

Lunds Universitet
Centrum för Genusvetenskap

Bridget Jones's Diary
and the subversion of the romance.

Hugrún R. Hjaltadóttir
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Handledare: Maria Nilson

Abstract in English:

This essay is a discourse analysis of *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding. The object is two folded, 1) to analyse the heteronorm presented in the book using Judith Butlers theory of gender as performance and the reproduction of the heteronorm, 2) as well as characterising the book as middlebrow fiction, by showing the text intertextuality to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as well as other cultural references. Concluding that Fielding is attempting to subvert the romantic genre through the use of middlebrow, irony and laughter which can lead to subverting the existing heteronorm.

Abstract in Swedish:

Den här uppsatsen är en diskursanalys av kärleksromanen Bridget Jones Dagbok av Helen Fielding. Jag använder mig av queerteori för att studera hur heteronormativitet är representerat i boken. Boken karaktäriseras också som "middlebrow" genom textens intertextualitet med Jane Austens bok *Pride and Prejudice*. Jag diskuterar även genren och dess subversiva möjlighet. Det jag velat visa med denna uppsats är att kärleksromaner, med hjälp av ironi och skratt, kan vara subversiva och jag vill därmed visa att min omläsning av boken ger nya möjligheter.

Keywords: Bridget Jones's Diary, genre, heterosexuality, middlebrow, romance and queer theory.

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1. Introduction:

To come out as a romance reader, particularly if you are a feminist, is not an easy thing to do. Why should a feminist like me be interested in reading books that are full of misogyny and promotes a patriarchal social structure? I must be a masochist to find pleasure in reading such trash. Even though I have been known to express this opinion on romances myself I know that it is based upon prejudice and stereotypical ideas about the romantic genre but like most myths it has some bases in reality.

Part of the pleasure I get from reading a romance is to get irritated and angry because of the sexism, stereotypes and restraints on female sexuality that is often presented. When I read *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding for the first time I found something I did not expect. I found myself laughing instead of throwing it in the wall in a moment of frustration. I enjoyed it in a new and different way. Not that I had not read romances before that did not 'piss me off' but it was the laughter produced by this ironic and self-critical character named Bridget that made me surprised.

Later I became interested in Queer theory, particularly its view on heterosexuality as a socially constructed institution that produces and reproduces itself in almost every aspect of society. Heterosexuality as a sexual orientation in itself is not the problem but its privileged position in our society and the homogeneity it promotes as well as its connection to women's subordination. As a feminist I am always looking for ways to subvert and change the existing social order and my interest here is to take a look at how heterosexuality as well as gender is produced through romance and find out if it can be changed.

My object here is two folded. I am going to analyse *Bridget Jones's Diary* which is a romance, with the use of Judith Butler's theory of gender as a performance and the concept of heteronorm to find out what kind of heterosexuality it promotes. I am in particularly looking for moments that disrupt the naturalness and normality of gender and sexuality through irony and laughter. I am also going to characterise the book as a middlebrow romance to see if it can be helpful in providing an environment where a change is possible.

Bridget Jones's Diary became a big hit when it first was published in Britain 1996 and was reprinted in English four times before the release of the movie in 2001 after that the interest in the book rose again and it was printed two more times (home page 1). It has been published in North America and other English speaking countries by different publishers and translated in to several languages including Swedish and Icelandic. For a book to be translated in to Icelandic it has to have a big audience and the publication was not released until 2002, after the movie and was best seller according to the publisher (home page 2). In Sweden the book was first published in 2000 and again the same year as the movie was released (home page 3). One of the reasons I choose this book is because of its popularity and that it might have had some influence on the reader's ideas of how heterosexuality works.

It is problematic to use queer theory on a middlebrow romance like *Bridget Jones's Diary* because it is fiction and not a diary of a real person, with real thoughts and feelings. A text is not produced in a social vacuum and is therefore always a product of culturally and historically formed discourses. I am looking for the discourse that it represents and reproduces, that is part of the fiction. To analyse a text like this can be hard, questions 'like am I reading to much or to little into the words in the book', 'am I telling the 'truth' or am I fabricating the whole thing' came to my mind. To solve this problem I try to be aware of the danger of reading in much in to the text and be careful and re-examine the text to be sure that I am being honest.

I will begin by introducing my method which is a discourse analysis. I read with a suspicion of an underlying meaning in the text that can give me clues about the heterosexual discourse. Then I discuss the romance genre, feminist research on the romance and its readers looking for ways that can subvert this extremely heteronormal form of fiction. I then go over to characterise the novel as a middlebrow fiction by determining what that is and looking at the texts cultural reference and the intertextuality with Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. After this I discuss irony and laughter as having subversive powers that we can use for a feminist purpose to deconstruct and reticulate.

To be able to recognise the normative discourse of heterosexuality I take a look at Judith Butler's theory gender as performance and the heterosexual matrix as well as looking for ways to subvert the existing social order and see if irony and laughter are

usable tools for subversing. The analyse will be two folded, first I go deeper into the intertextuality with *Pride and Prejudice* as well as establishing that Fielding is writhing middlebrow fiction intentionally. Other chapters in the analysis are associated with particular themes, 'Bridget and the men in her life', 'The outside pressure to engage in a heterosexual relationship' and 'The 'ideal' woman', with a subchapter titled 'The diet'. Then we arrive at the conclusion which I will not reveal at this stage.

2. To read is my method:

My method for this analysis is discourse analysis of a text. A text is a very broad term that can include all written and printed texts from personal letters, notes or newspaper articles and books as well as transcripts of spoken words. It can be fiction or non-fiction. In short every use of language can be seen as text but it can also be unverballed in visual images and sound effects of television programmes, movies, photographs and instrumental background music (Fairclough, 2003, 2). A text is also a social creation, produced and understood within the discourse. A discourse, as Foucault describes it, is a not one specific thing but a system of ways of constructing and sustaining meaning and power which are particular to different groups, cultures and historic periods (Brooks, 1997, 21). Through looking at texts we can find clues about the existing discursive norms which are always imbedded in the text as well as finding ways to subvert and change them.

I am analysing a text that is a fictional romance which I read to see if I can find the underlying normative discourse of gender and sexuality as well looking for a possible ways to subvert it. I will do this by reading with a suspicion of an underlying meaning. This method is not a new one and has been used by feminist for some time. Gilbert and Grubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* from 1979, is a good example of the use of reading with suspicion even though they do not mention that this is their method. The idea can be traced back to Paul Ricoeur's term 'hermeneutics of suspicion' a concept formed in the early '70's where reading a work of literature or any other texts with scepticism, where the words are not taken at face value but are explored in search for underlying meanings

and hidden agendas. The reader does not submit to the power of the text but rather takes the power in to her/his own hands and challenges its authority with own interpretations (Felski, 2003, 35 and Thompson, 1981, vii-viii).

Ricoeur sees text as work of discourse, a realisation of discourse through speaking and writing. Even though he sees it as equal modes of expression of discourse the written text is addressed to an unknown audience which can be anyone that is able to read. Therefore it decontextualises itself from its cultural and historical circumstances of production and opens itself up for an unlimited ways of interpretation. The author therefore is no longer the only authority of how a text should be understood and the original intention of the text is no longer the only interesting aspect about a text (Ricoeur, 1981, 108-112).

This is not saying that cultural and historical circumstances do not matter but that the meaning of the text is not bound to be one and the same for all its readers because they also find themselves in cultural and historical circumstances that will affect the meaning they contribute to the text. The text itself also exists within a discursive framework and the meaning of a text is always relying on a range of contextual information.

Bridget Jones's Diary is a book that I read first one year after its publication in 1996. I read it again before the release of the movie in 2001 and now, in 2004, I have read it several times. The first time I read it straight through, from cover to cover and after that I had a pencil in hand as well as orange and yellow post-its' marking parts that I thought where interesting and important for my analysis. Now the book is rather torn with a lot of post-its' standing out of it, some marked, others not and if you open it, it is full of underlines and pencil markings, some readable and others are not. I think I will have to by a new one if I find the desire to read it again.

I also read *Pride and Prejudice* again because of how important the intertextuality of the book is to the understanding of *Bridget Jones's Diary*. I read it first some time in my early teens and have read it again on several occasions; I almost know the story by heart. This time I read it with Fielding's book in mind and only marked those occasions that where important for the understanding of *Bridget Jones's Dairy*.

My interpretation of the text is collared by the fact that I am a feminist with an education in social-anthropology and I am interested in how heterosexuality and gender is represented and defined in our culture as well as my sense of humour. I realise that my reading is not the only possible way and that some of the moments that I think are ironic and funny other readers do not see as such. I know that it is possible to see Bridget as a childish, boring, shallow woman that sweeps chaotically through an entire year, learning nothing and changing little. That reading is as valid as mine but I hope that my argument here will explain way I see the story as funny and subversive for a feminist purpose.

Bridget Jones's Diary is a part of the romantic genre because it is a story of a woman looking for romantic love. In short, the story begins on Sunday the 1st of January when Bridget is recovering from the festivities of New Year at a dinner party held by her parents. There she meets Mark Darcy, a well-of human rights lawyer that is single (again) and her mother is eager to fix her up with. Bridget however is not interested and he appears to feel the same. Bridget goes home and pursues a relationship with her boss Daniel Cleave. When Bridget and Daniel have been going out fore some time it is becoming obvious that they do not have much in common and she finds out that he has been cheating on her which leaves her heartbroken.

Bridget meets Mark Darcy now and then through the book and little by little he realises that she is interested in him but shortly after she finds out that her mother and her new boyfriend have stolen money form his parents. Now she thinks that he will not be interested because of the criminal mother but as it turns out Mark Darcy chases after the criminals which ends in the living room at Christmas Day, where Mark Darcy saves the day and takes Bridget away and they finally get together.

This description of the story shows how traditional the outline of the plot is. First they meet and do not like each other, than they change their minds and think it is too late but in the end the get together. We have to take a deeper look at it to see the social critic that it contains.

3. The romance genre and its readers:

For a text to be recognised as part of a particular genre it has to stick to certain customs that are associated with that genre. A detective fiction has to have a crime and someone to solve it in order to be recognised as such by its readers. In a similar manner a romance needs someone to fall in love, without it we have something completely different. This expectation is the format of the genre. Associated with its format are certain ideological implications and assumptions that the text has to relate it self to but does not necessarily approve or agree with it. This means that a genres rules can be bent but they can not be broken if the work is to remain within a certain category (Makinen, 2001, 17). *Bridget Jones's Diary* is a romance because it is about a woman in pursuit of love which she finds.

The definition of the romance can vary from short statements to longer elaborations. In *The ICON Critical Dictionary of Feminism and Postfeminism*, Sarah Gamble defines it as stories “which portray the idyllic world of heterosexual love.” (Gamble, 1999, 307). While the feminist literary critic Merja Makinen sees the romance formula to “concentrate[s] on the emotional intensity of the experience of the protagonist falling in love and carefully prolongs the process of anticipation, bewilderment and desire that she experiences as she is pursued and/or played with by the ‘hero’.” (Makinen, 2001, 23). Event though both this definitions seem to see the genre as monolithic and unchanging, the fact is that they change over time and interact with cultural changes and the expectations of the readers. Makinen’s placement of the quotation mark on the word ‘hero’ can be read as a way to make space for the sub-genre of lesbian romance that has been a growing field since the 70’s (Makinen, 2001, 42) and therefore a room for subversive possibilities within the romantic genre.

Feminisms relationship with the romance genre has problematic. Many feminist, such as Germaine Greer, have criticised the romance for upholding conservative and phallogocentric values as well as creating false consciousness and sustain women’s oppression (Greer, 1971, 167-185). Others have pointed out that it can also challenge the dominant ideology and that it has subversive possibilities. Tania Modleski, in her book *Loving with a Vengeance* from 1982, is the first to take romance seriously and sees reader

of romance as more than passive absorbers of patriarchal ideology. Her psychoanalytic study on Harlequin romances, gothic novels and soap operas leads to the conclusion that:

“Their enormous and continuing popularity, I assume, suggests that they speak to very real problems and tensions in women’s lives. The narrative strategies which have evolved for smoothing over these tensions can tell us much about how women have managed not only to live in oppressive circumstances but to invest their situations with some degree of dignity.” (Modleski, 1982, 14-15).

The fictional world of the romance gives the reader an opportunity to experience rebellious anger as well as the feeling of protection, love and care. It offers women pleasure and a chance to escape their subjectivity and find a place of power within a patriarchal society. But because the pleasure always includes a happy ending where the hero sees the woman as attractive rather than rebellious undermines the disobedience and prevents women from rebelling. In Modleski’s theory the reader is passive and consumes the cultural text uncritically and unknowably.

Two years later Janice Radway *Reading the Romance* shifts the focus from the text to the readers with an ethnographic study of their reading habits. By doing this she opens up the possibility of active readers that are not “...purely receptive individuals who can only consume the meanings embodied within cultural texts...” (Radway, 1984, 6). Radway, like Modleski, sees romance as text that voices women’s anxieties and desires within a patriarchal culture. Radway does not only see the reading as

“... a relaxing release from the tension produced by daily problems and responsibilities, but it creates a time or space within which woman can be entirely on her own, preoccupied with her personal needs, desires and pleasure. It is also a means of transportation or escape to the exotic or... to that which is different.” (Radway, 1984, 61).

Radway, like Modleski, sees the romance’s value as serving the reader’s needs within an oppressive system. She sees it as within because the romance promotes the conservation of the existing social structure and legitimises its ideology and in some ways gives women resources to withstand male oppression in real life (Radway, 1984, 72-74). The women learn to adapt to their discontent through their reading of romantic fiction and not to challenge its source, the heteronorm, which produces their discontent in the first place.

Both Modleski’s and Radway’s work have been extremely influential not only in feminist theory but also in cultural studies and literature. Even though their work has been criticised it is mostly for the generalisation of their conclusions and not taking in

historical changes within the genre as well as seeing romances as monolithic and unchanging (Makinen, 2001, 16 and 34), a critic which is common of academic work of their time. Despite this critique researchers still see the romance genre as an important field of study. To day the literature on the subject is becoming quite extended. In her book *Feminist Popular Fiction* Merja Makinen argues that all genres are fluid and constantly developing and therefore potentially and inherently transformable. We can use that for a feminist subversion although all genres are not equally subversive for feminist practice (Makinen, 2001, 19).

The romance is the only genre dominated by women, both as readers and writers and it reaches an enormous audience. Despite its popularity the romance has never been seen as high art or fine form of literature and many readers are ashamed of admitting that they do read them. The authors sometimes write under alias especially if they are men and some of them see themselves as feminist while others see the romance genre as the last stronghold against feminism. Historically the heroines and heroes have changed according to popular trends. The male characters of the 90's are gentler and the women are more economically independent than the characters of the 80's and the relationships have become more of a relation between equals. Despite its diversity most of its texts uphold monogamy and marriage as the norm and many still support conservative and phallogentric values especially when it comes to female sexuality (Makinen, 2001, 24, 26-27 and 30). Makinen says that it does not change the fact that they still support patriarchal gender roles and institutions, if not through the plot or the characters then by the mandatory happy ending. A feminist attempt to subvert the romance is hard because of that and few have tried to do that (Makinen, 2001, 41).

The only successful way to subvert the romantic genre according to Makinen, is the lesbian romance. "By placing women in both roles, of protagonist and hero, the chased and the chaser, it is able to question the way gender roles have been portrayed as 'natural', in relation to sexual difference." (Makinen, 2002, 43). It has the potential to transform without reinforcing the phallogentric norms since the object of desire is another woman. This subversion has the potential to put forth an alternative model of femininity that would benefit all women, both lesbian and heterosexual but I am not certain that it would reach the 'ordinary' romance reading woman. I am also not convinced that the

happy ending is enough to diminish and/or neutralise critic of the existing social order that has been raised in a romance. The idea of the happy ending as bad news for women does not necessarily have to be right. Neither is the assumption that all romances promote phallogocentric norms. The romance like other genres is open for negotiation as long as they follow the format that makes them part of that genre. A romance without the happy ending is not possible because it is the core of the genre but this does not mean that changes and subversion are unattainable. Makinen's idea of the lesbian romance as potentially subversive is good but I would like to think that there are also other possibilities. I suggest the use of irony and laughter as well as parody, which can also "question the way gender roles have been portrayed as 'natural' " by reticulating and deconstructing.

4. Middlebrow:

The romantic fiction has always been thought of as a low cultural form not only by feminists. Many of its readers, including me, are ashamed of admitting that they read such books. *Bridget Jones's Diary* is however not conventional romance but rather something else, something that is middlebrow. The word implies that this is something that lies in between but in between what? High and low culture, that which is popular and mass produced or that which is presumed to be fine and advanced. Can middlebrow then be something that is both popular and fine, something that is both presumed to be high and low or is it neither?

Even though the concept of middlebrow has recently become popular in literature it has been around for a while. Virginia Woolf understands the predicament of this in between position as early as 1942. In her book *The Death of the Moth* she writes about middlebrow authors as not being one thing or the other.

"Their brows are betwixt and between. They do not live in Bloomsbury which is the high ground; nor in Chelsea, which is on the low ground... The middlebrow is the man, or woman, of middle bred intelligence who ambles and saunters now on this side of the hedge, now on that, in pursuit of no single object, neither art itself of life itself, but both mixed indistinguishably..." (Woolf, 1947, 115).

This statement demonstrates the problematic position that this mixture of high and low has created. But what is the difference between high and low culture? What is it in this mixture that makes it so detested and popular?

Traditionally high culture has been seen as the good, moral, aesthetic, original and ideological. It is conversed on the pages of cultural magazines and in classrooms. Low culture is its opposite in the cultural hierarchy. It has been seen as a threat against art and the “real” culture because of how it reuses and mixes together different cultural forms in form of parody. It is something that manipulates and makes the citizens passive and inactive as well as being a symptom of culture degradation (Persson, 2002, 11-15, 55). The tension between high and low has also been analysed as different ideology towards literature and art. Either you see it as a product to be sold on commercial market or something that is above that and is not supposed to be sold and consumed in a commercial way (Radway, 1997, 151-153).

The middlebrow did not emerge as a new thing in the 19th century, in between or clearly distinctive from high or the low ends of the cultural hierarchy but rather formed “...by processes of literary and cultural mixing whereby forms and values associated with one form of cultural production were wed to forms and values usually connected with another” (Radway, 1997, 152). It therefore borrows both from above and below but without becoming both because of the impossibility of reconciles between the two. As Magnus Persson explains in his book *Kampen om högt och lågt* that when the fine culture spreads itself down its “fineness” deteriorates and if the popular spreads itself up it disintegrates the fine culture. The worst form of the popular, according its adversaries, is when it takes on some elements of the fine and presents itself for something other and finer that it is (Persson, 2002, 330-332).

Now in our post-modern times this traditional view of high and low is starting to change. The new academic field, cultural studies is dedicated to take the popular massculture seriously as a part of our society and history. Some people have even turned the cultural hierarchy upside down and see the high culture as elitist, irrelevant and passé. Fine culture is now available in every store and the popular has found is way in to the universities. The boundary between the two is becoming murky and unclear. The

middlebrow, the in-between that borrows from above and below without becoming either, is beginning to come in to being in its own right (Persson, 2002, 11-15 and 347).

Even though middlebrow has not been seen as interesting or ambitious by academics it has always been appealing to readers that "...desperately [want] to present themselves as educated, sophisticated, and aesthetically articulate." (Radway, 1997, 5). This implies that the books in question do have something that the reader has to have some prior knowledge about, something they have to put in to context, understand or interpret to be able to enjoy and see as a verification of their intellects.

I would like to argue that Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* is one of these loved and hated books that occupy the middlebrow. The first thing that connects *Bridget Jones's Diary* with high culture is the novel's strong reference to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The reference is more than a loan of the plot, it is the same story, with some of the same characters and escalation of events. Daniel Cleaver is to some extent Mr. Wickham so is the mother's new boyfriend, Bridget's mother is composed of Mrs Bennet and Lydia the youngest Bennet sister and of course Mark Darcy is Mr Darcy. It is a rewriting of the story to a story of our time, a parody of the old one. Fielding also 'borrows' Austen's way of criticising contemporary society through irony (Kirkham, 1983, 81-82).

Romance has never rated high on the scale of cultural hierarchy even though some romances are seen as being part of the finest literature. One of them is Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The book has been popular since its first publication in 1796-97 and is still today available in most bookstores. It has also been influential in the development of the romance genres formula (Modleski, 1982, 36). This it though not the only high cultural reference in the book, Shakespeare's *Othello* is quoted and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* as well as others. I think that I do not recognise all of them because I have not read much of the 'high art' literature. I would not have recognised *Othello* if it had not said so in the book. Fielding therefore expects some knowledge by her readers but she tries not to make it too hard.

As important as the high cultural references are the popular culture references that can be found on almost every page of the book. Self help books like *Women Who Love Too Much* and *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* are used to strategies and

understand love and relationships. Famous people such as actors and gossip about them are referred to, so are television programs, movies and magazines. They are used in a variety of ways, to make a funny comment or as metaphors as well as being talked about for what or who they are and as sources of knowledge. *Cosmopolitan*, *Newsnight*, *Blind Date*, *Pride and Prejudice* the television adaptation, Calvin Klein and *Clueless* to name but a few. Here as well are some of the references lost on me. I think that it is because I am not fully as interested in some of the things she is referring to and that some of it is English culture that I have no way of being familiar with.

The question here is whether the reader has to recognise all these cultural references to enjoy the book? No, I don't think it is necessary to recognise them all to enjoy reading *Bridget Jones's Diary* but it gives the reader (at least me) a sense of sophistication and intelligence. The reference to *Pride and Prejudice* is the most important to recognise, it gives the reader a sense of pride and makes the story predictable in a fun way. This does not make it necessary to recognise the clues to be able to enjoy the reading it only makes the experience different. If you do not recognise a reference you read past it, ignoring or not noticing it, but if they become too many I can imagine that the reader would lose interest in the book. I therefore think that Fielding both expects and demands her readers to know *Pride and Prejudice*.

Fielding herself is conscious about this debate about high and low, and enters in to a dialog with it in the book.

'I have to say, I think it's disgraceful. All it means in this day and age is that a whole generation of people only get to know the great works of literature – Austen, Eliot, Dickens, Shakespeare and so on – through the television.'

'Well, quite. It's absurd. Criminal.'

'Absolutely. They think that what they see when they're "channel hopping" between Noel's House Party and Blind Date actually is Austen or Eliot.'

'Blind Date is on Saturdays,' I said.

...
'What I meant was, there isn't anything any good like Blind Date on the other side during the literary masterpieces, so I don't think that many people would be channel hopping.'

'Oh, Blind Date is "good", is it?' sneered Perpetua.

'Yes, it's very good.'

...
'We were just talking about hierarchies of culture' boomed Perpetua. 'Bridget is one of these people who thinks the moment when the screen goes back on Blind

Date is on a par with Othello's "hurl my soul from heaven" soliloquy' she said, hooting with laughter.

'Ah. Then Bridget is clearly a top post-modernist' said Mark Darcy.

(page 99-101).

When this conversation takes place Fielding has established her story to be a part of the fine culture with the endless references to Austen and other 'high' literature and she also distances the story from it with pop-cultural references. Bridget is a spokes person for the opinion that different forms of culture can be enjoyable and good no matter its position in the cultural hierarchy while the other participants in the conversation take up a more traditional point of view. Mark Darcy's comment in the end gives Bridget's view authority by naming it, ending the conversation with Bridget in power. I therefore think that Fielding is intentionally writing middlebrow fiction and redefining the romances position in the cultural hierarchy. Mixing together the high and low, experiment with the romantic genre and hopefully to create something new.

The use of irony is a form of middlebrow because you have to have some form of prior knowledge to be able to recognise it and give it meaning. In some cases the context is given in the text but in other cases the context exist out side it relying on the readers knowledge of culture in all its forms.

5. Irony and laughter:

Irony, what is that? To say one thing that you do not mean and expect people to understand what you mean as well as understanding what you really mean by it. It is not meaningful alone; it has to be interpreted to gain its meaning and is therefore a discursive practice or strategy. Irony involves power relations as well as relations of communication in a way that includes or excludes depending on if you "get it" or not (Hutcheon, 1994, 2-3).

Irony can be in found in an advancement of a plot or in a single happening. It is ironic to not want something until it is too late or to hate something that you later come to love or to throw away something that later becomes a necessity. This kind of irony also relies on interpretation because the reader has to know the history and/or context of the

happenings to be able to decipher the irony (Hutcheon, 1994, 19-21). Irony can therefore be said to be a form of intertextuality.

Irony has been around for a while and has inspired many scholars, from linguistics to anthropologists, from philosophers to psychologists, to find out why people express themselves in this odd way (Hutcheon, 1994, 1). Therefore is it hard to see who has the authority to talk about irony or who has had the most impact on the debate about it. I have chosen to use Linda Hutcheon's approach as it is presented in her book *Irony's Edge* because it builds upon the work of others as well as incorporates them in a way that gives multiple angles on "... how and why irony comes about (or doesn't), with a particular interest in the consequences of interpreting a text (in any medium) as 'ironic'." (Hutcheon, 1994, 2). Hutcheon's approach to irony fits well with Butler's approach to subversion because irony is only possible within the existing discourse which is the same place where Butler sees the potential to subvert.

Irony as it has been defined above can only happen within a discourse. Therefore it can not "be considered separately from the social, historical and cultural aspects of its contexts of deployment and attribution." (Hutcheon, 1994, 17). It can not happen in a social vacuum, it has to be related to something to obtain its meaning. It happens in relation to what Hutcheon calls 'discursive communities' that already exist which provides the context for the expression and understanding of irony and therefore make irony possible. All of us can belong simultaneously to a variety of such communities which are based upon our experience and discursive context. These multiple communities cannot be reduced to a single element such as class, gender, race, ethnicity or sexuality. They are of course involved but so are also the micropolitical aspects of our lives such as age, neighbourhood, profession, religion, hobbies and a wide variety of things that we might not be able to name (Hutcheon, 1994, 18).

Irony is a complex thing because it relies on interpretation and can therefore provoke misunderstandings. The people that are supposed to be interpreting it might not understand it as ironic and simply take you at your word, see you as contradicting your self or mistake you for advocating for something that you in fact are criticising (Hutcheon, 1994, 16). Another possibility is to read in irony where it was not implied, making irony where it was not supposed to be.

It is this complexity and ambiguity that makes it so disputed by both those that approve and disapprove of it. It provokes a range of emotional responses from anger to delight and laughter, as well as mock, attack, ridicule, exclude, embarrass and humiliate. It can be seen as conservative or authoritarian as well as oppositional and subversive, all depending on who is expressing it and who is interpreting its meaning (Hutcheon, 1994, 14-15). Here I am most interested in its subversive potentials. How it is able to challenge the existing social order by using its own words to undermine and overturn its power. It breaks down the existing discourse from within, destabilising and challenging its authority by appropriating its power (Hutcheon, 1994, 29-30).

I see irony as tool for subverting and changing existing ideas of gender and sexuality. It can produce 'queer' moments that can reveal and mock the heteronorm. Moments that can both provoke anger and delight depending on the persona of the interpreter. When irony ignites laughter its subversive power becomes even stronger.

In feminist theory laughter has been recognised as deconstructive of power by the powerless, a disruptive force which neutralises patriarchal restrictions. The idea originates in the Russian literature analyst Mikhail Bakhtin's book *Rabelais and His World* first published in 1956. According to Bakhtin laughter possessed the ability to criticise authority and is able to liberate us from prohibitions, fear and oppressive power. In his research on carnival culture of the 15th century he describes carnivals as liberating through the use of parody. The laughter provoked by the parody according to Bakhtin has a subversive power because it makes visible the other wise invisible power structures and gives opportunity to criticise and change them (Bakhtin, 1986).

The French feminist Hélène Cixous writes her story of the laughing Medusa in 1976. By endowing Medusa with a voice, Cixous allows her to speak against the lies and falsehoods introduced by men in an attempt to scare women from exploring their own power. They believe the myths created by men and therefore fail to question the validity of the myths and therefore allow the male created fear to continue. If women would simply look farther into the myths they would discover there is nothing to fear, that there is no validity to what they have been previously told. They would look into the face of Medusa and see that she is laughing and that laughter can "... smash everything, to

shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to brake up the “truth”, breaks down the prohibitions which work to silence women.” (Cixous, 1976, 890).

Here Cixous is exploring the deconstructive and subversive power of laughter in a strong metaphor showing how tough its power can be. What is funny is hard to determine, what I laugh at does not have to be funny to everyone else. For me *Bridget Jones's Diary* was extremely funny book and combined with its irony I started to see it as criticising the existing female gender as well as heterosexuality's strong position in our culture.

6. Queer Theory and Heterosexuality:

In recent years queer theory has become popular within as well as outside the academic world. The objective of queer theory is to problematise, denaturalise and denormalise heterosexuality to dissolve the heteronormative. This has been done by drawing attention to ways of life that breaks up the ‘natural order of things’ where biological sex, gender and sexual desires do not float in a coherent way from each other. This has also led theorists to turn their attention to heterosexuality because it is impossible to understand the “deviant” if you do not know the norm and how it is constructed.

The sociologist and feminist Diane Richardson has defined heterosexuality as being “... institutionalised as a particular form of practice and relationships, of family structure, and identity. It is constructed as a coherent, natural, fixed and stable category; as universal and monolithic.” (Richardson, 2000, 20). This definition implies that heterosexuality is not as natural as we are made to believe. Even though it appears that way heterosexuality is not a specific thing; it does not have a single ideology or a unified set of shared beliefs. It has a variety of different practices, beliefs, norms and institutions. Even though it is commonly represented as a unified whole, there exists a diversity of meanings and social arrangements within the category of heterosexuality (Richardson, 2000, 19-20).

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* published in 1990 brought new life into the studies of gender and sexuality. In her work she draws on her reading of the radical

feminists, Monique Wittig's 'heterosexual contract' and Adrienne Rich's 'compulsory heterosexuality' as well as Foucault's discourse theory and his ideas about 'normative judgements'. Butler's theory of gender as a performance proposes a segregation between sex, gender and desire to disturb the normative relations that naturalise heterosexuality in a way that disrupt the naturalness and coheres of these categories.

When Butler starts her discussion of the heterosexual matrix she has already placed sexuality within a discursive framework. Butler takes up Foucault's theory of sexuality which sees it as an open and complex historical system of discourse and power. She goes even further and says that the discourse produces a misunderstanding of sex, as part of the strategy to conceal and preserve continual power relations. Sex must not only be understood within the terms of sexuality but also as a construction produced by a generative power which conceals the mechanism of its own productivity. This means that to be a person of a particular sex is to be subjected to a set of social regulations and any analyse that does not take that into consideration uncritically extends and further legitimates that regulative strategy (Butler, 1999, 121-123).

Based on this understanding of sexuality she rereads Lévi-Strauss, Saussure, Lacan, and Freud and argues in a convincing way that "the naturalization of both heterosexuality and masculine sexual agency are discursive constructions nowhere accounted for but everywhere assumed within [the] structuralist frame." (Butler, 1999, 55). She is not saying that these theories and analysis of gender and sexuality are wrong. She is saying that they are not describing universal truths, as they claim, but socially constructed reality presented as such. The laws of sexuality, sex and gender as well as identity are presented as universal facts by the discourse in a complex and deceiving, so it will be able to hold its position as natural and normal. According to Butler we have to expose these discursive constructions in order to denaturalise and denormalise its masculine hegemony and heterosexist power. She sees gender as the outcome of collections of repeated action that have got strict rules that have coagulated over time and do therefore look like they are natural entities. But by seeing gender and its construction as a discursive act or process it becomes open for interference and reconstructions (Butler, 1999, 94-100).

6.1 The Subversion:

As Butler's theory is represented above gender is the effect of repeated norms. The performance of gender is not something that can be done as easily as choosing what to wear. It is sociality constrained through taboos, prohibitions, threats of punishment, something that is a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms "ones which cannot be thrown of at will, but which work, animate, constrain the gendered subject, and which are also the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are to be forged." (Butler, 1997, 17). These compulsory performances that construct our genders are maybe partly foreseeable but never fully fixed or predictable. It is an ongoing process, an assignment never fully carried out, never exactly what was expected, never the embodiment of the 'ideal' norm that s/he is going for. Butler therefore says that "... [t]he resignification of norms is thus a function of their own *inefficacy* and so the question of subversion, of *working the weakness in the norm*, becomes a matter of inhabiting the practices of its rearticulation." (Butler, 1997, 22, original emphases). The subversion of gender identity can not happen outside or beyond cultural power relations but has to happen through displacement of its norms.

Butler suggests that the existing genders can be subverted through parody and gives the example of drag. The drag is a performance that parodies the stereotypical customs of the opposite gender. It plays with the distinction between anatomic sex of the performer and the gender s/he is performing subverting "... the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of true gender identity." (Butler, 1990, 174-175). Butler also names cross-dressing and butch/femme lesbian identities as having subversive possibilities without going in to specific detail (Butler, 1990, 174). She never implies that these are the only ways to subversion and I think that she looks fondly on all attempts to problematise, denaturalise and denormalise heteronormativity. She is never specific about how exactly subversion should be carried out not even in her example of drag. I think that she is deliberately unspecific because it can be so many things. It can be a moment in our day to day life, a little thing that disrupts the coherence of sex, gender and desire, or it can be a

larger and longer moment like the performance of drag or even a way of life like the butch/femme identities.

Here I am most interested in the little moments in day to day life. Not because I think they are more important or more subversive but because they are the more likely to reach the 'ordinary' heterosexual. They emerge or appear and perhaps disappear as quickly but hopefully leave something behind in the heterosexual culture. Irony and laughter can produce such queer moments. Literature of the romantic genre is an extremely heteronormative place, it is dedicated to the process of falling in love and how that love is pursued and eventually concludes in a happy ending. It is one of the places where the heteronorm reproduces itself. This does not mean that romantic literature can not have queer moments as the result of irony and laughter. I am searching for these moments in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, a book that made me laugh when I least suspected.

7. Bridget Jones's Diary, the analysis:

I have earlier outlined the plot of the story which I will go deeper into here but let us begin by finding out who this Bridget Jones is that tells us this story. She is a thirty-something heterosexual single woman, living in central London. She has a degree in English and when the story begins she is working in a publishing house. Her appearance is never discussed in any detail and the only thing that we know about her looks is her weight which she is constantly monitoring. She is of middle class and most likely white because race is never mentioned. It would be interesting to analyse the text from a class and race perspective because of how well Bridget represents the British middle class and that fact that race is never mentioned. Here however it is two of the many things that I had to choose not to analyse further.

The story that spans one year is told in the first person and the setup is in the form a diary with dates and sometimes time of day. The 'I' in the story is Bridget herself which tells us her story in her own words, with her own reflections on what has taken place as

well as revealing her hopes and dreams, her fears and disappointments. The diary as a form of narrative in a novel gives the reader a view into the thoughts of the main character of the story. We are allowed to see the emotions that the character feels; we know if she is trying to hide something and it shows parts of the character that otherwise would not be available. This is a form of fiction that does not hide anything from the reader, it gives us the opportunity to feel her emotions and see how she interprets what is happening in her life. Other characters are however not given a voice and the reader only knows them by how they are represented by the main character. This very personal form of fiction makes the author invisible and the text becomes like a description of reality. The reader knows it is fiction but in a way it is read as a true story. The closeness makes at least me feel like I am getting to know Bridget as a real person even though I am fully aware that she is a fictional character. I felt compassion when she was having a bad day and saw myself in many of the situations that she found herself in.

To further elaborate the plot of the book and present Bridget's character I am going to read it in dialog with Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and show the middlebrow more clearly as well as taking a look at how Fielding has worked. As mentioned earlier is the plot and characters in *Bridget Jones's Diary* is built on or at least partly based on *Pride and Prejudice*. The characterisation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* as middlebrow fiction is closely connected to the parodisation of *Pride and Prejudice* so I think it is important to take a closer look at their intertextuality.

The first reference to *Pride and Prejudice* is as early as "Sunday 1 January". Bridget is recalling a conversation with her mother about the yearly New Year's Day Turkey Curry Buffet:

"Oh, did I mention? Malcolm and Elaine Darcy are coming and bringing Mark with them. Do you remember Mark, darling? He's one of those top-notch barristers. Masses of money. Divorced. It doesn't start till eight."

(page 11).

The family name Darcy is the first indication the reader gets of the relation of the story to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. This statement by the mother implies that she sees Mark Darcy as a potential husband for her daughter and is as eager to marry her off to a man "of a good fortune" (Austen, 1999, 3) in a similar manner as Mrs Bennet in the first

chapter of *Pride and Prejudice* which always is looking for husbands for her daughters.

On page 13 the reader gets a direct link to Jane Austen's Mr Darcy:

"It struck me as pretty ridiculous to be called Mr Darcy and to stand on your own looking snotty at a party. It's like being called Heathcliff and insisting on spending the entire evening in the garden, shouting 'Cathy' and banging your head against a tree" (page 13).

This gives the character a certain sense of predictability. He is a fictional character with a status of a historical or legendary character that the reader is supposed to have knowledge about and recognise. This recognition gives the reader an opportunity to predict that this character will in some way resemble his predecessor and the story involving him might also resemble that of *Pride and Prejudice* (Bal, 1999, 119-123). After this the reader does not doubt the intertextual relation between the two texts.

This little observation that Bridget does becomes hilarious when you know who Mr Darcy and Heathcliff are but if the reader does not recognise the characters it has no meaning. Therefore it is safe to say that the author does demand of her readers some education or at least knowledge of the "high" literature.

When Bridget finely meets Mark Darcy she thinks he is rather untasteful.

"He turned round, revealing that what had seemed from the back like a harmless navy sweater was actually a V-neck diamond-pattern in shades of yellow and blue – as favoured by the more elderly of the nation's sports reporters" (page 12).

Her first impression of him is not as a charming handsome man but rather an uninteresting geek that she has no interest in. When they start to talk she is faced by the question "Have you read any good books lately?" (Page 12). Being halfway through *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. A self-help book by John Gray bearing the under title *Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Relationships* and teaches people "everything they need to know about members of the opposite sex and how to deal with them" to make relationships work better (home page 4). This indicates that it teaches people to behave according to their gender and represents it as a natural fact, opposite to Judith Butler's theory and is one of the ideas that reinforce the heteronorm by pointing out its naturalness. Bridget is not proud of reading this book and decides to lie.

"Backlash, actually, by Susan Faludi," I said triumphantly. Hah! I haven't read it as such, but feel I have as Sharon has been ranting about it so much. Anyway,

completely safe option as no way dimond-pattern-jupered goody-goody would have read five-hundred-page feminist treaties.

'Ah. Really?' he said. 'I read that when if first came out' (page 14).

Backlash a book which now is a feminist classic is something that Bridget sees as better than *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* and the fact that this unattractive man has read it indicates that there is more to him than meets the eye. Most people that read this book do not do it for the pleasure of because it is not a light reading. It is read because of its contents and a man that reads it trough must be for equal rights if not a feminist. With this Fielding is perhaps distancing herself from this kind of self-help books and agreeing with feminist critique on them as well as bringing feminism in as something relevant to the story. Bridget however quickly changes the subject and starts rambling about New Year's Eve and New Year's resolutions. Then he blows her of.

"'Maybe you should get something to eat,' he said, then suddenly bolted off towards the buffet, leaving me standing on my own by the bookshelf while everybody stared at me, thinking, 'So that's way Bridget isn't married. She repulses men.'" (Page 15).

The abrupt end of their conversation in front of the whole party which is probably watching their every move hoping that they will get along makes Bridget uncomfortable. Later at the same party she overhears her mother's friend try to give Mark Darcy Bridget's telephone number. When he refuses to take it she is even more uncomfortable and embarrassed. Bridget's and Mark Darcy's first impression of each other is not good and they rather seem to loathe each other and Bridget sees him as an unfashionable snobbish person. Their meeting resembles Elisabeth's and Mr Darcy's first encounter where she hears him telling his friend that "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough for *me*; and I am in on humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men." (Austen, 1999, 9). After which Elisabeth writes him of as proud and snobbish. This further establishes the relation between the stories as well as the predictability of this story. This plot is popular in romances and some people contribute the origin of this plot to Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (Modleski, 36 and 49). Mark Darcy does not show up again until the 18. April (page 100) the reader expects him to because he is Mr Darcy and Bridget will end up loving him.

After this first encounter with Mark Darcy the connection between the two stories is evident, if the reader knows *Pride and Prejudice*, which I think that Fielding assumes

and expects. The use of *Pride and Prejudice* makes the story twofold, it is Bridget personal story told in her own words making it vary personal but it is also the retelling of an old story which gives the reader the power to predict what is going to happen as well as knowing more than Bridget does. An opportunity given by this kind of middlebrow literature, that expects its readers to recognise and solve the clues they are given. After this beginning the reader starts to look for other occasions that reveal this connection. In the next chapter I will further elaborate the plot of the story, from the point where I leave it here, mentioning the similarities when they occur and are relevant for the plot as well as taking a look at what kind of heterosexuality the book promotes.

7.1 Bridget and the men in her life:

Here I begin the discourse analysis of the text, working thoroughly through the story extracting what kind of heterosexuality the text promotes. In the beginning of the book Bridget has a crush on her boss, Daniel Cleaver. Their professional relationship changes into something more personal through flirtatious instant computer messages and after some time he asks her out on a date. After the date things start to progress and he tells her “is just a bit of fun” and that he thinks that they should not get involved she gets angry and walks away from the intimate moment they were having telling him that: “That is just such crap... How dare you be so fraudulently flirtatious, cowardly and dysfunctional? I am not interested in emotional fuckwittage. Goodbye” (page 33).

After this it becomes obvious that Bridget knows what she wants and she knows when she is mistreated and she will not accept that. Despite this experience with Daniel she is still attracted to him and wants to have a relationship with him. By the advice of her friends she decides to take up an ice-queen act and ignore him. To her joy it has the intended effect on Daniel which becomes interested and invites her to Prague for the weekend. Later the same day he cancels the trip leading Bridget to bust out in anger:

“I told you quite specifically the first time you tried to undo my skirt that I am not into emotional fuckwittage... Did you ask me to Prague to make sure you could still sleep with me if you wanted... Either go out with me and treat me nicely, or leave me alone” (page, 76).

Daniels response to this outburst is “What about you, this week? First you completely ignore me like some Hitler Youth ice-maiden, then you turn into a irresistible sex kitten...” (Page 76). Again we get the reassurance that Bridget will not be treated unfairly even though she perhaps is not herself fully good and honest. She knows what she wants and it is like she is playing a game where she knows the rules and can manipulate them in order to get what she wants. With the aid of her friends and self-help books she plans her actions in order to get Daniel in her net.

At a publishing party Bridget meets Mark Darcy again. In a middle of a conversation where they are discussing fine literature and television (the one mentioned above) Bridget is rather upset and

“... sulkily grabbing a handful of passing sate sticks and shoving them into my mouth. As I looked up I saw a dark-haired man in s suit straight in front of me. ‘Hello, Bridget’ he said. I nearly opened my moth and let all the sate sticks fall straight out. It was Mark Darcy. But without the Frank Bough-style diamond-patterned sweater.

‘Hello,’ I said through my mouthful, trying not to panic.” (Page 100).

Here Bridget finally meets Mark Darcy again and she is not able to present herself as a sophisticated and elegant because she has her mouth full. This is not important here in the story but becomes important when we find out that Mark Darcy likes her as she is and not for what she presents herself to be. Moments like these prevent Bridget to pretend with Mark Darcy like she did with Daniel.

After this uncomfortable meeting, Mark Darcy joins the conversation taking Bridget’s side of the argument as was described earlier and Bridget’s starts to reconsider her opinion of him and she finds herself “...reflecting on how much difference the presence or absence of a diamond-patterned sweater can make to someone’s attractiveness...” (Page 103). At the same time we find out that Daniel and Mark Darcy have some history, what it is we do not know but this indicates that Daniel might have some characteristics of the deceiving Mr. Wickham from *Pride and Prejudice* and the reader does therefore have further reason not to trust him. Bridget herself does not know this and when Daniel shows up drunk at her door she lets him in and they end up in bed.

After this night Bridget goes through a period where she thinks she is pregnant, imagining herself and Daniel with the baby. Especially Daniel, “... carrying the baby in a sling, Daniel rushing home from work, thrilled to find the two of us pink and glowing in

the bath...” (Page 116). The descriptions are like a “feel-good movie or similar” (Page 116) and she is rather charmed by the idea to become a family and live the heteronorm, directly starting to eat for two. The idea of abortion does not enter her mind and it is not until Daniel ignores her at work after the weekend and does not call, that she thinks that perhaps she will be a single mother. When she goes to buy a pregnancy test she thinks to herself “... wishing I’d thought to put my ring on my wedding finger...” (Page 117) indicating that it is not as shameful to be buying a pregnancy test if you are married and that a child out of wedlock is not desirable. This chapter in the book reinforces the heteronorm, it naturalises and normalises the existing discourse of heterosexuality as the natural order of things. Bridget only sees children as part of the family institution other options are not thought of as desirable, emphasising how fixed and monolithic this category is. As it turns out she is not pregnant which she thinks is rather sad but forgets all about it when Daniel calls her.

After the phone call they start to go out and they become a sort of a couple. Bridget starts to dream again: “Head full of moony fantasies about living in flats with him and running along beaches together... being trendy Smug Married instead of sheepish Singleton” (page 131) and she expresses hopes of romantic moments “... tomorrow I expect we will go to the park or out to a lovely pub in the country for lunch. It is marvellous having a boyfriend” (page 141). Again Bridget is dreaming of a life carrying out the heteronorm, seeing it as a scene in a movie and making plans of romantic things that they are going to do. She also sees it as something that will give her a better status in life, becoming hip and cool married person instead of being awkward and self-conscious single person. Again her thoughts reinforce the heteronorm to be part of the institution is better than being out side it, it is the natural and normal thing to do, what is required and respected of everyone.

As it turns out the relationship does not become like she imagined it to be. Instead “it seems the entire summer is doomed to be spent watching the cricket with the curtains drawn” (page 149) and she is not happy about it but wants to sunbathe in the park or barbecue but he is not interested in any of those things. In the end she manages to get Daniel to go on a mini-break and almost immediately as they get there he says “I’ll just pop the telly on” (Page 159). The idea they have of what to do in a relationship is

totally different and this frustrates Bridget a lot but she tells Daniel about it but it does not seem to have any affect on him. Daniel is not playing the game so to speak, according to the roles. He is not being romantic and pampering her like he is supposed to do both as a hero in a romance and as the heteronorm demands.

Shortly after this mini-break Bridget's mother invites her to a 'Tarts and Vicars' costume party and Bridget is very happy to get the opportunity to show Daniel of: "It will be so lovely for once not to have to drive up on my own, arrive on my own and face all that barrage of inquisition about why I haven't got a boyfriend" (page 165). To her horror he cancels in the last minute, saying that he has to work and she ends up going alone. At the party she meets Mark Darcy and in conversation which leads to Daniel we get to know that there has something happened between Mark Darcy and Daniel.

"Daniel Cleaver?" said Mark Darcy.

'Yes, it is, actually,' I said, jutting my chin out.

'Is he a friend of yours, Mark?' said Una.

'Absolutely not,' he said, abruptly.

'Oooh. I hope he's good enough for our little Bridget,' ...

'I think I could say again, with total confidence, absolutely not,' said Mark.

(Page 171).

This leads to an argument between Bridget and Mark Darcy which ends with him telling her quietly "to take care of yourself, that's all" (page 172). Now the reader knows that there is some reason to be concerned about Daniel because of the strong words Mark Darcy uses against him bearing in mind that Daniel is Mr Wickham that tried to marry Mr Darcy sister without his knowledge to get her money and how managed to marry Elizabeth's sister for profit.

When Bridget leaves the party she goes directly to Daniel. When she arrives he does not answer the door but she knows he is home because the car is there. She thinks this is strange and immediately jumps to the conclusion that he has got another woman in there which turns out to be right. He was a deceiving man like Mr Wickham from *Pride and Prejudice*, after all and the reader was right to suspect him to be up to no good. Daniel is not the man of Bridget's dreams; he does not take care of her and indulge her. This is rather unusual in a romance where the hero pampers the heroine and attends to her every need making shore that she knows that she comes first. Daniel is an antihero; not noble and morally good and first of all he is not what Bridget is looking for. Here

Fielding is breaking the rules of the romantic genre by making Bridget be attracted to and have a relationship with the 'wrong' man for a long duration of the book. I think that she is deliberately subverting the romance and she is showing how a relationship should not be. Making it both subversive and reinforcing the heteronorm at the same time. She does it through irony, girl wants boy, girl gets boy, girl does not like boy anymore. This is not supposed to happen, girl wants boy, girl gets boy and they will live happily ever after, that is the 'story'. The way she shows how a relationship should not be, does not indicate that Bridget did something wrong or that she has to be ashamed of that he was not 'the one' and therefore not reinforcing phallogocentric norms and reinforcing and changing the heteronorm without the phallogocentrism.

Now she is once again single and invited to a gathering of people with her parents. This time it is Malcolm and Elaine Darcy's ruby wedding party. At the party Bridget meets Mark Darcy and they have two rather awkward conversations where he tells her that Daniel slept with his wife two weeks after their marriage and asks her out to dinner but the dinner never takes place because of a misunderstanding.

Little by little Bridget starts to realise that she wants Mark Darcy to ask her out but she does not have the courage to do it herself so she asks him to a dinner party with her friends. In the middle of the party the phone rings and her father informs her that her mother has run away with her new boyfriend and that he has been stealing money with the aid of her mother from most of their friends, including Mark Darcy's parents. This is another connection to *Pride and Prejudice*. There the youngest Bennet sister is taken away by Mr Wickham in order to come in to some money as mentioned earlier, he had before tried to do the same with Mr Darcy's sister and Mr Darcy feels it is his fault that Mr Wickham is able to do it again so he does everything he can to save the Bennet family from this scandal. Here Mark Darcy immediately takes the matters in to his own hands asking all kinds of questions:

“‘What’s being done to find her?’ ‘What are the sums involved?’ ‘How did the matter come to light?’ ‘What is the police’s involvement?’ ‘Who knows about it?’ ‘Where is your father now?’ ‘Would you like to go to him?’ ‘Will you allow me to take you?’ It was pretty damn sexy, I can tell you.”
(Page 274).

This is the first time Bridget directly says that she is attracted to him and his concern for her is heart-warming. He is showing the love and care a hero should show a

heroine in a romance and has been doing for quite some time. Like at the ‘Tarts and Vicars’ party when he warns her about Daniel or at the publishing party when he saves her from the conversation about the cultural hierarchy. After the phone call they drive directly to see her father and the day after Mark Darcy disappears in pursuit of the criminals, like Mr Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*. After that Bridget does not hear much from him for a long time and she thinks that he probably has lost all interest in her because of her mother’s behaviour especially after she does not show Mark Darcy any gratitude for helping her out and behaves like nothing happened.

At Christmas Bridget finds her self in exactly the same situation as the year before: “... once again I am humiliatingly spending Christmas Eve alone in my parents’ house in a single bed” (page 299). Then at the Christmas Day gathering of family and friends the mother’s boyfriend comes running through the French windows taking the mother as a hostage, right after him comes Mark Darcy to save the day. When the situation has been taken care of and the police have arrested the criminal, Mark Darcy announces that “I am taking Bridget away to celebrate what is left of the Baby Jesus’s birthday” (page 305).

He brings her to a fine hotel where they eat dinner and then it turns out that he has rented a suite. In the end Bridget asks him:

“‘*Why did you bother doing all this?*’
‘*Bridget, he sad ‘Isn’t it rather obvious?’*
Oh my God” (page 306).

Then he tells her how much he loves her and they end up in bed together. The end is rather swift not giving any indication of what might happen in the future.

Bridget’s relationships with these two men are quite different but what makes the reader think that Bridget and Mark Darcy relationship is going to be any better than Bridget’s relationship with Daniel? First of all Mark Darcy is the hero and Daniel is the antihero, Mark Darcy plays by the rules of the heteronorm and Bridget’s expectations as well as according to a hero in a romance but Daniel does not. Bridget herself does not have the opportunity to pretend to be someone she is not with Mark Darcy as she does with Daniel and Mark Darcy therefore likes her as she is, not like she presents herself. When the story is over Bridget and Mark Darcy is having their first night together and we

have no idea what is going to happen but because it is a romance and Mark is fulfilling his expectations, the reader expects that they will be happy ever after.

The heterosexuality promoted in the book is rather traditional; a monogamous relationship, where the partners respect one another leading to marriage and children and therefore reinforces the heteronorm. Bridget makes it clear to Daniel that she is not looking for an on-night-stand but wants a relationship where she is respected and a relationship that has got potential to become something more. The revealing of her dreams concerning the baby and Daniels presence in those dreams show that she is wants a family. Bridget is looking for a lifelong partner with whom she can make a home and a family with. Even though the reinforcements of the heteronorm as a natural and normal thing the female sexuality presented is not reinforcing phallogentic norms.

Bridget does have no problem saying no to Daniel when it becomes clear that they have different ideas about what is happening and she makes it clear that she will not be disrespected. Bridget does not talk much about sex but when she does it is in small sentences like: “And then... Mmmmmmm” (page 128) that I interpret as showing that she likes it and she never expresses any guilt or shame for having sex and enjoy it. When Daniel turns out to be Mr Wrong she expresses a lot of thoughts about why but none of those reasons she names are related directly to sexuality.

7.2 The outside pressure to engage in a heterosexual relationship:

Bridget’s mother: “... if you’d had something a bit more bright and cheerful on at the turkey curry buffet Mark Darcy might have shown a bit more interest. Nobody wants a girlfriend who wanders round looking like someone from Auschwitz, darling” (page 131).

The outside pressure on Bridget to get a boyfriend, marry and have children is evident in the book. When she attends a family gathering or is asked to dinner by friends that are married she always feels anxious and uneasy because of the questions she knows that she will face.

“How’s your love-life, anyway?”

Oh God. Way can’t married people understand that this is no longer a polite question to ask? We wouldn’t such up to them and roar, ‘How’s your marriage going? Still having sex? Everyone knows that dating in your thirties is not the happy-go-lucky free-for-all it was when you were twenty-two and that the honest answer is more likely to be, ‘Actually, last night my married lover appeared wearing suspenders and a darling little Angora crop-top, told me he we gay/a sex addict/ a narcotic addict/ a commitment phobic and beat me up with a dildo,’ than, ‘Super, thanks.’

Not being a natural liar, I ended up mumbling shamefacedly to Geoffrey, ‘Fine’ at which point he boomed, ‘So you still haven’t got a feller!’

‘Bridget! What are we going to do with you!’ said Una. ‘You career girls! I don’t know! Can’t put it off for ever, you know. Tick-tock-tick-tock.’

‘Yes. How does a woman manage to get to your age without being married?’”

(Page 11, original emphases).

This conversation takes place at the New Year Turkey Curry Buffet held the first of January almost immediately as she walks in the door. It is not unique and is reoccurring in different forms. The almost exact conversation takes place on 25th December, with the same people present beginning with the same question. Bridget responses and her thoughts on the subject are not unique. This is what she expects to meet every time she shows up at one of these gatherings. At another occasion she wants to scream at her friend that she does not have a boyfriend because she does not want to end up like her “... you fat, boring, Sloaney milch cow... or because actually... underneath my clothes, my entire body is covered in scales” (page 40). To Bridget’s horror her friend and family is constantly trying to get her together with someone and seat her “opposite an increasingly horrifying selection of single men” (page 212).

As mentioned earlier Bridget’s mother is fixated on bringing Bridget and Mark Darcy together and every conversation they have, in the beginning of the book, include some mention of him. “Do you remember Mark, darling? He’s one of those top-notch barristers. Masses of money. Divorced” (page 9). Bridget’s following comment indicates that this is not the first time her mother gets an idea like this. “Oh God. Not another strangely dressed opera freak with bushy hair burgeoning from a side-parting” (page 9). Despite her anger and frustration she never actually expresses these feelings to anyone except her friend that find themselves in a similar situation. Everybody is trying to help her to find the right men, to settle down and start a family with according to the expectation of the heteronorm. To be single at her age is not normal and is made to look

unusual by the way people talk about is reinforcing the heteronorm but the way this is done by Fielding becomes subversive.

These reoccurring conversations as well as Bridget's outbursts and the fact that she does not voice her anger to the people it is directed towards makes the obligatory heterosexuality and its norms visible. She is constantly reminded of the fact that she does not have a boyfriend or husband and it gives the indication that she is failing to do something that everybody do, that is normal. It is OK for people to ask about her love life because everybody is supposed to have one and to ask about it reinforces the heteronorm. It is not acceptable that Bridget would object to answering the question because for the other person this is just a way to make conversation and seeing it as an insult to be asked further shows her failure to participate in normal behaviour. Bridget has a duty to find a boyfriend, get married and have children other options is not available. She knows this is the norm and she wants to live by it and feels that it must be here fault that she does not have a man in her life.

Fielding repeats conversations like the one quoted above all the time and most of them produce laughter or at least a smile. If we look at these moments through Bakhtin's theory Fielding is using the parody and irony to criticise other peoples insistence that everybody take part in the heteronormal lifestyle and do not give room for anything else.

When Valentine's Day is coming up and she does not have a boyfriend to celebrate this holiday of heterosexuality with she expresses both the feeling of failure and the will not to care.

"Oh God. Valentine's Day tomorrow. Why? Why? Why is entire world geared to make people not involved in romance feel stupid when everyone knows romance does not work anyway. Look at royal family. Look at Mum and Dad.

Valentine's Day purely commercial, cynical enterprise, anyway. Matter of supreme indifference to me" (page 49).

The next entry is: "8 a.m. Oooh, goody. Valentine's Day. Wonder if the post has come yet. Maybe there will be a card from Daniel. Or a secret admirer" (page 49). Here we can see that the outside pressure is not only from friends and family but also from society as a whole. Even though there is some truth to what she is saying she still wants to be a part of this celebration of heterosexual love. To feel loved and show others that she is despite that it is commercial enterprise created by marketing. This kind of speculations does not exactly fit in to a romance where everything is supposed to be about the pursuit of love

and can be read as another attempt by Fielding to subvert the romance and criticising the heteronorms power in our culture, though irony and laughter.

Bridget wants to rebel against the norm occurs in several places in the book she expresses thoughts like "... I am a woman of substance and do not need men in order to be completed..." But these sentences always become ironic when the next entry contains "Humph. Daniel does not seem to be here yet... Still no sign of Daniel... Oh God. Maybe he's fallen in love in New York and stayed there" (page 43) leaving the statement as noting more than a wish.

Bridget would like to feel that it is OK not to have a boyfriend but this it is not possible because of how strong the heteronorm is around her and in her own expectation of life. I think this underlines that she does not have another option because it is not available. She is expected to live out the heteronorm not only by her surrounding but by her self as well. Like Judith Butler explains in her theory, socially created norms can not be thrown of at will because it has a great deal of power over us.

This constant recurrence of the dreaded question and Bridget's angry and ironic outbursts in the diary can be read as a critic of this outside pressure to live according to the heteronorm. The angry and ironic comments reticulate the situation provoking laughter drawing attention to events and situations that otherwise would not be so noteworthy. Fielding manages to create a critique within the existing heteronorm that is potentially subversive using the norms own norms and values against it. A reader that finds her/himself in a similar situation of frustration of others interference and judgment can relate to Bridget's feelings and see that s/he is not the only one feeling this way. For another reader that does not recognise the situation but is rather the person asking the dreaded question might realise, at least for a moment, that it is hard not to fit in to the norm, that it is not others peoples business what others choose to do with there life and think twice before asking the question again. Perhaps its moments like this, if they are repeated enough, can reduce the heteronorms strong hold in our culture.

7.3 The 'ideal' woman:

“Wise people will say Daniel should like me just as I am, but I am a child of Cosmopolitan culture, have been traumatized by supermodels and too many quizzes and know that neither my personality nor my body is up to it if left to its own devices” (page 59).

The 'ideal' woman according to Bridget is someone that is thin, well groomed, has a career and a boyfriend (if not a husband). Bridget wants to be the 'ideal' woman and she puts in a lot of effort in to taming her appearances and personality to become more like 'her'. She waxes her legs, shaves her armpits, plucks her eyebrows, cleans her skin and moisturises, files her nails and feet, does cellulite massage and stomach exercises. She is on a constant diet to become thinner and wants to find a “job with potential” (page 3) as well as read books and newspapers to improve her intellect. Her list of New Year's Resolutions in the beginning of the book is committed to make her a better woman and find a relationship. Drink less, do not waste money on useless things, clean up, control her emotions, be a nicer person, be more confident and intelligent, find a better job, exercise more, become thinner and not fall for men that are not potential husbands. All of these things are something that she associates with the 'ideal' woman (living in the western world, is white and of middle class), the one she is not but would like to be.

We do not know much about Bridget's appearance apart from her weight. The reader has to pick up clues through out the book in little comments like “roots dyed” (page 30), in a list of date-preparation necessities, which indicates that her hair colour is not her natural. This is unusual in a book of the romantic genre because usually looks are described in detail to establish why the hero is interested in her. By not describing her appearance she is not made to look like the 'ideal' woman and she can look like the reader wants. The appearance that she is changing therefore is not quit clear so the reader does not know if she is beautiful or not, if she needs this 'improvements' or not. In fact I think it does not matter how she looks because this way she looks has nothing to do with how she sees herself and she can be some woman as well as every woman that wants to be feminine and beautiful (Bordo, 1993). In Judith Butler's theory gender is the effect of

repeated norms and Fielding's way of making Bridget talk about her grooming it is clear that Bridget is repeating the society's norms related to femininity and beauty.

When Bridget is preparing for a date, doing all the things a woman is supposed to do to look her best; she manages to become extremely clumsy describing the moment like this:

"Ugh. Completely exhausted. Surely it is not normal to be revising for a date as if it were a job interview? ... Since leaving work I have nearly slipped a disc, wheezing through a step aerobics class, scratched my naked body for seven minutes with a stiff brush; cleaned the flat; filled the fridge, plucked my eyebrows, skimmed the papers... and waxed my own legs... Ended up kneeling on a towel trying to pull off a wax strip firmly stuck to the back of my calf while watching Newsnight in an effort to drum up some interesting opinions about things. My back hurts, my head aches and my legs are bright red and covered in lumps of wax" (page 59).

This little moment is ironic because women are supposed to be dignified and beauty is thought of as effortless and grooming comes natural to women. Here Bridget is not dignified, beauty is hard work and she is having problems with something that is thought of as natural. If we look at this description of Bridget performing femininity through Butler's theory we see that Bridget knows the norm of femininity and is trying to fill them. She wants to appear thin, well groomed, hairless in appropriate places, cellulite free as well as intelligent and up-to-date in world news. The process of getting there is however hard and painful. The ironic undertone and the laughter that this description of the event produces break down the idea of femininity as natural and effortless. It is rather something that has to be worked at, as it takes time and can not be done without an idea of what you are striving for. This is what most women do and often we do not think about that we do it, we just do. This moment and others that are similar forces the reader to think about it and maybe question the beauty standards and the pressure on women to act in accordance with them. Fielding again manages to turn the existing discourse around on itself by the use of parody, irony and laughter. This even becomes more evident when we take a look at Bridget's dieting.

7.3.1 The diet:

“It is proved by surveys that happiness does not come from love, wealth and power but the pursuit of attainable goals: and what is a diet if not that?” (page 18).

As I mentioned previously the only thing that we know about Bridget’s appearance is her weight. When we first meet her Sunday the 1 of January she is 9 stone 3 (page 7). For me this does not mean much because where I come from we use the kilo-system. So the first time I read the book I did not bother to find out how much it equals in kilos I just imagined her to be a little bit chubby because of the constant weighing and counting of calories. When I now find out that 9 stones 3 is the equal of 59 kilos (Sörenson, 1984, 1024) which means that she is not at all a chubby girl no matter what her height is. I therefore think that her constant weighing and calorie counting must therefore have another reason than actually losing weight because she cannot afford to lose much.

I think the reason Fielding makes Bridget be on a diet is because all women are expected to so she is as well. All women are supposed to be striving for the perfect body of a supermodel and Bridget is no different. She knows how many calories are in everything she eats and she counts them almost every day. She uses a lot of time calculating the nutritional value of the things she eats and she knows by heart how many calories are in everything she eats. Her intake can vary from 456 to 5424 but are usually from 1200 to 2500 a day. In a conversation she has with her friend Tom we find out that people need 2000 calories a day to survive. Bridget, to her surprise notes

“... that I have spent so many years on a diet that the idea that you might actually need calories to survive has been completely wiped out of my consciousness. Have reached point where believe nutritional ‘ideal’ is to eat nothing at all, and that the only reason people eat is because they are so greedy...” (page 257).

This is of course not a healthy assumption and is a way of thinking that can lead to devastating consequences such as malnutrition and anorexia. Even though Bridget expresses this opinion she herself is one of this greedy people. She lied to Tom about how many calories she eats per day and even though she knows a wide variety of diet menus she uses them to eat what she wants and has no problem with taking a side step

from her dieting and have a chocolate croissant for breakfast. She thinks and talks about going to the gym but she rarely seems to get there.

Despite this half-hearted effort of dieting she reaches her goal. Saturday 22 of April she notes: “Today is an historic and joyous day. After eighteen years of trying to get down to 8st 7 I have finally achieved it. It is no trick of the scales, but confirmed by jeans. I am thin” (page 105). (8st 7 equal 55 kg). Three days later she goes to a party wearing a tight little dress to show off her figure and feeling really good about herself. The first comment she gets when she arrives is “God, are you all right? ... You look really tired” (page 106). After the third negative comment about her appearance she is totally miserable. “Eighteen years – wasted... Eighteen years of struggle, sacrifice and endeavour – for what? Eighteen years and the result is ‘tired and flat’. I feel like a scientist who discovers that his life’s work has been a total mistake” (page 107). Fielding’s use of irony in this unfolding of events is a clear statement by the author. I think she must be familiar with the feminist critique of society’s beauty standards and wants to contribute to the change of that image. I also think this is Fielding’s best use of the subversive possibilities that irony and laughter provide her with.

To put down a lot of time and effort on something that then turns out to be something that totally opposite to what was expected is hard to see as something other than ironic. Bridget has been on a diet for most of her life and to find out that it has been a mistake is not hard to see as ironic. Bridget’s expectations of being thin are equal to being beautiful. When she realises that she has reached the goal she has been striving for for eighteen years she expects not only to be thin but also that the people around her will note how thin and gorgeous she has become. Her self-confidence is boosted because of the pleasure she expects from her friends’ admiration. When the reaction she gets is the total opposite to her expectations she becomes extremely disappointed but her calorie counting continues. The 28 of April she notes: “calories 8400 (v.g., though bad to have counted. Slimming obsession v. bad)” (page 108). The 3 of May she is up to 9st 2 and the 5th she notes “9st (oh sod it, cannot break weighing habit of lifetime... will get therapy of some kind in future)... calories 1895” (page 120).

Her experience of being thin and the realisation that being thin does not equal being beautiful does not seem to have long lasting effect on her calorie counting or her

weighing habit. This leads me to the conclusion that the goal of becoming thinner is not the main reason for her dieting. I think that she is on a diet because she is expected to as most women are. It is more a habit, hobby or the normal thing to do than a real effort to become thinner. I think the reason for Fielding to make Bridget behave this way to further draw attention to the compulsory dieting that is part of our cultures beauty standards.

This ironic unfolding of events can be read as a critique on western society's idea of the perfect woman as thin. The image of women portrayed in mass media as well as the social recognition of slenderness equalling beauty makes many women feel that they are not thin enough no matter how thin they are. To be thinner is always an unreachable goal because you can always be thinner. The idea that you will happier and more self-confident if you lose some weight is misleading because the secret of happiness and self-confident has more to do with loving yourself just the way you are rather than the way you look (Bordo, 1993). Although Bridget does not come to this conclusion, the irony and the laughter that her thinking on the subject causes the whole diet obsession to become ridiculous and therefore undesirable to the reader or at least makes the reader think critically about dieting, for a moment.

8. Conclusion:

I think Fielding set out to redefine the romance when she wrote *Bridget Jones's Dairy*. By writing a middlebrow text she is elevating the romance from its low place in the cultural hierarchy and demanding more knowledge from her readers than is usual for a romance. Fielding is clearly familiar with the genres rules and uses them, parodies them with the aid of irony and laughter both to subvert and reinforce the heteronorm and creating something new.

The book is a romance that reinforces the heteronorm like other romances. It promotes a lifelong, monogamous, cohabiting relationship, legally sanctioned through marriage and producing children. The difference is that the heterosexuality she reinforces is without the pallocentrism that often is closely related to the reinforcements of the

heteronorm. With this exclusion the heteronorm is not the same as it was and is not as bad for women as it was before. Fielding also criticises the heteronorms strong hold in our culture by drawing attention to the endless interference by others in people's love life. She also ridicules Bridget's needs for a man in her life by making her want to feel complete without a man but not able to. I am not sure this was her intention but through the irony of the situations and laughter they produce these critical points visible, Fielding ridicules and subverts this important reinforcement mechanisms of the heteronorm in to something different, without interference and need for men, reducing the heteronorms strong position.

Fielding is also critical towards the existing female gender. The way she makes Bridget perform her femininity in an undignified way destabilises our ideas of grooming as natural and beauty as effortless. Bridget constant dieting is also used to destabilise the existing ideas through the irony of situation and the laughter it provokes ridiculing the modern western woman's chase for the perfect body.

Fielding has managed to do what Butler proposes, to find ways to displace the existing norms and work their weaknesses by using parody, irony and laughter. I have no idea if Fielding knows Butler's work but I do not doubt that she is a feminist. She uses the cracks in the heteronorms wall or the glitches in the matrix to successfully subvert the traditional romance in to a social critic. By doing this she the critic reaches an audience with perhaps other ways would not be reached making feminism available to women that are not necessarily interested in politics.

The subversive power that irony and laughter is a power of deconstruction. It does not always show the reader another way to perform femininity or an alternative heterosexuality but it reticulates and destabilises the existing norms and it gives hope of something different. I am not asking for gender to disappear or heterosexuality to fade away but I am looking for broader definitions of this terms that will make the diversity of human life equally valued and respected.

A textual subversion like the one described here has the potential to bring forth social changes. All genres are transformable and the romance is perhaps hard to subvert because of the mandatory happy ending but not impossible. Subversion on a discursive level gives different opportunities for social change then politics actions and policy

making which I see as equally important. It can smuggle in thoughts to the reader without her/him noticing or regarding these thoughts as political action or something out of the ordinary, making the subversion normal in the same way the 'normal' makes itself normal. I at least see *Bridget Jones's Diary* as a successful subversion of the romance into something that has potential for a feminist agenda. The fact that there exists sequel to the book indicates that Bridget and Mark Darcy do not live happily ever after and further destabilises and subverts the romance. Now I will have to watch the movie again to see if some of the subversion analysed in this essay, made it into the script to an even wider audience.

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