

Molly: Hey, everyone, before we begin today, we just have a few quick housekeeping things. First, we want to thank our newest patrons, Rachel, Kaylee, and Alison. Welcome to the team. Over on Patreon, we've just started a new bonus series, where we tell our top tier patrons what content we're currently consuming, aside from Jane Austen, of course. So, if that sounds good to you, head on over to patreon.com/podandprejudice.

Next, this episode is going to be our last episode before we dive into *Emma*. So, to prepare for next episode, if you want to read along with us, we're going to be covering the first three chapters of *Emma*. And now, enjoy this week's episode covering *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* with our guest, Ashley Clements.

[Pod and Prejudice theme]

Becca: This is Becca.

Molly: This is Molly.

Becca: We are here to talk about Jane Austen.

Molly: We are here specifically to do our first coverage of the very highly requested *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. And we are here joined today by **[00:01:00]** the star of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, believe it or not-- [crosstalk]

Becca: Elizabeth Bennet herself.

Molly: Elizabeth Bennet herself. Ashley Clements, thank you so much for joining us. We are so excited to have you here.

Ashley: Elizabeth Bennet incarnate.

Molly: [laughs]

Ashley: Not at all. But it's a pleasure to be here. Thanks so much for having me.

Becca: Thanks so much for joining us. For our listeners, who might not be aware, Ashley played Elizabeth Bennet or Lizzie Bennet in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* on YouTube. Ashley, do you want to introduce yourself a little bit for our listeners?

Ashley: Sure. I'm Ashley Clements. I'm an actor primarily, but also a writer, producer of all around creative person, at this point, I make things. And I am best known for starring as Lizzie Bennet in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the YouTube sensation of 2012. And I'm currently doing a rewatch of the whole show, because it's been 10 years, which **[00:02:00]** is crazy.

Molly: Truly bonkers, it's called *The Look Back Diaries*, right?

Ashley: It is called *The Look Back Diaries* because I thought two LBDs was cute.

Molly: Adorable.

Ashley: It turns out it's also confusing.

Molly: [laughs]

Becca: If our listeners want to check that out, where can they find that?

Ashley: They can find that on my YouTube and then can just search YouTube. That's how you can find all this stuff.

Becca: Fantastic. So, every time we have a guest on the show, we asked them a few preliminary questions about their relationship to Jane Austen starting with a very seminal self-explanatory. What is your relationship to Jane Austen?

Ashley: We're pals. We go way, way back. It's true. Actually, I was already a big Jane Austen fan before booking *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, which actually helped me, because I was brand new to Los Angeles. I didn't have an agent yet. I self-submitted for that job. I wrote in the notes, "I'm a big Jane Austen fan and I would love to be a part of the project." And the [00:03:00] creator later told me that's why he called me in. So, I owe a debt to all the people who introduced me to Jane Austen as a child, which started with my--

I had an elementary school teacher who was British, and she told my mom specifically that I get British humor, or I got British humor. I think I still do. And she specifically recommended Jane Austen to my mom. And that started with the very first piece of Austen content that I ever saw was the Gwyneth Paltrow, *Emma* movie, which I absolutely loved as a kid. I have seen that movie so many times. The way that you rewatch movies more as a kid than any other phase of your life, I would request it when I was home sick from school. Because see, back in the 90s, we used to go to these brick-and-mortar stores and rent physical movies.

Molly: [laughs]

Becca: Best of luck, if you will.

Ashley: Mm-hmm. And that is [00:04:00] how I watched that movie over, and over, and over again. And then shortly after was also introduced to be Emma Thompson's, *Sense and Sensibility*, which is incomparable. So, those two were for a long time, just my Jane Austen love. And I didn't actually read a book until I was assigned to in high school, sophomore year of high school. I read *Pride and Prejudice*. And it was a little bit hard for me to get into, but I also absolutely could not admit that. Part of my very nerdy persona as like the Shakespeare theatre nerdy kid was that I was super entertainer of Austen and I was. But I did have a harder time getting into the language, which I think is common and also, I was very young.

And then we watched the miniseries in school, but I didn't really remember it very well. And then other Austen things came out and I continued to consume them and love them. I was nerdy enough about it that I was [00:05:00] getting Jane Austen themed gifts. I remember I had a book about, which Jane Austen hero should you end up with?

Molly: [giggles]

Ashley: Or, that quiz was in it, at least. And I remember my friends and I going like, "Ooh, titter, twitter, titter," whatever.

Becca: [laughter]

Ashley: Are you going to end up with Mr. Darcy or Mr. [unintelligible [00:05:22]]? And so, that was, yeah, just like part of my nerdy Shakespeare, Jane Austen theater kid thing. And then I was cast in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and reread *Pride and Prejudice*. Really enjoyed it as an adult. And actually, enjoyed it so much that just for funsies went on to read *Sense and Sensibility* for the first time, and then *Emma*, and then *Persuasion*, and just really had a new appreciation for Austen after that.

Molly: Wow.

Becca: That is such a lovely origin story.

Ashley: I really owe a lot to [00:06:00] that teacher.

Molly: Yeah, totally.

Ashley: She was like, "Hey, you're weird kid." She's going to like this.

Molly: That's relatable as we are also both the Shakespeare nerdy girls from school, and we wouldn't have this podcast if Jane Austen didn't go hand in hand with those things.

Ashley: Mm-hmm. Yes.

Becca: It's absolutely accurate and I also hyper fixated on a movie in my youth that made me an Austen fan and that was the 1995 *Sense and Sensibility*. So, very big fan. [chuckles]

Ashley: They were close, but *Emma* was first. So, it's funny, because now, I've met many doing Austen's. I've been invited to speak at Jane Austen conventions and things, which is just a very strange thing. But I remember bringing up that movie and a whole crowd of people were like, "Ooh."

Becca: [laughs]

Ashley: I don't even know that that was not an approved adaptation, but I stand by it.

Becca: Listen, there's no such thing as a disapproved adaptation. We are going to be covering *From Prada To Nada* at some point on this show. And [00:07:00] we've heard stories and that are way worse than anything we've heard about the Gwyneth Paltrow adaptation. But this does actually lead me to our second question that I think you answered, which is, what's your favorite Austen content?

Ashley: It is actually the *Sense and Sensibility*. Ang Lee, Emma Thompson, the fact that she wrote it, won an Oscar, and starred in it, it's perfection. It's also such a good adaptation, because I knew the film first. When I read the book, I so appreciated what Emma Thompson did with that screenplay, because there's no dialogue in the beginning of the book for a long time. It was her first book. She wasn't as adept with it and she had to create all of these cinematic scenes to portray things that were just told through omniscient narration at the beginning, which is not super cinematic.

Becca: It's a very good choice. It also has your [00:08:00] standard emotional support Alan Rickman in it, which is very important to me. [laughs]

Ashley: Mm-hmm. Yeah, what a versatile, versatile actor. My God.

Molly: Truly.

Becca: Oh, yes.

Molly: Obviously, you play Lizzie in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. But out of all of Austen's works, which character do you relate to the most?

Ashley: It is Elinor Dashwood, actually. And I think that that is probably not how I present, but as a young person, I related so much to Elinor, because while I may have presented more like a Marianne, especially as a teenager, what I felt on the inside was knowing the burden of not being able to tell the truth.

Becca: We actually have a tagline on the show, Elinor Dashwood's the goddamn liar, because she's stop from telling the truth.

Ashley: Yeah, I very much related to suppress your emotions, push them down. These other things are socially acceptable, and you can't do that. But I also [00:09:00] speaking of being like a Shakespeare-Jane Austen nerd, I had a thought friend, now, I would, I guess, a friend of me in high school, who at some point gave me a very beautiful copy of *Emma*. And she inscribed in it that I should read it, because I had a lot to learn from *Emma*.

Becca: That is the shadiest thing I've ever hears.

Ashley: Right.

Becca: [laughs]

Ashley: That is some Jane Austen backhanded shade.

Molly: [laughs]

Ashley: I did not see this very beautiful copy, because it was tainted.

Molly: Wow.

Becca: Oh, God. Jane Austen's *Emma* also as we recently relearned opens with some crazy shade thrown at the Prince Regent.

Ashley: [laughs]

Becca: It feels fitting for there to be an inscription in a copy of *Emma* that is bad rude, but still, Jesus Christ.

Ashley: Yeah. I also hadn't read *Emma* yet.

Becca: Oh, [laughs]

Ashley: I didn't fully get-- I was like, "Wait, what do you [00:10:00] saying about me?" It wasn't meant kindly.

Molly: I don't know anything about *Emma* yet, but from the first three chapters, I told Becca, "I did not like *Emma* that much.

Becca: [laughs]

Ashley: Well, *Lizzie Bennet* is a very flawed protagonist, but I think *Emma* is more flawed.

Molly: So far, I'd agree.

Ashley: I love her, but she has a journey to go on.

Molly: Totally. So, do you have any Austen hot takes?

Ashley: [laughs] I feel I have an anti-hot take, especially, because I did not ever imagine that I would become a person who's so strongly associated with Jane Austen that I would frequently be asked these questions. My hot take is that you actually cannot compare the 1995 miniseries to the 2005 film of *Pride and Prejudice*. Because they're literally different mediums. One of them very successfully tells the story in six hours and with that much time, [00:11:00] obviously can include a lot more detail from the book.

The other theory successfully condenses a much longer story into two hours, which is really difficult to do. And it does it very well and very smartly. It takes events that happen at different parties and balls, it spread over months, all happen to the same party. What a just smart way to condense it, but they're literally different things.

Molly: I could not agree more.

Becca: Yes, that's the consensus we have come to on this podcast as well. And we are very entrenched in the whole 2005 vs 1995 drama from our listeners, who have on both sides, very strong opinions.

Ashley: Very strong opinions. And because I am Elizabeth Bennet, which again is a very strange thing to say. People really want me to be on their side and they want me to understand why their side is the [00:12:00] right side. And I'm like, "They're both great." If I want to spend six hours watching an adaptation of Jane Austen, I know what I want to watch. If I want to watch something in two hours, I have options."

Becca: And if you want to watch something in eight hours, you can watch yourself as Elizabeth Bennet in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, which brings us to our coverage of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* [laughs].

Ashley: Well transitioned.

Becca: Thank you. [laughs] The first question we have for you is, how you got involved in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*? What the process of auditioning was like and how you made the thing? [laughs]

Ashley: Yeah, I auditioned for this just like any other job. I was very new to Los Angeles. I was right out of grad school, which turned out to be such a benefit to the project, because I was just used to dealing with an enormous amount of text. Those muscles were strong at that time. And as I said, I didn't even have an agent yet. [00:13:00] I was just doing a lot of self-submitting and included that little note about a Jane Austen project. And at that time, the breakdown was just for the original for women and I looked at it and went-- well, based on these descriptions, I'm Lizzie. So, I submitted for Lizzie.

And then the first audition was, these were all in little rundown, rented by the hour spaces that used to be all over Hollywood. I don't know, if they survived the pandemic. And the first audition sides didn't even really explain what the vlog format was. I didn't actually know what a vlog was. We haven't mentioned that. The show is a vlog style adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, if you're not familiar, which

means that Lizzie Bennet is directly addressing camera and saying, "Ah, here's my crazy life. Yeah, my sister's in here. What's going on? And I'm so annoyed with this guy. Let me [00:14:00] tell you about."

Molly: [laughs]

Becca: But so, the first audition sides just said pause, where there were actually going to be jump cuts and I didn't know what any of that meant. I just did it like a monologue. And obviously, they liked me. They brought me back to callbacks, which were chem reads and read with everyone. And then I started to get really excited, because I was really seeing the show shape up. And actually, that's the point when I reread *Pride and Prejudice*. I didn't have the job yet. I just was very excited about Jane Austen again. And so, when I booked it, I was like, "Perfect. I just did the research."

Molly: Well.

Becca: I have to say on the vlog format thing, it occurred to me watching it again in 2022. It's a time capsule for a very specific medium of social media and [crosstalk] that happened over the course of five years very intensely. Any of our listeners who are millennials have a very strong idea of what a vlog looks like, but I don't know if our [00:15:00] younger listeners or our older listeners have actually experienced authentic vlogging in the same way we did. [chuckles]

Ashley: Right. Well, it was also the peak of personality vlogging, because I think that format still very much exists on YouTube, but it tends to have more of an explanation or educational bent at this point. If someone's just going to sit and talk at the camera for that long and this was a time when people were just fed regular upload times, and they would talk about whatever they could think of. And so, that meant a variety of things. And some were more sketch like or character based, and some of them were just talking about their lives to the camera and creating this para-social relationship.

Molly: Yeah.

Becca: At the time, you guys were putting it together and recording? Did you guys have a sense of what a sensation it would become?

Ashley: Absolutely not. No. We [00:16:00] get asked that question a lot and the answer is no. In fact, I've been frequently reminded through, I've had guests from various parts of the cast and crew on *The Look Back Diaries* and they have reminded me that actually, when the show launched, Hank Green is the cocreator and one of those original peak vloggers, who was still doing it. He and his brother, John Green, the author are still-- Well, Hank Green is also an author now. I'm so sorry. Both of them are very successful authors and their books are great. I'm not contractually obligated to say that.

Molly: [laughs]

Becca: Their books are grayed out from the ones I've read. [laughs]

Ashley: Yes, I do recommend. We knew that we had Hank's star power behind it, but he was funding the initial batch. The initial batch was basically the first 24 episodes. And beyond that, if the show wasn't successful, there wasn't going to be any more of it.

Becca: [00:17:00] Wow.

Ashley: So, that was something that-- I think that they did tell me that at the time and I just very much put it out of my head, because that's not really helpful pressure for me. And so, I was just very focused on my job, which was to do a tremendous amount of work, because this is commonly known to people who know *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. But for those who don't, we would film eight episodes a day. We only filmed once a month, because there was a very low budget and that was a way to get a lot of content for very little money, which means that we filmed each episode in about an hour, hour 20.

Becca: Oh, my God.

Ashley: And then, I immediately changed outfits, and maybe changed my hair and they were all my clothes as well. So, I was preparing at home the outfits that I thought would work for episodes, and lining those up, and putting those notes. I only got the final **[00:18:00]** script typically two days before. This is where I say my grad school training was really useful, because I had about two days with a script that was usually 50 to 60 pages. We quickly learned that the more memorized I could be, the better the day went.

They initially said, when I booked the job, he said, "You're not going to have to memorize it because of the jump cuts." But there's no teleprompter like I did have brain and we wanted the scenes to feel authentic and not jump cuts. So, we really wanted those to be memorized. And so, it was, yeah, just a tremendous amount of work that happened in a really condensed amount of time for me as an actor.

Becca: As a former actor, I was sitting there this time and actually thinking about the level of rigor it takes to sit and talk for as long as you do you through this series. Because I think it's a hundred episodes that are just strictly *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* **[00:19:00]** episodes, but there are Q&A's and there are other episodes as well. And I remember looking through all the episodes and thinking, "She must be talking for eight hours straight at this point."

Ashley: I have not done the math, but it was a lot of talking. Yeah. And I actually did lose my voice in the first couple shoot days before I figured out that I needed to do a full warm up as if I was doing outdoor Shakespeare in order to sit in a room and talk for eight hours.

Molly: That's amazing. It makes a lot of sense after having watched it, but truly amazing. So, out of all of those hundred and maybe 160 episodes of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*

Ashley: I am in 94 episodes plus 10 Q&A's. No, sorry, 96. I am in 96 of the one hundred official episodes plus 10 Q&A's. And then all the spin offs, I'm actually not in. The whole idea there was that we could get perspectives that we couldn't get on Lizzie's channel **[00:20:00]** by giving other people their POV.

Molly: And I loved those spin offs, especially, the Lydia spin offs, which felt pretty-- I was just watching *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and Becca was like, "You should insert millennial one."

Becca: As I get to go back to the full playlist. [laughs]

Ashley: I agree.

Molly: Yeah. So, out of all of those, do you have a favorite episode?

Ashley: [laughs] I used to have really clear answers to that. Maybe I will, again, once my rewatch is complete. I feel rather than having favorite episodes anymore. I have favorite moments and I have

favorite beats and favorite relationships. And yeah, some of the Darcy episodes really stand out, because I think there are so few of them. And so, those were very potent for my character. But I had such incredible relationships with the actresses playing my sister's and Charlotte, who [00:21:00] we usually just refer to as all as the Bennet sisters and we mean Charlotte, like, obviously, she's one of us. So, it was so rewarding and so lovely to play with all of them.

42 was a standout, because that's the first episode that got serious and that's the fight between Lizzie and Charlotte after Charlotte and our version accepts a job offer from Mr. Collins. And we were really nervous about how our audience would feel when we took this very light comedy into a darker place. And it was really rewarding and the fans very much responded to it. We felt we'd earned it at that point. But I remember rehearsing so much extra with Julia Cho, the actress who played Charlotte, so that we would really get that. So, that's a special memory for me.

Anytime that I got to do costume theater, those are always favorite moments. [00:22:00] And yeah, I feel as I continue to do my rewatch, people are going to show up and I'm going to be like, "Oh my gosh, I love this person." Yeah, it's fun. It's so weird to look back 10 years ago and have so much of your life at the time be on camera.

Molly: Yeah.

Ashley: Not that that was my life, but it immediately brings back all the memories of what was going on around it.

Becca: Absolutely. And I will say that one of the things that's so brilliant about the show for me is, first of all, the very light touch of Darcy. Because when he's on, it's much more potent. The fact that he comes back just in time for what in the novel is what we call here proposalgeddon.

Ashley: [laughs]

Becca: And before that, he's just one of your characters you play on your vlog. And then also, this is something my boyfriend, Mike was watching with me as I was going through this time and he had never seen it before. And he was saying, basically, there's a very specific style to most of the show. That's really comedy, that's really funny, it's really [00:23:00] can't be. And what makes those series moments so earned is when you guys go into them, they feel earned through the funniness. So, it's not an overly bleak or dramatic show and it's not overly hyped up, funny, quirky all the time, you guys find a good balance there. So, it's really such a joy to rewatch it again.

But you brought up costume theater, which does bring me to the next question which is, you play Mrs. Bennet, you play Mr. Bennet, you play Catherine de Bourgh, you play Darcy, did you have a favorite character of those characters to play on your vlog? And for our listeners who haven't seen it, essentially, Ashley was Lizzie, but Lizzie play acts a lot of different characters from her life for her viewers on her blog and that means, Ashley is playing not only one of the most iconic heroines of all time, but also several people related to her story.

Ashley: [00:24:00] And what a dream, right? As actors, we want to play all the roles and then to actually get to do it. This was actually a fairly common, I guess, technique used in vlogging at the time that people would play multiple characters. You still see that on TikTok, this version of that where people intercut between themselves in different shirts and things like that. But the costume theater

specifically of relaying things that happened in your real life was happening on YouTube at the time. And it was a blast and it's mama Bennet. Of course, it's mama Bennet.

Becca: [laughs] Every actor dreams of playing Mrs. Bennet. You want to play Lizzie, but Mrs. Bennet's where you're going to have the most fun.

Ashley: The most fun and what a cool thing. I hadn't actually even thought of it until you put it that way. Because other people do custom theater as well. Jane at some point [00:25:00] plays-- I was calling mama Bennet, [giggles] because it's fun for me. And also, because in our version, she's a Southern belle. So, I'm like, "Mama."

Becca: [laughs]

Ashley: Mama Bennet. But those impressions were all ultimately based on my version of Mrs. Bennet. I did for the most part pretty much establish all of the costume theater characters. I think Mr. Bennet is an exception. Actually, no, I do play Mr. Bennet at some point, but Charlotte plays him first and I never play Caroline Bingley. Charlotte also plays her, the only time. But the rest of the times, I do think that I established the costume theater for the most part.

And mama Bennet was the only piece of costume theater in the initial audition and they did suggest Southern, but they said, "Any crazy accent would be fine" and I was like, "Well, Southern works with this," which is why they wanted it to be that way, because [00:26:00] there's this idea of being stuck in the past in this debutante Southern belle way and just such a blast. You couldn't go too far. That's a really fun thing about this medium is that, you couldn't overreact it, because the character is aware that they're acting. So, it's a blast, a total blast.

Molly: That's actually a really great transition into our next question which is, what was the most fun part of bringing Austen to the YouTube medium and also, what was the hardest part?

Ashley: I think, I'm going to take a step back. The most fun part about bringing it specifically to YouTube was that the show was responsible for introducing a lot of young people to Austen. And that was something that we would hear over and over again in 2012, and 2013, which is when the show ended it ran for a full year in real time. We would go to conventions, and signings, and [00:27:00] various events, and meet fans face to face. We heard so often that this was how they got introduced *Pride and Prejudice* that this is how they discovered Jane Austen. And that's very much heavily represented in the comments on YouTube as well. One girl told us that we introduced her to Jane Austen and she used the show to introduce her mom to YouTube.

Molly: Oh.

Ashley: That it was a way that they could connect and share something. So, I think being a part of that legacy is very, very cool.

Becca: It did not occur to me to introduce my incredibly Austen obsessed mother to YouTube for this-

Ashley: [laughs]

Becca: -show and I'm furious at myself that I didn't do that sooner.

Ashley: Well, look, some mothers are never going to be big into YouTube and that's fine. Because we need their Netflix passwords. I'm just kidding. I have my own Netflix, I'm an adult.

Molly: [laughs]

Ashley: [00:28:00] Yeah, it was just lovely to hear that and how many people-- Because I related to it so much. I said this earlier that I didn't immediately respond to the language and I was 15, I guess, the first time I read *Pride and Prejudice*. But I realized when I was rereading *Pride and Prejudice* and reading all the other Austen in my 20s that I could appreciate the books so much more when I already knew the story, because I wasn't trying to puzzle that out and then I could really enjoy the language.

And for me, the most fun part of the novels is Jane Austen's voice. And that's the part that we cannot translate to film adaptations. It is her right observant, judgmental sense of humor that is in the narration and that uniquely exists in the books. But then when I knew who everyone [00:29:00] was and I wasn't going like, "Wait, who is the Hurst's? Who are these people? What did they have to do with the story?" That I could just relax and really enjoy it. And so, I never shame anyone who says that they love to film, or *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, or what have you first, because I needed to know the story.

I already knew *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Emma* so well from watching many different versions many times. But when I picked up *Persuasion*, I actually had not seen a film of it and I struggled a lot more and then I went, "Well, there must be a film adaptation of this. Why don't I watch that first, so that I can then focus on the language and not be worried about the plot?" Don't ask me about the new *Persuasion*. I haven't seen it.

Becca: We haven't either, if that makes you feel any better. We are also consistently asked by people on Instagram, if we've seen that movie and we have to say, "Oh, you're going to have to give it a few years."

Ashley: Based on what I've heard I would say, definitely don't watch that one before the book, because it sounds different.

Molly: [00:30:00] Yeah.

Becca: Yes. Speaking of the story, one of the things that is emblematic of Austen being adapted to the modern day generally, but as specifically a part of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* in the fabric of it is taking elements of the story that are dated or don't really make sense in the 21st century and putting them into a context that makes sense to our modern sensibilities. So, some examples.

Spoiler alert, if at this point in time you haven't seen *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* would be Mr. Collins offering Lizzie and Charlotte the same tech job instead of a proposal for marriage, and Charlotte being practical about that or possibly most iconically from this adaptation, the relationship between Lydia and Wickham and how that plays out. So, for those changes in the story, was there one when you were working on it or [00:31:00] reflecting on it now that stands out to you as a really great translation of the story?

Ashley: I think the writers did such an incredible job with so many of the major beats. There are times in the smaller scenes, where I'm saying this in *The Look Back Diaries*. We get a little bogged down in the minut details. But those big arcs, I think we did some really cool things and I agree that the Lydia-Wickham thing is one of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* greatest achievements. I think that *The Lizzie*

Bennet Diaries greatest achievement is actually centering the female relationships, which wasn't necessarily the intention.

But because this is all being told Lizzie Bennet's POV, the reason we get so little Darcy so little of any of the men is, because the first large chunk of the show, we are mostly in Lizzie's bedroom and why would those people be in Lizzie's bedroom. It's very weird when [00:32:00] Mr. Collins pushes his way into Lizzie's bedroom, which he does. And there are times that we had to stretch the bounds of what was possible. What we also had to get Lizzie out of her bedroom, so that we could introduce Darcy, because he just wasn't going to be in there.

But what that meant is that it really centers the relationships and friendships between the sisters and I include Charlotte as one of my sisters. And I think that is probably the coolest thing that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* did. Everything that happened with Lydia and Wickham is a development that came out of how the show was responded too. The spoiler, the sex tape was planned from the beginning, but the Lydia vlogs, which is a spin off that Lydia had all on her own, which reveals Lydia's side of that, the concept of Lydia having her own show developed, because the audience responded so well to [00:33:00] her and she wasn't going to be in the Netherfield arc, because she's not. And so, the creators gave her her own show and said, "Well, here's more Lydia for you."

And what that turned into, I think, is also one of the most powerful things that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* does. But I think that the centering of the female relationships is my favorite part other than turning Kitty into a cat, that is the crowning achievement.

Becca: [laughs]

Molly: [giggles]

Becca: I would have to agree. Both of those are peak. Absolute peak. The relationship between particularly in my opinion, Charlotte and Lizzie is really beautiful to watch, although relationships are really stunning. But that one in particular, I think, is one where you don't get as much time caring about their friendship in the book as you end up having in this adaptation. But Kitty as a kitty is elite.

Ashley: Yeah, I don't know why that hasn't been done more. It's so brilliant. Because other things, I don't know [00:34:00] *Fire Island* saw *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* before they came up with sex tape scandal. I don't know. Could just be in the zeitgeist? It makes sense. But if you're going to copy stuff, why isn't Kitty a cat, this is smart. [laughs]

Molly: Right. Totally. Yeah, I was actually thinking that during watching it this morning with the sex tape, I was thinking *Fire Island*. And surely, those creators watched this.

Ashley: It was literally my thought when I was watching the movie, which I totally enjoyed, by the way and think is a very clever adaptation. No shade of *Fire Island*. But when that happened, I went, "Do you think that these people have seen *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*?"

[laughter]

Becca: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. And to be charitable, I'm wondering if this falls into what I have coined as the justice for Margaret phenomenon, which is when you have Jane Austen adaptations that become so iconic that they create canon that isn't in the original books, but everyone just decides it's part of the

books. So, my example for that is the character of Margaret [00:35:00] Dashwood in Emma Thompson's writing of *Sense and Sensibility*.

Ashley: Mm-hmm.

Molly: Margaret essentially has no character in the book. But every adaptation since that 1995 adaptation has Margaret with this cheeky, tomboy energy that she has in the Emma Thompson writing. So, my thing is, did *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* definitively decide with the equivalent of the Wickham-Lydia scandal is in the 21st century?

Ashley: And that Lydia is a fully fleshed out human being, who we can actually feel bad for. Maybe. I will not be so bold as to take credit. I will just say, I have noticed some similarities in these adaptations.

Becca: [laughs]

Ashley: And one of them came first.

Molly: And also, on the subject of Lydia and us feeling bad for her, I cried during *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, I think five times.

Ashley: Oh, wow.

Molly: And all of them were related to [00:36:00] Lydia, but the biggest one was Lydia and Lizzie's relationship. And Lydia coming in to Lizzie and Lizzie is yelling at her about the sex tape, and then she realizes Lydia doesn't know, and Lydia starts crying on to Lizzie shoulder, and then she's like, "No, I don't need anyone, I don't need anyone." And Lizzie's like, "Yes, you do. Come here." I was a mess, a disaster. It's so beautiful. But it's something that we don't get in any other adaptation. I think that the 2005 does it pretty well and the *Fire Island* does it pretty well, the sisters loving each other. But Lydia and Lizzie, I feel that relationship never really gets flushed out except for here and it truly touched my heart like no other.

Ashley: Episode 87. See, there are numbers that I know and that is one of my favorites as well. That is what I hear the most about from viewers other than just general Jane Austen and love of it. Very specifically, people reach out to me [00:37:00] and Mary Kate Wiles, who played Lydia to say, what an impact that had on them personally, either because they learned something about a relationship they were in and needed to leave or because they started to understand and respect their younger sister differently.

The show was so very online that I still have way too much social media, but I'm accessible. And so, I would get inundated with these messages for a long time after the show ended too. But that is absolutely the thing I hear the most about. Occasionally, I'll get a and this is very 2012. A squee for the Lizzie and Darcy.

Becca: [laughs]

Ashley: But an actual-- Oh, wow, I learned something about myself comes from that relationship. And I think-- No, I'm just giving the show a lot of different credit here. But another thing that the show very successfully does is that, Lizzie's journey is not just about learning that [00:38:00] she misjudged Darcy, but learning that she misjudged her sister.

Becca: I think that the show does a really fantastic job of tying not just her judgment of Lydia to her judgement of Darcy, but generally, her judgment of Charlotte of Ricky Collins and also just her belief in her own worldview so strongly in a way that I think is really smart and pulls the show into more of a coming of age than a romance necessarily in a way that's very enjoyable.

The thing about the Lydia story for me is that it throws into stark light how messed up the original story is for Lydia. And if you read it, there's not so much dignity given to Lydia in that situation. But if you take a step back and realize what actually happens to her, it's so messed up that it requires another level of empathy that the characters don't [00:39:00] necessarily give her. And I think that seeing modern adaptations, yours being a real standout on this. Take the time to give the character space to have some grace is a very refreshing way to see the story and also to reading of the story that was originally written in the early 1800s.

Ashley: We see these archetypes in Jane Austen. And I don't mean to spoil anything and I haven't read all the books. And I haven't read all the books. I haven't read *Northanger Abbey* or *Mansfield Park*, but I have seen the movie of *Mansfield Park* that many people say is not a faithful adaptation.

Becca: [laughs]

Ashley: But within the familiarity that I do have with Jane Austen having read the four major works and seeing film adaptations of all of them, she does have these repeated character types and some similar story beats that play out in different scenarios, but there are [00:40:00] other fallen women. And Jane Austen does not actually have a lot of empathy for those characters, I would say. She does not write an empathetic Lydia and she does not as the omniscient narrator have a lot of empathy for Lydia, who broke the rules. The rules are very clear. This is a society-- *Bridgerton*, I think takes this way too far, but there are consequences. I love *Bridgerton*, but they're all running around going, "If I'm seeing in the garden, I'll be murdered." Okay, calm down.

Molly: [laughs]

Ashley: But she did something really outside the bounds. She had premarital sex, she is ruined, and that also ruins the family. And so, I don't blame Jane Austen for not having empathy for her, because the rules of society were such that she can't really excuse that kind of behavior. [00:41:00] There's the good guys, there's the rake, and you know *Sense and Sensibility*. So, as you like, "Wickham and Willoughby cut from the same cloth."

Becca: Yeah, never trusted W name.

Ashley: Right. And we learned that Willoughby, it's all off of outside the realm of this, but Willoughby did do this to someone else. We just don't know that character.

Molly: Right.

Ashley: And what we get out of it is a shaming of him. We do have empathy for her just as we have empathy for Georgiana Darcy, who was not ruined, but it can close. [laughs] And so, it's interesting how, yes, we don't paint Lydia as a victim. We paint her as actually having a lot of agency and I don't mean Jane Austen gives her a lot of agency. She made those choices, she made her bed, she's going to lie on them. No. She's 15 and he's a predator.

Becca: [laughs]

Molly: Yeah.

Becca: Exactly.

Ashley: We see that differently now. But I like *The Lizzie Bennet [00:42:00] Diaries* take on it. I like that. Who hasn't picked the wrong guy and the consequences are much higher than just going, "Oh, wow, this guy sucks. I need to leave."

Molly: Right.

Ashley: And so, that's powerful for a lot of people too.

Molly: Also, speaking of Georgianna, I think that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* also gives her a lot more agency than the book did. Because, again, spoiler alert. I'll put a spoiler alert at the top of the episode.

Becca: [laughs]

Molly: But she gets Wickham to download her company's app and that's how Darcy is able to track him down. She does that against his wishes, but she's like, "I want to help. I need to help Lydia not have the same thing happened to her as me." I was like, I cheered. Yes, [crosstalk] go Georgie. GiGi, GiGi. I call her Georgie.

Ashley: Our little GiGi. Yes. She gets agency into a-- She's instrumental in meddling and getting Lizzie and Darcy together. She's the [00:43:00] human personification of the old internet meme, "Now kiss."

[laughter]

Molly: She is.

Becca: Which I love that she gets there from watching Lizzie's vlogs and she's like, "Yes, this girl gets my brother. I want her to end up with him."

Ashley: Rewatching it, girls obsessed. She's obsessed with him. So, something's going on. That's not somebody you really dislike. When Collins leaves, she stops talking about Collins.

Molly: Right.

Ashley: She cannot stop talking about Darcy. And then the other way that we give GiGi agency as you say, she gets to be a part of having revenge on someone who hurt her which is just very satisfying.

Becca: And very powerful too. She really takes it into her own hands to stop him from hurting another person. So, good one for GiGi. Also, this is completely off topic and off script. But for some reason, you guys were 100% successful in getting actors with family resemblances.

Ashley: Isn't that crazy? [00:44:00] She got the job, because her acting was the best. But when she came in, we were like, "Oh, my God." To quote Daniel Vincent Gordh who plays Darcy, she looks more like my sister than my sister.

Molly: [laughs]

Becca: It's crazy.

Ashley: It's pretty nuts. Ultimately, when you put Mary Kate Wiles and Laura Spencer, the three Bennet sisters, when you put the three of us together and we all have red hair, you're like, "Yeah, they're sisters." If we didn't all have red hair, rarely on shows do people really look like they're such family. But if we didn't all have red hair, I don't think that people would assume as much that we might actually be real sisters. But when you put those two together, the Darcy's, it is just-

Becca: Shocking.

Ashley: -absolutely shocking. You're like, "Wait, they don't have the same parents, but they're not related."

Molly: Yeah, she came on screen for the first time, and my girlfriend was cooking, and I was watching, and I just go, "That's Georgianna." She's never read *Pride and Prejudice*. So, she has no idea [00:45:00] what I'm talking about. She's like, "What? I'm like, "Nevermind." But I just knew.

Ashley: Yep. That one has to be, it would mean. If not, this was badly cast. She must be family.

Molly: Yeah. So, speaking of iconic women characters, I guess, Jane Austen has a lot of iconic heroines. What was it playing potentially her most iconic heroine?

Ashley: It's so strange to be a part of that legacy. It's not something I thought as much about at the time and I'm very glad. People started asking me about halfway through the show. But I was just concerned with doing my job. I was very concerned with making the best show possible. I knew many different versions of *Pride and Prejudice*. So, I knew many different iterations of Lizzie.

But then my ultimate source and guide was the text. And then as I got to have more ownership over the character, because I was also very familiar with the material, I was able to say, "Hey, that doesn't [00:46:00] feel how Lizzie would respond to that. That doesn't feel right. What about this?" I think, yes, that aligns with where she is. So, in that way, I was thinking about, about it. But I wasn't ever thinking, I am now playing one of the most iconic heroines in the English lexicon. I couldn't have functioned if I thought that way.

Molly: Totally.

Ashley: What is very, very, very strange, but what an honor is that I'm on the list of women who've played Elizabeth Bennet. And sometimes, that comes up like, "I'm a millennial. I have a Google alert for my name." And the things that come up are lists of Lizzie Bennet's and of adaptations of Jane Austen. And the fact that here we are 10 years later and that's always going to be something that is true of me that people associate me with [00:47:00] and it's so strange. It's so strange to be on lists with Jennifer Ehle and Keira Knightley, but forever. I'm like, "What?"

Molly: Yeah.

Becca: I was going to say, you're up there with our girls, Jen and Keira, which, by the way, if either one of you want to come on this podcast, we can't have only one Lizzie on. Now, that we've had one iconic Lizzie on. We need all the iconic Lizzies.

Ashley: They are listening right now and they are so excited you finally asked.

[laughter]

Becca: This actually brings us to our last question and it's related to the one you just answered. But as we've mentioned a couple times during this podcast and also, if you watch *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and check out the heroine outfits at the time, this show did come out 10 years ago. Do you have any insight into playing Lizzie or any perspective on that character 10 years down the line?

Ashley: What Lizzie Bennet gave me was learning how judgmental I was. And that began [00:48:00] in 2012. The rewatch has been really interesting in just noting all the ways that I've grown since then. But there were a lot of things at the time that I did not even see as Lizzie being judgmental, because I just agreed with her. And then there were a lot of things that she got called out on that I learned in real time, "Oh, that's not okay." And it was really rewarding and powerful to actually go on that journey with her and playing that character made me a better person.

And so, there's so many things 10 years-- I can't believe we're still talking about this show 10 years later. I can't believe I'm on these lists, I can't believe the show has endured like this, because it does really feel like a time capsule. But I feel forever changed [00:49:00] by it and I'm so grateful that I got to do it.

Molly: That is so beautiful and what a way to end the episode. Listeners, I watched it all in the last four days and I feel like a better person for having watched it, honestly.

Becca: [laughs]

Ashley: It works great as a binge, but also great as a study break, because the episodes are three to five minutes.

Molly: Exactly.

Becca: It's usually, I'm watching for two hours, though, because they just keep going. [laughs] It's just playing in the background and I'm like, "I might as well watch one more. What's another four minutes?"

Ashley: And it's such a different experience, I think, to watch it that way then. When it happened in 2012, you got three to five minute episodes twice a week. And then there was social media, the characters were all on social media, that's a whole other part of the show that we actually won an Emmy for.

Molly: Wow.

Ashley: The show won an Emmy for original interactive show and it is interactive, because the characters can be engaged with. Could be best as engaged with [00:50:00] through various social medias. Jane had a Look Book, which now would be Instagram, but Instagram was not nearly as big a thing as it was then. And Gigi had a, this is my jam, which used to be a way that you could share what you're listening to. And actually, during the very beginning of the show, months before that character ever appeared, she was posting breakup songs, because she was breaking up with George Wickham at the time.

The characters would talk to each other. There would be little story bits in between. And then you as the viewer and a person with a Twitter account could also interact with them. And that's what those Q&S are. The Q&A episodes don't really affect the plot, but they show some character and they are actual comments from viewers. So, the viewers didn't necessarily, directly impact the plot. It was not a choose your own adventure, [00:51:00] but they were very much a part of the story.

And as I mentioned earlier, the things that they responded too got more air and they got Lydia's side of the Wickham story, because they responded so much to it. And then, likewise, just the expanded universe of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* with all the spin offs are because of the way that fans interacted with it. So, that's another whole other part of the legacy of that, because I was less involved with that side. I forget 2.2, but it was very different to experience the show in real time than to binge it now, but they're both valid. And you can find some of that social media stuff out there, but it's a little hard to find.

Becca: Yeah, I actually was in that early cohort watching along with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* way back in my freshman year of college. [chuckles] But it to this day, it's still one of the coolest and most [00:52:00] creative ways of presenting a story I've seen. On that note, Ashley, thank you so much for joining. This is a little surreal for me, honestly. So, it's been really cool to talk to you. Do you want to tell our listeners where they can find you on the internet, if they don't already follow you?

Ashley: Yeah, I'm @theashleyclm, which is the first four letters of my last name on all the social things. And just search for me on YouTube and stuff. At this point, just google me. I'm the top Ashley Clements. I'm the most famous one.

Molly: Yeah.

Ashley: It's a very common name, but I'm the most famous one.

Molly: [laughs]

Becca: That's fantastic.

Ashley: Because of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

Molly: There you go. Well, thank you again for joining us. And listeners, thank you for listening. And until next time, stay proper.

Becca: And interact with some people on the Look Book.

Molly: Or, go watch *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. [00:53:00]

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