

The Modern Elizabeth Bennet
A Conversation with Ashley Clements, Star of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*

Moderated by Susie Wampler, JASNA Southwest Regional Coordinator
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Ashley Clements: Well, hello, everyone. Thanks for having me.

Susie Wampler: What introduced you to Jane Austen?

AC: My introduction to Jane Austen was the Gwyneth Paltrow adaptation of *Emma*. I was young, and I fell in love. My mom took me to see it. I think I had a British teacher who told her, “She understands British humor; you should take her to this movie.”

Sophie Thompson is so funny in that movie, and I would quote her all the time. And that was the beginning for me — what is probably not everyone’s favorite adaptation of *Emma*, I think it’s fair to say. [laughter]

SLW: It’s definitely fair to say. [laughter] What is it about Austen’s work that speaks to you the most?

AC: Certainly, in the beginning, it was the comedy and the romance. There’s a lot of great romance. It wasn’t until I actually read her — I think the first time I actually read Jane Austen was when I was assigned *Pride and Prejudice* in high school — that I was really introduced to her voice.

And I think the comedy can be, and has been, adapted beautifully for film. But some of what can only be understood in reading her work is how funny her narratorial voice is. Her point of view that she infuses into everything, that’s some of the funniest parts of Jane Austen — and that’s a relationship you can only have with her by reading.

SLW: Do you have a favorite adaptation?

AC: I was also very much the right age to love things like *Clueless* and *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, which I would say were more “inspired by” than true adaptations. The Romola Garai adaptation of *Emma* is particularly stunning and wonderful. I love a lot of them, in different ways, but that might be a favorite.

SLW: That's actually my favorite as well. What attracted you to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*? How did you hear about it?

AC: Well, they said they were making a modern *Pride and Prejudice*, and I thought, "I love *Pride and Prejudice*, tell me more about it." And actually, that's part of how they called me into the audition, the producers told me later, because when I submitted for it, I wrote a note that said, "I love Jane Austen, and I'd love to be a part of this." And they thought, "Oh, good, someone knows the book." [laughter]

SLW: Tell us about the process of putting it together. Were they writing when you came onboard?

AC: I think at that point, they had written a few episodes. They were figuring out what the whole thing was going to be. I don't know if everyone here is familiar with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, but ... [applause] if not, it's a vlog-style adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. And if you don't know what vlogging is, neither did I when I got the role. [laughter]

But vlogging is those kids on YouTube just talking directly into the camera about their day, just going, you know, "I did this today," or, "I have these thoughts about this, and I'm going to talk about this topic." And they're edited together, typically with a lot of jump cuts of — as you saw in that clip, that kind of cutty nature of it, where — look, no one was in charge of my hair but me, so my hair changed a lot. [laughter] Low budget filmmaking.

Hank Green is a prominent vlogger on YouTube, and he thought that it would be an interesting idea to adapt something and do a narrative, tell a story through vlogging, and ultimately landed on *Pride and Prejudice* because that was his wife's favorite book.

They didn't exactly know what that was going to look like at first, and how do you tell *Pride and Prejudice* entirely through first-person narration? So you're getting a very biased view, right? You're getting a prejudiced view, you might say. [laughter] You're getting just Lizzie's perspective, and because it's her vlog, and she's telling it in her bedroom, you can only show people on camera who would be in her bedroom, so how do we figure that out?

There were still a lot of pieces that they were still figuring out as they started the casting process, and I had a lot of questions as it became clear — you know, I had a call with one of the producers when they had narrowed it down to two Lizzies, which was a nerve-wracking time.

But it got me so excited about the prospect of it and thinking about how you adapt this story and make it relevant. You know, we don't have to get married. It was 2012 at the time. We're still full members of society if we don't find a husband. And we're able to work, so we're not destitute if we don't find someone with, you know, ten thousand a year — if we're very lucky. [laughter]

How do you make the pressure to get married something that's relevant? How do you do all those things? So I was talking with the producers even before I got the part. I had a lot of questions about it, and I got so excited thinking about it that it made me go back and reread the book and start thinking about how you would make that work now.

Actually I had some ideas that helped them. I'm the reason that Lizzie and Darcy met at a wedding in our adaptation, because they thought, well, we'll have a ball at a country club, and I was like, "Who do you know who's ever been to a ball?" [laughter] He was like, "Yeah, but they have to dance together." And I said: "It's a wedding. Everyone dances at weddings. That's when we dance nowadays." Mind blown. You're welcome. [laughter]

SLW: Maybe you can tell us a little bit about some of the other character changes? Charlotte Lucas becomes Charlotte Lu. Charles Bingley becomes Bing Lee.

AC: That's all a credit to the writers. In terms of bringing *Pride and Prejudice* to 2012, they wanted to make it inclusive racially and make it look like the real diverse world that we live in now.

And so Charlotte Lucas became Charlotte Lu, played by a Korean actress. And yes, Charles Bingley became Bing Lee, and Caroline was Caroline Lee, and they were a Chinese family. Fitzwilliam Darcy became William Darcy, just because, you know — also to just make it simpler, but then Colonel Fitzwilliam is just Fitz.

SLW: And then there's Ricky Collins.

AC: Ricky Collins, again, because there's too many Williams. Then he became Ricky Collins, partly because I think they thought it was funny that you could call him Dick. [laughter] See? It's funny.

What else did we do? Oh, well, I think probably the biggest change we made was turning Kitty into a cat. [laughter] And again, that's a decision that was made — not to make Kitty specifically into a cat, but to take the five sisters down to three.

That was a decision made before I was brought onboard, which changes the dynamic. It's a very different sister relationship for Lizzie to be a middle child, for there to be just an older sibling and a younger sibling, for Lydia to be the only kind of crazy one, for there not to be sort of a cohort for her to bum around with.

And that isolates Lydia in a way that I think the writers took good advantage of in our story and makes it all the more understandable that Lydia turns to Wickham as somebody who will hang out with her and not lecture her about not partying so much, like her annoying older sisters do.

And then Mary became our slightly goth cousin, which was brilliant, but you don't see a lot of her. And then Kitty became a cat because I don't think the writers anticipated there being so much upset, where people were like, "Where are Mary and Kitty?"

Of course they have fans. So it was fan response that made them write in cousin Mary and then the actress who played Lydia, Mary Kate Wiles, her cat became Kitty, which upset my cat very much, that she was not offered the opportunity to audition. [laughter] She would have crushed it.

SLW: *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is the longest version of *Pride and Prejudice* that's ever been filmed, yet you had to make a lot of cuts to produce it as a vlog series. Can you talk a little bit about that? What was the hardest thing to lose from the novel?

AC: Any time you're adapting a book to screen and trying to tell that story in a major adaptation, [you have to lose things]. We're kind of midway between *Bridget Jones* and an actual filmed version of *Pride and Prejudice* in terms of fitting along the storyline and keeping the characters, mostly.

But we did lose some really fun people, because how in earth would you have ever gotten them into Lizzie's bedroom? And also, low budget filming. We already ended up with a cast of 12 by the end. We wouldn't have been able to have more.

I would have loved to have gotten to meet the Gardiners. We turned Mrs. Gardiner into Professor Gardiner, who advises Lizzie because she's a grad student. And then she arranges for Lizzie to do an internship at Pemberley Digital, which is where William Darcy works. And so it's still sort of the Gardiners taking her to Pemberley in a way, which I think was very clever. That was some very clever adaptation.

But probably the most fun for me, perhaps the saddest thing for the audience, is that we never see the Bennet parents, and they're some of the greatest characters. But, consequently, Lizzie had to act out what her parents did for her vlog audience, which meant that I got to play Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, which was probably the most fun thing to do in the whole show.

SLW: And you even had Mrs. Bennet with a *Gone With the Wind* hat.

AC: We did, yes.

SLW: That accent.

AC: Our Mrs. Bennet was Southern, partly because they were looking for a place where you still might have a little bit more of the old-fashioned ideas of getting all your young daughters married off, which would not be quite as common in California, where the show was set, although it depends on what part of California you're in. We're a large and varied state. [laughter]

But it also meant that I got to play a very exaggerated Georgian-esque Southern accent, which some people tell me was a very good Southern accent, and some people not politely said was terrible. [laughter] Take it or leave it.

But it was fun to do, and all knowing that everything that Lizzie does in imitation is just Lizzie's lens, that also leaves interpretations like, "Is that what Mrs. Bennet really sounds like?" We don't know. And for a long time, we get only Lizzie's version of Darcy. In our adaptation, you don't

meet Mr. Darcy until halfway through, because why would he end up in Lizzie's bedroom?
[laughter] That would be odd.

And he in fact never shows up in Lizzie's bedroom. That's why we had to send her off on an internship so she could — she did several internships — so that she could be in other places and be in an office setting where he might walk in and we could get him on camera.

But, up until then, all we saw of Mr. Darcy, or William Darcy, or just Darcy, as our Lizzie called him, was Lizzie's impression of him. And that was biased, it turns out. [laughter] And so you get to play with that kind of unreliable narrator. I think that's a fun thing for any filmmaker, or writer, to get to play with. I love the unreliable narrator. [laughter]

SLW: Tell us how you prepared to take on this role.

AC: Well, I reread *Pride and Prejudice*. [laughter] And I re-watched probably just the '95 miniseries and then the 2005 adaptation. I've actually never seen the 1940 *Pride and Prejudice*, and I'm okay with that. [laughter]

I was a Jane Austen fan and I felt very familiar with the novel, but I didn't know anything about vlogging. They gave me people to watch. They gave me YouTube videos to watch.

I was also preparing for the role by learning that kind of, lots of loud energy directed right at the camera, and moving around so that the jump cuts are fun, and that kind of very energetic performance that they were looking for. I watched a lot of YouTube videos.

SLW: The show started in 2012 and ended in 2015. Some of the scripts were done in advance and you modified as you went on. How did that work?

AC: They had maybe six episodes written when I was cast, and then they were writing as we went. We would shoot once a month, so they would basically get a month to write each batch of episodes. Ultimately, they figured out that we could do a month's worth of episodes in a day. We would shoot eight episodes and then once we started doing Q&A episodes, which was every day after the very first day, we were doing nine episodes a day.

They would basically have a month to write. We would shoot on Saturdays. On Wednesday, about a week before, I would get a first version of everyone's episodes, basically at the same time that the showrunner got the episodes, and I would go through and do a notes pass, and then we would basically do a long Skype call where the two of us would go through the script and I would play Lizzie, and he would play everyone else.

And I would just give my notes and thoughts. "I don't think Lizzie would say that," or "This doesn't track," or "Don't we need to set up such and such?" And just a lot of, "Can I say it this way, because it seems more natural to me?" And then he would take my notes and do a pass, and then Wednesday, before we shot, we would get together with the rest of the cast, and we would read through everything.

We would figure out the staging, which was always very simple, because it's a static camera, so it doesn't move, and it's just people coming in and out. We would make sure that we'd have all that, go over what props we need and make any other changes that the other actresses would request — and actors. We had a few men.

And then we would get a final script either late Wednesday or early Thursday, and then I would block those days off and do nothing but try to cram 60 pages of dialogue into my brain. I would sort of hole up for that Thursday and Friday and show up on Saturday and see how much stuck.

We learned pretty quickly that the more I could memorize, the faster and easier shooting days went. So luckily — you know, it helped in school, too — I can memorize a lot of things short term. Don't ask me to keep that knowledge for a long time, but I can cram for a test.

I basically crammed, and then we would have about an hour, hour fifteen per episode. We'd do a 12-hour day. That's a pretty standard shooting day. But when we talk about doing 60 pages of dialogue in one shooting day, a TV show is typically doing five to 10. And 10's a lot. Movies are doing about two to three pages a day.

And that's because in movies there's a lot of cameras moving, there's a lot more technical aspects to it. We could do a lot because the camera didn't move. But it meant that our performances were what we were watching.

We learned quickly that jump cuts didn't really make sense in the scenes as much as they did in the vlogging parts. We had to memorize them and do long, full takes of them. And that's not something that any actor is doing on anything that you're watching. So shoutout to me and the entire cast for incredible feats of memorization. [laughter]

SLW: What about the Q&As you had with the audience? Did it change the scripting or performing?

AC: It did in small ways. Like I said, Mary and Kitty were never intended to be part of the show, and people were upset about that. But the show was always designed to be interactive. That is, in fact, what we won an Emmy for, was interactive. The first YouTube show to win an Emmy.

And that meant that all the characters had twitters, and that you could tweet at them and respond to them, and they might respond to you. And then you could ask Lizzie questions, and we would film a Q&A episode once a month in which the writers would cherry-pick the questions that let us lead into the bits of plot point that they wanted to reference in those episodes.

But they were all real audience questions. We didn't fake any of them. There were certainly things like Mary and Kitty, but also we had such a fun relationship with our audience when that show was on.

It's still all available online, but the experience of people who were watching it live would see some tweets on Tuesday, and then some responses on Wednesday, and then a new episode would come out on Thursday, and they would be going along with us, with the story.

And in that way, the writers and myself would learn what the audiences were excited about and we could tease things out or drop little acknowledgments into the Q&A episodes in particular, but in all the episodes. There were just small ways — when you know what your audience wants, you've got to give it to them or kind of enjoy withholding it from them. "Oh, you want Darcy? No Darcy for you." [laughter]

The plot of the show was obviously never going to change, but there were subtle things in which we were able to really engage with the audience and let them be part of the show.

SLW: What was the strangest reaction you had from a fan?

AC: I will preface this story by saying she's become a friend. [laughter] But I met one fan who was so excited to meet me that she threw up into the planter in a hotel lobby. [laughter] And then, as if nothing had happened, just turned around and hugged me. [laughter] It was memorable.

SLW: Did you get recognized on the street?

AC: I did a lot when the show was on. It still happens occasionally. My demo, because of the YouTube nature of the show, was very young, and I couldn't go to the mall without getting followed around a little bit. I learned that if I needed to go shopping, I should go to the mall at 10 a.m. on a Tuesday when they were in school. [laughter]

And I do still occasionally get recognized. My favorite is when people say, "Have you ever seen *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*? Because you look a lot like..." And depending on how much time I have, I either say it's me or, "I hear that all the time." [laughter]

SLW: What was the most endearing interaction you had with a fan?

AC: Luckily, that's a very long list. I've had some incredibly endearing memories of fans. But maybe one of my favorite quotes that anyone said was, "You introduced me to *Pride and Prejudice* and my mom to YouTube." [laughter]

One of the most remarkable things about *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is that it's been used as a teaching tool. It's been used as a way to help young people engage with text that they might think before getting into it that it's boring, or it's too hard to understand, or it's old, or, you know, all the same things you hear about people not wanting to try to read Shakespeare, which I basically have a master's degree in.

I love being part of something that became an access point, because then people say, "Oh, now I know the story. Now I understand the characters. And now I'm able to enjoy the book. Now I'm able to go back and not SparkNotes my high school assignment to read this." I think that's a pretty incredible legacy for the show to have.

SLW: That pretty much answers my next question, which is what was it like to bring this iconic character to new generations?

AC: I had no idea that that's what we were doing, in as much as, you're an actor, you book a job, you get excited about the job. I was the right person for the job, because I had the training that let me shoot 60 pages in a day, and because I was a big Jane Austen fan, and because I was ready to embrace the spirit of what does a 2012 Lizzie Bennet look like, which is obviously going to be very different.

But thinking about all those things, it never occurred to me that we were entering something into the Jane Austen lexicon that will be referenced forever. And that's the craziest part to me — that I'm here talking to a Jane Austen society. And that any list of *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations includes me. And that I still get asked about it all the time.

I had no idea if anyone would even watch it when we started making it, and so for people to not only watch it and fall in love with it, and then for some people, fall in love with Jane Austen because of it, and to just sort of be forever on this list of prominent Jane Austen adaptations.

That's something I luckily didn't think about at the time, because I might have been completely overwhelmed and paralyzed, if I thought, "This is a part of history." But it is, in a way. I'm incredibly grateful for that, grateful for the response and proud to have introduced a new generation to *Pride and Prejudice*.

SLW: Do you have a favorite episode?

AC: I have many favorite episodes. I played the character for a year, so when Lizzie and Darcy finally get together, to be Lizzie getting what she wants is very satisfying. But I got to do a kind of big, dramatic episode with each of the characters.

And our show really explored the relationships with the sisters and the friendship between Lizzie and Charlotte in great detail, especially as we didn't even meet Darcy until halfway through the show.

In our version, rather than get married, Charlotte takes a kind of sellout job — she gives up on her passion and goes after a paycheck. And so that friendship falling-out moment — of course they recover, but her disappointment that Charlotte is taking Collins' job offer — that was a great emotional episode for me to do with Julia Cho, who played Charlotte.

And then we really played into the Lizzie-Lydia relationship, and that became a very key relationship in our show. And I had several great dramatic — more dramatic than the rest of the show — episodes with Mary Kate Wiles, who played Lydia. And we are still great friends, and we always loved getting to play opposite each other.

We did over 100 episodes. There are four that Lizzie is not in, in which other people take the camera over. And the first time we did that was about episode 15 or so? I can't remember the episode numbers so well anymore.

But Charlotte and Jane took over the vlog. And it's the first time that I ever got to watch the show without watching myself. And I was able to really appreciate what the show was and to say, "Oh, this is really funny and smart and, if I wasn't in it, I'd like it." [laughter] "I'd like to be in it."

But you know, it's hard to have that effect when watching yourself. It's hard to completely separate from that. Even now, watching a 6-year-old version of myself, I'm like, "Girl, your hair's a mess." [laughter]

That was the first time that I fell in love with our show as an audience member, and that will always be a special episode to me because of that.

SLW: What's your favorite memory, or your best memory, from the series?

AC: We all became such great friends, and they're still my friends. I moved to Los Angeles without really knowing anyone, and I'd been here about a year when I booked that show. And then I had a community, and we've all continued to make things, and we've continued to make them together. I know you're about to ask me about some of those things, so I won't get into them here.

My favorite times on set were really falling in love with these people who became incredibly good friends of mine. And also we got to do a lot of things like this together. We were flying out to conventions and basically having little sleepovers where it was usually Mary Kate and I, who played Lydia, sharing a hotel room. And we were very sisterly during that time. I still call Laura and Mary Kate my sisters, and they still call me their sister. We found something very special on that show.

SLW: Speaking of Laura Spencer, she played Jane Austen in...

AC: *Edgar Allen Poe's Murder Mystery Dinner Party*. I don't know why no one can remember the name! [laughter] We call it Poe Party for short.

SLW: In Poe Party, you played Charlotte Brontë and Laura Spencer played Jane Austen here, and that's very interesting. You were one of the stars of that series and Laura just did a cameo, right? Can you describe what your character did to her character?

AC: *Edgar Allen Poe's Murder Mystery Dinner Party* was produced and costars Mary Kate Wiles, who played Lydia, and was written by Sean and Sinead Persaud, who the three of them and a fourth created a group called Shipwrecked Comedy. And they invited me to come be in a thing, and I said, "Of course. I'll be in anything you ask me to be in."

It's kind of like Clue if all of your favorite authors were invited to the party, from different eras intermingling. Poe and Hemingway have a lot of beefs. And I play Charlotte Brontë, and we... Look, this is a spoiler, you guys. You should watch the show. It's very funny.

Actually, I don't do anything to Jane Austen, but Emily Brontë *murders* her. [laughter] And we're not in correct period dress at all, just preface that. I'm actually, as Charlotte Brontë, dressed in a very beautiful Regency ball gown.

And no one ever called it out. No one who watched the show was like, "That's incorrect." Am I the only nerd here who noticed? It was a very pretty dress, though, so it was really fun to wear, and I finally got to wear a Regency dress, like I was classic Jane Austen. More of a Caroline Bingley dress, but beautiful.

And then I think our Jane Austen was dressed in more of a — look, I'm not the historian, but like 1780s or something. It's wrong, but it's funny. And also, we have authors from all sorts of different time periods intermingling, so you can't take it seriously anyway.

That's a great sort of literary send-up, lots of inside, funny literary jokes in that piece, including the Brontës murdering Jane Austen. [laughter]

SLW: Tell us what else you've been doing since, especially *Sona*, the series you produced, wrote and star in.

AC: Well, I will also plug my romantic comedy, because I produced it and I star in it, and I find that audiences who like Jane Austen like romantic comedies. One of the things I did — and the first time that I ever produced anything — I coproduced it — is a romcom called *Non-Transferrable*, which is on Amazon Prime.

So if you're looking to see more of me, and you want to see me fall in love with a handsome man, I got you. [laughter]

And then just this past year, I wrote my own series for the first time, which I produced as well. And in my varied interests, I also happen to be a big Star Trek fan. I think Jane Austen and Star Trek go together, at least to me. Maybe it's Patrick Stewart, I don't know. [laughter] It just makes sense to me to love the same things.

But no one was casting me that way. I've been very fortunate to do a lot of comedy and romantic comedy. And I wanted to do a dystopian sci-fi, and so I wrote it myself. And I built a spaceship, and I filmed it. My partner and I filmed it.

And that is called *Sona*, and it's about a united earth space corps officer who is married to an alien — a very handsome alien — I got you [laughter] — on an earth in which aliens become banned from the planet, and so allegiances are torn. What is she going to do? She's married to someone who's now illegal. Yes, I'm influenced by current events. [laughter]

And that show is available on projectalpha.com. And I'll give you a free code, if you want to check it out. It's space, as in outer space. S-P-A-C-E, all caps, gets you a 60-day free trial at projectalpha.com. And you can enjoy the show and then cancel your subscription. [laughter]

SLW: What's next for you after this?

AC: Well, now I've got the writing bug, so I'm actually working on my next project, which is a modern adaptation of a classic piece of text. But that's all I can say. It's more adaptation-y in sort of the *Clueless*, *Bridget Jones* reimagined kind of way.

And I'm writing it with two partners, which is also a new process for me. That's been interesting and exciting to, how do you collaborate and share and play well with others. We're reimagining a dramatic piece of text. Actually, it's kind of a comedy.

That's what I'm working on right now. I'm deep in the writing process, which is very exciting. And you also mentioned that — at the time, I've written an upcoming Christmas horror film. But it's out now. It's Christmas. So if you like horror movies, that's out. It's called *All the Creatures Were Stirring*. It's scary. It's funny and scary. I'm not a scary movie person.

SLW: Well, I think we're ready to open up to questions.

Audience Member: You mentioned the demographics of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. What percentage of your audience would you guesstimate didn't realize this was an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*? [laughter]

AC: I don't know what percentage didn't realize it was an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, but I do know that there were a number of people who didn't realize it was a scripted thing at all. They thought it was just me.

What's really funny is that there were a few people — because we'd get these notes that said, "You know, I thought it was just a coincidence that you all had the same names as they did in *Pride and Prejudice*." [laughter]

But some people were absolutely completely unfamiliar with the novel or any film adaptation and were introduced to it by us. I think especially kids.

Audience Member: I'm particularly interested in, and a lot of my college students are interested in, the whole side story of Lydia when she goes off to Vegas. Pretty brilliant, because how do you make it a scandal that she just runs off with a guy for the weekend? I know a lot of people probably haven't seen it, but do you want to talk a little bit about that?

AC: Yes, thank you, I do want to talk about it. It's one of my favorite things that the writers did, and it's actually a question I had before I accepted the role, because I was very nervous that an updated Lydia scandal would be an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, and I didn't want to be a part of something that was going to shame her for that.

What the writers did so brilliantly was instead turn the scandal into Wickham making a sex tape of Lydia against her will and then threatening to sell it online unless he got bought off by Darcy. That still allowed Darcy to come in and be a hero, makes Wickham despicable, makes Lydia having gone through something but ultimately gets redemption, which I think became really important.

That is something that developed along through the show. I don't think anyone knew how much the audiences were going to fall in love with Lydia. And that is also very much to Mary Kate Wiles' credit, who is just so loveable, but also found a way to make this young girl relatable and lovable even when she's being irresponsible, sure. By contrast, maybe Lizzie's just a bit of a stick in the mud sometimes.

In our adaptation, part of the reason that Lydia runs off with Wickham is because her sisters keep telling her "You have to behave a certain way, you have to be a good student and not party and follow the rules." And she was the youngest and acting out. And all of that is perfectly understandable.

It's after a big fight with Lizzie that Lydia runs off to Vegas with Wickham, partly to spite Lizzie because Wickham and Lizzie had had their thing, their flirtation. And it touched a lot of people in a way that I think is also one of the more enduring legacies of *Lizzie Bennet*.

Something I've heard more about than any other aspect of the series is people who said that the Lydia and Lizzie relationship made them realize that they needed to make amends with their own sisters. And that was very meaningful to us at the time as well. We got a lot of messages

from people saying, “Oh, I need to figure out how to get ahold of my sister.” Because you only get the one sister. I only have brothers, which is why I’ve adopted many sisters. [laughter]

Audience Member: I saw on your Instagram a while back a script for *Lizzie Bennet Gets Married* or something to that effect. Could you speak more about that?

AC: I can. I don’t want to disappoint anyone. When I was starting to write things, I was trying to write something else, and my brain kept saying, “But I know how to write a Lizzie Bennet movie.” And I thought, okay, well, if I just write this Lizzie Bennet movie, will you be quiet and let me write my other movie?

And so I did. I sat down and I wrote a movie. It’s tentatively titled *The Lizzie Bennet Wedding*, in which, guess what happens? [laughter] And I know that, because I shared that online, a lot of people are hoping that that movie happens. It’s not in my control. There are business reasons why it won’t, which could change. It’s just not in my hands.

And if nothing else, someday I’ll just put the script online so people can read it, because I’m proud of it, and it does revisit all of our beloved characters and have a lot of fun side jokes. And Catherine De Bourgh is a large character in the film, which was very fun for me to write. Because in the film, I would finally let people meet the characters who were only ever played by me in the series.

Never say never, but I don’t know if that will ever see the light of day.

Audience Member: I know a lot of movies are filmed out of sequence, based on the actors’ schedules or budget, and big scenes are filmed first and all. But this apparently was filmed very much in sequence. As an actress, how was that different for you than other projects? And how did you approach the Lizzie character toward the end of the filming compared with the beginning?

AC: We would film month to month in order. We would film the day a bit out of order based on actors’ schedules. Basically, we would clump together the Jane episodes and the Lydia episodes and the Charlotte episodes, so that those actors didn’t have to stick around all day. Just me.

They were slightly out of order, but still very much mostly in order. And yeah, you can be working on a movie and shoot the end first. But because we shot mostly in order and we spent a year with these characters, we were so connected to them by the end of it that — and my relationships were very real with these people.

There's an episode in which I cry, and I couldn't do it without crying. I didn't have to pull out any of the actor tricks to get the waterworks going. I just was so invested in the relationships. You know, the longer you spend with those characters, you know them so well, their pain is your pain, and their wants are your wants.

And that's partly why I say it was so rewarding to be Lizzie and get Darcy, because I'd spent so much time being like, "I don't like that guy, I do like that guy, he doesn't like me." It was very emotional to do that last day as well. We shot out of order. The very last episode was actually, I think, shot before lunch, and then we did the Darcy chunk at the end of the day.

And so I had to say goodbye for the final time to the audience before I was actually done playing Lizzie. But I still cried, because it was hard to say goodbye. I was really attached to Lizzie, and I will always be very grateful to her that she let me be her.

Audience Member: If somebody gave you all the money and said, choose one of the Jane Austen movies to remake, which one would you make and which character would you like to play?

AC: I always wanted to be Elinor Dashwood. I wouldn't say I would do any better than Emma Thompson, because, eh. But I do love Elinor Dashwood. And I don't think we have enough adaptations of *Persuasion*. And I think that Anne is a tremendous heroine and frankly the only one I could legitimately play, because I'm an old woman. Anne, what is she? 27? [laughter] That would also be on my list.

Audience Member: I was wondering if you got any feedback from, say, England, home of these sacred texts. [laughter] And also your mother, what she thought of this?

AC: My mother thinks I'm brilliant in everything I do. [laughter] We did have a large audience in England. I was very afraid that there would be purists who would really dislike what we were

doing, which is completely understandable. But to them, I just say: “Enjoy the book. Don’t watch this.”

But outside of North America, our largest audience was in England, and we were very popular, which surprised me. But yeah, mostly English-speaking countries. We also had a large following in Brazil and Germany and the Philippines.