic Studies Press, Brighton, MA, 2009, pp. 53–66. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1zxsk0k.10](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1zxsk0k.10). Accessed 9 Dec. 2018.
- Connolly, Julian W. "Lolita's Afterlife: Critical and Cultural Responses." *A Reader's Guide to Nabokov's "Lolita"*, Academic Studies Press, Brighton, MA, 2009, pp. 141–174. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1zxsk0k.12](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1zxsk0k.12). Accessed 9 Dec. 2018.
- Crowther, Bosley. "Screen: 'Lolita,' Vladimir Nabokov's Adaptation of His Novel:Sue Lyon and Mason in Leading Roles." *The New York Times*, June 14, 1962. <https://www.nytimes.com/1962/06/14/archives/screen-lolita-vladimir-nabokovs-adaptation-of-his-novelsue-lyon-and.html>. Accessed 9 Dec. 2018.
- Crowther, Bosely. "Girls Will Be Girls." *New York Times (1923-Current file)*, June 24, 1962, p. 73. *ProQuest*. Accessed 9 Dec. 2018.
- Doherty, Thomas. "The World According to Joseph I. Breen." *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930-1934*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

- James, Caryn. "On the Run with Jeremy Irons: Wrapping Himself Inside Enigmas." *New York Times*, November 18, 1992.
- Lawrence, Amy. "James Mason: A Star Is Born Bigger Than Life." *Larger Than Life: Movie Stars of the 1950s*, edited by R. Barton Palmer, Rutgers University Press, 2010, pp. 86–106. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hhxt7.8](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hhxt7.8). Accessed 9 Dec. 2018
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema." *Critical Visions in Film Theory*, edited by Timothy Corrigan, Meta Mazaj and Patricia White. Bedford/St. Martins, 2011, 713-724.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *The Annotated Lolita*. New York, Random House, 1970.
- Rolo, Charles J. "Lolita, By Vladimir Nabokov." *The Atlantic*, Sept. 1958. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1958/09/lolita-by-vladimir-nabokov/304639/>. Accessed 9 Dec. 2018
- Schiff, Stephen. *Lolita: The Book of the Film*. New York, Applause Books, 1998.
- Sharp, Anne. "'LOLITA'; Time for Lolita's Story." *New York Times*, March 29, 1998. <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/29/movies/1-lolita-time-for-lolita-s-story-203262.html>. Accessed 9 Dec. 2018.
- Straumann, Barbara. "'Aesthetic Bliss' and Its Allegorical Displacements in Lolita." *Figurations of Exile in Hitchcock and Nabokov*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2008, pp. 86–124. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1r28v3.7](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1r28v3.7). Accessed 9 Dec. 2018.
- Trubikhina, Julia. "'Cinemizing' as Translation: Nabokov's Screenplay of Lolita and Stanley Kubrick's and Adrian Lyne's Cinematic Versions." *The Translator's Doubts: Vladimir Nabokov and the Ambiguity of Translation*, Academic Studies Press, Brighton, MA,

2015, pp. 141–205. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1zxsjwj.7](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1zxsjwj.7). Accessed 9 Dec. 2018.

## Chapter 2

### Introduction

“SEX ROMP JANE AUSTEN,” was the headline when screenwriter Andrew Davies discussed his upcoming BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* with the press (Birtwistle vi). Davies had mentioned that the principal themes of the text — sex and money — were what he wanted to emphasize in his adaptation and journalists ran with the story of an updated, edgier Austen. While the 1995 BBC adaptation remained relatively tame, save for a single scene of Wickham’s indiscretions and the famous Darcy lake dive, the question of how to update Austen to appeal to modern audiences has been a question that many adapters have struggled with. As audiences have grown more liberal and feminist, some critics might question what role Austen’s stories should play on modern screens. Two adaptations, the 1995 BBC mini-series and the 2005 film adaptation, struggled with this question in a landscape of rapidly changing ideas of feminism. These struggles, which primarily deal with how to represent women in terms of their sexuality and their power in their relationships, caused Austen adapters to explore ways to increase the agency of female characters within the nineteenth century’s strict patriarchal society. While the 1995 BBC mini series adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* uses additional scenes between the novel’s female characters to create a space separate from the patriarchy that allows the young women to derive enjoyment from their private lives, rather than their unreliable material or romantic prospects, the 2005 film adaptation plays up the novels romantic elements in order to increase Elizabeth Bennet’s apparent control over her situation. Both adaptations, therefore, appeal to an increasingly independent female audience by supporting light,

proto-feminist gains for their protagonists while also, in the case of the 2005 film adaptations, affirming the patriarchal value of heterosexual romance through creating nostalgia for the past.

Twentieth and twenty-first-century filmmakers were attracted to Austen's novels because they believed her plots about love and money would resonate with modern audiences. In the essay "Mass Marketing Jane Austen: Men, Women, and Courtship in Two Film Adaptations," Deborah Kaplan cites a sheet of guidelines for hopeful, twentieth-century romance writers that uses Mr. Darcy as an example for the ideal "self-assured, masterful, hot-tempered... [and] mysteriously moody" romance hero (Simon and Schuster qtd. in Kaplan 177). The guidelines go on to basically rehash the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* by suggesting writers develop stories where "the heroine is put off by the hero's ruthless, domineering, and arrogant manner" (Simon and Schuster qtd. in Kaplan 177). These guidelines are not the only indication that Austen's stories and characters continued to resonate with modern audiences, however. In the making-of book that was released in conjunction with the 1995 BBC mini-series adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, the series' producer, Sue Birtwistle, describes the novel as "the sexiest book ever written" (Birtwistle vi). She also notes that the novel's principal themes are "love" and "money," topics that remain highly relevant to modern audiences, and goes on to cite the oft-touted fact that *Pride and Prejudice* is the most widely read novel in the English language (Birtwistle v). Writers and producers were attracted to Austen, therefore, because her stories had relevant themes and a large audience appeal.

While writers and producers believed the themes of Austen's novels were still relevant to modern audiences, some of the content needed updating to align with the values of modern audiences. The tip sheet makes this explicit when it emphasizes the importance of including

“love scenes [that] should be described sensuously and in detail,” something that Austen could have never done in her time (Simon and Schuster qtd. in Kaplan 177). Birtwistle’s comment about the themes of the book also suggest a disconnect between the novel and the adaptation she produced. Birtwistle emphasizes that the novel is about money when really it is about the rigid class structures that were prevalent in nineteenth-century England. By reducing wealth and social status to concerns over money, Birtwistle is updating the language of Austen’s time for a modern audience. Adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* would similarly need to be updated and the presentation of the novel’s female characters in particular would need to fit the expectations of modern audiences.

In costume drama adaptations, however, nineteenth-century values, which could leave outspoken women as “socially ostracized” if they dared to speak out against the patriarchy, are inescapable (Dickson 49). Elizabeth Bennet cannot shed her restrictive empire dress for a pair of pants as she goes trekking across the country side. Filmmakers are, therefore, faced with the problem of updating the social mores of a world with vastly different values for the “utterly modern single woman in possession of her own income” (Mallick). Filmmakers must find a way to make the concerns of nineteenth-century women, who had to depend on men to provide for them, interesting and appealing to women who were no longer in need of a man to provide for them and were, in fact, actively speaking out against the ways the patriarchy left them disadvantaged.

By the time the boom of Austen adaptations in the 1990s occurred, women were vocal about the ways they felt they should be treated by men. Inspired by Anita Hill’s allegations against then Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas, “many women... came forward with

accusations against [sexual] harassers” and 1992, only three years before the 1995 BBC adaptation aired, was often referred to as the “year of the woman” in popular culture (Serrienne 212, Gould qtd. in Serrienne 218). This is a sharp contrast from the lives of nineteenth-century women who, if they were discontented with the roles society laid out for them, had to keep their concerns to themselves lest they be socially ostracized. Jane Austen even knew two such women, Hester Wheeler and Lady Frances Honywood, who were left socially destitute, according to Rebecca Dickson, because they “had the unfortunate tendency to speak [their] minds” (Dickson 48). While modern women could openly vocalize their discontent, nineteenth-century women had to obscure their feelings from the public. As a result, Austen’s proto-feminist heroines who upheld many of the proper manners decorum for gentry women at the time would not have resonated with modern audiences even if the themes love, marriage, and wealth were still relevant.

As a result, many millennial era Austen adaptations deviated from their source material in order to make their heroines more appealing to female viewers. In her essay, “Misrepresenting Jane Austen’s Ladies: Revising Texts (and History) to Sell Films,” Rebecca Dickson describes how director Nick Dear’s 1995 adaptation of *Persuasion* and screenwriter Emma Thompson’s *Sense and Sensibility*, which was made in the same year, attempt to portray Austen’s female characters as having more agency over their lives than nineteenth-century women would have realistically had. She also points out how Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility* was updated to be more emotional, which was more in line with the ways millennial-era women could express themselves than nineteenth-century ones. While Dickson points out that these texts were updated pretty extensively in ways that changed the meaning of their source material, she also notes that

the adaptations were “popular with female audiences” (Dickson 56). Filmmakers knew, therefore, that straying from the source material to make the female characters more independent helped the films maintain their popularity with female audiences. Given that these two adaptations were made in 1995, the same year as the *Pride and Prejudice* mini series, it is likely that the creators of the BBC serial wrestled with these issues of representation as well.

### **1995 BBC Mini-Series**

In adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, the problem of adapting Austen for a modern, more feminist audience manifests itself through the need for modern viewers, who value marriage for love, to understand why the otherwise independent Elizabeth Bennett would end up considering both love and social status in her final choice of a husband. By the late twentieth and early twenty-first century marrying for love had become the standard in both England and America where the mini series aired (in America, it aired in 1996 on the A&E network). This standard would have made it difficult for viewers of the series to understand why Elizabeth Bennet, a “headstrong” heroine (Littlefield) and “a woman who speaks her mind” (Mallick) would consider both love and wealth in her final choice of a spouse. Jennifer Ehle, the actress who portrayed Lizzy in the BBC mini-series, said in an interview “that Lizzy has attributes that women in the '90s think they've reclaimed... the same independence, integrity and free-spiritedness” (Ehle qtd. in Littlefield). Many millennial-era adaptations, BBC mini-series included, highlight Elizabeth’s independence. In the BBC series, viewers see her ambivalence towards marriage and her determination to marry for love from the beginning. In one of the first scenes in episode one of the BBC series, viewers see Jane and Elizabeth, alone in their room, discussing marriage for love. In this scene, Elizabeth tells Jane that “only the very deepest love”

will convince her to marry and later jokes that she “shall end an old maid.” These lines, which do not appear in the novel, serve to introduce the reader to a version of Elizabeth who does not care whether she marries or not. This ambivalence towards marriage emphasizes the qualities Ehle mentioned when she commented that Elizabeth had the attributes 90s women were striving for. She is portrayed as ambivalent about her need to marry and determined that she will be in control of her future.

These scenes are a departure from the novel, which portrayed Elizabeth as willing to consider the prudential motives for marriage. When Lizzy is being pursued by George Wickham her aunt, Mrs. Gardiner, warns her against marrying for pure love. She tells her to consider Wickham’s lack of a fortune and warns her that she “must not let [her] fancy run away with [her]” (Austen 144). Elizabeth assures her aunt that she understood her advice and the narrator tells the reader that their conversation was “a wonderful instance of advice being given... without being resented” (Austen 145). The fact that Lizzy does not “resent” Mrs. Gardiner’s advice shows that she is willing to consider the ways in which marrying a man without any fortune would be a disadvantage to her and, later in the novel, Lizzy even defends the idea of a courtship for financial security. In a discussion with Mrs. Gardiner about Mr. Wickham’s courting of Miss King, Elizabeth says, “what is the difference in matrimonial affairs, between the mercenary and prudent motive... Last Christmas you were afraid of his marrying me because it would be imprudent” (Austen 153). Lizzy then goes on to defend Wickham’s prudential courtship of Miss King, who has recently been left a fortune. These two scenes show that Elizabeth is not as dedicated to marriage for pure love as the BBC version makes her out to be.

She is willing to consider the prudential motives of marriage as they apply to herself and to those around her.

In order to increase the adaptation's appeal to modern audiences, the mini-series downplays Elizabeth's consideration of and respect for the prudential motives for marriage. The two scenes between Lizzy and Mrs. Gardiner where marriage for love and marriage for wealth are discussed are cut from the mini-series. Wickham's courtship of Miss King is reduced to the voiceover gossip of the Bennet women and Mrs. Gardiner is not given the opportunity to speak out against him. Instead, Mrs. Gardiner's disapproval is reduced to two disapproving glances and, since one of them immediately cuts to Jane, who is sitting alone after being slighted by Mr. Bingley, her looks can be read more as concern for both Bennet sisters, rather than disapproval of Elizabeth and Wickham's relationship. Mrs. Gardiner's advice that Lizzy consider marrying for prudential motives is similarly reduced to the line, "now that is a definite virtue," which she speaks when she learns of Miss King's inheritance. From the ball where these discussions and glances take place, the adaptation cuts to an exterior shot of the Bennet house, which has been overtaken by winter. As the shot pans along the house, we see glimpses of Mr. Bennet in his office and Lydia, Kitty, and Mrs. Bennet in the house's drawing room. The voiceover discussion of Mr. Wickham's and Miss King's courtship by the three women plays over this shot until the camera tilts upwards to show Elizabeth reading a letter from Jane. The emphasis on the winter imagery in this shot and the superficial nature of Mrs. Bennet's conversation, which critiques Miss King's looks and her wealth, suggests that Wickham's new relationship is just a part of time passing rather than a site for examining the different motives for marriage and emphasizing the novel's themes. By tilting up to Elizabeth and remaining with her while she reads Jane's

letter, which will contain crucial plot information about her trip to town and the rudeness of Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst, the camera suggests that the gossip about Mr. Wickham, and the prudential marriage he is pursuing, are below her own concerns. In this scene, she is only concerned with those like Jane, who is pursuing a match for love. While this depiction furthers the adaptation's portrayal of Elizabeth as a more modern, independent woman, it does away with the more balanced heroine who is aware of her need to marry for wealth, but is also determined to love, or at least respect, her spouse that readers see in the novel.

Characters, such as Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Collins, who are fixated on the prudential motives for marriage are also portrayed as ridiculous. While Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Collins were definitely sources of comedy in the novel, the BBC series emphasizes their absurdity. In the case of Mr. Collins, this is done through the addition of physical humor which does not appear in Austen's novel. In the book, Austen describes Mr. Collins as "not a sensible man" and "awkward," but she does not linger on physical descriptions of his clumsiness (Austen 71, 91). In his dance with Elizabeth at the Netherfield Ball, for example, Austen gives only a two-sentence description of his clumsy dancing which says that he missteps, but does not say that he was running into people, as he does in the BBC adaptation. Additionally, Mr Collins' physicality is mocked twice in Hunsford when he runs to meet Lady Catherine and again to announce Mr. Darcy's arrival. His running form is rather ugly and he is clearly winded. The decision to include two different shots of his poor form in the same episode show that the adaptation was using his physicality as an added layer of ridicule. Mrs. Bennet's physicality is treated in a similar manner to Mr. Collins'. This can be most clearly seen during the scenes where she takes to her her room after Lydia elopes with Mr. Wickham. In these scenes, Mrs. Bennet's bodily

shakes and emotional appeals are exaggerated for humor. At one point, she asks Jane for a whiff of a smelling salt so that she will not faint, which she breathes in deeply and then immediately sinks further in her chair. These moments of physical comedy for both Mrs. Bennet, who constantly worries over the girls' need to marry to secure their fortunes, and Mr. Collins who lays out only practical reasons he and Elizabeth should marry during this two proposals, shows that the adaptation is making fun of, rather than endorsing, the prudential motive for marriage.

While Mr. Collins and Mrs. Bennet were shown as increasingly ridiculous, characters such as Lydia who disregard the prudential motives for marriage are given more freedom in the BBC adaptation. This can be most clearly seen through the way the adaptation handles her elopement with Mr. Wickham. In the novel, Lydia's elopement and Mr. Bennet's threat to ban her and Wickham from Longbourn even after the wedding are taken very seriously. Austen writes that "with such a husband her misery was considered certain" and that "a long dispute" between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet follows after he tells her that Lydia will not be allowed to visit the family. The adaptation, however, glosses over this fight and, while Mr. Bennet is saying that Lydia and Wickham shall not be allowed into Longbourn, the scene jumps forward in time to show their carriage pulling up at the house. The editing choice makes it seem as though Mr. Bennet's threat was just another attempt at teasing his wife, rather than a serious punishment for Lydia's actions. Furthermore, the adaptation does not suggest that Lydia will be wholly miserable in her marriage. In the final wedding scene of the adaptation, the preacher who is marrying Lizzy and Jane suggests that one of the motives for marriage is so that people may "avoid [unholy] fornication" and the camera cuts to an image of Lydia and Wickham, in bed, drinking wine together, and seemingly enjoying their honeymoon. Not only is Lydia not

miserable, but the preacher's words suggest that her and Wickham's motive for marriage is a just one and they are posed as a well-matched couple due to their shared vanity and love of living wildly.

The only real marriage the adaptation shows as being about economic security and social status is Charlotte's marriage to Mr. Collins. The question of whether Charlotte made the right decision when she accepts this proposal, however, is dwelled on less severely in the adaptation. In the novel, extensive time is spent on whether or not Charlotte made the right decision in her pursuit of the bafoonish Mr. Collins. The discussion of whether Charlotte should marry for love or for economic security is brought up over the course of three chapters and nearly every character in the Bennet family gives their opinion on the matter. Two conversations, one between Jane and Lizzy and another between Lizzy and Charlotte, discuss the matter in depth. In these conversations the discussions range from Mr. Collins' absurdity to the "difference[s] of situation temper" that might cause a woman to marry for economic security (Austen 135). While these two discussions remain in the BBC adaptation, the total amount of discussion time given to Charlotte's marriage is only a few scenes at the beginning of the episode. Additionally, the adaptation does not include the private thoughts of Elizabeth, from the novel, which state that she believes, "no real confidence could ever subsist between [herself and Charlotte] again" (Austen 127). In these scenes, Elizabeth takes her firmest stance against the marriage for the prudential motive. Through the narrator, the reader learns that Lizzy thinks that "Charlotte, the wife of Mr. Collins, was a most humiliating picture!" and later that "all the comfort of intimacy" in her friendship with Charlotte "was over" (Austen 125, 146). She even tells Jane that she finds Charlotte's decision to marry for financial security, "unaccountable! In every view it is

unaccountable!” (Austen 135). The extreme language in these sections found in “most humiliating” and the repetition of “unaccountable” show how firm Lizzy was in her stance against marrying for money. Furthermore, Austen’s repeated use of exclamation points in these passages shows the intensity of emotion behind Elizabeth’s stance. They also show the reader that the debate over whether a woman should marry for love or for economic security is not really for Charlotte-- it’s for Lizzy. By traveling to visiting Charlotte and Mr. Collins in their home later in the novel, Elizabeth learns that Charlotte is able to find contentment in her situation and the marriage of Charlotte and Mr. Collins becomes another example of Lizzy overcoming her prejudice. In the BBC version, viewers lose this debate by having Lizzy forgive Charlotte so easily and, therefore, do not force her character to question whether both love and the need for economic security have a place in a marriage.

While the adaptation does not dwell on the prudential motives for marriage as much as the novel, it does feature several scenes which show that wealth and social status are of concern to the poor Bennet daughters. In Jane and Lizzy’s first private conversation in episode one, they discuss the need for at least one Bennet daughter to marry well since the Bennet estate is entailed on the male line. This conversation is largely driven by Elizabeth who opens the scene by saying that she would be quite happy if she “could love a man who would love me enough to take me for a mere 50 pounds a year.” This line, which is spoken in an airy tone as Lizzy gazes dreamily upward, suggests that she knows love must come second to financial security for the Bennet daughters. Throughout the scene, Lizzy retains the voice of the prudential motive for marriage as she tells Jane that she “fears the task will fall on [Jane] to raise [the family’s] fortunes” even as she states, “nothing but the very deepest love will induce me into matrimony,” a line that is never

directly spoken in the novel. This reveals to the audience that even the independent Elizabeth knows that she, and her sisters, must consider both love and wealth in their choice of a husband. Additionally, the first episode of the mini-series shows Mr. Bennet going through the family's expenses late at night and sighing deeply. The next morning, the Bennet women learn that their father has, indeed, called upon Mr. Bingley even though he vowed not to earlier in the episode. Positioning the scene of Mr. Bennet doing the family's sums next to the scene that reveals he took steps to allow his daughters to become acquainted with Mr. Bingley, who, as Mrs. Bennet continually reminds the audience, "has 5,000 a year," suggests that his actions were motivated by a lack of wealth. The adaptation demonstrates, therefore, that marrying well is one of the only ways that the Bennet daughters can secure their financial stability. While these scenes illustrate the realistic concerns of nineteenth-century women and showcase how economically dependent they were on men, they create a contradiction in the character of Elizabeth who is supposedly above marrying for the prudential motive. This is problematic because it is the Elizabeth who declares she would rather die an old maid than marry someone she does not love or respect, not the one who considers practical concerns, that millennial era audiences would have found appealing. The series must, therefore, try to retain the novel's feminist underpinnings, without portraying a world that does not include the very real economic stressors that were placed on nineteenth-century women.

The mini-series solves this problem by emphasizing the novel's female friendships in order to create a space for women that is separate from the patriarchy. In her essay, "What Are Men to Rocks and Mountains? Romanticism in Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*," Sarah Ailwood describes how Austen's novels, which primarily focus on the relationships of women,

“valorize [the] relational over a detached conception of self” (Ailwood). She notes that the “relational self” defined individuals in terms of their relationships with family members, friends, [and] lovers” (Mellor qtd. in Ailwood). While Ailwood’s essay goes onto discuss the 2005 adaptation rather than the 1995 mini-series, her discussion of the role of the relational self in Austen’s novels is worth noting because of the added emphasis on women’s relationships to one another in the BBC series. An emphasis on how women’s relationships with each other define their personalities and attitudes both publicly and privately is present in Austen’s novel. For example, the narrator tells the reader that Mrs. Bennet believes Jane’s presumed marriage to Mr. Bingley will “throw [her other daughters] in the way of other rich men” (Austen 99). Conversely, Lydia’s elopement is presumed to affect all the girls negatively to the point where they will all be ruined for her actions. These two examples show that what one Bennet daughter does affects all of them as if they were a joint entity rather than individual women. Additionally, Jane and Elizabeth both seem to experience the others’ losses and happinesses. This is indicated throughout the novel with the verb “felt” (Austen 14, 305). “Felt” is used to indicate that Lizzy feels and see Jane’s happiness even when other characters are unaware of her emotions. It is also used to describe Jane and Lizzy’s dread at Lydia’s imprudent marriage to Wickham. The fact that the girls are affected by the actions of their sisters and, in the case of the older two, the way they experience each other’s emotions shows the concept of the relational-self at play in Austen’s work. The female characters of the novel experience the world not only as individuals, but also through their attachments to each other. They share in each other’s happinesses and pain and, in doing so, create a small atmosphere of support.

The BBC adaptation amplifies this sense of sisterly support through addition of several conversations between Jane and Lizzy which allow the audience to see the girls share in both each other's happiness and pain. In the BBC adaptation, there are 17 different scenes where Lizzy and Jane confide in one another. Eight of these scenes do not appear in the novel as full conversations between Jane and Elizabeth and three of them are lengthened versions of the dialogue that appears in the novel. In these scenes, the audience sees the girls laughing over men, debating the pros and cons of various marriage pairings, and supporting each other through moments of emotional distress including Bingley's abandoning of Jane and Lydia's elopement. Additionally, rather than having a voiceover or other form of narration reveal Lizzy's private thoughts, as is done in the novel, the series chooses to make most of Lizzy's private opinions heard through added conversations with Jane. This can be seen clearly in both their first private conversation in episode one and again in episode five when they discuss Mr. Darcy after Lydia's elopement and again after Wickham and Lydia are married and Elizabeth regrets Darcy's knowing about their disgrace. These three scenes exist in the novel as thoughts in Lizzy's mind, but not as conversations with Jane. In the case of the conversations about Mr. Darcy regarding Lydia's elopement, the audience is able to see how conversations with Jane give Elizabeth relief from her troubled thoughts. Before Jane enters in the scene where they discuss the conversation in which Elizabeth told Mr. Darcy of the elopement, the audience sees a distressed-looking Elizabeth, staring into a mirror and imagining Mr. Darcy telling her that he must leave her. The apparition of Mr. Darcy in the mirror shows the viewer that Elizabeth's thoughts are on Mr. Darcy and that she is troubled by the thought of losing him. The disruptive, visual apparitions of Darcy vanish, however, when Jane enters and she is able to voice her troubles. This shows that

being able to talk with Jane provides a place for Lizzy's emotions, even when their conversations cannot solve her problems. This scene, and the others like it, allow the sisters to voice proto-feminist views, concerns over their financial security, and support for one another, without diminishing the oppressive role the patriarchy plays in their lives.

The series further emphasizes Lizzy and Jane's bond by costuming them similarly and shooting them so that their relationship is at the forefront. During their conversations, Lizzy and Jane are frequently framed together, rather than separately. This is most clearly seen during the scene where Lizzy comforts Jane over the loss of Mr. Bingley. In this scene, the girls start out at separate ends of the bed and, although Jane is quite far from Elizabeth, the camera still frames them together as Jane tells Lizzy, albeit in a restrained manner, of her sadness. The camera cuts during Jane's dialogue to show Lizzy's reactions and, in doing so, it emphasizes the darkened space she is sitting compared to the candle-lit space her sister occupies. This cutting suggests that Lizzy is feeling Jane's dark mood even though she is trying to conceal it with lines, such as "I have nothing to reproach him with, at least I have not had that pain." When Lizzy moves closer to Jane, the dark lighting scheme follows her, and Jane exposes a bit more of her pain by letting her voice break on the line, "don't tease me Lizzy." From then on in the scene, the girls are always framed together as they plan for Jane to go to London where Mr. Bingley is staying. By framing them in close proximity to one another as Lizzy plans to help her sister, the series is able to show how the girls support one another, even when their situation seems impossible. They are further aligned in the adaptation by the identical cross necklaces that they both wear frequently. No other character, not even the stodgy, religious Mary, dons these necklaces throughout the series and Lizzy and Jane seem to wear them more frequently when they need to support one

another. After Lydia's elopement, for example, both sisters are seen wearing the necklaces almost constantly. The cross symbol further suggests that Lizzy and Jane are good characters because of its religious connotations. The fact that they both wear them when they need each other's support shows that their sisterly bond has the same power of consolation for the two of them that religion has for other people.

Furthermore, their bond is just as central to the series as their respective marriages. In the final scene of the series, Bingley and Jane and Elizabeth and Darcy have joint wedding ceremonies. This scene, which is entirely added, shows that Elizabeth and Jane will not lose one another and their bond even as they embark on their separate marriages. Furthermore, it shows that Mr. Darcy who, before his first proposal, suggested that it would not be a terrible thing for Lizzy to be away from her family with the line, "you should not always wish to be near Longbourn," has warmed up to Jane and will allow Elizabeth to have some connection to her family. In fact, in the final scene, Darcy's initial concerns about Elizabeth's family and their impropriety seem to be gone as it is Darcy's aunt Lady Catherine, not Elizabeth's family, that is absent on their wedding day. In her book *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, Claudia L. Johnson asserts that in the novel "Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy is so wholly satisfying... [because] it requires no sacrifice of the two friendships Elizabeth has placed before Darcy all along," her relationship with Jane and with Mrs. Gardiner (91). In the BBC adaptation, the final scene takes that a step further and asserts that all the relationships Elizabeth values-- that with Charlotte, her younger sister, her father, etc.-- will not be lost on account of her marriage due to their presence as guests at the wedding. Neither Lizzy nor Jane is asked to choose between their

husbands and their friends in the end of the series, which allows their sisterhood to remain strong even in the face of their traditional, patriarchal unions.

The mini-series also strengthens Elizabeth's friendship with Charlotte in order to suggest a sisterhood of emotional support that can take the place of poor companionship in marriage. This can be most clearly seen during the scene when Elizabeth first arrives at Hunsford to visit the now-married Collins couple. During the visit, Mr. Collins takes the rest of the party outside and leaves Charlotte and Elizabeth alone to talk with each other. During this conversation, Charlotte confides that she encourages Mr. Collins to engage in solitary activities, such as walking, gardening, and reading, so that they are together as little as possible. She tells Lizzy that she can "bear the solitude quite well" and the two women engage knowing glances, as if they are sharing in a joke at Mr. Collins' expense. This joke is continued during Elizabeth's departure when, as Mr. Collins boasts of his happiness with Charlotte, the two women share a look and smile and it is implied that they are both laughing at his ridiculousness. These scenes show that, while Mr. Collins may not be a match for Charlotte, Lizzy certainly is able to understand her humor and her character. This suggests that women like Charlotte, who do not care for "either... men... or... matrimony," can find their happiness through their relationships with their friends rather than those with their husbands (Austen 123). Charlotte may need to marry for financial security, the adaptation seems to say, but she will not be miserable due to her close relationship with other women. Again, the mini-series creates a space outside of the patriarchy where women's happiness can exist.

Charlotte and Jane are not the only characters who benefit from a sisterhood with Lizzy, however. Smaller characters such as Maria Lucas and Georgiana Darcy benefit from this bond as

well. In the mini-series, Maria Lucas is thrilled Lizzy will be accompanying her when she goes to visit Charlotte and Mr. Collins at Hunsford and during the visit Elizabeth serves as a dissenting voice that protects Maria from some of Lady Catherine's criticisms. When Maria is hastily repacking her trunk, for example, after Lady Catherine's tirade on the proper way to pack gowns, it is Elizabeth that reminds Maria that she may do whatever she likes and that Lady Catherine will never know anyway. Similarly, Elizabeth is able to help the younger Georgiana avoid embarrassment when Caroline Bingley mentions Mr. Wickham. In this scene, Caroline is trying to use Wickham to embarrass Elizabeth, who she knows used to favor him, in front of Mr. Darcy, but she inadvertently reminds Georgiana of her own plans to elope. Elizabeth, in order to conceal Georgiana's embarrassment, rushes over and covers her missed note on the piano by saying that she should have remembered to turn the pages for her. These scenes show that Elizabeth's sisterhood extends beyond herself and Jane to other women, and it confirms the audience's judgment of her good character.

The series even invites the audience to share in this sisterhood by flipping cinema's traditional male gaze into a female one where men are the objects of sexual attraction. The creators of the mini-series stated several times their desire to emphasize both the novel's and Mr. Darcy's sex appeal. Andrew Davies, the screenwriter for the mini-series, said during a publicity interview for the project that his adaptation would focus on how "sex and money" drive the plot of the novel (Davies qtd. in Birtwistle vi). He also added that he wanted to show Darcy fencing, riding-- sweating-- to capture the physical dimension of the character. Colin Firth, who portrayed Darcy, said in the series' making-of book that he considered refusing the part because his brother insinuated that he wasn't sexy enough for the role. The costume designer even noted that Firth

had a “strong and virile quality” which they did not want to lose when he was seen in “sissy” period clothing (Collin qtd. in Birtwistle 52). The creator’s decision to transform Austen’s hero into a sexy, lively man was typical of Austen adaptations of the time. In her essay, “Balancing the Courtship Hero: Masculine Emotional Display in Film Adaptations of Austen’s Novels,” Cheryl L. Nixon discusses how millennial-era Austen adaptations updated her male heroes using a “bodily struggle with... emotion” (Nixon 33). She argues that added scenes of physical activity, such as the visuals of Darcy fencing, swimming, and riding, allowed the adaptations to dramatize his emotional struggle. When he writes to Elizabeth after his failed proposal, Nixon notes, he experiences a rush of emotions that leave him sweaty and out of breath which causes him to take a break from writing the letter. The bodily expression of his emotions allows Darcy’s love for Elizabeth to come across more clearly in the adaptation, and the decision to express his emotions through his physicality allows his body to become a site of interest for the female viewer.

This can be seen most clearly through the famous scene where Darcy dives into the lake and emerges with his soaked shirt clinging to his skin. This scene is cross-cut with another one where Elizabeth admires Darcy’s portrait as she tours the house with the Gardiners. In the portrait scene, the camera cuts from shots of Elizabeth gazing to shots of Darcy in the painting. The lake scene, however, does not cut to images of someone gazing at Darcy, nor does it cut to Darcy’s point of view by showing the landscape. Instead, it allows viewers of the adaptation to gaze on his body as he strips, dives, and swims. The viewers in this sequence, therefore, occupy the role of the gazer, which Elizabeth plays in the portrait sequence. This aligns the viewers with her point of view and, consequently, allows them to engage in her admiration of Darcy’s body. The fact that his physicality is linked to his emotional journey also allows the viewer to

appreciate, by gazing upon his body, the extent to which he has transformed for Elizabeth. This emotional transformation is clearly noted by Elizabeth, who feels herself coming to love him during her time at Pemberley. However, it is never expressed to another woman the way Jane shares her love of Bingley, because Lizzy's emotions are quickly overshadowed by Lydia's disastrous elopement. While Elizabeth does not have a chance to share her growing feelings for Darcy with Jane or another female friend until after the engagement, she does get to share the experience with the audience through their viewing of Mr. Darcy and, therefore, brings them into the sisterhood that the adaptation creates.

The adaptation values this network of sisterly support so highly that women, such as Caroline Bingley and Lady Catherine, who try to use it to hurt other women are punished in the end. While both Lady Catherine and Caroline Bingley have their own sisters, Lady Anne Darcy and Mrs. Hurst respectively, to scheme with, both women use their bonds to try and disadvantage other women. Caroline Bingley and Mrs. Hurst, for example, work to separate their brother from Jane in the hopes that he will marry Miss Darcy and improve their own connections instead. Visually, this is represented through the scene where a sick Jane dines with Caroline and Mrs. Hurst. In this scene, the camera cuts between low-angle shots of Mrs. Hurst and Caroline as they quiz Jane about her family connections. The low-angle shots make Mrs. Hurst and Caroline look intimidating as they seem to leer over Jane, whose weak voice indicates her impending sickness. At the end of the scene, Jane collapses from weakness showing both that she is unwell and that their conversation has taken a toll on her. This scene is only one of many examples where Caroline is seen verbally putting down other women. Throughout the adaptation she teases Mr. Darcy about his love of Lizzy and tries to put down her looks by saying that she never thought

her very pretty. Lady Catherine takes on a similar antagonistic position in the film as she puts down Lizzy's family for not hiring a governess and letting all the girls participate in society at once. She also tries to prevent Lizzy's marriage to Darcy in favor of her own daughter, despite the fact that the sickly Anne and Mr. Darcy have no connection. Their actions against other women are punished, as neither Caroline nor Lady Catherine get what they want in the end. The effects of a positive, supportive sisterhood are affirmed.

### **2005 Film Adaptation**

Instead of leaning into elements of sisterhood, the 2005 film adaptation solves the problem of Lizzy considering both wealth and love in marriage by playing up the novel's romantic elements through its use of tropes from the gothic romance genre and its appeals to modern notions of romance. The film contains many gothic-romance style shots and scenes, such as a wide shot of Elizabeth, standing out on the edge of a cliff and gazing outwards as she ponders the effects of Mr. Darcy's letter, Mr. Darcy's rain-soaked first proposal, and their first kiss, which is engulfed by the sun. In their first scene dancing together at the Netherfield ball, we even see all the other characters fall away for a moment as the camera spins from Darcy to Elizabeth, emphasizing their sole focus on each other. These shots and scenes play on nature to emphasize their characters' inner moods and, therefore, use the landscape to visually dramatize their inner feelings in a way that emphasizes love rather than wealth or social status.

Additionally, the promotional materials for the film emphasized *Pride and Prejudice's* love story rather than its more complicated critiques of women's rights in the nineteenth-century. This is exemplified in the film's tagline, "sometimes the last person on Earth you want to be with is the one you can't be without" (Martin). This tagline highlights the drama between Elizabeth and

Darcy in a way that allows other elements of the film, such as Jane's relationship with Bingley and the Bennet's marital distress, to fall to the side and, therefore, it allows the story to focus more on Elizabeth and her choices.

One way the film downplays non-romantic elements is in its treatment of Charlotte's marriage to Mr. Collins. In the film, Elizabeth's disapproval of Charlotte's marriage is reduced to a single scene in which her objection is reduced to a single line, "but he's ridiculous." Charlotte speaks for the majority of the scene in a thirty-second long shot where she tells Lizzy not to judge her. Immediately after this scene the debate about whether or not Charlotte made the right choice is abandoned, and instead the audience sees Lizzy's view of the dull activities of the farm as she swings around. The dreariness of farm life is accentuated in this scene by the addition of rain mid-way through the sequence, and a voiceover of one of Lizzy's letters to Charlotte suggests that being alone on the farm has left her feeling discontent. In the next scene, Elizabeth is seen travelling to visit Charlotte and Mr. Collins, which demonstrates that no real rift between them was created by Charlotte's marriage. Additionally, the fact that Mr. Darcy is seen in Hunsford immediately, rather than in a few weeks, indicates to the audience that Charlotte's marriage is of little importance to themes or the plot as anything other than an excuse to get Elizabeth and Darcy back together. Part of the reason Wright may have chosen to shorten this section could be due to the confines of time. A typical film is only about two hours in length, whereas the BBC mini-series was able to have six hours to tell the same story. Time constraints aside, however, by cutting out much of Charlotte and Lizzy's time discussing and living with Mr. Collins, Wright is able to make more room for the romantic elements in the film.

The entailment of the Bennet estate is also treated less seriously than in the novel or the BBC adaptation. The entail is mentioned once at the beginning of the film by Elizabeth and in this brief mention it is not even called an entail. Instead, it is presented as a mere fact that Mr. Bennet's estate must be inherited by a male. The line seems to exist only to explain why the Bennets are so hostile to Mr. Collins at dinner, as it is not discussed in the context of the girls' need to marry, as it is in the BBC version. By not linking the entail explicitly to the girls' need to marry the film suggests that the entail, and thus the economic insecurity it represents, does not exert any kind of oppression on the girls' lives. This is problematic because English estate law "underwrote... gender... privilege" (Macpherson 2). By removing the emphasis on the entail, the film eliminates a key part of Austen's critique of the patriarchy. It, therefore, chooses to eliminate economic concerns that dominated nineteenth-century women's lives in favor of a love story.

By treating the entail as less important to the plot, the film also allows for a kinder portrayal of Mr. Bennet and, consequently, the traditional family and its patriarch. From the beginning of the 2005 film, Mr. Bennet is seen as less antagonistic to his wife, more supportive of his daughters, and concerned for their future. Austen's famous opening scene where he teases Mrs. Bennet about not going to visit Mr. Bingley is largely cut from the film. Instead, after Mrs. Bennet urges him to go visit Mr. Bingley, he turns to her and says "there's no need, I already have." His prolonged, days-long torturing of his wife is missing from the film. Instead of picking on her relentlessly, we see him being affectionate to her, calling her "blossom" and confiding in her about his thoughts on Jane's marriage to Bingley. His neglect of the girls is also stricken from the film. Unlike in the novel, where he privately blames himself for Lydia's elopement, and

the BBC version, where he vocalizes his disappointment in himself, Mr. Bennet takes no responsibility for Lydia's actions. Instead, we are given images, such as the shot of him comforting Mary after her poor piano playing is mocked at the ball, that show Mr. Bennet as a loving father. This is most emphasized in the British ending of the 2005 film, which differs from the one released for American audiences, in which the story ends on Mr. Bennet after he has approved Elizabeth's marriage to Mr. Darcy. These positive images suggest that Mr. Bennet is a good father who is trying to do the best for his daughters and, consequently, lead to an implicit endorsement of the patriarchy. While this may not have been Wright's intention, it is a side effect of portraying a kinder Mr. Bennet since it is in his character where most of Austen's critique of the patriarchy lies.

In addition to emphasizing the novel's romantic elements and downplaying the oppressive role of the patriarchy, the 2005 adaptation also centers itself more firmly on Lizzy's character than do earlier adaptations. This decision to center on Lizzy's character is made clear from the opening scenes of the film where we see Lizzy walking through a field reading. The shot follows her as she goes through the house and it is clear that this is a story about her. This decision makes sense for the film because Keira Knightley, who had starred in the first *Pirates of the Caribbean* film only two years before in 2003, was a reasonably well known star. One review of the film described her as "Britain's busiest and starriest young film actress" (Price). The same review later described Matthew Macfadyen, a TV star before he took on the role of Mr. Darcy, as "impossibly shy" and "bashful" (Price). Almost the entire review focuses on Knightley, her beauty, and her likeability in the role, while glossing over Macfadyen. Jeff Vice, another reviewer, notes that the film's appeal is largely due to its cast. He goes on to praise Knightley's

performance and chemistry with Macfadyen, while calling the portrayal of Mr. Darcy “conflicted” (Vice). The praise for Knightley shows that her portrayal of Elizabeth was one of the film’s most memorable elements. Unlike the BBC version in which Andrew Davies strove to create a story about Elizabeth and Darcy, the 2005 version tried to maximize its appeal by emphasizing the more famous Knightley.

By playing up both Elizabeth's character and the story’s romantic elements, the 2005 adaptation sheds some of the novel’s nuance in favor of giving Elizabeth Bennet an increased apparent control over her romantic future that would have appealed to the film’s audience. During the 2005 film, Elizabeth seems to have more apparent control over her situation. She is able to refuse proposals without seriously considering the economic ramifications and, in her final choice of Mr. Darcy, the audience sees that she has some agency over her life. In the final scene of the U.S. version of the film, the audience sees Mr. Darcy asking for permission to call Elizabeth by various “endearments.” She dictates what he may call her and tells him that he may only call her Mrs. Darcy when he is “completely, and perfectly, and incandescently happy.” He then repeats “Mrs. Darcy” several times before kissing her on the head, and then on the lips. This scene shows viewers that Elizabeth, whose independence they have seen throughout the film, will still be allowed to give orders to Mr. Darcy, albeit playfully, now that they are married and, therefore, re-emphasizes her apparent control of him.

Diminishing the role of economic insecurity as a driving force in the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* allows the 2005 adaptation to fall prey, however, to the heritage film trope of nostalgia which the BBC version avoids. According to Andrew Higson, one of the first scholars to identify the heritage film genre, heritage films draw on “detailed aspects of the English past” in ways that

make the “commodification of the past highly visible” (11). Creating nostalgia for the past is one of the key traits of the genre as is a “gaze [which] is organized around props and settings” (Higson qtd. in Dole). In Wright’s film, special attention is paid to both the props and the locations. He uses wide shots of Elizabeth standing by a lake, trekking through the countryside on her way to see Jane, and standing atop a mountain to emphasize the beauty of a landscape uninhibited by the modern technologies that would give rise to the industrial revolution and a smoggy skyline. He also uses camera tilts when shooting some of the finer houses, including Netherfield, which suggests that they are to be gazed upon in the same way that shots which tilted down women’s bodies offer their subjects up for viewing. Additionally, the restrictiveness of costumes, such as the fine eighteenth-century style gowns, is removed from the plot. For example, there is no sense that the long gowns hinder Elizabeth’s activity. Even after she walked several miles to visit a sick Jane at Netherfield, the film never shows her soiled gown. Rather, it alludes to the mess her dress was through dialogue from the snobby Caroline Bingley whom viewers already dislike. The fact that the audience is never allowed to see the messy gown prevents them from understanding how the gown, and other elements, such as the entail, restricted women’s lives. In the BBC version, viewers not only see the mud, but they are also exposed to conversations about the women’s economic insecurity. The BBC adaptation is, therefore, able to showcase the concerns of nineteenth-century women’s lives while still appealing to notions of feminist sisterhood that would have appealed to modern audiences.

## **Conclusion**

While both the BBC mini-series and the 2005 film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* updated Austen’s novel to appeal to modern audiences, only the BBC version did so in a way

that upheld the soft, proto-feminist critique of the patriarchy that is essential to many of Austen's novels. Austen adaptation critics have emphasized the need for costume drama adaptations to uphold the realities of nineteenth-century women's lives. In her essay, Rebecca Dickson illustrates the consequences that come with revising history. She writes that revisions to Austen's novels "have undermined the quiet feminist force of... [Austen's] works" and she notes that, since film plays such a big role in education, adaptations that stray away from exposing the rigid values placed upon nineteenth-century women can mislead viewers about what the realities were (Dickson). By choosing to confine its feminism to a sisterhood of support, rather than leaning into the novel's romantic elements, the BBC adaptation is able to adapt the novel for modern audiences in a way that does not lose the subtlety of Austen's work.



## Works Cited

- Ailwood, Sarah. "“What are men to rocks and mountains?” Romanticism in Joe Wright’s *Pride & Prejudice*.” *Persuasions On-line*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2007. <http://jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/ailwood.htm>? Accessed 21 April 2019.
- Birtwistle, Sue. *The Making of Pride and Prejudice*. Penguin Books, 2003.
- Dickson, Rebecca. “Misrepresenting Jane Austen’s Ladies: Revising Texts (and History) to Sell Films.” *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, edited by Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, University Press of Kentucky, 2001, pp. 44-57.
- Dole, Carol M. “Jane Austen and Mud: *Pride & Prejudice* (2005), British Realism, and the Heritage Film.” *Persuasions On-line*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2007. <http://jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/dole.htm>? Accessed 21 April 2019.
- Higson, Andrew. *English Heritage, English Cinema*. Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Johnson, Claudia L. *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*. Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Kaplan, Deborah. “Mass Marketing Jane Austen: Men, Women, and Courtship in Two Film Adaptations,” *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, edited by Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, University Press of Kentucky, 2001.
- Littlefield, Kinney. “‘PRIDE’: IN THE NAME OF LOVE; TELEVISION: True romance is timeless in the new A&E miniseries “Pride and Prejudice,” the latest adventure in the Jane Austen revival.” *The Orange County Register*, 14, January 1996. *Nexis Uni*. Accessed 21 April 2019.

Malick, Heather. "Why we watch: Some women have seen the televised version of *Pride and Prejudice* numerous times..." *Ottawa Citizen*, pg. E10. *Nexis Uni*. Accessed 21 April 2019.

Macpherson, Sandra. "Rent to Own; or, What's Entailed in *Pride and Prejudice*." *Representations*, vol. 82, no. 1, 2003, pp. 1–23. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/Rep.2003.82.1.1](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/Rep.2003.82.1.1). Accessed 21 April 2019.

Martin, Lydia. "Joe Wright's *Pride & Prejudice*: From Classicism to Romanticism." *Persuasions On-line*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2007. <http://jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/martin.Htm>? Accessed 21 April 2019.

Nixon, Cheryl L. "Balancing the Courtship Hero: Masculine Emotional Display in Film Adaptations of Austen's Novels," *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, edited by Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, University Press of Kentucky, 2001.

Palmer, Sally B. "*Little Women* at Longbourn: The Re-Wrighting of *Pride and Prejudice*." *Persuasions On-line*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2007. <http://jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/palmer.html>. Accessed 21 April 2019.

Price, Karen. "Pride." *Western Mail*. 16 Sept. 2005. *Nexis Uni*. Accessed 21 April 2019.

Seeber, Barbara K. "A Bennet Utopia: Adapting the Father in *Pride and Prejudice*." *Persuasions On-line*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2007. <http://jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/seeber.htm>? Accessed 21 April 2019.

Serrienne, Nina Esperanza. "LGBT and Women's Rights." *America in the Nineties*, Syracuse

University Press, Syracuse, New York, 2015, pp. 197–235. *JSTOR*,  
[www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1j1nt2w.14](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1j1nt2w.14). Accessed 21 April 2019.

Vice, Jeff. “Austen would be proud of new 'Prejudice' film.” *Deseret Morning News* [Salt Lake  
City, Utah], 11, Nov. 2005. *Nexis Uni*. Accessed 21 April 2019.

## Chapter 3

### Introduction

While the costume adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* have to contend with how to both update Austen's plots for a modern audience and retain period realism, revisionist adaptations are free to give their female protagonists all of the freedom of a modern woman. This independence, however, causes complications for Austen's plot, which relied on patriarchal systems in order to motivate the actions of the characters. If Elizabeth does not have to get married for financial security, what motivates her interest in Darcy? Through its use of voice-over narration, engagement with postfeminism, and the emphasis on Bridget's relatability in the film's advertising campaign, the 2001 film *Bridget Jones's Diary* portrays the modern, Western woman as crippled by the choices offered by feminism and in need of a man who can provide personal and professional fulfillment by reinscribing them into the patriarchy. Conversely, the 2012-2013 vlog-style Youtube series *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* responds to young women's desires for collective feminist spaces by using Lizzie's misjudgment of other characters, career insecurity, and the series' transmedia storytelling to create a community of supportive women both inside and outside of the story world.

*Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* are part of a boom of revisionist Austen adaptations that begin in the 1990s and stretch into the 2000s and 2010s that update *Pride and Prejudice* for a variety of cultural sensibilities. In 1995, the BBC released their highly successful mini series, a period adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, the next year Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* was released, and a film version followed in 2001. In the following years, other revisionist media adaptations would follow including a Bollywood film, *Bride and*

*Prejudice* (2004), a Mormon version released in 2003, and several other Austen-themed adaptations, such as *Lost in Austen* (2008) and *Austenland* (2013), that transplant modern women back into the novel's historical settings. These revisionist adaptations reinterpret the source texts for many different cultures and sensibilities and this radical transformation of the originals allows them to reinterpret the themes of Austen's novel and update them for more modern cultural and political sensibilities.

One of the most common cultural trends these revisionist adaptations draw on is what Rosalind Gill has labeled the postfeminist media sensibility. Media critic Angela McRobbie defines postfeminism as "an active process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s come to be undermined" through what critic Rosalind Gill describes as an "entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist themes" (McRobbie 255, Gill 149). This mixing of themes allows the texts to empower their female protagonists with both an increased real and apparent control over their lives. However, this sense of control may be undermined throughout the text as a way of reaffirming the traditional, patriarchal heterosexual relationships at their core. While postfeminism has come to refer to a movement of backlash against feminism, a political assertion that feminism is no longer needed, and a means of describing the changes feminism underwent after the second-wave, I will be using the term throughout this chapter to refer to the media sensibility in which female characters were often portrayed as independent women who, despite their careers and friendships, seek fulfillment in the form of a heterosexual relationship and who often embark on journeys to help themselves achieve this goal. By exploring postfeminism as a media sensibility, rather than a political movement, this chapter will be able to

better examine the ways in which the postfeminist sensibility draws from both feminist and anti-feminist themes in its depictions of women.

In both the book and film version of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, and several other revisionist *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations this mixing of feminist and anti-feminist themes is seen through the ways the female characters feel nostalgia for Austen's era despite their modern independence. In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Bridget obsesses over the 1995 BBC mini series adaptation, in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* Lizzie gushes over "period romance[s]," and the protagonists of *Lost in Austen* and *Austenland* love the novel so much they want to transport themselves back to her world. In "Jane Austen's World as Postmodern Simulacrum in Fielding's Narratives of Bridget Jones," Laura M. White writes that the interest in Austen adaptations among postfeminist heroines creates "a constant imaginary past which offers an alternative realm for straight-forward nostalgia" (260). Bridget and Lizzie's love of Austen and period romances, therefore, creates an alternative world where these independent woman can fantasize about the manners and romance of Austen's time without interrogating the damaging aspects of the patriarchy that they as modern women are unencumbered by. This exemplifies the ways postfeminism mixes feminist and anti-feminist themes and it is this mixing of themes which allows these texts to examine the ways patriarchy functions in the past and in the present.

By simply bringing the story of *Pride and Prejudice* into the modern world, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* are able to grapple with the ways female agency in patriarchal, Western society has changed over time. Unlike the Mormon and Bollywood updates, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* do not transport the story of *Pride and Prejudice* into a vastly different cultural or religious contexts that replicate some of the

patriarchal values from regency England. Similarly, unlike *Austenland* and *Lost in Austen*, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* do not transport modern women into the past where they embark on relationships with nineteenth century men. These differences allow *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* to examine how both the Western culture Austen was writing about and the relationships between men and women have changed as a result of feminist movements. Unlike Austen's Elizabeth Bennet, Bridget and Lizzie are free to own property, get jobs, and marry whomever they want. As a result both women attempt to fit into the archetype of a typical postfeminist "can-do" girl. In her book, *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*, Anita Harris describes the "can-do" girl as a young woman "who is flexible, individualized, resilient, self-driven, and... who easily follows nonlinear trajectories to fulfillment and success" (16). The "can-do" girl is not affected by the same types of direct, patriarchal oppression that result in the lack of options for women that we see in Austen's novel.

Bridget's and Lizzie's apparent freedom puts the texts in danger of losing some of the feminist themes in the original because it removes the novel's central critique of Mr. Bennet, who failed to provide for his daughters and, therefore, they must marry in order to secure their futures. In this critique, Austen exposes the ways in which patriarchal systems can leave women disadvantaged and dependent on the men in their lives. Modern retellings of *Pride and Prejudice*, therefore, are at risk of confirming aspects of the postfeminist discourse that render feminism "historicised and... out of date" (McRobbie 258). Rather than merely existing to confirm that feminism is no longer needed, I would argue that revisionist Austen adaptations exist to highlight the ways in which patriarchy still plays an active, albeit limited, role in

women's lives. In *Adaptation, Authorship, and Contemporary Women Filmmakers*, Shelley Cobb notes that postfeminist Austen adaptations suggest a longing for "a lost feminist identity that signals discontent with... postfeminist culture" by featuring heroines who idolize the ways in which Austen's female protagonists took control over their lives. (114). Both *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* show hints of this type of critique by the ways in which they maintain that patriarchy persists. *Bridget Jones's Diary* demonstrates this through the repeated scenes of and references to workplace sexual harassment, while *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* examines the negative aspects of patriarchy and male entitlement through the issue of revenge porn. Furthermore, the women in both adaptations express their interest in Austen's novels and heroines and the love stories they created for themselves.

Since the adaptations are set in the 20th and 21st centuries, they do not have to grapple with as many more overt forms of oppression and as a result both texts examine issues of feminism from a more personal perspective through the use of the diary format. The diary format allows *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* to prioritize their thoughts, feelings, and opinions despite how biased or limited they may be. Additionally, this emphasis on female interiority is a productive means for finding feminist discourse in a postfeminist culture. As Cheryl A. Wilson notes "diaries, and other forms of articulating women's experience are certainly not 'crap' but instead offer important perspectives on feminism and contemporary culture" (29). Wilson highlights both how the diary form is undervalued by male, patriarchal discourse and outlines its usefulness for understanding female interiority. She points out that diaries contain women's perspectives on feminism and culture that have the potential to express women's inner selves. Furthermore, diaries are an especially productive form for feminist

discontent in postfeminist culture. Angela McRobbie writes that postfeminist “young women [prefer] to keep [their] feminism a private matter... a kind of secret life” (McRobbie qtd. in Cobb 122). Given their status as a refuge for private thoughts, diaries, both fictional and nonfictional, are likely to be the sites of this private form of feminism that persists in the postfeminist world.

The diary-style forms of both *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* also showcase the central characters' limited perspectives through first person narration, allowing them to occupy the role of the feminine narrator. In her essay, “Authenticity, Convention, and *Bridget Jones's Diary*,” Alison Case describes how female narrators are often excluded from “the activity of shaping [their] experiences into a coherent and meaningful story” (176). She argues that, through the use of diary and epistolary forms which tend to document the present, female narrators are “deprive[d]... of the interpretive advantage of hindsight with which to shape a narrative” (Case 177). Diary and epistolary form, she believes, prevent female narrators from interpreting the events of their lives within that of a larger narrative due to their tendency to document the minute details of the present without the knowledge of the future. The narratives therefore, require that the reader read between the lines to get the full story. Consequently, feminine narrators' stories are shaped just as much by what their protagonists don't know as by what they do.

Both Lizzie's and Bridget's diaries fit these categorizations as they tend to document events in real time. Moreover, each of the adaptations highlights the narrator's limited perspective. In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Bridget's voice-over narration filters the events of the story through her point of view, allowing the audience to see both the other character's actions and Bridget's perspective on them. In *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, this limited perspective is intensified as,

instead of seeing other characters' actions, the audience often only sees Lizzie dress up and act them out in moments of costume theater. Both Bridget's and Lizzie's perspectives are displayed as limited throughout the adaptations. In one scene of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, for example, Perpetua, Bridget's co-worker, openly rolls her eyes as Bridget pretends to be talking about work as she comforts her broken hearted friend in order to make their boss believe she is on a work-related phone call. Bridget's smile in this scene cues the audience into the fact that Bridget believes she has fooled her boss, while Perpetua's eye roll makes it obvious to the audience that she has not. After the call ends, Daniel, Bridget's boss, also makes it clear that Bridget has failed to fool him by pointing out that the critic she was pretending to converse with is dead. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* employs similar methods with characters rolling their eyes, contesting Lizzie's narratives, or even taking over her video diaries to set the record straight when they believe Lizzie has led the viewers astray with her unfair portrayals of events. By using the character's limited perspectives as a way to derive humor, both adaptations create pleasure for their viewers by giving them a sense of mastery over the narrative.

This pleasure occurs because female viewers are able to shape the "raw and unmediated" events of Bridget's and Lizzie's lives in a way that is typically outsourced to what Case calls the "male 'master narrator'" (176). The "male 'master narrator'" Case describes can be either a literal figure in the narrative or it can be a cultural frame. In the case of a cultural frame, systems, such as the patriarchy, play an active role in shaping the narrative by relying on the audience's understanding of common themes and tropes like the damsel in distress who must be rescued by a male hero or the virtuous (i.e. virginal) good girl who is rewarded in the end of the novel for adhering to patriarchal ideals for women. Rather than an empowered female narrator, therefore,

it is a male figure or the patriarchy that gives the stories their shape. In texts with primarily female target audiences, these systems create pleasure for female viewers because they allow women to construct themselves as more clever than their protagonists by placing them in the position of the master narrator. As a result, women are able to enjoy these texts despite the fact that they reinforce aspects of the patriarchy.

### ***Bridget Jones's Diary (2001)***

In *Bridget Jones's Diary* her confessional style of voiceover narration allows her to embody the role of the feminine narrator by highlighting how her attempts to plan for situations often fail. Throughout the film, Bridget makes plans that she ultimately does not follow through with, such as when she aggressively plans for the book launch party her publishing company is holding. This planning is displayed through a montage of Bridget consulting with her friends and engaging in physical preparation for the book launch party and later in the film over Bridget's anxiety about the Tarts and Vicars party her mother's friends are holding. Bridget's preparation for the book party involves lessons from her friends in networking, rehearsing conversations, mentally practicing her speech, and debating what to wear. Despite this all this preparation, Bridget messes up her speech due to an extreme fear that she will accidentally call her boss "tits pervert" instead of "Fitz-Herbert" and she fails to use any of the networking tips she received. At the Tarts and Vicars party, Bridget's costume preparation backfires when she shows up dressed as a *Playboy* bunny while everyone else is in dress clothes because no one told her about the theme change. Both of these instances result in Bridget's embarrassment and they encourage the audience to laugh at her distress. Consequently she occupies the role of the feminine narrator

whose lack of awareness is more pleasurable to viewers than a competent adult woman would be.

One of the biggest examples of Bridget's failed plans is her resolution to stop fantasizing about her boss, Daniel Cleaver. Bridget's inability to avoid romantic entanglement with Daniel is revealed in her voice-over resolution where she proclaims that she "will not fantasize about a particular person who embodies" everything she hates about men. As she reads these lines from her diary, the film cuts to an elevator opening to reveal Daniel Cleaver as the lyric "what you want, baby I got it" from Aretha Franklin's "Respect" plays. This shot accompanied by these lyrics suggests that despite her resolution, Daniel is still desirable to Bridget. The next few scenes further show Bridget's inability to ignore Daniel's attentions as their instant message flirting becomes in-person flirting and eventually a relationship. Bridget's voice-over tells the audience that she "will put a stop to flirting" with Daniel after the initial messaging scene, yet her actions immediately afterwards — wearing a shorter skirt and see-through top — show that she is still actively pursuing Daniel. She even imagines their wedding in a fantasy sequence. Despite their new relationship and Bridget's obvious feelings, Daniel remains distant. He uses derogatory, rather than affectionate, language when he flirts with her, cancels their plans, and eventually cheats on her, ending their relationship. Even in Bridget's fantasy, he seems aloof, joking that their relationship is the result of "irresponsible emailing" rather than conveying any genuine emotion. The fact that this occurs even in Bridget's fantasy shows that she knows Daniel is an unreliable partner, and yet she still pursues him despite her resolution not to.

Bridget's seeming inability to refrain from being attracted to Daniel highlights the ways in which postfeminist discourse on gender roles leads to a reinstatement of patriarchal values.

Throughout the film, Daniel is portrayed as a figure of traditional masculinity. He is overtly sexual, calling Bridget a “dirty bitch” and telling her that she is “looking very sexy” after the book launch party. He also controls his relationship with Bridget by resisting her attempts to define them as boyfriend and girlfriend. When Bridget initially asks him how their sexual relationship will affect their working relationship Daniel dismisses her saying “it started on Tuesday and now it’s Thursday. It’s not exactly a long-term relationship.” Later when Bridget declares herself the “proper girlfriend of a bonafide sex-god” in her voice-over, the viewer sees Daniel resist the idea of their committed relationship by saying to her “promise me we don’t have to sit in any little boats and read poncey poetry to each other.” In this scene, Bridget celebrates the new state of their relationship, while Daniel resists the very activities couples are expected to engage in. Daniel’s representation as hyper-masculine aligns with postfeminist discourse about the roles of men and women. Gill writes that representations of so-called “authentic masculinity” “[assert]... freedom against the stranglehold of feminism” (158). This form of masculinity reaffirms notions of traditional sex differences and suggests that those differences are “sexy” even “pleasurable” (Gill 159). In other words, the film suggests that Bridget should be attracted to Daniel’s overtly sexual attitude toward their relationship and the fact that it gives him power over her. This reaffirms that, despite her critique of men like Daniel as “emotional fuckwits,” Bridget is still seduced by the ways patriarchy classifies men as strong, sexual beings and women as emotional and vulnerable.

Bridget’s need for control and planning does not just extend to her career and romantic life. This need also manifests itself in her desire for self improvement. After her initial encounter with Mark Darcy at her mother’s Turkey Curry Buffet, Bridget buys a diary to “tell the truth about

Bridget Jones” and immediately embarks on making New Years Resolutions that include “obviously will lose 20 pounds,” “always put last night’s panties in the laundry basket,” and “will find nice, sensible boyfriend to go out with.” These resolutions mark the beginning of Bridget’s mission to improve herself over the course of the year while the accompanying images underscore her inability to achieve these goals. At the beginning of this sequence, a set of subtitles come on the screen marking Bridget’s current weight, 136 pounds; the number of cigarettes she has smoked, 42; and the amount of alcohol she has consumed, 50 units. Two of these categories, cigarettes and alcohol, showcase resolutions Bridget has already broken since at the Turkey Curry Buffet she told Mark Darcy she intended to quit smoking and drink less. Her other resolutions seem equally as unlikely to manifest as the images that accompany them, such as Bridget walking around the apartment with “last night’s panties” stuck to her leg, make it seem like she has already begun to fail.

Additionally, all of Bridget’s efforts toward self-improvement in the film seem to derive from a need to please men, rather than from a source of self-empowerment. In the postfeminist sensibility, bettering oneself is often “(re-)presented as something done for yourself, not in order to please a man” (Gill 154). The ways in which postfeminist heroines go about improving their bodies and lives, however, often resembles the ideals of female beauty put forward by the patriarchy. Gill notes that “monitoring and surveying the self have long been requirements of successful femininity” and the modern standards of “attire, posture, elocution and ‘manners’” are not really different from the ways women have always been encouraged to behave, making the new standards as much about pleasing men as the old ones (155). This is especially true of Bridget who, according to the novel, will “develop inner poise and authority” and who will

project that she is “complete without boyfriend as the best way to obtain boyfriend” (Fielding 2). These lines from Bridget’s resolutions show that her quest for self-improvement is really about finding someone to date. The film takes this resolution a step further by removing from the voice-over any suggestion that Bridget wants to develop herself for her own pleasure. Instead, it shows Bridget’s actions are directly motivated by her desire for a husband.

While Bridget’s obsession with improving her personality and appearance to seem desirable to men could read as a manifestation of the way patriarchal societies use gendered beauty norms to make women feel insecure about their abilities, the film removes most of the novel’s critiques of the magazines and advertisements that promote this standard. According to Srijani Ghosh, “the post feminist sensibility trapped [women in]... ‘the beauty myth,’” a set of impossible standards that dictated thin, busty, Barbie Doll-like women were the ideal that all women should strive for despite how impossible or unhealthy this standard was (Wolf qtd. In Ghosh 79-80). As a novel, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* seems cognizant of the impossibility of these standards and seizes on them as an opportunity for feminist critique. Bridget describes herself as “a child of Cosmopolitan culture” who has “been traumatized by supermodels and too many quizzes” in a line that allows the novel to critique the very elements of popular culture that set these unrealistic beauty standards (Fielding 52). This critique is furthered by that fact that when Bridget does actually lose the weight in the novel she is told by her friends that she looks sick and tired. One even tells her that she “looked better before” (Fielding 92). These moments, which allow the reader to see that unrealistic beauty standards are unhealthy for women, are removed from the film. Instead, it shows montages of Bridget’s beauty routine which includes waxing, rubbing cellulite off her thighs, and squeezing her butt into a tight pair of granny panties.

These failures and insecurities, which the film often plays for humor, showcase Bridget's lack of control over both her love life and her career due to her own incapability. Many of the film's jokes rest on the idea that Bridget is incapable at work. During the montage where Bridget interviews for TV production jobs she incorrectly answers questions about the El Niño phenomenon, she implies that she does not like children at a children's network, and she only gains a job at a TV studio when she says in her interview that she needs to leave her "current job because [she] shagged her boss." Later, in a scene from her job at the TV studio, Bridget is embarrassed when she accidentally flashes her buttocks at the camera while sliding down a fireman's pole. Her personal life features similar embarrassments. In one scene, she embarrasses herself in front of Mark Darcy by going on about how she "[wishes] she could be lying with her head in a toilet" due to a hangover and she leaves the smug marrieds dinner party embarrassed and distressed after everyone grills her about her status as a single woman. In all of these scenes, Bridget seems incapable of functioning happily on her own in the adult world. She is, therefore, in need of someone to help her deal with the responsibility of managing herself.

As a result, Mark Darcy, her primary love interest in the film, must save her both personally and professionally. As her professional savior, Mark gives Bridget an exclusive interview about one of the cases he was working on. This prevents Bridget from further embarrassing herself at her TV job as, had it not been for Mark's interview, she would have had to confess to her boss that she missed speaking to the defendant because she was out buying cigarettes. In her personal life, Mark helps her prepare food for her birthday party after her own attempts go awry. Bridget's need to be saved by Mark makes her less similar to *Pride and Prejudice's* central protagonist Elizabeth Bennet. While Elizabeth is portrayed as Darcy's equal, Bridget needs Mark to take

care of her. This update aligns with the postfeminist sensibility in that it shows “the burden of self management” and “fantasizes [about] tradition” (McRobbie 262). This is especially clear during her birthday party where Bridget’s failures — poor cooking and a desire to reconnect with Daniel — are on full display. This offers Mark the perfect opportunity to step in and save Bridget by fighting Daniel. The scene, which is underscored by “It’s Raining Men,” shows Bridget and her friends ogling as Daniel and Mark punch each other in the street and even break through a window. Bridget and her friends’ gaze on the two men shows that she takes pleasure in the fact that they are fighting over her. Furthermore, it shows how badly Bridget needs Mark because, when the fight ends, she again chooses to care for Daniel over him. While Bridget ultimately stands up to Daniel after Mark leaves, her initial refusal shows that she is still attracted to men like Daniel who hurt her.

Additionally, the savior moment that a *Pride and Prejudice* adaptation demands involves Mark saving Bridget from her own embarrassing, single self and admitting that her mishaps are what attracted him to her. In both *Pride and Prejudice* and the *Bridget Jones’s Diary* novel, the dilemma that allows Darcy/Mark to prove his love for Elizabeth/Bridget involves him rescuing another character from shame. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy prevents Wickham from refusing to marry Lydia and, therefore, saves the Bennet family from shame. In the novel *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, Mark Darcy helps Bridget’s mother side step the legal troubles when her lover Julio is caught embezzling. Rather than have Mark Darcy save another character, however, the *Bridget Jones’s Diary* film has him save Bridget from her own embarrassing, single self. The final scenes in the film when Bridget attends Mark’s parents’ Ruby Wedding party bear this out. At the party, Mark’s parents announce his engagement to Natasha, a lawyer at his firm, and Bridget

embarrasses herself by interrupting the speech. Bridget leaves the party and spends her time sulking in her apartment. She even changes the name of her diary to include the word “spinster.” It is only when Mark returns to sweep her off her feet that she is able to feel wanted.

In the end, Mark buys Bridget a new diary, signalling his complete role as the master narrator of her life. When Mark returns for Bridget, rather than marrying Natasha, his actions imply that he would rather be with an ordinary woman he can control, rather than a competent woman who is his equal. This action is exemplified through his decision to buy a new diary after he snoops through Bridget’s things and reads in her diary that she thinks he “is rude, he’s unpleasant, he’s DULL. No wonder his clever wife left him” and that her mother “was really scraping the barrel” when she introduced them. These lines expose the fact that Mark was rude at the beginning of the film and they chronicle Bridget’s legitimate reactions to his treatment of her. By buying her a new diary after he discovers Bridget has been disparaging him, Mark is asserting that her opinion of him is wrong and needs to be corrected. Furthermore, during their conversation about the diary, Bridget dismisses the power of her own voice saying, “I didn’t mean it. I mean, I meant it, but I was so stupid that I didn’t mean what I meant” and “everyone knows diaries are just full of crap.” This dismissal of her own voice, rather than defending her opinion of Mark’s treatment of her, shows that Bridget is willing to accept his role as the master narrator of her life.

Bridget’s reversal of opinion about Mark may seem similar to Elizabeth’s change of heart concerning Mr. Darcy; several differences, however, emphasize the fact that Mark and Bridget’s relationship is patriarchal while Elizabeth and Darcy’s challenges tradition. One example of this is that Elizabeth and Darcy view one another as intellectual equals while *Bridget Jones’s Diary*

continually reminds the audience that Bridget and Mark are not equals. Rather than the lively debates Elizabeth and Darcy have, Mark and Bridget's conversations often consist of Bridget embarrassing herself by pretending to be more sophisticated than she is. In the scene equivalent to the one in which Elizabeth rejects Darcy's proposal, for example, Bridget does not even properly get to tell Mark off for the ways he has been rude to her. While Elizabeth speaks confidently as she defends her sister against Darcy's pride and later reflects on her misjudgment of Wickham, Bridget calls herself an "idiot" and Mark comes off not as arrogant, but as loving when he says "I like you, just as you are" and dreamy music swells. By situating Mark as dreamy, rather than prideful, and Bridget as incapable, rather than merely mistaken in some of her judgments, *Bridget Jones's Diary* removes the central theme of *Pride and Prejudice* which is that both Elizabeth and Darcy need to change in order to be together. The fact that Mark wants Bridget to remain as she is suggests that he does not want an equal the same way Darcy and Elizabeth did and would rather have a woman whom he needs to constantly save from embarrassing herself.

*Bridget Jones's Diary*, therefore, suggests that women need men, and by extension the patriarchy, for personal and professional fulfillment. Bridget's need for a man to fulfill her both personally and professionally is a "grotesque deflation not only of Elizabeth Bennet's independence] but of the liberal feminist tenets of autonomy and choice" (Harzewski 61). This deflation allows *Bridget Jones's Diary* to reinstate the differences in gender roles that Bridget's *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* self-help books espouse. Gill notes that "a key feature of the postfeminist sensibility has been the resurgence of ideas of natural sexual difference" (158). This plays out in *Bridget Jones's Diary* as Mark assumes responsibility for

Bridget's professional and romantic success as well as her inner voice through the purchase of a new diary. This reinscribes Bridget into the patriarchy and, consequently, affirms the place of male-oriented social structures in society.

While some may argue that the film reinscribes only Bridget into the patriarchy, rather than women as a whole, the emphasis on Bridget's ordinariness and relatability in the film's advertising campaign suggests that her experiences in the film are meant to be applied to all women. In an interview with *The Guardian* to promote the film, actress Renée Zellweger said, "Obviously I related to the female aspect [of the character]... I, like so many people, understood her quest. I understood her search for self-acceptance and her daily attempt to define what is going to bring her happiness in life." In another interview with the UK's *The Telegraph* director Sharon Maguire notes that "Bridget Jones is meant to be a funny night out, but with emotional truth... The [single woman] is still a relevant social phenomenon. It continues to be an issue that we're all dealing with." These quotes emphasize the fact that both Bridget's character and the film as a whole are meant to appeal to single women as realistic representations of their lives and inner feelings. Bridget's relationship with Mark and its patriarchal implications, therefore, are not meant to be seen as something one particularly inept woman needs, but as something all women desire.

### ***The Lizzie Bennet Diaries (2012-2013)***

Unlike *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* maps more neatly onto the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*. and, therefore, this modern retelling draws more directly from the depictions of the more competent women found in Austen's novel. All of the characters retain their names from the novel, with few taking on slight variations. Charles Bingley, Jane's love

interest, becomes Bing Lee, an Asian-American who is aspiring to become a doctor. Similarly, Elizabeth's friend Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice* becomes Lizzie's friend, Charlotte Lu. Many of the characters also retain their romantic pairings from Austen's original plot as well. Lizzie is still ends up with Mr. Darcy at the end of the series, Jane pursues Bing, and Lydia still needs to be rescued from Wickham in order for Darcy to prove his love for Elizabeth. While many aspects of the novel's plot remain in the series, several other aspects are altered in order to make sense with the contemporary setting. Charlotte, for example, does not marry Mr. Collins to gain financial security. Instead, he gives her a job within his company. Similarly, Jane does not move around just to follow Bing, instead her career takes her to LA, where he has moved in order to return to school. Notably, none of the female characters get married in this adaptation, and as a result the series feels more focused on their careers and their relationships with one another, rather than the marriage plot.

While *Bridget Jones's Diary* uses the confessional form to emphasize how often Bridget's plans fail, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* uses it to highlight Lizzie's misconceptions about other characters. Part of the diary's appeal is its use of sections the characters call "costume theater" to reenact events that happened outside of the camera. These skits are often highly exaggerated. For example, Mr. Darcy is played by Lizzie with a robot voice and Mrs. Bennet is portrayed with a ridiculous Southern accent. Since these exaggerations are based on scripts written by Lizzie, this provides a opportunity for the audience to see her limited perspective.

This use of limited perspective allows the audience to get the same pleasure from Lizzie's feminine narration without making her seem incompetent. The fact that viewers are expected to understand the series by picking up on Lizzie's prejudices against other characters allows

viewers to gain pleasure by “reading... beyond the narrator’s perceptions” (Case 177). Since these prejudices are rooted in Lizzie’s preconceived opinions of other people, and not her lack of intelligence or proper manners as Bridget’s were, they do not require that the audience laugh at Lizzie. Instead, the pleasure comes from pulling together clues from Lizzie’s depiction of events that suggest Darcy’s interest in her. One of the clearest examples of this occurs in episodes 14 and 15, in which Lizzie gives one account of the night spent with Bing, Caroline, Darcy, Jane, and Lydia at Carter’s bar and Charlotte and Jane give another. In episode 14 when Lydia asserts that “Darcy would have played” the video game Just Dance with Lizzie, Lizzie responds by saying “Darcy can go play whack-a-mole in the corner by himself. I don’t want or need his pity.” In Lizzie’s version of events, she asserts that Darcy only wanted to play with her because he pitied her. Additionally, her sarcastic tone and use of “whack-a-mole” as a euphemism for masturbation suggest that she felt he was mocking her. In Charlotte and Jane’s version of the events, Darcy was complimenting Lizzie and he even uses the famous line from *Pride and Prejudice*, “I’ve been thinking about the pleasure a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow.” By watching these two videos together, the audience sees the gaps in Lizzie’s narrative and they are, therefore, able to gain pleasure by figuring out the love story before she does.

Rather than rendering her incompetent in her personal life, Lizzie’s close female friendships allow her to use hindsight to shape her narrative. The fact that Charlotte, Jane, and occasionally Lydia correct Lizzie’s perspective does not cause Lizzie embarrassment in the same way Bridget feels embarrassment when corrected by her co-workers or lovers. This largely has to do with the intent of the people correcting her. When Lizzie’s sisters and friends bring her

misconceptions to her attention, they are not doing it to shame her for not knowing facts or proper etiquette, they are doing it to help her see the errors in her narrative and to potentially find happiness. This is a far cry from the film adaptation *Bridget Jones's Diary* which diminishes the role of her friendships and, through the film's networking advice montage, shows their help as causing Bridget's embarrassments rather than helping her succeed. By affirming the roles women play in helping one another, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* suggests that a network of women, rather than a man, can lead to personal fulfillment.

This is especially true of Lizzie's relationship with Charlotte, who shoots and edits Lizzie's video diaries. The series' editing techniques frequently highlight Charlotte's role in helping Lizzie shape her narrative. Charlotte best states the series' editing style in episode 51, "Together Again," when she comments on her role as the editor. She says, "I promise I will continue to draw devil horns on your face and leave in all the weird bits you wish I would cut." Throughout the series, the videos draw attention to these intrusive editing techniques. Parts of the videos Lizzie tells Charlotte to cut are left in, Charlotte's voice-over will step in and correct Lizzie's perspective, and mustaches, devil horns, and other doodles are drawn on Lizzie's face when Charlotte thinks that events may not have been conveyed truthfully. In her videos, Lizzie often addresses Charlotte's intrusions and they allow her to reflect on the events and occasionally admit that she did not see the bigger picture. Episode 8, "Charlotte's Back," for example, features both women discussing Lizzie's opposition to Jane's relationship with Bing Lee. In the middle of the video, Charlotte cuts out their conversation because Lizzie refuses to see Jane's relationship as anything other than an "arranged marriage." Charlotte then explains to the viewers that "Lizzie had already made up her mind to hate" Bing Lee and that "Lizzie hates

changing her mind.” Three episodes later in “The Charming Mr. Lee,” Lizzie retracts her negative opinion of him and admits that she misjudged him. Charlotte calling out Lizzie with the series’ intrusive editing, therefore, helps Lizzie recognize when she misjudges people and allows her to use hindsight to shape her narrative.

Despite these intrusions, viewers never get the sense that Charlotte is narrating for Lizzie. She is merely helping Lizzie shape the narrative by allowing her to access an alternative perspective. When Charlotte leaves to go work for Mr. Collins at Collins & Collins, Lizzie notes that she “took the same [production] classes” as Charlotte and, therefore, will be able to edit her videos on her own. Lizzie then takes over editing the videos for the rest of the series, aside from a brief stint when she visits Charlotte at Collins & Collins. The fact that Lizzie is a capable editor without Charlotte shows her ability to provide her own narration. Additionally, even as Lizzie is increasingly on her own, she still reflects on where she went wrong without the help of her sister and friend. Episode 80, “Hyper-Mediation in New Media,” showcases this as Lizzie and Darcy perform costume theater to help Lizzie work out her feelings about seeing Bing again after he dumped Jane. In the episode, Lizzie explains to Darcy how performing costume theater in the videos helps her create “verisimilitude” by depicting the emotional truths present in situations that would not normally occur. This conversation allows Lizzie and Darcy to discuss how it was wrong for both of them to meddle in Bing and Jane’s relationship through the use of video diaries, in Lizzie’s case, and through encouraging Bing to move to LA in Darcy’s case. This conversation shows that for Lizzie, the costume theater, editing, and other techniques in the videos help her gain perspective on situations even without the more obvious intrusions of Jane

and Charlotte. Rather than becoming master narrators in her life, Charlotte, Jane, and even Darcy serve as resources that help Lizzie develop her own hindsight.

Lizzie's close relationships with Charlotte and Jane also help her navigate her precarious financial future. In her essay "Working Girls: The Precariat of Chick Lit" Suzanne Ferriss uses Toby Miller's concept of the precariat to describe the economic condition of many postfeminist, chick-lit heroines. The precariat, according to Ferriss and Miller, are "young, female, mobile, intercultural workers struggling against employment insecurity" (Miller qtd. in Ferriss 182). This characterization applies to the three main women in the series, Lizzie, Jane, and Charlotte, who are seeking careers in communications, fashion, and filmmaking, respectively. This lack of career stability is expressed by Charlotte who says in episode 16, "Happiness in the Pursuit of Life," that "success is mostly luck," by Jane's unstable career trajectory as she bounces from job to job in the fashion world, and by Lizzie throughout the series as she jokes about her "mountain of student loans." The fact that the three of them share this precarious financial future becomes a bonding point for all three women. Lizzie offers confidence in both Charlotte's and Jane's skills throughout the series. She encourages Charlotte to pursue her dreams as a filmmaker rather than settling for a job at Collins & Collins and she supports Jane's move for her job as a fashion designer. Furthermore, it is this ultimate support of each other's career ambitions that allows the series' romantic plot to function. Rather than simply follow Bing Lee to LA under the guise of visiting relatives, as Jane does in *Pride and Prejudice* with her trip to London, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* has her move because she got a better job. Lizzie's movements are similarly motivated by her graduate school independent studies which require her to shadow new media companies, two of which end up belonging to Darcy and his aunt, Catherine De Bourgh.

This sense of support is seen most clearly in her relationship with Charlotte which, in addition to providing personal support, also allows both women to gain professional experience. When Charlotte is able to leave the video diaries and accept a job at Collins & Collins, it is because of the work she has put into helping Lizzie with the videos. Episode 41, “Your Pitch Needs Work,” showcases the ways Charlotte is able to use the video diaries for her benefit. In this video, she essentially interviews with Mr. Collins for the position Lizzie rejected by suggesting Mr. Collins practice pitching a job at his company to her. She then critiques his pitch to show that she is both interested and qualified to work for him. This leads Mr. Collins to highlight the ways in which the videos have helped Charlotte develop a resourcefulness as a video content producer and how working with Lizzie has helped her develop her interpersonal skills. The use of the diaries as a medium for talking with Mr. Collins and the experiences Charlotte has gained from working on them, therefore, help her move to a job at a company she will eventually lead when Mr. Collins moves to Canada.

Lizzie benefits similarly from working with Charlotte on the videos. In episode 50, “Moving On,” Lizzie expresses concern that “everyone [is] moving on but [her].” After she expresses her fear that her life is stagnating, she visits Charlotte at Collins & Collins. There, Charlotte suggests that instead of remaining at home Lizzie should do independent study projects where she shadows new media companies in order to fulfill her final graduate school requirements. This suggestion gives Lizzie the opportunity to network with four different companies and both her independent studies and her video diaries eventually lead her to start her own companies when investors who watch her videos start messaging her. The work Lizzie, Charlotte, and her sisters put into the videos, therefore, creates career opportunities for them.

Given that Jane and Charlotte have similarly precarious career paths, the three women are also able to provide each other with distractions as they face an uncertain future. A recurrent theme throughout the series is Charlotte telling Lizzie that “no one cares” about her independent study projects and her graduate school classes in order to redirect the videos to focus on the series’ romance plot. One instance of this occurs during the video “Letter Analysis” in which Charlotte prompts Lizzie to talk about the letter Darcy wrote to her after she rejected him rather than her analysis of Collins & Collins as a media company. While these moments of redirection may seem like an attempt to reshape a story motivated by the women’s careers into one about heterosexual romance, in actuality they allow the women to escape from their uncertain futures by engaging in light-hearted conversations about their love lives. According to the IMDb page for the series, Bing and Darcy appear in 10 and 12 episodes respectively, while Charlotte and Jane each appear in over 30 episodes. The fact that the women appear more frequently than the men means that Lizzie is often re-enacting her conversations with men for the pleasure of her female friends and viewership. Lizzie’s performative antics, therefore, are just as much about entertaining her friends and distracting them from their own precarious financial situations as they are about helping her gain distance and perspective.

Throughout the series, each of the women affirm their commitments to career over romance. Charlotte’s marriage to Mr. Collins in the original *Pride and Prejudice* becomes a job offer; Jane does not marry Bing Lee, he follows her to New York so she can pursue her dream of working in the fashion industry; and Darcy’s proposal to Elizabeth becomes a job offer that she ultimately rejects so that she does not mix her love life with her professional life. As Lori Halvorsen Zerne notes, this means that the women’s relationships “[lack] the permanence that...

[they have] at the conclusion of *Pride and Prejudice*” (Zerne). However, the fact that Charlotte, Lizzie, and Jane all find security in their careers shows that through working with one another, rather than depending on men, that a female support network can help women achieve financial security.

These supportive relationships also allow Jane, Lizzie and Charlotte to function as the can-do girls Bridget aspires to be. Harris writes that can-do girls are defined by “the idea that good choices, effort, and ambition alone are responsible for success” and she notes that “this kind of girlpower [*sic*]” suggests that women’s “lives [are] lightly infected but by no means driven by feminism” (16, 17). Lizzie, Charlotte, and Jane are characterized throughout the series by their good choices and ambitions. Rather than working towards their goals alone, however, they support one another in their ambitions. As a result, the three women are able to become can-do girls while a heroine like Bridget who works alone towards self improvement becomes “the never-good-enough girl who must perpetually observe and remake herself” (Harris 33). A crucial part of Lizzie, Jane, and Charlotte’s success is, therefore, not the self-monitoring found in Bridget’s New Years resolutions, but the support they provide one another.

Additionally, their community extends throughout the series to include Darcy’s sister, Gigi, and Lydia. When Lizzie job-shadows at Pemberley Digital for her independent study project, she meets Darcy’s sister, Gigi, who immediately begins helping Lizzie adapt to the company, work on her videos, and encourages her to realize her feelings for Darcy. Like Charlotte and Jane, therefore, Gigi helps Lizzie in both her career and her personal life. Gigi’s support extends beyond Lizzie, however. As a fan of Lizzie’s videos, Gigi sees that George Wickham has taken advantage of Lydia by threatening to release a sex-tape they made together to subscribers of a

website. In her spin-off series of videos to showcase Pemberley Digital's new technologies, viewers see that Gigi, as well as Darcy, intervenes on Lydia's behalf by using the technology to message and call Wickham which inevitably allows Darcy to track him down. The supportive relationships Lizzie develops throughout the series, therefore, shows that a collective sisterhood can extend even to women who do not know one another.

In Lydia's case, it is sisterly support that allows her to overcome her scandalous relationship with Wickham and assume the position of a can-do girl along with her sisters. Early in the series, Lizzie establishes Lydia as an "at-risk" girl or someone who "display[s]... a lack of a sense of power or opportunity and inappropriate consumption behaviors," such as promiscuous sexual activity and an inappropriate use of alcohol and drugs (Harris 14). Episode two, "My Sisters, Problematic to Practically Perfect," features Lizzie characterizing Lydia as a "stupid, whorey, slut" who is "suited" to "a life of drug addiction, irresolute drinking, and out-of-wedlock pregnancy." This characterization continues throughout the series as Lizzie complains about Lydia's hangovers, boy-craziness, and the fact that she steals Xanax from their mother. The characterization of Lydia as an at-risk girl reaches its peak in episode 85, "Consequences." In this episode, Lizzie confronts Lydia about the sex tape George plans to release and accuses her of irresponsibility. What Lizzie learns over the course of the video, however, is that Lydia was unaware of the website and the series then turns to Lizzie and Jane attempting to help Lydia recover from this embarrassment. Lizzie advocates for her through the video diaries telling viewers not to subscribe to the website where the sex tape will be released. As a result of this support, Darcy and Gigi, who watch the video diaries, learn about what George has done and they are able to intervene and prevent the sex tape from being released.

After the scandal with George, Lydia also changes to become less immature and more like the can-do girl-type her sisters embody. Throughout the series, Lydia has been taking steps to become more of a can-do girl, than an at-risk one. She seeks help studying from her cousin Mary and she improves her grades at her community college. After the sex-tape scandal is averted, she continues to grow as a character and becomes less of an attention seeking party-girl. This is noted by Lizzie in the videos when she tells the viewers that she is taking a break from the camera after the scandal occurs. When she does appear again in episode 94 “Revelations,” she is no longer scantily clad, shouting “wut,” and begging Lizzie to party with her. Instead, she confides in Lizzie that she is trying to get better about “opening up” and that she is working with a counselor to help her build more meaningful relationships with people and recover from the revenge-porn scandal. Lydia’s transformation affirms the can-do girl attitude that one has “control over one’s own identity invention and re-invention” (Hopkins qtd. in Harris 17). It, therefore, allows the viewers to see how, through a network of female support, women can take control over their lives.

This network of female support does not just exist within the series, however, it also extends to the audience due to the series’ transmedia storytelling. Henry Jenkins, one of the key theorists of transmedia storytelling, defines it as a fictional world where audience members “chas[e] down bits of the story across media channels, compar[e] notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborat[e] to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience” (Jenkins qtd. in Russo 514). As a series, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* certainly makes use of transmedia storytelling through its use of character Twitter pages, spin-off vlogs, and secret diaries in novel form to continue growing the

story universe. The variety of media platforms the series engages with also allows fans to discuss the series with one another and to offer support and advice to the characters. In a reply to one of Lydia's tweets defending her relationship with George, for example, the fan @cascaremascare wrote "love can blind us to the point of detriment" and in the comments on episode 85, "Consequences," the fans write sympathetic messages empathizing with Lydia's abusive relationship and support other commenters who confide they have had similar experiences. This support shows the ways that transmedia storytelling "eliminat[es] the divide between the characters and the audience, instigating a dialogue from fan to fan, fan to character, and fan to creator" (Tepper 45). Furthermore, the series actively engages with fan conversations. Lydia's character replies to tweets she receives from fans and Lizzie's blog has a series of fan question and answers videos where she answers questions that were sent to her about the vlogs in character. This engagement between the fans and the characters allows the audience to become part of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* world and it allows them to offer support for both the fictional women in the series and with the other fans. This draws on the broader culture of Janites, a group of women united through their love of Austen, and it represents a longing within the broader culture for more collective spaces for women.

## **Conclusion**

By affirming the importance of sisterhood for female success both within and outside of the series, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* exposes a desire amongst its audience for the collectivism that the postfeminist media sensibility denies women. Angela McRobbie notes that postfeminism undermines the collective, political actions of the second-wave feminist movement by positioning women as already equal to men and that their successes or failures are based on

individual choices rather than a patriarchal system that is working against them therefore leaving no “place for feminism in contemporary culture” (720 “Top Girls”). *Bridget Jones’ Diary* definitely takes this position by suggesting that Bridget needs men to help her succeed and through suggesting that she likes some forms of the patriarchy, such as Daniel’s workplace sexual harassment. It also applies to Harris’ description of the can-do girl that Lizzie, Jane, Charlotte, and in the end even Lydia embody because it positions women as either successful or failures due to their individual choices. Rather than rest the series on these stereotypes, however, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* uses the women’s relationships with one another to show how a feminist sisterhood can help women succeed in both their careers and their personal life. By affirming the need for collective feminism that the postfeminist media sensibility attempts to deny viewers, it consequently reminds viewers of the continued need for feminism in modern society.

## Works Cited

- Case, Alison. "Authenticity, Convention, and 'Bridget Jones's Diary.'" *Narrative*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2001, pp. 176–181. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/20107244](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20107244). Accessed 21 April 2019.
- Cobb, Shelley. "Introduction: Agency, Adaptation, and Authorship." *Adaptation, Authorship and Contemporary Women Filmmakers*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 1-18.
- Cobb, Shelley. "Postfeminist Austin: By Women, for Women, about Women." *Adaptation, Authorship and Contemporary Women Filmmakers*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 113-138.
- Ferriss, Suzanne. "Working Girls: The Precariat of Chick Lit." *Cupcakes, Pinterest, and Ladyporn: Feminized Popular Culture in the Early Twenty-First Century*. Ed. Elana Levine. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015.
- Genz, Stéphanie. "Singled Out: Postfeminism's 'New Woman' and the Dilemma of having it all." *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2010, pp. 97-119. *ProQuest*, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/53341645?accountid=26986>, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2010.00732.x>. Accessed 21 April 2019.
- Gill, Rosalind. "Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a Sensibility." *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 10 no. 2, May 29, 2007, pp. 147-166.
- Ghosh, Srijani. "Is 'Fat' a Dirty Word? Body Dismorphic Disorder and the Postfeminist Chick Lit Heroine." *Popular Culture Review*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2013, pp. 79-90. *ProQuest*, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1401088235?accountid=26986>. Accessed 21 April 2019.
- Harris, Anita. *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*. NY: Routledge, 2004.
- Harzewski, Stephanie. "Bridget Jones's Diary and the Production of a Popular Austen." *Chick*

*Lit and Postfeminism*, University of Virginia Press, 2011. ProQuest Ebook Central,  
<https://spectacled.ursinus.edu:2194/lib/ursinus-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3563200>.

Accessed 21 April 2019.

McRobbie, Angela. "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 4 no. 3  
2004.

McRobbie, Angela. "Top Girls?: Young Women and the Post-Feminist Sexual Contract."  
*Cultural Studies*, 18, June 2007.

Tepper, Allegra. "Lizzie in Real Life: Social and Narrative Immersion through Transmedia in the  
Lizzie Bennet Diaries." *Film Matters*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2015, pp. 45-51. *ProQuest*,  
<https://spectacled.ursinus.edu:4037/docview/1735341201?accountid=26986>,  
doi:[http://spectacled.ursinus.edu:3269/10.1386/fm.6.1.45\\_1](http://spectacled.ursinus.edu:3269/10.1386/fm.6.1.45_1). Accessed 21 April  
2019.

White, Laura M. "Jane Austen's World as Postmodern Simulacrum in Fielding's Narratives of  
Bridget Jones." *Persuasions: Journal of the Jane Austen Society of North America*, vol.  
24, 2002, pp. 256-69. *ProQuest*, [https://search.proquest.com/docview/53947811?](https://search.proquest.com/docview/53947811?accountid=26986)  
[accountid=26986](https://search.proquest.com/docview/53947811?accountid=26986). Accessed 21 April 2019.

Wilson, Cheryl A.. "Chick Lit in the Undergraduate Classroom." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women  
Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2012, pp. 83–100. *JSTOR*,  
[www.jstor.org/stable/10.5250/fronjwomestud.33.1.0083](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5250/fronjwomestud.33.1.0083). Accessed 21 April 2019.

Zerne, Lori Halvorson. "Ideology in the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*." *Persuasions Online*, vol. 43, no.  
1, 2013. <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol34no1/zerne.html>. Accessed 21 April  
2019.

## Chapter 4

### Introduction

From the hyper-sexual vision of Lolita as a nymphet, several revisionist adaptations arose that attempted to correct Humbert Humbert's narrative by telling the story from the girl's point-of-view. After Lyne's film was released in the U.S., a *New York Times* letter to the editor called for a "Lolita-driven revisionist version" helmed by a female director (Sharp). With this comment, the letter-writer nails down why Dolores Haze gets lost in Humbert centered adaptations. The only real way to hear her voice is to tell the story through her perspective. This led to a boom of revisionist adaptations that attempt to center the voice of their Lolita-characters through their depictions of both her sexuality and the pain caused by Humbert Humbert's abuse. In this chapter, I will be examining the only two of these texts which have been adapted into film: *Una* and *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*. By retelling *Lolita* from the perspective of their respective female protagonists, the revisionist appropriation *Una* and the revisionist adaptation *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* are able to avoid creating the caricature of an all-powerful, sexually promiscuous nymphet that Humbert Humbert gives the reader. As a result, these texts grapple with the trauma of sexual abuse and teenage sexuality in ways that prioritize women's experiences over the patriarchal fantasies that dominate so much of the media's discourse about female sexual desire.

After the publication of Nabokov's novel, the name Lolita began to signal a sexually desirable and promiscuous young girl in media discourse. Journalism and communications scholar M. Gigi Durham writes that Lolita "has become an everyday allusion, a shorthand cultural reference to a prematurely, even inappropriately, sexual little girl" and that she "is our

favorite metaphor for a child vixen, a knowing coquette... a baby nymphomaniac” (25, 26). This use of the name Lolita is especially prevalent in newspapers and film reviews. *Hard Candy*’s protagonist was called “an Internet Lolita” by the *New York Times* and Amy Fisher, a 17-year-old who had an affair with her married boss and shot his wife, became known as the “Long Island Lolita” in numerous newspaper headlines (Dargis qtd in Vickers, “Lolita in Movieland 2” 88, Vickers, “Tabloids and Facts” 172). In these uses, Lolita is not depicted as the sexually abused child of Nabokov’s novel, but rather as a girl who is a “deliberate sexual provocateur” who turns “adults’ thoughts to sex and thereby [lures]... them into wickedness” (Durham 25). This dangerous lure is certainly true of the protagonist of *Hard Candy* who tries to manipulate an older man she met online into sleeping with her in order to prove he’s a pedophile and it is also true of the way the media portrayed Amy Fisher as a sex-obsessed teen who dabbled in “part-time prostitution,” seduced her boss, and turned violent when he would not leave his wife (Vickers 172). This depiction of young girls as possessing a dangerous, manipulative sexuality is in line with Humbert Humbert’s fantasy version of Lolita and it leaves little room for the actual experiences of girls and women in the media discourse surrounding the concept of a Lolita.

As a result of this characterization, a boom of *Lolita* revisionist adaptations from the 1990s onwards attempt to retell the story from Lolita’s point of view in order to increase her agency over her story. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, increasing critical attention was paid to the perspective of Lolita within Nabokov’s novel. Linda Kauffman, Elizabeth Patnoe, Colleen Kennedy, Virginia Blum, and other feminist literary scholars all argued against reading Humbert Humbert’s perspective as fact and advocated for readers to search for Lolita’s perspective and to

empathize with her trauma. This increased critical attention towards Lolita's voice extended into the fictional realm as well and numerous books, plays, poems, and films tackled the story from the nymphet's perspective. The book *Lo's Diary* by Italian author, journalist, and translator Pia Pera attempts to tell Nabokov's original novel from Lolita's point of view, as do Nancy J. Jones's 2000 novel *Molly* and Emily Prager's 1999 novel *Roger Fishbite*. *Lolita* revisionist adaptations that attempt to tell the story from the nymphet's point-of-view are also found in Paula Vogel's play *How I Learned to Drive*, the collection of poems *Poems for Men Who Dream of Lolita*, and the two works which will be discussed in this chapter: David Harrower's 2005 play *Blackbird* which was adapted into the film *Una* and the 2002 graphic novel *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* which became the 2015 film of the same name.

These adaptations are divided between two different approaches to increasing *Lolita's* agency: depicting her as an asexual child victim or as promiscuous and in control over her relationship with Humbert. Nancy J. Jones's *Molly*, the book *Poems For Men Who Dream of Lolita*, and *Blackbird* and its film adaptation *Una* all emphasize the pain Lolita experienced as a result of Humbert's sexual abuse. *Molly* accomplishes this through telling the story through the perspective of Betsy Thurmont, the equivalent of Lolita's female camp friend, Elizabeth Talbot, who discovers her friend's diaries after her death and learns of the pain the abuse caused. *Poems For Men Who Dream of Lolita* features the haunting lines "this string of motels like old teeth/rotting under red lips, putrid/fluorescent with death" and "leave you stiff and hard/as the head of a corpse" which both foreground Lolita's experience of the abuse as being akin to death (Morrissey 23, 47). In these three texts, the sexuality of the Lolita-character is heavily downplayed so as to render her almost asexual in order to remove any suggestion that she was

leading on or flirting with her abuser. Furthermore, many of these texts retain the death of their Lolita-character, either in childbirth or otherwise, as a way to enshrine her as the ultimate victim. By killing their Lolita-characters off at the end, these texts argue that Humbert did not simply ruin Lolita's life, he ended it.

While these texts foreground the abuse and its traumatic effects, other revisionist adaptations *Lo's Diary*, *Roger Fishbite*, and *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* all showcase the powerful sexuality of their Lolita-characters. *Roger Fishbite's* protagonist, Lucky, taunts her abuser and mimics the eloquent prose of Nabokov's novel in order to suggest that she is as in control over both her situation and language as Humbert Humbert was in control in the original. *Lo's Diary* "cast[s] [Lolita] as... a sexual punk" and positions her as being the initiator of all of her sexual encounters with Humbert Humbert (Vickers, "Blood Sisters" 210). *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*, on the other hand, delights in depicting the promiscuity of Minnie, the graphic novel's Lolita equivalent. While this approach fails to realize the trauma of prolonged sexual abuse, it does give these various Lolita-characters agency over their sexual relationships and it prevents them from being killed off at the end.

Texts that depict Lolita as an asexual child tend to employ elements of traumatic narration in their stories in order to depict the pain the protagonist carries with her into adult life. In her book, *Trauma and Recovery* psychologist Judith Herman explains that "traumatic events confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness" and that, as a result of this helplessness, "traumatic memories lack verbal narrative and context; rather they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images" (33, 38). Furthermore, traumatic memory "imposes itself... repeatedly in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (Caruth 3-4). The idea of

traumatic memory as fragmented, repetitive, and imagistic lends itself nicely to the use of two literary devices: flashback and short, poetic line breaks. These devices allow traumatic memories to repeat themselves in the story while also recognizing their fragmented nature. Many of the *Lolita* revisionist adaptations employ these techniques to show how sexual abuse has affected their Lolita-characters. *Poems For Men Who Dream of Lolita* and *Blackbird* both use short, poetic lines that often repeat themselves to show how the memories are both vivid and inaccessible to their protagonists. Similarly, *Una* uses fragmented flashbacks to repeat the memories of sexual abuse and to show how they interrupt its protagonist's daily life.

On the other hand, texts that depict Lolita as sexually promiscuous both grapple with the real sexual feelings of adolescents and give their protagonist a sense of agency over her story by prioritizing her experiences whether they be positive or negative. The depiction of Lolita-characters as being promiscuous despite their young age and as sexually manipulative stems from ideas surrounding the sexual revolution in the 1970s and from the do-me feminism of the 1990s. In "do-me" feminism, a woman "draws a sense of power and liberation from her sexual difference" and she uses sex as a tool for manipulating men to get what she wants (Genz 107). The sexual revolution of the 1970s, on the other hand, pushed for a more open expression of sexuality among people of all ages. Influenced by Freud's ideas of repression of the libido, the sexual revolution allowed people to "take... [their] own genital sexual needs seriously" and it promoted "an egalitarian love relations, whether it be with a man or a woman" (Ferguson 164). These ideas often play a crucial role in the *Lolita* revisionist adaptations which, in the case of *Roger Fishbite* and *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*, have used updated settings to more actively engage with these ideologies. Additionally, given that all of the Lolita-characters in *Lo's Diary*,

*Roger Fishbite*, and *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* use their sexuality manipulatively to some extent, they also engage with the ideologies of do-me feminism. As a result, these texts tend to use the sexuality of their Lolita-characters to create a place of agency within the narratives.

While many of these texts are revisionist adaptations of *Lolita*, the characters often have different names and the plots of the stories are slightly shifted due to lawsuits from the Nabokov estate that have prevented more direct revisionist adaptations. With the English translation of *Lo's Diary*, Vladimir Nabokov's estate, headed by his son Dmitri, sued in an attempt to prevent the publication. While they failed to prevent the book from reaching American audiences, Nabokov's estate did manage to have a share of the profits diverted from Pera and donated to the International PEN Club and Dmitri won the right to insert his own preface into the book which informs any "would-be plagiarist" that "*Lolita* isn't in the public domain, and won't be until well into the next millennium" (Vickers 212, D. Nabokov qtd. in Pera x, viii). This preface attempted to scare off any future adapters from directly revising *Lolita* without the estate's permission by stating that any future revisionist adaptation "required by law" Dmitri Nabokov's "permission to publish" and it succeed for the most part (D. Nabokov qtd. in x). Future revisionist adaptations remain only loosely inspired by Nabokov's work and they often changed the characters' names, portions of the plot, and the settings in order to avoid any overt connections to Nabokov's work that could potentially lead to lawsuits over copyright infringement. This did not stop writers from stating the influence of *Lolita* on their work, however. Nor did it prevent the press from drawing out obvious allusions to the novel and pointing out the connections between *Lolita* and newer revisionist versions of the story. Anyone studying revisionist adaptations of *Lolita*, therefore, must be aware of the more covert revisions that resulted from the *Lo's Diary* lawsuit.

This chapter will focus on two different *Lolita* revisionist adaptations, *Blackbird*, and its film adaptation, *Una*, and *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*. These texts were selected as, unlike the other *Lolita* revisionist adaptations mentioned here, they have been adapted into films. Their similar plots, allusions to the novel, and the tendency to compare *Blackbird*, *Una*, and *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* to Nabokov's work in reviews allow the texts to be considered revisions of *Lolita*. In an interview with the *Huffington Post*, Phoebe Gloeckner, the author and illustrator of the graphic novel, *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*, on which Marielle Heller's 2015 film is based, said "I would get so angry when I read [*Lolita*]... because I just felt like something was wrong" (Gloeckner qtd. in Bronner). She then goes on to describe how she wanted to tell that story "from the standpoint of a 15-year-old who was going through that experience" (Gloeckner qtd. in Bronner). Both the film and Gloeckner's novel reference *Lolita* directly through referencing "nymphets" and following a similar plot structure to Nabokov's novel (Gloeckner 86). Like *Lolita*, *Blackbird* and *Una* recount a sexual relationship between a 12-year-old girl and an adult, they rely heavily on beach imagery, and other references to the text. Reviews of the play frequently equate the two, with the *New York Times* evoking *Lolita* in its review, the *Hartford Courant* calling it a "shocking variation on Nabokov's 'Lolita,'" and *The Telegraph* dubbing the play "a *Lolita*'s chilling return" (Johnson, Spencer). Given the tendency of these texts to reference and be compared to *Lolita* by either their creators or reviewers, I would like to consider them *Lolita* revisionist adaptations.

### ***Blackbird* (2005) and *Una* (2016)**

*Blackbird* and *Una* both shift the perspective of *Lolita* to focus on the ways in which the abuse has affected their protagonist as an adult. Rather than recounting the entire plot of *Lolita*,

*Una* and *Blackbird* hone in on the central abusive relationship by examining the relationship between 12-year-old Una and Ray, the adult who sexually abused her through dialogue and flashbacks. The story takes place during a single confrontation between the two as adults and fixates on two key moments that can be linked to Nabokov's novel: the hotel scene and Humbert and Lo's conversation as adults. The play and the film also engage in an intertextual dialogue with both the novel and the film adaptations of *Lolita*. As with Humbert and Lolita, Ray meets Una as she is sprawled in a garden and the text focuses on the relationship between beach imagery and childhood sexual experiences that is prevalent in Nabokov's novel. Many of the beach shots in *Una* even echo those from the beginning of Adrian Lyne's 1997 adaptation of *Lolita*. In addition to these more obvious parallels, *Blackbird* and *Una* also allude to *Lolita* throughout. Ray's name recalls the name of John Ray, the psychiatrist who read Humbert's manuscript and like Humbert, Ray has a moment where he is overcome by guilt during an encounter with strangers in the hotel.

In this way, *Blackbird* and *Una* are more similar to what adaptation theorist Julie Sanders categorizes as a revisionist appropriation rather than an adaptation. According to Sanders, appropriations contain "intertextual relationship[s] that are less explicit, more imbedded, but what is inescapable is the fact that a political or ethical commitment shapes [the]... decision to reinterpret a source text" (3). As a result, "appropriation frequently effects a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product" (Sanders 34). This is certainly true of *Una* and *Blackbird* which take Nabokov's basic story of a 12-year-old girl who is sexually abused and appropriate it for their own plot and characters in order to investigate the moral implications of sexual relationships between adults and children from the female

character's perspective. The mark of *Lolita*, however, is readily apparent in the texts with nearly every review of both *Blackbird* and *Una* referencing Nabokov's novel. As a result of the sustained conversation about and between these two texts, I would like to consider this revisionist appropriation alongside the more traditional adaptation *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*, as both texts examine the effects of abuse primarily from the woman's perspective.

Focusing on the female character's perspective allows both the play and the film to use fragmented narration in order depict the traumatic effects of abuse. In their reviews of the play, scholars and critics have noted that "*Blackbird* is language focused up until its ending" and that it is "written with particular attention to the fragmentary nature of thought" (Sorgenfrei 320, Svich 88). This intense focus on fragmentary language continues in the film due to its often strict adherence to the dialogue in the play and it allows *Una* and *Blackbird* to represent trauma through the character's speech patterns. On the page, the lines of dialogue in the play read more like lines of poetry with characters breaking up their thoughts, repeating their ideas, and back-tracking their phrasing. This mimics the nature of traumatic narration which, according to trauma theorist Cathy Caruth, is characterized by repetition and indecisiveness. Given that the play and the film rely heavily on this dialogue to narrate Ray and Una's story, the texts can be understood as employing elements of traumatic narration in order to help the viewers better understand Una's pain.

In the film, this fragmented narration also appears in the form of the flashbacks that are used to tell the story. The film introduces this flashback structure with its opening images. In these scenes, the audience sees young Una and follows her as she approaches Ray for the first time. As soon as Una approaches him, however, the scene abruptly cuts to a rapidly strobing image of

adult Una in a nightclub before the viewer can glimpse Ray. In this sequence, the film visually represents Una's inability to access her memories of the abuse by mimicking the nature of traumatic memories which, according to Judith Herman, "[break] spontaneously into consciousness... as flashbacks" (379). They are often also rendered inaccessible through repression, dissociation, and denial. By cutting to adult Una before the audience can see Ray, the film underscores how Una has tried to repress the intrusive flashbacks that remind her of the abuse and the strobing in this scene visually reflects her own fragmented sense of self. The same idea of repression appears later in the film as Una narrates Ray's abuse of her in the park. In this scene, the audience sees only a flashback of the bush they hid behind and not the abuse itself, even though Una graphically narrates it and, as a result, they see how Una can speak the abuse, but cannot allow her mind to image and process it, thereby leaving her trapped by her memories of the past.

By representing her trauma the play and the film work to show how Ray's abuse has kept Una contained to the past. As Una drives to see Ray in the beginning of the film, the audience can only access her face through the rearview mirror, thereby suggesting that Una is trapped in the past and can only look backwards. Later in the film, this entrapment is linked directly to Ray through the sequence in which he abandons her in the break-room to attend to his job for an extended period of time. In this sequence, wide shots highlight Una's loneliness in the room and visuals of Ray walking through the hallways emphasize his ability for movement. Later, when Una escapes the room, Ray grabs her and drags her into a smaller storage space with him. This sense of entrapment is indicative of the ways trauma "repeatedly interrupts" the lives of victims of abuse (Herman 37). Unlike with the flashbacks and even the rearview mirror, however, these

interruptions are linked directly to Ray's character rather than Una's mind and body, thereby allowing the film to place the blame for her trauma on him.

This emphasis on Una's trauma stems from a growing effort in the 1990s and 2000s to give a voice to victims of child sexual abuse for processing their trauma. During the 1990s and early 2000s a child sex panic arose in which "child molesters were viewed as being extremely persistent in their deviant careers, having sexual contact with very large numbers of children over many years" and "concerns that pedophiles were using the medium of the Internet to seduce children" arose (Jenkins 189). This increased fear that children were being sexually abused en masse also drew attention to the damaging effects child sexual abuse has on children. According to Herman, who was writing in 1997, just as the panic was leading to changes in legislation, "repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality" and leaves the survivor with "fundamental problems in basic trust, autonomy and initiative" for years afterwards (Herman 96). This fixation on both child abuse and its traumatic effects extends from public debate into Harrower's play. In a profile about his work on *Blackbird*, *The Guardian* notes that Harrower was "inspired by the chilling real-life case of an American Marine who groomed an 11-year-old girl online" and that "it could barely be clearer that [Una] has been abused" (Dickson). This inspiration draws on common themes from the child sex panic and, therefore, it is no surprise that *Una* and *Blackbird* highlight their protagonist's traumatic experiences.

Prioritizing Una's experiences of the physical and social consequences of abuse allows her to silence Ray when he tries to paint her as a nymphet. There are several instances in *Blackbird* and *Una* where the nymphet excuse is offered by Ray and other characters as justification for the abuse of Una. In the play, Ray tells her "You knew about love./You knew more about love

than... [my girlfriend] did/Than *I* did./You knew what you wanted,” and in the film he repeats a variation of this saying, “you were wise beyond your years” (Harrower 47). Una recalls the judge at the trial offering a similar excuse by telling her that she had “suspiciously adult yearnings” (Harrower 60). Each time these excuses are brought forward, Una silences them. She responds to Ray’s charges by saying, “I was a girl” and the judge’s with the phrase “I didn’t know what... [that] meant” (Harrower 47, 60). In addition to defending her innocence, Una is also unafraid to name Ray’s treatment of her as abuse. In the film, she tells him that “[she] doesn’t know anything about... [him except that... [he] abused her” and, when he tries to suggest that he is not a pedophile she attacks him saying, “you seem to know a lot about it.” These lines show that Una is willing and able to use her own voice to defend herself against charges that she wanted to be sexually abused — an opportunity Nabokov’s *Lolita* is never given. By allowing Una to call out Ray’s abuse of her, *Una* and *Blackbird*, therefore, do not fall into the nymphet excuse that so many critics, adapters, and readers often use to justify *Lolita*’s abuse.

Furthermore, the play and the film show the ways in which the nymphet excuse has affected Una’s self image and her conception of her adult sexuality. In “Framing *Lolita*: Is There a Woman in the Text?,” literary critic Linda Kauffman writes that by accepting that *Lolita* is a nymphet who “seduced Humbert” readers “degrade the female by blaming her for her own victimization” (134). This is made plain through the guilt Una expresses in the lines, “I wanted anything you wanted” and “[I was] a stupid girl with a stupid crush” (Harrower 45, 46). This sense of shame Una feels as a result of people blaming her for Ray’s actions continues to affect her adult sexuality. Both the play and the film note that as an adult Una is promiscuous but only *Una* links her adult sexuality to the child abuse abuse. When the film displays Una’s adult

sexuality it is always in a claustrophobic manner. The first sexual encounter in the film shows Una pressed against a bathroom stall while someone has sex with her from behind. In a later sexual encounter, the audience sees adult Una trapped under Ray's body and in the scene where she initiates an affair with one of Ray's coworkers she is encased in his arms after she begins to sob. This physical containment of Una's body during her sexual encounters mimics the way Ray physically confines her body earlier in the film. The message of this confinement is clear: sex is not something that Una desires, it is something that traps her in the same way that Ray captured her childhood.

Through dismantling the nymphet excuse, *Una* and *Blackbird* appealed to feminist audiences in the 1990s and early 2000s who had grown tired of the proliferation of "Lolitas" in the media. According to *The Lolita Effect*, "the turn of the new millennium... spawned an intriguing phenomenon: the sexy little girl... the baby-faced nymphet... whose scantily clad body gyrates in music videos, poses provocatively on teen magazine covers, and populates cinema and television screens" (Durham 24). Durham, the author of the book, dubs this phenomenon "The Lolita Effect" and argues that as "a pro-sex feminist" she must the "challenge sexist and repressive media portrayals" that are essential to the patriarchal fantasy of the nymphet myth (22, 38). Texts like *Una* and *Blackbird*, therefore, feel refreshing because they assert that girls are not sexy and cannot be physically or emotionally prepared for sexual relationships with adults. *Una* makes this lack of sexuality explicit by refusing to use the same kinds of leg tracking shots and sexualized costumes that appear throughout Lyne's and Kubrick's adaptations of *Lolita*. Instead, the shooting style the filmmakers used for Una and the costumes she wears highlight her youth. She's seen in oversized t-shirts and fuzzy pink sweaters and even during the pool scene where

she is pictured in a bathing suit she wears a one-piece rather than the bikinis that both Lyne's and Kubrick's *Lolitas* famously donned. The cinematography, furthermore, does not linger on her legs, hips, or breasts, favoring instead to show her as a normal child who argues with friends and plays on swings without exuding sexuality.

Through their dismantling of the nymphet excuse, however, both the play and the film erase any sexuality from their female protagonist by emphasizing her innocence and creating a portrait of her as pure victim. Both the film and the play emphasize Una's status as a child and a virgin. In the play, Una repeatedly tells Ray that she was a "baby," and "a child," (Harrower 24 47). She also fixates on her virginity and her body saying, "[I was] a virgin./an untouched body" and "what could I have possibly given you/... that *wasn't* my twelve-year-old body?" (Harrower 48). This emphasis on Una's age and her virginity "uphold[s] the traditional construction of youth as a time of sexual purity that is foundational to the vision of intergenerational sex as... being monstrous violation" and it reinforces the popular child sex panic idea that children need constant protection from sexual abuse (Siegel 33). According to Philip Jenkins, the 1990s and early 2000s saw an increased fear of child sexual abuse that resulted in increased legislation that sought to protect children from sexual abuse (193). The word "predators," Jenkins writes, "became central to [this] legislative debate" because it conjured images of an "animal... that survives by hunting and eating other animals" and thereby depicted pedophiles as figures who irreparably mauled the bodies of the children they abused (193). By establishing Una's youth and virginity, the film plays into the idea that Ray was a predator who left her forever damaged through his violation of her body. Her innocence, or more specifically her hymen, therefore, is essential for the story's treatment of her trauma to be effective.

Erasing Una's sexuality and stressing her status as a virgin is a major departure from Nabokov's novel, in which Lolita is portrayed as having some curiosity about sex, and it problematically plays into the debate over her virginity within *Lolita* criticism. In Nabokov's novel, Lolita is portrayed as flirtatious within the appropriate context for a 12-year-old girl. She tells Humbert that she "has been revoltingly unfaithful to him" and says "you haven't kissed me yet" to him after he picks her up from camp (Nabokov 112). This display of sexuality, however, has caused critics to debate whether or not she was a virgin with Linda Kauffman noting that she was "bleeding," a clear sign of her virginity, after her night with Humbert, and other critics, such as Howard Nemerov and John Hollander respectively calling her "thoroughly corrupt" and "completely corrupt" (Kauffman 142, Nemerov and Hollander qtd. in Connolly 56). Within each of these perspectives, critics use Lolita's sexual experience as a parameter for determining whether or not she can be considered a victim of Humbert's abuse. One critic, for instance, notes that Humbert's "depravity is when we learn that he deals with a Lolita that is not innocent" and another writes that it is impossible to feel sympathy for Lo because "before yielding to Humbert, the girl had a nasty little affair with a nasty little thirteen-year-old (Trilling qtd. in Kauffman 133, Molnar qtd. in Kauffman 133). In these lines, both critics use Lolita's status as a whore, rather than that of a virgin to determine whether or not to feel sorry for her and consider her a victim of rape. Critics, such as Kauffman, on the other hand, defend Lolita's status as a virgin-victim by stressing that she was "in such pain that she cannot sit because Humbert has torn something inside of her" (Kauffman 142). Both of these approaches are problematic because they suggest that in order for Lolita to be a victim she must also be a virgin. *Blackbird* and *Una*, with their

emphasis on Una's virginity, therefore, perpetuate this problem by stressing the purity of their protagonist as one of Ray's central violations.

The film and play further play into the problematic stereotype of the virgin-victim by containing Una to the past and suggesting that Ray's abuse has rendered her life as equivalent to death. At the beginning of the play, both Una and Ray refer to her as a ghost. He says "you're a/some kind of ghost" and "stop being a ghost" while she says "you made me into a ghost" (Harrower 19, 20). While these lines are not included in the film, Una notably says "I lost my life." Additionally, Una says in both the play and the film "I hate the life I've had" (Harrower 61). These statements echo the line, "*You... broke my life,*" which Humbert supplies for Lolita during their meeting as adults and the line "[it was] as if I were sitting with the small ghost of somebody I had just killed" which he speaks after their first sexual encounter (Nabokov 279, 140). Furthermore, all of these quotes encapsulate the idea of rape as a symbolically life-ending force. In "Rape as Social Murder" anthropologist Cathy Winkler writes that rape and sexual abuse "attack victims' definitions of their body, and their... self definition" and in "Rape, Retribution, State: On Whose Bodies?" Pratiksha Baxi notes that, in cultures that fetishize purity and virginity, rape causes "a symbolic death — both of... social status and... self" (Winkler 13, Baxi 1197). Una experiences this symbolic death as a result of Ray's abuse of her. Both the play and the film emphasize that her life essentially stopped after the sexual assault. They note that she "still live[s] in the same town" and the same house as she did when she met him (Harrower 19). The film also visually underscores her symbolic loss of life through its use of color: adult Una's world is full of greys and blacks, while as a child her world is marked by bright blues, greens, pinks, and reds. This shift to dreariness occurs during the night of the hotel rape, which

shows Una wandering through the dark night with all the color drained from her life. By portraying Una as symbolically dead as a result of the abuse, the film and the play show viewers that a life marked by trauma and sexual abuse is one not worth living.

This depiction of girls as victims of abuse was in-line with a growing awareness of the long-term trauma caused by sexual abuse in the 1990s and as a result, both the play and the film are often praised as overcoming *Lolita*. By the 1990s and mid 2000s, around the same time playwright David Harrower was inspired to write and ultimately publish *Blackbird*, child sexual abuse was increasingly viewed as a traumatic, life-altering experience that affected children well into their adult lives. Harrower's decision to focus his play on the traumatic relationship between a 12-year-old girl and an adult man is certainly in keeping with this perspective. Harrower's play is, therefore, often praised for creating an "empowered Lolita" who is a "much more emotionally tangible female creation than the flat, fantastical object of obsession contrived by Nabokov and Kubrick" (Rooney, Winkleman). While the critique of Nabokov's *Lolita* applies more to her cultural reiterations than the author's actual depiction of her, this praise suggests that by prioritizing the female perspective *Blackbird* and *Una* overcome the cultural stereotype of nymphets and, consequently, give voice to the abuse women have endured.

### ***The Diary of a Teenage Girl* (2015)**

Unlike *Una* and *Blackbird*, *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* maps more easily onto the novel, through its depiction of a teenage girl who engages in an affair with her mother's boyfriend. The characters in the film and graphic novel also roughly match the personalities of those in Nabokov's novel with Minnie's mother, conveniently also named Charlotte, matching the flighty, pseudo-intelligence of Charlotte Haze and her step-father figures, Monroe and Pascal,

matching Humbert's pedophilic-obsession and scholarly pompousness respectively. This matching of character personalities is especially true of Minnie, *The Diary of a Teenage Girl's* Lolita-character. Like Lolita, Minnie is obsessed with candy, comics, and all forms of pop-culture. Unlike the flat Lolita in Nabokov's novel, however, Minnie is rendered as a full character due to the notable shift in the story's perspective. Rather than Humbert's manuscript, it is the Lolita-character whose diary governs the story, thereby allowing the film to explore the ways in which her sexual awakening is affected by statutory rape.

This shift in perspective allows the film and the graphic novel to explore Minnie's sexual curiosity and to examine both her sexuality and the trauma she experiences from the abuse. While Lolita is certainly not the overblown sexually-dominating nymphet Humbert describes, her "sapphic diversions" at camp and her relationship with Charlie Holmes hint that she was not the innocent, asexual child *Una* suggests either (Nabokov 136). Readers can, therefore, discern that Dolores Haze likely had experienced age-appropriate sexual activities, such as kissing or at most groping at camp, before Humbert's abuse damaged her sexuality. This depiction of Lolita as someone who was sexually curious but who had her relationship with sex damaged by sexual abuse is something that can be easily missed in the novel, but it is something that *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* examines at length through its positive depictions of her sexual relationships with boys her own age and through its more negative depiction of her relationship with Monroe.

Minnie is not only sexually curious, however, she also affirms to the audience that she likes and wants to have sex, thereby inverting *Lolita's* story to focus on female, rather than male pleasure. As Kauffman notes, *Lolita* is a novel "where the father's body is the site and source of not only aesthetic bliss but literal orgasm" (135). This quote underscores the fact that in

Humbert's narrative, and the patriarchy more broadly, it is only male sexual pleasure that matters. This has caused some American feminist movements to "[insist] that vaginal intercourse... [is] always unsatisfying to women" and to suggest that "feminine pleasure has to remain inarticulate in language" because it exists outside of phallic-centric discourse (Siegel 42, Irigaray 796). By expressing Minnie's pleasure with lines like "I want to be fucked so badly" and "I exude sexuality" *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* graphic novel breaks down the idea that women's sexual pleasure has to remain invisible (Gloeckner 111, 70). The film builds on this by including similar lines and through spending little time concerning itself with the sexual pleasure of male characters. For example, during one of the sex scenes with her teenage boyfriend, the film shows Minnie moaning in pleasure then cuts after her orgasm and does not show his climax. Consequently, the film affirms that it is Minnie's sexuality and desires that are important, not those of the men.

The film and the graphic novel do not only suggest that Minnie enjoys sex, however, they also depict her as using sex as a tool for control in her relationships and, therefore, play into both the fantasy of nymphets and the "do-me" feminist cultural that arose in the 1990s and 2000s. Throughout the graphic novel readers see Minnie using her sexuality as a form of control within her relationships with her male sexual partners. In one scene, she refuses to put on her clothes after having sex with Monroe until he kisses her or gives her a piece of bread and he tells her that "he [doesn't]... little chicks like... [her] trying to manipulate him" (Gloeckner 78). This depiction of Minnie as sexually manipulative extends to the film where she threatens to run outside naked and tell her mother about the relationship if Monroe does not spend the night with her. Minnie's actions in these scenes recall both the actions of Lolita, who used her mother or the

authorities as leverage to get treats from Humbert, and the tenets of do-me feminism. Do-me feminism, or power feminism, as some theorists have called it, “is unapologetically sexual [and] understands that good pleasures make good politics” (Wolf qtd. in Showden 174). In this quote, Wolf summarizes the idea that “good pleasures,” or sex, can be used as a strategy for empowering women. In Minnie’s case, she manipulates Monroe to get the sex she desires and thereby finds a sense of control in their relationship through her sexuality. Furthermore, Minnie finds her sexuality empowering, even though some of the characters, such as her high school boyfriend Ricky, find it intimidating and this plays into the do-me feminist idea that “most sex is good and more sex is better” (Showden 172). In this philosophy, the age difference between Minnie and some of her sexual partners can be seen as a positive thing because, for her, it is a greater variety of sex. While these ideas about free, open, and at times manipulative, sexuality, can be positive, they run the risk of playing into the patriarchal fantasy of the nymphet. By portraying Minnie as empowered by her sexuality, the film and the graphic novel, therefore, toe a thin line between do-me feminism and problematic patriarchal fantasy.

Additionally, both the film and the graphic novel draw on the text’s 1970s setting to blur the power imbalance between Monroe and Minnie so that she can feel in control over her body and empowered by her sexuality. Many elements in the *mise-en-scène* remind viewers of the film’s 1970s setting. The characters are costumed in bell bottom pants, loud, brightly colored prints, and high-waisted denim, and drug culture and discos feature in the film as well. One of the primary elements of 70s culture that is featured in the film, however, is the sexual revolution. Early on in the film, Minnie passes by a topless woman in the park and in another scene her voice-over notes that her mother’s relationship with Monroe is not “possessive” in order to

indicate that they have an open relationship. These allusions to the sexual revolution in the film do not just function to establish setting, however, they also allow the film to position Minnie's loss of virginity as "initatory" and her sexuality "as a journey of self discovery" that is unconcerned with the sometimes problematic age differences of sexual partners (Siegel 41). Minnie's sexual relationship with Monroe certainly functions as an initiation rite of sorts as it is only after an older, experienced man sleeps with her and buys her drinks that she is able to begin engaging in these and other adult behaviors with her peers. By positioning Minnie's relationship with Monroe as initiatory and connecting it to the sexual revolution *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*, therefore, suggests that intergenerational sex is necessary to forward a journey into self-discovery and adulthood.

While giving Minnie an empowered sexuality and sense of control may lead modern audiences to believe that the film and the graphic novel are endorsing pedophilia, in actuality this choice allows the text to avoid the virgin-victim stereotype *Una* and *Blackbird* perpetuate. At the beginning of her graphic novel, Gloekner writes that her book is "about life. That's all" to caution readers against considering it merely a narrative of trauma, and when asked whether her film was meant "to condemn pedophilia or glorify it," Heller responded "Neither. I had one intention, which was to tell an honest story about a teenage girl and what it feels like to be a teenage girl" (Heller qtd. in Winkleman). Part of their fixation on telling an honest story about a girl's sexuality results from the fetishization of childhood innocence and purity within American culture. In "America's Virginity Fetish and the Mysteries of Child Molestation," Carol Siegel writes that modern discourses surrounding virginity suggest that "young women cannot truly consent to sex" and that "loss of virginity is posited... as... a significant crisis threatening teen

girls” (44, 45). The idea that a girl’s loss of virginity is a “crisis” stems from the same idealistic image of childhood purity and victim feminism that arose during the child sex crisis of the 1990s when girls were “identif[ied] with powerlessness” and the culture was “obsessed with purity” (Showden 73). This view is problematic, however, because it suggests both that young women are vulnerable creatures who have no sexual desires and that they should only be valued for their purity. Women and girls who have lost this purity due to rape, or because they wanted to have sex, therefore, take on the same symbolically dead status that Una occupies as a virgin-victim. *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*, on the other hand, recognizes this fetishizing of virginity and pokes fun at it. During the scene where Minnie loses her virginity to Monroe, she smears the blood from her torn hymen on his thigh and uses it to doodle an “x,” as if to mark him as a conquest. This scene underscores the fact that virginity doesn’t really mean more than a torn hymen, if even that, and it shows that the fetishization of virginity is rooted in antiquated notions of purity that deny women’s sexuality.

Furthermore, the film does not present Minnie’s relationship with Monroe as a wholly positive experience. Instead, it uses Minnie’s voice-over narration and her animations to show the audience the power imbalance between them. Early on in the film, the voice-over narration and animations contrast Minnie’s fantasies of her relationship with Monroe with her reality. This can be seen from her first drawing where Minnie’s image of Monroe stutters as he tells her that her breasts are “really great” only to be cut off by actual Monroe calling her a “weirdo” as he pulls a beer from the fridge. In this fantasy, Monroe’s stuttering lines as he talks about breasts make him seem more like an awkward, infatuated teenager than a sexually-experienced adult, thereby underscoring Minnie’s belief that they can be sexual equals while in reality he seems

more interested in his beer than Minnie. The voice-over narration and animations throughout the film continue to underscore the ways in which Minnie's perception of their relationship differs from the reality and, as a result, they highlight the power imbalance between Minnie and Monroe. This creates a reversal of Nabokov's novel in which the Lolita-character, rather than Humbert Humbert is positioned as the unreliable narrator. This reversal of perspectives allows *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* to suggest that girls like Minnie and Lolita are overwhelmed by the power differentials in their relationships even during moments when they seem like they are manipulating their adult partners and consequently this gap in perspective debunks the nymphet myth while still allowing the female characters to have a sense of their sexuality.

This increased access to Minnie's subconscious allows the audience to see the trauma that having sex with older men has caused her and how she processes it. In "The Space of Graphic Narrative: Mapping Bodies, Feminism, and Form," Hillary Chute writes that comics allow artists to "reappear, in the form of a *legible, drawn* body... at the site of her own trauma" and thereby creates "an expanded *idiom of witness*... [that] put[s] contingent selves and histories into form" (201). Comics, in other words, allow the artists to return to the contingent, or "unexpected realit[ies]" of traumatic events and bear witness to them (Caruth 6). Minnie continually uses her drawings to process things that have happened with Monroe and to gain comfort when her situation becomes unbearable. This can be seen during one incredibly powerful moment in the film: the bathtub sequence. In the bathtub sequence, which is intercut with the scene where Monroe tells Minnie their relationship has to end and then receives a blow job from her, features Minnie sobbing in the tub while her voice-over berates her saying, "I hate myself." Eventually, Minnie sinks under the water in an implied suicide attempt and the film then cuts to her floating

in an imaginary ocean, and then her sketching herself in that ocean. This sequence reveals to the audience both the pain and shame Minnie feels during her relationship and shows how she is able to process that pain through art.

Like Lolita's escape from Humbert, Minnie's escape from Monroe leads her to an even more dangerous situation and it therefore exposes the extent to which she fears a life of being abused. Once she learns of the affair through reading Minnie's diary, Charlotte demands that Monroe marry Minnie, thereby allowing him to assume the same "unmonitored access" and control over her life that Humbert has over Lolita's (Kauffman 131). This prospect is rightfully terrifying for Minnie, and as a result she runs away with Tabatha, a drug addicted lesbian who serves as the film's Clare Quilty character. As with Lo and Quilty, Minnie is obsessed with having an exclusive relationship with Tabatha who only wants to sell Minnie's body in order to exchange it for quaaludes. In the graphic novel, Tabatha tells Minnie that she let two men "fuck" her while she was passed out in exchange for quaaludes (Gloeckner 262). Minnie insists that she would have known if anyone had had sex with her, but when she gets home she realizes Tabatha is telling the truth because her tampon is missing and she has no memory of taking it out. While this scene is conveyed in detail in the graphic novel, the film shows Tabatha and the rapist transforming into ghoulish cartoons with bats coming out of their mouths, before Minnie escapes from them. This frightening animation suggests that the trauma of Tabatha's world prevents Minnie from accessing her memories of that time. Like with Lolita, who runs away from Quilty when he tries to get her to participate in an orgy, Minnie must free herself from Tabatha in order to avoid having her body unwillingly used by others. When they run off with the respective Quilty-characters, therefore, both girls have few options other than a life of abuse.

Unlike *Lolita*, however, Minnie gets to return to her mother and has a chance of living a normal life. In *Lolita* the death of Charlotte Haze marks a turning point in the novel as it allows Humbert to become Lolita's legal guardian and, consequently, leaves her life entirely up to his control. *The Diary of a Teenage Girl's* Charlotte remains alive, however, and the film, therefore, offers Minnie the potential to escape from the abuse she faced. In the film, when Minnie returns home, her mother tells her, "I looked everywhere for you" and "I've been looking all night. I've looked every single night since you've left." Minnie responds with surprise, exclaiming, "you did?" and looking at her mother through tears. By showing Charlotte's desire to locate Minnie the film affirms that she will not have to rely on either Monroe or Tabatha, who have both abused her, and will instead be protected by her mother, thereby allowing for her to go on to live a happier life. In these final moments, the film allows Minnie's mother to ban Monroe from Minnie's life and, consequently, she is able to succeed in preventing her daughter from further abuse in a way that Charlotte Haze was unable to and Minnie, unlike Lolita, has a future in which she can exist without fear of further abuse.

## **Conclusion**

By prioritizing women's experiences of trauma, sexuality, and abuse over patriarchal fantasies, *Una*, *Blackbird*, and *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* are able to give young women a voice in a media landscape that often silences their perspectives. As Durham notes, "media images of sexuality are everywhere" and more often than not they feature girls as "hypersexualized" objects for male attention rather than exploring female sexuality and desire (Durham 28-29). Furthermore, this image of girls as sexy objects for male consumption ignores the effects sexual violence can have on women. By exploring how trauma affects its protagonist,

*Una* and *Blackbird*, therefore, problematize depictions of sexy girls within the media. Furthermore, *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* not only exposes this trauma but also makes space for female desire and sexuality within its story. Given that *Una*, the text that emphasizes the damaging effects of sexual abuse, is often praised as overcoming *Lolita* while *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*, which depicts both Minnie's trauma and her sexual desires, has been accused of advocating for pedophilia, the texts thereby expose society's discomfort with portraying female characters as anything other than helpless victims and the media's desire to depict feminism as necessary only in conditions of extreme abuse.

The fact that both of these texts were adapted for the screen during the 2010s, is also indicative of the growing desire for better representation and the renewed interest in the effects of sexual abuse on women that has overtaken our current cultural moment. In 2011, the documentary film *Miss Representation* pushed for the media to represent women as powerful leaders rather than mere sexual objects and later that same year the Obama Administration released the "Dear Colleague Letter" which outlined the ways in which sexual abuse and violence interferes with a young woman's right to an education. These texts spurred a broader discussion of the effects of sexual abuse and the representation of women in the United States. This led to a myriad of texts, including the 2015 documentary *The Hunting Ground*, the 2018 film *The Tale*, and even the current #MeToo movement, that seek to address how sexual violence affects women of all ages. Released in 2015 and 2016 respectively, *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* and *Una* are products of this current cultural moment and consequently they reflect this increased focus on women's perspectives of abuse. As with the adaptations, many of these texts and movements are praised for portraying women as one-dimensional victims rather than full

subjects with complex desires. *Una* and *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*, therefore, expose the ways in which contemporary feminism continues to be relegated to situations of extreme abuse.

## Works Cited

- Baxi, Pratiksha. "Rape, Retribution, State: On Whose Bodies?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 35, no. 14, 2000, pp. 1196–1200. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/4409115](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4409115).
- Caruth, Cathy. "Introduction: The Wound and the Voice." *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Kindle ed., Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, pp. 1-9.
- Chute, Hillary. "The Space of Graphic Narrative: Mapping Bodies, Feminism, and Form." *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions*, edited by Robyn Warhol and Susan S. Lanser, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 2015, pp. 194–209. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv8j6sv.14](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv8j6sv.14).
- Connolly, Julian W. "Lolita's Afterlife: Critical and Cultural Responses." *A Reader's Guide to Nabokov's "Lolita,"* Academic Studies Press, Brighton, MA, 2009, pp. 141–174. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1zxsk0k.12](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1zxsk0k.12).
- Durham, M. Gigi. "Introduction: Sexy Girls in the Media." *The Lolita Effect*, The Overlook Press, 2008, New York, pp. 21-41.
- Jenkins, Phillip. "Full Circle: The Return of the Child Sexual Predator in the 1990s." *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America*, Yale University Press, 1998, pp. 189–214. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hk0vf.13](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hk0vf.13).
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery*. Basic Books, New York, 1992.
- Rooney, David. "'Blackbird:' Theater Review." *The Hollywood Reporter*, 10 March 2017. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/jeff-daniels-michelle-williams-blackbird-873962>. Accessed 14 April 2019.
- Sharp, Anne. "'LOLITA'; Time for Lolita's Story." *New York Times*, March 29, 1998. <https://>

[www.nytimes.com/1998/03/29/movies/l-lolita-time-for-lolita-s-story-203262.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/29/movies/l-lolita-time-for-lolita-s-story-203262.html).

Accessed 9 Dec. 2018.

Siegel, Carol. "America's Virginity Fetish and the Mysteries of Child Molestation." *Sex Radical Cinema*, Indiana University Press, 2015, pp. 32–69. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt18crxxq.5](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt18crxxq.5).

Showden, Carisa R. "What's Political about the New Feminisms?" *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2009, pp. 166–198. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/40388740](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40388740).

Sorgenfrei, Carol Fisher. "Performance Review: The Edinburgh International Festival." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 58, no. 2, 2006, pp. 320–324. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/25069828](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25069828).

Svich, Caridad. "Ordinary Sites of Transgression." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2008, pp. 88–92. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/30133345](http://www.jstor.org/stable/30133345).

Vickers, Graham. "Blood Sisters: Some Responses to *Lolita*." *Chasing Lolita: How Popular Culture Corrupted Nabokov's Little Girl All Over Again*, Chicago Review Press 2008, pp. 205-223.

Vickers, Graham. "Lolita in Movieland 2: "Pedophilia Is a Hard Sell"" *Chasing Lolita: How Popular Culture Corrupted Nabokov's Little Girl All Over Again*, Chicago Review Press 2008, pp. 71-91.

Vickers, Graham. "Tabloids and Facts: The Press and Lolita." *Chasing Lolita: How Popular Culture Corrupted Nabokov's Little Girl All Over Again*, Chicago Review Press 2008, pp. 165-183.

Winkelman, Natalie. "How Can We Ever Make a Movie About Nymphets?" *Another Gaze*, 14

Dec. 2017. <https://www.anothergaze.com/how-can-we-ever-make-a-movie-about-nymphets-una-rooney-mara-feminist-benedict-andrews-lolita-stanley-kubrick/>. Accessed 2 March 2019.

Winkler, Cathy. "Rape as Social Murder." *Anthropology Today*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1991, pp. 12–14. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3032794](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3032794).

## Conclusion

While many of the costume and revisionist adaptations of *Lolita* and *Pride and Prejudice* examined in this project altered the source texts to meet the demands of an increasingly feminist audience, they did so by representing women as already independent from men and therefore, only in need of feminism and collective action during situations where they face extreme patriarchal control. The *Lolita* costume adaptations barely problematize the fact that Lolita's life is completely controlled by Humbert Humbert. In the *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations, feminist sisterhood and collective action are only portrayed as necessary when female characters lived in a strict, patriarchal society where men kept them from having rights of their own and the modern, independent women of the revisionist adaptations are depicted as living their lives mostly unencumbered by the patriarchy. The revisionist versions of *Lolita* represent their more modern protagonists as in need of feminism only in cases of severe sexual abuse. These adaptations roughly reflect the shift from patriarchy to the more collective, politically involved second-wave feminism to the more individualistic postfeminism, do-me feminism, and victim feminism sensibilities. These more individualistic, postfeminist sensibilities represent a backlash to second-wave feminism and they attempt to reinscribe women into the patriarchy by either promoting heterosexual romance or affirming the place of women as one-dimensional victims within society.

The costume adaptations of *Lolita* reinforce the patriarchal view of Lolita as an annoying, sexually promiscuous nymphet while also, in the case of the 1997 Adrian Lyne adaptation, beginning to address the damage sexual abuse causes women. In Kubrick's version, all of the novel's sexually explicit content is removed due to the constraints of the Production Code, and as

a result the film is unable to expose the damages of child sexual abuse. Instead, it puts forward a relatively tame version of Lolita and Humbert's relationship and casts its Lolita as annoying and one-dimensional. The Lyne version, on the other hand, occasionally depicts Lolita as an abused child in order to appeal to audiences in the 1990s who, as a result of the child sex panic, were becoming increasingly aware of the damages sexual abuse caused children. The film, however, does not wholly diverge from Humbert's portrayal of Lolita as a nymphet. Instead, it oscillates between depictions of Lolita as a victim and a vixen without giving her much nuance or complexity. This contributed to the rise in use of the term "Lolita" to mean any sexually attractive underaged girl and, as a result, the films played a role in the rise in people using the term to blame victims for sexual assault. The costume adaptations of *Lolita* largely adhere to Humbert Humbert's perspective when depicting Lolita which therefore leads them to merely replicate the ways in which the patriarchy controls women.

BBC's 1995 mini-series adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, on the other hand, draws from second wave feminism's emphasis on collective action by adding additional scenes between the female characters which allow the film to create a space outside of the patriarchy where women can support one another. These additional scenes allow Elizabeth and her sisters to complain about aspects of the patriarchy, such as the entailment of their father's estate, that limit their options for greater financial freedom and they allow the girls to offer emotional support to one another throughout their precarious romantic entanglements. By highlighting sisterhood and the need for a space for women's interiority outside of the patriarchy, the BBC mini-series draws on the second wave feminist movement's prioritization of collective action and support for one another. This emphasis on collective support for one another and sisterhood allows the series to

draw on feminist themes that would have been familiar to the series' audience while also exposing the ways in which the Bennet sisters were limited by the patriarchy. As a result of its nineteenth century setting, the 1995 BBC mini-series is able to draw on feminist themes of sisterhood and the need for women to have a space outside of the patriarchy for their inner thoughts without disrupting modern notions of female independence.

While the BBC mini-series focuses on themes of collectivism, the 2005 film costume adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* focuses on the romantic plot in order to give the female characters more apparent control over their lives. In the film, Lizzy's apparent ability to accept or reject Darcy's proposal is highlighted, and consequently, she appears to have more agency in her romantic relationships. However, the fact that the female characters in *Pride and Prejudice* appear to have more control over their romantic lives, leads the film to create a kind of nostalgia for the nineteenth century that obscures the damaging effects of the patriarchy. By locating female agency within the context of heterosexual relationships, the film, therefore, runs the risk of creating nostalgia for the patriarchal controls of the nineteenth century.

This shift towards depicting Elizabeth Bennet as a more independent woman, however, fits in with the shift towards the postfeminist media sensibility which revisionist adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* often embraced. Within the postfeminist media sensibility, feminism is relegated to a thing of the past, and the female characters are depicted as having their own careers and interests even though many of them are still fixated on finding a man. This fixation on finding a male love interest reinscribes women back into the patriarchy by suggesting that they need men to find true personal and professional fulfillment. In the case of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, this leads the film to represent Bridget, the central female protagonist, as being incompetent until she is

rescued by her love interest Mark Darcy, and thereby reinscribed into the patriarchy. The fixation on Bridget as an independent, single woman throughout the film, therefore, serves only to reinforce the idea that women need men in their lives in order to function.

This movement into the postfeminist media sensibility's emphasis on independence is challenged a bit by *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. While *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* contains several elements of postfeminism, such as the series' emphasis on the women's careers, it also appeals to notions of sisterhood and collective action that postfeminism deemphasized in favor of individuality. This is seen in the series through the ways the female characters support one another and help each other succeed both in their careers and romantically. The series, therefore, represents a shift back towards muted feminist ideals in the more recent media landscape.

This shift back towards feminism occurs again with the film adaptations of two of the *Lolita* revisionist texts: *Una*, which is based on *Blackbird*, and *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*, both of which were released in the mid-2010s. These films, like their print counterparts, emphasize the traumas their protagonists experienced as a result of sexual abuse and, in the case of *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*, allow the Lolita-character to feel empowered by her sexuality. These texts respond to an increased interest in the traumas of sexual violence that arose in the 2010s with President Obama's "Dear Colleague Letter" and, consequently, they are exemplars of the ways in which the media appropriates feminist themes in order to emphasize female victimization. This is especially true of *Una* which presents its protagonist as a one dimensional, virgin-victim in order to suggest that sexual abuse completely ruined her life.

Given that *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* deal with modern protagonists in ordinary situations, the fact that they either reflect postfeminism and only loosely

endorse feminist stances while revisionist adaptations of *Lolita* and costume adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* more explicitly include feminist themes suggests that the modern media landscape is only comfortable endorsing feminism in cases where overt patriarchal abuse is present. In other words, *Lolita* revisionist adaptations and costume adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* are allowed to interrogate the damages patriarchal views of women cause only because they depict extreme forms of oppression. It is acceptable in society to suggest that women need feminism in order to curb sexual abuse or the rigid social order of the nineteenth century. Portraying modern women as experiencing sexism and benefitting from feminism, however, would lead to further social change and therefore, the postfeminist media sensibility seems to suggest that protagonists like Bridget must be reinscribed back into the patriarchy.

All of these adaptations point to a system where the demands of an increasingly feminist audience lead to female characters gaining more agency only to be reinscribed into the patriarchy when feminism begins to be viewed as radical and unnecessary. This trend of the media praising women for speaking up and fighting oppression and then silencing them when their anger is deemed too extreme continues in the modern day cultural landscape. This can be seen through responses to the current #MeToo movement. When the movement began, women were praised for outing men like Harvey Weinstein and Louis C.K. as serial sexual abusers. These men, who were accused of repeatedly attempting to rape and constantly exposing themselves to women respectively, were seen as predatory and were consequently blacklisted in Hollywood while their accusers were hailed as courageous for telling their stories. Later in the movement, when comedian Aziz Ansari came under fire for allegedly pressuring a woman he was on a date with to engage in more sexual activity than she was comfortable with, the media began to question if

the movement had gone too far. In a January 2018 article from the *Atlantic*, Caitlin Flanagan wrote that the article accusing Ansari of sexual misconduct “was 3,000 words of revenge porn” that “destroyed a man who didn’t deserve it.” Just as with the revisionist adaptations of *Lolita* and *Pride and Prejudice*, this instance shows that American culture is comfortable with feminism so long as it only calls out the most extreme forms of abuse, and even as more recent adaptations of these texts, such as *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, attempt to make greater space for the voices of women, they still have to potential to shift backwards into the postfeminist and patriarchal media sensibilities.

## Works Cited

Flanagan, Caitlin. "The Humiliation of Aziz Ansari." *The Atlantic*. January 14 2018.