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“Have You Met Miss Jones?”  
Feminism and Difference in the Bridget Jones Diaries

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**“Have You Met Miss Jones?”**  
Feminism and Difference in the Bridget Jones Diaries

**Reshma Dhrodia**

Thesis Supervisor: David Jarraway

Thesis submitted to the  
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## ABSTRACT

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Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones novels are popular with countless readers all over the world. They are "ripe for feminist interpretation and investigation" because they are "contemporary women's novels" that discuss the everyday lives of women, particularly unmarried women in the West (Whelehan 2004, 38). Imelda Whelehan argues that if the Bridget Jones novels do not "offer a 'true' reflection of contemporary single life for women, they perhaps present its tensions more boldly than ever" (2004, 30). This thesis is a feminist study of the Bridget Jones novels and the film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, focussing on how discourses of feminism and otherness appear in Fielding's texts and in the film, and how the major women characters use them to interpret their own lives.

Chapter One investigates the ways in which Bridget, Sharon, and Pam Jones understand feminism and employ feminist language in Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996). Chapter Two explores how characters who are Other – those who are racially and ethnically different from Bridget, her friends, and her family – create barriers between the white, heterosexual couples in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (1999). Finally, Chapter Three turns to the 2001 film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* in order to demonstrate how prevalent themes in the first novel, including feminism, go missing in the adaptation.

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## INTRODUCTION

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### *Meet Miss Jones*

Bridget Jones, the heroine of two bestselling novels written in diary form and two popular film adaptations, is a name with which many have become familiar. Even if one has not read Helen Fielding's bestselling *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (1999), or seen the more recent film adaptations of the novels, those who know little about Bridget Jones have likely been exposed to her through film trailers and posters, and popular awards ceremonies such as the Academy Awards.<sup>1</sup> Terms such as “singleton” (an unmarried person, usually a woman)<sup>2</sup> and “emotional fuckwit” (a person, usually a man, who fails to make a commitment to one's partner)<sup>3</sup> have entered the vocabulary of Bridget fans. Imelda Whelehan, a British, feminist cultural critic, believes that “‘Bridget Jones’ is a term which has entered our contemporary lexicon and itself conjures up the image of a single woman of a certain age

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<sup>1</sup> Renee Zellweger was nominated for several awards for playing Bridget in the film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, including an Oscar and a Golden Globe.

<sup>2</sup> The word “singleton” is defined by Bridget as a “replacement for poison outdated word ‘spinster’” in *Bridget Jones's Guide to Life* (Fielding 2001, 54).

<sup>3</sup> Bridget describes emotional fuckwittage as the following: “Annoying behaviour by fuckwits, e.g. saying will ring then not ringing, shagging others then not calling them, being in relationships with others then saying it's not a relationship, going out with people for twelve years whilst insisting they don't want to get too serious, refusing to go on mini-breaks, etc. etc” (Fielding 2001, 50-51). Whelehan admits that this particular term “is hard to define, but it seems to be used to describe any man in his thirties who tries to embark on a liaison with the clear intent of *avoiding* a functional relationship” (2002, 36).

who obsesses about her body and its shortcomings, whilst loudly bewailing the inadequacies of men with her close friends in a bar” (2004, 30). According to Whelehan, Bridget is a “chick lit” and “chick flick” heroine who has appealed to a legion of women who seem to embrace her as “one of their own.”<sup>4</sup>

In “Sex and the Single Girl,” Whelehan argues that “contemporary women’s novels about women’s lives are ‘about’ feminism in that they offer any commentary on today’s women’s lives.” As such, the chick lit genre is “ripe for feminist interpretation and investigation,” especially the Bridget Jones novels, which “appear to have a substantial global appeal to women” (2004, 38). This thesis attempts to answer Whelehan’s call for a feminist study of Helen Fielding’s Bridget Jones novels by analysing how discourses<sup>5</sup> of feminism and difference are understood and used by Bridget and other major characters to interpret their own lives.

Much of the appeal of Bridget as a character with whom women may identify lies in the ways she attempts to reconcile the seemingly contradictory notions of femininity and feminism. My first chapter examines the relationship the major female characters in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* have with feminism. While Bridget, her friends, and her mother

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<sup>4</sup> Humorous, “confessional,” woman-centered books such as the Bridget Jones novels have been called “chick lit.” They “are seen to appeal primarily to the women readers who can recognize themselves within their pages” (Whelehan 2004, 29). Films which deal with this kind of material are usually placed in the genre of romantic comedy, and are often referred to as “chick flicks.”

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this thesis, I use “discourse” to mean the following: “...a discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements, but groupings of utterances or sentences, statements which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence” (Sara Mills 11).

are aware of the overwhelmingly positive impact that (especially) second-wave feminism has had upon the lives of women in the West, Bridget makes it clear that feminism is still understood mainly as an obstruction for women who wish to form heterosexual relationships with men. Whelehan explains Bridget's attitude: "If feminism is just a little too 'strident' to be of use to Bridget and her singletons, it is because feminism is seen as antagonistic to heterosexual relationships in its call for transformation in the behaviour of men to accommodate women's redefined social roles" (2002, 43). Thus, while the women in *Bridget Jones's Diary* are aware of feminist thought and language, ultimately, feminism is an impractical political movement in which to participate because it threatens any chance for women to find men with whom they may share heterosexual relationships.

While there has been some work discussing Bridget's relationship to feminism in Fielding's novels, there has been little said about representations of difference (or "otherness") in the novels. There has never been a serious study concentrating on the palpable racial tension present in the Bridget Jones novels, especially within *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*. As one feminist literary critic, Maaïke Meijer, points out, "analysis of racism in texts is just as necessary as critique of sexism. They often go together... Deconstructive anti-sexism and/or anti-racism is connected with the view that sexist texts are not in fact about women, but about men, just as Western or Eurocentric texts are in fact about whites" (30). Bridget's own whiteness never comes into play within Fielding's texts until she is confronted with racial and ethnic difference, confirming Judith Mayne's observation "that, in a predominately white culture, race is an issue only where 'other' races – i.e., 'other' than white – are concerned, as if (paralleling

early feminist criticism) to be white is unmarked, unspecified, neutral” (145).<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, this thesis not only discusses the discourse of feminism in the Bridget Jones novels, but also the discourse of difference within these particular texts. Focussing on *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, my second chapter attempts to answer the following questions: why does Fielding include characters who are racially and ethnically Other in this novel? How do these characters interact with white characters in the novel? What purpose do they serve?

Finally, my third chapter analyzes the film adaptation of the first Bridget Jones novel, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, in order to explore how both feminism and otherness appear (really, disappear) in the film. A whole new host of Bridget Jones fans was created through the successful 2001 film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Director Sharon Maguire's adaptation not only grossed over 280 million dollars worldwide,<sup>7</sup> it was praised critically, in spite of the doubts many had about casting American actor Renee Zellweger as Bridget rather than a British actor. During the transfer from page to screen, however, much of the plot from Fielding's original novel was removed, and the film finally became structured around two love triangles, with Bridget and her mother each having to choose between two men. Not only was Fielding's plot considerably pared down, but the feminist language and action within Fielding's novel also failed to make the cut. Consequently, the film adaptation displays an even more antagonistic relationship to feminism than Fielding's novel, rendering it nonexistent. As for representing

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<sup>6</sup> Vron Ware similarly remarks that “in a society habituated to dominant ideologies of white supremacy it is often easier for people who fall in the category ‘white’ to see themselves as merely ‘normal’ and therefore without a racialized identity” (118).

<sup>7</sup> Please see the website *The Numbers*, which provides up-to-date information concerning box office data.

otherness, the only major character in Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* who is neither white nor English – a Portuguese man named Julio – is replaced with a white, British man named Julian in the adaptation. In the end, both feminism and otherness seem too controversial to include in a big-budget, mainstream Hollywood film.

I will now outline the structure of the three chapters in this thesis in more detail, and discuss the methods of analysis used to study the Bridget Jones novels and the adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

### **Chapter One: Feminism and the “Backlash” in *Bridget Jones's Diary***

Using Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1992), the first chapter of my thesis explores how feminism is referenced and understood by Bridget, her mother, and Sharon in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. It is clear throughout the novel that these women are familiar with feminist language. While Bridget never really identifies herself as a feminist, she does bemoan the ways in which female singletons are devalued in a society which continues to privilege married women. Bridget's mother, Pam Jones, is also familiar with feminist rhetoric, lamenting that she has spent over three decades as a homemaker who must continue to work while her husband is allowed to retire. Sharon, one of Bridget's closest friends, not only declares herself a feminist, but uses feminist language to decry the way singletons are derided. Thus, it is clear that these women are drawn to feminism as an empowering way to understand their experiences as women living in contemporary British society.

What becomes evident to the reader throughout the novels, however, is that feminism may be discussed, yet it is never accepted as a “sensible” political tool with

which to revolutionize the lives of women. Bridget only seems to call upon feminism when it is convenient to her. While Sharon continues to espouse certain feminist principles throughout the novel, she is silenced over and over again by Bridget and her other friends when she expresses her disgust at sexism in public. Lastly, Pam Jones may recognize the way her work in the home is devalued by her husband, yet the reader is encouraged by Fielding to understand her as a hypocrite.

Ultimately, Fielding's novel betrays an allegiance to what Susan Faludi calls "the backlash": a belief that the countless problems women face in the West have been caused by the advent of feminism. Instead of acknowledging that it is the *failure* to promote and create feminist policies that will better the lives of women that has resulted in the continuing oppression of women in the West, the backlash insists that *feminism* is the cause of women's woes. Thus, while the women in *Bridget Jones's Diary* are attracted to feminism, in the end, it is not the answer to ending sexism.

## **Chapter Two: Discourses of Difference in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason***

In my second chapter, I examine cross-cultural meetings in Fielding's second Bridget Jones novel, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* in order to understand how otherness is represented in the novel. In *The Edge of Reason*, Bridget and her mother travel overseas on holiday, inevitably leading to the women interacting with persons who are racially and ethnically Other. Bridget's first encounter with otherness, when an "oriental" boy mysteriously appears on Mark's bed, is fraught with anxiety. Assuming the worst, Bridget betrays a fear not only of pedophilia, but perhaps also of miscegenation. In another encounter with otherness, Bridget finds herself thrown into a

prison cell filled with prostitutes in Thailand. Yet again Bridget expresses a desire for distance from otherness. She is able to achieve it through an exchange of Western materials and knowledge with the prisoners, leading to the Thai women virtually worshipping her for her Western pop culture wisdom. The longest encounter with otherness in the novel, however, occurs when Mrs. Jones visits Africa and returns with a most lively souvenir: a Kenyan tribesman.

Along with discussing Bridget's anxiety-ridden encounters with otherness in *The Edge of Reason*, using Toni Morrison's work on "Africanism" in *Playing with the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), I attempt to show how Wellington, the African man whom Pam brings to England, "ignite[s] critical moments of discovery or change or emphasis" within Bridget's narrative (viii). Delineated as a kind of "noble savage," Wellington is sympathetic to Bridget's problems with Mark Darcy and doles out wise "tribal" wisdom that enables Bridget to reconsider her relationship. Nonetheless, Wellington's residence still causes anxiety for the Jones family. Pam is so enamoured with Wellington's "exotic" difference that she continually attempts to "appropriate" his culture, worrying Bridget that her mother may be perceived as a "neocolonialist." Bridget's father, Colin, is so threatened sexually by Wellington's potential to replace him that he must turn to alcoholism to soothe his fears. Once again, the only cure for these anxieties is distance. It is only when Wellington returns to Africa that Mr. and Mrs. Jones are able to begin mending their unstable relationship.

Finally, these cross-cultural encounters result in three things. First, they disrupt the heterosexual relationships that Bridget and her mother are involved in. Second, they set up hero-worshipping scenes in which the white characters in the novel are usually

adulated by the non-white characters in the novel. Third, these encounters usually result in Mark Darcy, Bridget's love interest, having to play the role of white knight in shining armour who heroically rescues women, foreigners, or both. In the end, the "foreign" characters Fielding creates in *The Edge of Reason* can only impede the lives of the white characters in the novel. It is the ability of the white characters to "survive" their encounters with otherness which allow them to reassert their white identities and rebuild the heterosexual relationships such encounters always threaten to dismantle.

### **Chapter Three: From Page to Screen – Making it Mainstream**

In my third chapter, I survey the film adaptation of Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* in order to ascertain how feminism, a subject that is discussed by Bridget, Sharon, and Pam throughout the novel, is conveyed in the film.<sup>8</sup> In the novel, these characters use feminist language to lament the way women in the West are treated as "second class citizens," especially those who are unmarried and over the age of thirty. In the film, however, feminism virtually disappears. The plot focuses only upon which men Bridget and Pam will end up living happily ever after with, and demotes Sharon's character from an outspoken, self-proclaimed feminist to "Shazzer: journalist; likes to say 'fuck' – a lot." While it may be argued that there are feminist moments in the film, these moments

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<sup>8</sup> I will not be focussing on the film adaptation of *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, which was not well received by critics, likely because it features a Bridget whose presence onscreen seems to be purely farcical. This film's Bridget is continually portrayed as a buffoon, a woman who is incapable of performing even the simplest tasks. The film adaptation of *The Edge of Reason* also strays almost entirely from Fielding's original plot for the novel, which was based upon Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (2000).

are always undermined by other scenes in the film, and by the way the story ends for Bridget and her mother.

Drawing upon David R. Shumway's analysis of screwball comedies, I show how the adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* is structured around a plot consisting mainly of two love triangles, making it seem as though the only decision Bridget and her mother must make is to choose between two men. Bridget's relationships with both Daniel Cleaver and Mark Darcy are also altered in the film. Bridget's relationship with Daniel is far less turbulent in the film than it is in the novel and Bridget never challenges Daniel's refusal to commit to their relationship. Bridget is also cruelly insulted by Mark in the film and decides to change her lifestyle after she has heard him berate her. In the novel, Mark is merely a little abrupt with Bridget and she is still able to regain some of her dignity by mocking his snobbery. Perhaps the most interesting change made to Bridget's character is her relationship with her diary. In Fielding's novel, Bridget may reject feminism, but she continues to use her diary to log her frustrations with sexist behaviour. In the film, however, Bridget dismisses the value of her diary to save her relationship with Mark, sacrificing the power of her words for the mere prospect of finding a boyfriend.

Pam Jones's character in the novel is similarly altered in the film. While she is still able to express frustration with her life as a homemaker in the film, her flirtation with feminism is brief. The power Pam has in the novel, which includes the ability to find both herself and Bridget new jobs, is taken away from her in the adaptation. Finally, instead of being forced home to her husband by Mark Darcy as she is in the novel, in the film, after a brief extramarital affair, Pam returns home to Colin, meek and apologetic. Ultimately,

the film presents us with women who are willing to overlook the faults of the men they desire, place the blame for their problems entirely upon themselves, and beg for affection.

Discussing Susan Faludi's backlash theory, Imelda Whelehan argues that the word "feminism" has become a swear word: "Yet somewhere along the line, feminism has become the 'f-word,' perceived to be an empty dogma which brainwashed a whole generation into false consciousness of their relationship to power" (2000, 16). Feminism, then, does not only become a synonym for the swear word "fuck," it also comes to be associated with an even nastier "f-word": failure. The fact that feminism provides no easy way out, since feminists must challenge sexism on a daily basis, makes it seem impossible to work with. By refusing to transfer the feminist themes present in Fielding's novel into the film, the filmmakers never give feminism even a fighting chance.

Lastly, this chapter reveals how the film retains its focus only upon the white characters in the novel, so much so that the only major character who is not white in the novel, Julio, is remade into a white British man named Julian in the film. The film also fails to represent the racial and ethnic diversity of the city of London; even most of the background actors in the film are white. Ultimately, both feminism and otherness go missing in the adaptation, indicating that film studios and filmmakers are still unwilling to deal with potentially controversial subject matter in order to ensure that big movies make big business.

### **Taking Bridget Seriously**

I became increasingly interested in the Bridget Jones novels when I realized that much of the struggles the women experienced in the books concerned a concurrent

attraction and repulsion to feminism. While Bridget is enthralled by the idea that she might be seen as “a radical feminist,” it is clear that she does not believe feminism is the answer to ending women’s oppression. Imelda Whelehan believes that if the Bridget Jones novels do not “offer a ‘true’ reflection of contemporary single life for women, they perhaps present its tensions more boldly than ever” (2004, 30). By pinpointing the push and pull relationship so many women have with feminism – women who flourish by means of the fruits feminism has reaped but dismiss its validity – Helen Fielding’s Bridget Jones novels are worth taking seriously because they offer evidence that the backlash is a continuing cultural phenomenon over a decade later, and provide important clues for why this might be so.

Finally, it is my hope that this study will tease out the less obvious racial tensions that are buried within the humorous language used by Bridget and other characters in the novels. It is strange that so little has been written about the way otherness is represented by Fielding in the Bridget Jones novels. Once again, feminists have been quick to pick up on the ways in which (white) women’s bodies are portrayed within popular culture, but not the ways in which otherness is consistently rendered dangerous within this cultural space. My analysis of otherness in the Bridget Jones novels and the first film adaptation is, I hope, at least a scholarly push in a more ameliorative direction.

## CHAPTER ONE

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### *Feminism and the “Backlash” in Bridget’s Jones’s Diary*

In this opening chapter, I will explore how feminism is referenced and understood by Bridget, Sharon, and Pam Jones in Fielding’s first Bridget Jones novel, *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. I am interested in both the use of feminist language by the women and their references to feminist writing and writers. The first major text referenced within this novel is Susan Faludi’s *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. When Bridget first meets Mark Darcy at a New Year’s Day party, in an attempt to impress him, she mentions that she has recently finished reading the lengthy book. Bridget has never actually read the text, which consists of a critique of the way feminist practices have been portrayed by the American media as the cause of, rather than the solution to the continuing oppression of Western women. However, Sharon’s “ranting” about the book has left her feeling as though she is familiar with its arguments. She feels safe telling Mark that she has read Faludi because she assumes that a “diamond-pattern-jumpered goody-goody” such as Mark would never be interested in reading a feminist text (14).<sup>1</sup> As soon as Bridget learns that Mark has, indeed, read the book, she rapidly changes the subject. While Faludi is rarely mentioned again within the novel, it is interesting that Fielding chooses to reference this particular text at such an early stage in the book.

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<sup>1</sup> Although Mark has read *Backlash*, he remains unconvinced by Faludi’s arguments and states that the book seems to contain “a lot of special pleading” (14).

### **Bridget Jones and “Backlash”**

Faludi’s critically praised bestseller argues vehemently that throughout the 1980s and even during the revolutionary 1970s, the American media, advertising and various forms of popular culture began to perpetuate the idea that the “documented” widespread misery of American women was a result of the advent of feminism. She provides countless examples of the ways in which this “counterassault” encourages the public to believe that feminism is not the symptom of the oppression of women but its source.

According to Faludi:

The backlash is not a conspiracy, with a council dispatching agents from some central control room, nor are the people who serve its ends often aware of their role; some even consider themselves feminists. For the most part, its workings are encoded and internalized, diffuse and chameleonic... Taken as a whole, however, these codes and cajolings, these whispers and threats and myths, move overwhelmingly in one direction: they try to push women back into their “acceptable” roles – whether as Daddy’s girl or fluttery romantic, active nester or passive object. (xxi-xxii)

It is useful to place emphasis upon Faludi’s central argument. The backlash is not a conspiracy theory. It is not part of some insidious plan created by a single, archetypal villain whose evil goal is to continue the tradition of the oppression of women. It is a

movement that involves countless numbers of people, men and women alike, who are, for whatever reason, threatened by feminist actions. Such persons not only resist the changes feminists work so hard to implement and enforce, such as altering the oppressive, patriarchal nature of the family and the home, and dismantling sexist structures in the workforce, they also redefine and reverse the very objectives of feminism. The backlash blames feminist movements for the problems women face through its insistence that women would have been better off without them.

In spite of the feminist language that is present in both Bridget Jones books, in the end, Fielding's novels espouse a backlash-ist attitude towards feminism that encourages readers to believe that feminism is, in the end, ultimately unnecessary and unpragmatic. Susan Faludi believes that "feminism's agenda is basic: It asks that women not be forced to 'choose' between public justice and private happiness. It asks that women be free to define themselves – instead of having their identity defined for them, time and again, by their culture and by their men" (xxiii). The narratives Fielding creates in the Bridget Jones books encourage the reader to believe that *feminism* is the movement that requires women to choose between "public justice and private happiness" – between the political and the personal. Consequently, feminism may be pleasant on paper, but it is impossible to practice. Fielding advocates the belief that feminism is merely an identity one may don whenever required rather than a political commitment to ending the oppression of women. It is the stuff of make-believe, of play, of idealism, of unfulfillable fantasy.

Throughout the first diary, Bridget categorizes the term "feminist" in various ways. Feminist may mean a genre of music (3), a kind of behaviour that will attract men

(2), a kind of behaviour that will frighten men away (20), a word that expresses solidarity among women and hope for change, and an ideology that asks them to privilege the political over the personal. In almost every case, what Bridget is most concerned with is the reaction men will have to those women who choose to speak and act out against the oppression of women. Almost immediately in the first novel, in a list of New Year's resolutions, Bridget writes: "**I WILL NOT**... Sulk about having no boyfriend, but develop inner poise and authority and sense of self as woman of substance, complete *without* boyfriend, as best way to obtain boyfriend" (2). Female autonomy, then, is a snare, a trick – a powerful tool to attract men who do not want to be attached to women who are too needy or "co-dependent" (19).

### **The "Feminist" Rant**

The term "feminist" is never defined in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, but we may uncover what it means to Bridget and her friends by examining the contexts in which it is used. The word "feminist" is most often coupled with the word "ranting" or "rant," a verb meaning "to speak or discourse vehemently, intemperately, or wildly" (*OED*). This feminist ranting occurs when Bridget gathers her girlfriends to discuss the emotional fuckwittage that occurs within romantic relationships. Most often, the feminist rant becomes a broad tirade against the way men treat the women with whom they are involved. Rarely do these harangues locate and discuss actual sites of female oppression such as violence against women, and poor and unequal employment. Feminist ranting is also almost always paired with excessive drinking; Bridget calls one particular meeting with the girls a "delicious night of drunken feminist ranting" (125). These rant sessions

are powerful for Bridget and her friends, for the women are allowed, if only for a short time, to question the choices men make concerning heterosexual relationships and sex. They are able to express anger at the constant pressure women are placed under to be thin and beautiful, and to find a man, marry, and have children before the age of thirty. They are also able (rather optimistically) to predict how obsolete patriarchal thinking will become in the near future, when both women and men will have “smartened up.”<sup>2</sup>

These moments of female bonding allow Bridget and her friends to challenge the impossible standards that have been set for women within patriarchal society. And yet, when Bridget is alone again, without the solidarity she feels when her girlfriends are present, both her body and her mind “sober up”: she reverts to feeling miserable about her singleton status, and expresses a deep and intense kind of despondency.

**5 p.m.** Har har. Am marvellous. Feeling v. pleased with self. Had top-level post-works crisis meeting in Café Rouge with Sharon, Jude and Tom... Sharon maintains men... are so catastrophically unevolved that soon they will just be kept by women as pets for sex, therefore presumably these will not count as shared households as the men will be kept outside in kennels. Anyway, feeling v. empowered. Tremendous. Think might read bit of Susan Faludi’s *Backlash*.”

**5 a.m.** Oh God, am so unhappy about Daniel. I love him. (77)

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<sup>2</sup> The term “patriarchy” is defined and discussed in depth in pages 31 to 33 in this chapter.

This kind of reversion, which may be best described as a kind of “who am I kidding?” syndrome, is experienced by Bridget throughout the novel. According to Faludi, “instead of assailing injustice, many women have learned to adjust to it. Instead of getting angry, they have become depressed. Instead of uniting their prodigious numbers, they have splintered and turned their pain and frustration inward, some in starkly physical ways” (57). Thus, a feminist rant session may relieve stress and encourage a kind of pseudo-feminist solidarity, but it cannot help to solve any of Bridget’s dilemmas. Indeed, a feminist rant session seems to work more like a powerful sugar rush; Bridget experiences a temporary bout of euphoria only to end up crashing to the ground, weary and unhappy.

When Bridget finally ends up in a “functional” relationship with Daniel Cleaver, who is her supervisor at the publishing house where she works, the feminist rant session takes on a different format. The night certainly starts out right. There is plenty of food and alcohol available and Bridget tells us that Sharon begins yelling “Bastards!” before 9 p.m. Sharon, who is the angriest of the three women (and therefore, according to Fielding’s logic, the most “feminist”), takes charge of the rant session:

“Ten years ago people who cared about the environment were laughed at as sandal-wearing beardy-weirdies and now look at the power of the green consumer... In years ahead the same will come to pass with feminism. There won’t be any men leaving their families and post-menopausal wives for young mistresses... because the young mistresses and women will just turn round and tell them to sod off and men won’t get any sex or any women unless they learn

how to behave properly instead of cluttering up the sea-bed of women with their SHITTY, SMUG, SELF-INDULGENT, BEHAVIOUR!” (126-127)

Unlike Bridget and Jude, Sharon reads feminist texts and uses theoretical language in order to understand the workings of her society. She resents the “Culture of Entitlement” that is privileged by patriarchal capitalism, which demands that people should “get what they deserve.” This kind of blatant individualism encourages women and men to believe that they are entitled to certain luxuries because they have “earned” the right to exercise privilege. In her angry critique of this particular brand of individualism, Sharon is able to link together patriarchy and capitalism in order to understand why men, especially older men, feel that “women are there to give them what they’re bloody entitled” to (127). And yet, Sharon’s ranting ends up sounding rather hollow when Daniel interrupts the session.

Not only does Bridget’s new boyfriend bring the women chocolates, he brings home bags of groceries (a chore that is still often regarded as part of women’s work). He then proceeds to put the groceries away and finally, offers to drive Jude and Sharon home. Daniel plays the role of provider and knight-in-shining-armor while Bridget watches “the girls flutter[ing] around finding their handbags and grinning stupidly at [him]” (128). Initially, Bridget has mixed feelings about this interruption: she feels “smug” and “proud” because she knows her friends are envious of her relationship with Daniel. On the other hand, she is “furious with the normally disgusting sexist drunk for ruining our feminist ranting by freakishly pretending to be the perfect man” (128). Thus, while the text reminds us that Daniel does not (and certainly will not) behave this way

often, Fielding's decision to have Daniel behave in this manner *at this particular moment* in the novel pushes the reader to conclude that the feminist rant session was unwarranted. The feminist guises the women have put on for the evening, rather like frightening Halloween costumes, are finally removed at the end of the night.

This incident is reminiscent of a scene in the popular 1996 film (ironically starring Renee Zellweger as heroine Dorothy Boyd), *Jerry Maguire*. In the final scenes of the film, a divorced women's club that Dorothy's sister is a member of meets at Dorothy's house in order to have a rant session. Dorothy is shown joining a discussion concerning the emotional distress women suffer in relationships with men. She admits that she used to doubt their arguments: "I've listened to you all tell a thousand sob stories... I've not been fair to you. Women need to stick together, and not depend on the affections of a man to "fix" their lives. Maybe you're all correct. Men are the enemy... But I still love the enemy."<sup>3</sup> The women's response to Dorothy's frustration (including one woman denying fervently that men are the enemy) is interrupted by the entrance of Jerry, who arrives in time to declare his love for his wife and to remind women everywhere not to give up hope. "You complete me," he says gazing into her eyes, and the divorced women who watch him (and likely the audience who watch them) let out a collective sigh.

It would be difficult to argue that the kind of message this scene delivers is entirely negative. After all, as many feminists point out, men are not the "enemy."<sup>4</sup> To

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<sup>3</sup> All excerpts from *Jerry Maguire* were copied verbatim from the film rather than from a copy of the screenplay.

<sup>4</sup> In *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000), bell hooks defines feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." She is partial to this particular definition "because it so

believe that living life as a human necessitates a participation in an unending “battle of the sexes” is to place blame on one sex or the other, rather than to stimulate social change. However, what this scene and the scene almost identical to it in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* do is promote the idea that if women simply wade through enough men, the “right one” (Prince Charming) will arrive to better their lives (rescue them). Instead of locating and resisting the powerful patriarchal dichotomies that encourage the divide between men and women, the women are temporarily appeased. Again, the message advocated here is that women are silly to complain about men, for if they look hard enough, they will find their own Jerry Maguire – that is, of course, if they are thin, white, blonde, and conventionally attractive like Renee Zellweger. In both this film and Fielding’s novel, the feminist/female rant, even when it is private and rather mild in its severity, is threatening and must be quelled. “Nothing seems to crush the masculine petals more than a bit of feminist rain – a few drops are perceived as a downpour” (Faludi 62).

Bridget and Jude usually prevent Sharon from bringing the feminist rant into public spaces. When the women meet outside the home in order to discuss their latest relationship woes, the discussion often results in Sharon denouncing very loudly the actions of men who have misbehaved. Sharon’s feminism focuses mainly on power relations between heterosexual men and women, the pressure placed upon women to remain young and beautiful, and the negative connotations associated with unmarried women. In other words, she is most interested in the feminist issues that she believes affect her most. A true believer in Faludi’s backlash theories, Sharon understands that the

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clearly states that the movement is not about being anti-male. It makes clear that the problem is sexism”

(viii).

world is set up in ways that make it impossible for women to achieve what men are able to achieve. She also understands that women must consistently confront negative perceptions of womanhood and argues that, one day, women will regain control of their lives and men will be left rather helpless: “We women are only vulnerable because we are a pioneer generation daring to refuse to compromise in love and relying on our own economic power. In twenty years’ time men won’t even dare start with fuckwittage because we will just *laugh in their faces*” (21). While it is certainly misguided (and some may argue, arrogant) of Sharon to call herself part of a “pioneer generation” that, for the first time, resists patriarchy, it is important to note that she sees herself as part of a movement of women working against oppression. She both believes in and exercises female solidarity.

In the home, Sharon’s loud and angry ranting at men is both accepted and spurred on by her friends. They revel in her anger and wish to share in its power. Yet when they are in public, the women often attempt to restrain Sharon from displaying her anger, even when they feel it is justified. She becomes too angry: irrational and inappropriate. She must be silenced not because her anger is unjustified (she is often both lucid and funny even in moments of rage), but because it threatens to disrupt the order of things, to make things ugly. Early in the novel, the three meet one of Sharon’s coworkers, who confesses, rather smugly, that he is being dishonest with the woman he is seeing; he is using her for sex while she believes they are involved in a committed relationship. Immediately, Sharon berates him and decides to interfere: “Oh, that is just such crap, you cowardly, dysfunctional little schmuck. Right. I’m going to talk to that woman” (21). Sharon clearly believes that, as a woman, she should prevent another woman from experiencing pain.

And yet it is Bridget and Jude who “forcibly restrain” her from taking action, from getting involved. As Faludi points out, “to make a fuss about sexual injustice is more than unfeminine; it is now uncool. Feminist anger, or any form of social outrage, is dismissed breezily – not because it lacks substance but because it lacks ‘style’” (72). Whenever Sharon gets too loud and too angry in public, she becomes embarrassing and must be silenced. Once again, the reader is reminded that “there is nothing so unattractive to a man as strident feminism” (20).

### **Confronting Sexism**

Perhaps this fear of permanently crossing over into feminist space is why, time and time again, Bridget allows herself to be disrespected, treated like a sexual object, and even molested by men. While the sexual dynamics of power involved in her relationship with Daniel Cleaver are interesting, I am more intrigued by the way she is treated by a friend of her parents, Geoffrey Alconbury, and her second employer, Richard Finch. We are introduced to Geoffrey early in the novel when Bridget arrives at the New Year’s party only to have him give her “the sort of hug which Boots would send straight to the police station” (11). This kind of insidious behaviour continues throughout the novel whenever Bridget comes into contact with Geoffrey. While Bridget makes it clear that she is uncomfortable with this harassment, she never resists it openly and the threat of being touched and leered at by “uncle” Geoffrey remains potent. What is appalling is that neither her parents nor those surrounding Bridget seem to notice her intense discomfort.

While the character of “uncle” Geoffrey was likely created by Fielding to poke fun at this particular kind of person – the father figure who enjoys ogling the young

woman he is supposed to treat like his daughter – the character is undeniably sinister. We might wonder whether “uncle” Geoffrey also behaved in this manner with Bridget when she was a little girl. While Fielding is willing to bring up the topic of sexual perversion by family members (which we know through statistics happens at alarmingly high rates), her heroine never accuses Geoffrey of treating her improperly. In fact, Bridget is more disturbed by the impertinent remarks Geoffrey makes concerning her life as a singleton. He consistently asks about her “love life” and berates her for not being in a relationship.

“So, come on, then, Bridget! How’s yer love-life!” quipped Uncle Geoffrey, giving me one of his special hugs, then going all pink and adjusting his slacks.

“Fine.”

“So you still haven’t got a chap. Durr! What are we going to do with you!”

(300-301)

While Bridget has every right to be annoyed with these kinds of statements, which illustrate how single women are often treated like circus freaks, we must wonder why, in the end, Bridget is angrier over the implication that she is not able to “catch” a man than by being sexually harassed and molested by a supposedly trustworthy family friend.

Familial environments are not the only spaces where Bridget is threatened sexually. After Daniel Cleaver informs Bridget that he has been engaged to a younger

American woman throughout the time they have been dating, her mother helps her to get a job in television. While this change in her life should be a positive one, ultimately, Bridget leaves one uncomfortable work environment for another. In both work places, her employer objectifies her. However, Richard Finch's explicit sexual overtures are especially disturbing because Bridget does not solicit his attention and never treats Finch like anything but her employer (the same cannot be said for Daniel). Finch uses overtly sexist language when addressing his employees (he encourages them to create a show that exploits "lesbian rape victims"), encourages the objectification of Bridget when she is being filmed (on a broadcast at a firehouse, he wants her wearing a miniskirt and "pointing a hose") and constantly stares at Bridget's breasts while talking to her. In fact, whenever Bridget comes up with an idea he approves of, he congratulates her breasts: "A leery smile spread across his face. 'Brilliant,' he said to my breasts" (210).

Ideally, Bridget would openly oppose this kind of behaviour and not allow herself to be subject to sexual objectification. However, to resist this treatment candidly would be too dangerous because: a) resisting it might not necessarily mean that it would not happen again; b) resisting it would be messy and perhaps even more uncomfortable for Bridget than tolerating the objectification itself; and c) it might cause her to be "written off" in the same way Sharon is – as a strident feminist. Faludi attempts to explain why women so often choose to remain inactive:

When one is feeling stranded, finding a safe harbour inevitably becomes a more compelling course than bucking social currents. Keeping the peace with the

particular man in one's life becomes more essential than battling the mass male culture. Saying one is "not a feminist" (even while supporting quietly every item of the feminist platform) seems the most prudent, self-protective strategy. (58)

Bridget's more extreme moments of unhappiness occur when she feels outcast socially. Her desire to be an accepted member of a certain part of society (white, educated, heterosexual, married, middle/upper class) goes unfulfilled because of her inability to fit into specific social expectations. When she is surrounded by companions who share the same concerns, she feels satisfied because she is still part of something, though the sphere in which she finds herself is not the locale of her choice. Bridget is most uncomfortable when she feels as though she is on the outside looking in. Bridget needs to belong.

Feminism, then, is an unattractive option for Bridget because feminists do not give into but challenge accepted social norms. As such, they are located on the edge, in uncertain and dangerous border spaces, working for change. As bell hooks points out, "struggle is rarely safe or pleasurable" (2000, 28). While Bridget struggles inwardly to deal with the disparity that exists between expectation and reality, to struggle with it outwardly and actively would require her to turn her back on her desire for the privileged life she dreams of. This is not to say that Bridget does not show resistance in her own way. Her sharp, barbed humour is her weapon of choice and she uses her tool well. She recognizes when she is treated in a sexist manner and uses laughter to recover from it: "You, my darling,' [Richard] said to one of my breasts, 'are an absolute fucking genius.'

I always hoped I would turn out to be a genius, but I never believed it would actually happen to me – or *my left breast*” (249).

The reason why so many readers, most of them women, have responded to Bridget’s words is because many of her experiences are universal: women everywhere are objectified, unable to take advantage of decent employment opportunities, and pressured to conform to specific, dominant notions of beauty. But most women also avoid outwardly resisting oppression because it can be a painful, difficult, and downright frightening process. To confront (as it often seems) single-handedly white-supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist agendas seems a hopeless task. As Faludi points out in *Backlash*, women are told repeatedly that they are simply better off reverting to “traditional” lifestyles because feminism has failed them: they can’t “have it all.” The price of women’s “equality” is the loss of happiness, success, and even womanhood itself. The narrative Fielding creates for one particular character, Pam Jones, is a prime example of a story that tells the tale of a woman who “liberates” herself only to learn that the costs of female “freedom” far outweigh the benefits.

### **The Public and Private Mrs. Jones**

Bridget’s mother is dissatisfied with how she has been restricted access to male spaces because of her gender and is able to use feminist language to express her frustration. However, the individualistic, patriarchal, capitalist structure of Western society and her own imbedded sexism and racism block any opportunity she has to move beyond “traditional” female space. The narrative Fielding creates for Pam Jones invites us to explore the tensions involved in resisting the separation of private/female and

public/male spheres. While Fielding does not shy away from presenting the unattractive side of a single woman's life, her text also surveys tensions within heterosexual married life. The institution of marriage both binds and acts as a safeguard for middle class, white women such as Pam. Although the storyline Fielding constructs for Pam delineates the difficulties involved in married women attempting to recast themselves in roles other than homemakers, the author does not present satisfactory alternatives for women in general and for Pam in particular. When Pam realizes that she must revert to her state of "domestic bliss," Pam chooses to exploit her Portuguese lover, Julio, in order to escape unpunished for her "feminist" adventures. Thus, while Pam Jones is allowed to return to her domestic sphere, the degenerate and criminal Julio is hauled off to jail. Fielding's text, then, not only forces her back into the home, but casts the racialized Julio into prison for his role as seducer of the English, white woman.

Bridget first learns of her mother's dissatisfaction with her life when she notices changes in her parents' relationship. After a week long, women-only holiday in Portugal, Pam is different somehow: "blooming and confident" but snappish towards her husband (38-39). She has realized that "marriage is not a viable career" (Fox-Genovese 2). Identifying herself as the "Invisible Woman" Germaine Greer described in her early work, Pam makes clear that she resents the way aging women are unseen by men, rendering them powerless (47). She especially resents the way the work she has performed over the years as a homemaker has gone unappreciated by her husband:

Darling, it's merely a question of realizing, when your father retired, that I had spent thirty-five years without a break running his home and bringing up his children... and that as far as he was concerned his lifetime's work was over and mine was still carrying on, which is exactly how I used to feel when you were little and it got to the weekends. You only get one life. I've just made a decision to change things a bit and spend what's left of mine looking after me for a change. (53-54)

Pam's frustration with the limitations of women's roles mimics the frustrations expressed by other middle-class, white, female homemakers in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Three decades after its publication, the messages within Friedan's book are relearned and repeated by Pam. bell hooks discusses Friedan's work in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (2000).

Friedan's famous phrase, "the problem that has no name," often quoted to describe the condition of women in this society, actually referred to the plight of a select group of college-educated, middle and upper class, married white women – housewives bored with leisure, with the home, with children, with buying products, who wanted more out of life. (1)

hooks's critique of Friedan's book is valid. There were far more pressing issues concerning "masses of women" at the time, especially poor women and women of colour. Yet hooks does not dismiss the complaints of women like Pam entirely. While she refuses to privilege the concerns that wealthy white women face, she does believe that the hegemonic structure of the family is the main source of female oppression. Unlike racism and classism, sexism is learned inside the home and within the family: "Power struggles, coercive authoritarian rule, and brutal assertion of domination shape family life so that it is often the setting of intense suffering and pain. Naturally, individuals flee the family. Naturally, the family disintegrates" (36-37). Thus, Fielding's representation of Pam Jones reminds us that no matter how many areas feminist action has been able to amend, the family remains an institution that has changed little over the years. While many women now work outside the home and have found what Friedan's women seemed so desperate to gain – a career – women's ability to work outside the home does not mean they are offered the career opportunities men are, nor are they relieved of their duties at home.

It is important to explore why the structure of the family has remained virtually untouched over the decades. Heidi Hartmann's essay on the relationship between feminism and Marxism provides a useful discussion of the devaluation of women's labour in the home and explains why the large number of women who joined the work force during the last century did not help to shift domestic practices in the home. Hartmann asserts that "it is in studying patriarchy that we learn why it is women who are dominated and how" (214). She defines patriarchy very specifically: it is "a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to

dominate women... they are dependent on each other to maintain that domination” (211). Patriarchal systems work to maintain hegemony over women in order to allow men to stay in control. Instead of demarcating patriarchy as a kind of unknowable, grand male institution, Hartmann locates it among the relationships men form with each other in order to create and dictate the way institutions are run. While certain men – poor men and men of colour – are also subjected to dominion by more powerful men – namely white, wealthy men – all men benefit from patriarchy, for “in the hierarchy of patriarchy, all men, whatever their rank in the patriarchy, are bought off by being able to control at least some women” (212). Hartmann then argues that the purpose of patriarchy – to retain male control over the female to have full access to power – also suits the purpose of capitalism – for the wealthy to retain control over the poor. Therefore, “a partnership of patriarchy and capitalism has evolved” (207).

Some Marxist theorists proposed that the advent of capitalism, through the increasing number of women who joined the labour force to provide much needed womanpower, would lead to the redistribution of labour in an equal way (207). Hartmann argues that these Marxists failed to recognize and acknowledge the impact of patriarchy upon the economic dynamic: “The material base of patriarchy is men’s control over women’s labour power. That control is maintained by excluding women from access to necessary economically productive resources and by restricting women’s sexuality” (214). A major reason women were invited into the workforce was because it became more acceptable over time to use women’s labour for capitalist gain. The large number of women entering into the public workforce, however, did not mean that women would be welcomed into the public sphere in the same way men were, nor did it mean that women

would be relieved of the responsibility of maintaining the house and the home single-handedly. As a homemaker who raised her children throughout the 1960s and 70s, Pam Jones would have been aware of the “double day” many women were forced to put up with because of the push for women to work both in and outside of the home. It is no wonder, then, that she originally requests to be paid for housework rather than entering the public work force.

According to Hartmann, “mother work” is “crucial to the maintenance of patriarchy” (209). Hartmann reviews Mariarosa Dalla Costa’s work on housework in relation to capitalism to examine the true worth of women’s domestic labour. While Dalla Costa’s work is more anti-capitalist than feminist, in a revolutionary way, Dalla Costa argues that women should be paid for housework. She claims women’s domestic labour provides “essential services for capital” by giving birth to and raising children, thereby “reproducing the labour force” and creating “surplus value through that work” (208). Dalla Costa insists that women be paid for domestic labour so they do not have to be “forced” into juggling unpaid housework and paid work outside the home. Both Hartmann and Dalla Costa are aware that paying women for domestic labour would then trap women who do wish to seek careers outside the home and “further institutionalize woman’s housewife role” (219). Clearly, paying women for domestic work will not alter the nature of gendered labour, which is the heart of the problem. Men would still benefit far more from women’s work than women would. Nonetheless, the impact Dalla Costa’s work has on creating awareness of the crucial and profitable work women perform inside the home has effected countless women who believed that receiving pay for housework might finally allow it to be recognized as imperative to the maintenance of society.

In Fielding's novel, Bridget's father is bewildered by his wife's demands that she receive wages for domestic labour. He attempts to explain the "recent" change in his wife to his daughter: "She's been like this since she went to Albufeira with Una Alconbury and Audrey Coles,' he sobbed, trying to wipe his cheek with his fist. 'When she got back she started saying she wanted to be paid for doing the housework, and she'd wasted her life being our slave'" (48). Colin's words encourage us to believe that his married life was idyllic before his wife went on a women-only holiday. Instead of conceding that her feelings of resentment may have been bubbling up inside of her for many years before she finally confronted him, he places the blame upon the work-free, women-only week she spent in Portugal, insinuating that if women leave the domestic sphere without the accompaniment of men, their experiences can only lead to trouble. The reader might expect Bridget, an unmarried woman who is familiar with feminist theories and language, to sympathize with her mother's point of view. She does not, however. By having her protagonist, with whom the reader is supposed to identify, dismiss her mother's frustration and anger, Fielding's novel encourages the reader to assess Pam's belief that she be paid for housework as silly, unnecessary, and impractical.

There are other ways we are encouraged to understand Pam's frustration with her role as wife and mother as ridiculous. Just when Bridget finally tries, "as a feminist," to understand her mother's frustration, we learn that in fact, the *real* reason Pam leaves her husband is because of her desire for another man. After lunch with her mother, Bridget notices a man waiting for Pam outside the café and decides to conduct some detective work:

Sure enough, I eventually found her in the perfume department wandering round with the tall smoothie, spraying her wrists with everything in sight, holding them up to his face and laughing coquettishly...I sensed also that she had met him in Portugal, before the trouble with Dad... let's face it, Julio *was* the trouble with dad. (54-55)

Thus, according to Bridget, it was her mother's desire to cheat on her father rather than her dissatisfaction with gender constraints which caused her marriage to break down. She believes her mother uses feminist arguments merely to create excuses to cast aside her duties as wife and parent, and follow the urges of her libido. The reader is encouraged to accept Bridget's reading of her mother's behaviour as true rather than questioning whether Bridget's assessment is accurate. Indeed, it seems Pam was at least partly motivated to leave Colin so she could pursue a relationship with Julio. However, this does not necessarily mean her discontent with her home life was not genuine.

Bridget's resistance to her mother's desires is really a resistance to the possibility that one's subjectivity is consistently in flux. According to poststructuralist theory, "subjectivity is neither unified nor fixed... poststructuralism theorizes subjectivity as a site of disunity and conflict, central to the process of political change and to preserving the status quo" (Weedon 21). If we apply Weedon's poststructuralist definition of subjectivity to Pam Jones, it becomes clear that both her anger at the devaluation of housework and motherwork, *and* her attraction to another man who is able to fulfill her sexual needs are at play. Neither her feelings nor her subjectivity as a whole are fixed, but

are “constantly being reconstituted in discourse” (33). Bridget creates and imposes her own meaning onto the experiences of her mother in order to feel more secure about her own life. If she can locate her mother’s “problem” outside feminism, she will not only confirm what she already suspects about her mother, her desire to resist the application of feminist beliefs to her own life will be achieved. She will not have to confront the very real and frightening problem her mother has identified – the consistent, systematic oppression of women – and she can reduce her mother’s troubles to being caused by misplaced female sexual desire.

In spite of Pam’s previous demands that she be paid for housework, she expresses a desire for a career outside the home when she realizes that neither she nor other women will receive wages for domestic labour in the near future. “I feel like the grasshopper who sang all summer... and now it’s the winter of my life and I haven’t stored up anything of my own... I want a career” (71). Pam does, indeed, find herself work. Using her personal experience as a woman who has recently left her husband, she becomes a television presenter for a show called “Suddenly Single” (90). While her show becomes popular enough for her to become a minor celebrity, her role as presenter mostly involves thrusting microphones in front of newly single women asking, “Have you had suicidal thoughts?” (90) Although Pam does not have trouble finding herself paid work outside the home, the work is concerned with exploiting both herself and other women. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese points out, “for women, the advent of capitalism and individualism prove[s] paradoxical, simultaneously offering them a greater promise of full and independent social participation than had any previous social system and raising more systemic barriers to their social integration and self-respect” (16). Pam Jones

certainly enjoys the celebrity status her work allows her to attain. But her privilege comes at a price: she must exploit and promote the very sexist dogmas she and other women, including Bridget, are confronted with on a daily basis.

Pam's new found freedom does not last for very long. Less than a year after she leaves her husband, we find that her attraction to and trust in Julio (who is neither white, nor British) leads to financial ruin and the end of her new career. After her mother has cadged large sums of money from her friends in a fraudulent time-share scheme, Bridget learns from her father that her mother and Julio have left Britain and run off to Portugal:

“Apparently Julio, using your mother as – as it were – ‘front man,’ has relieved Una and Geoffrey, Nigel and Elizabeth and Malcolm and Elaine... of considerable sums of money – many, many thousands of pounds, as down payments on time-share apartments... Not a penny of your mother's and my savings or pension fund remains. I was also unwise enough to leave the house in her name, and she has remortgaged it. We are ruined, destitute and homeless, Bridget, and your mother is to be branded a common criminal.” (273)

The fact that Pam's major transgression occurs with (and because of) a non-white, foreign man is significant. In *Cinema and Spectatorship* (1993), Judith Mayne asserts that “one of the most efficient ways to evoke and deny race simultaneously is to make a black character a projection of white anxieties about race” (148). While Julio is not black, his

colour still marks his difference and thus, the “white anxieties about race” that Mayne speaks of in the aforementioned passage are projected onto him in the novel. Julio, in King Kong fashion,<sup>5</sup> represents the dangerous dark beast who threatens to steal the white woman from the white man through his rampant sexuality. He is excessively passionate and violent, representing transgression itself. After Pam returns safe and sound to England, rescued by the heroic Marc Darcy,<sup>6</sup> Julio interrupts Christmas lunch by crashing through a window in the house.

He was unshaven and clutching a bottle of sherry. He stumbled over to Dad and drew himself up to his full height...

“You sleep,” said Julio dangerously, “with my woman.”

“Oh, he’s so Latin, hahaha,” said Mum coquettishly while everyone else stared in horror. Every time I’ve met Julio he has been clean and coiffed beyond all sense and carrying a gentleman’s handbag. Now he was wild, drunk, unkempt and, frankly, just the type I fall for. No wonder Mum seemed more aroused than embarrassed. (302)

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<sup>5</sup> Ed Guerrero, author of *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (1993), calls the film *King Kong* one of the “great signifiers of race and *otherness*” through which “racial *otherness*” is shown to threaten “an innocent white reality in King Kong’s fatal, obsessive encounter with pure white womanhood” (65, 41).

<sup>6</sup> Fielding wrote this scenario to mimic the return of George Wickham and Lydia Bennett (now Mrs. Wickham) from London that was enforced by Mr. Darcy in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (2002). Fielding admits to having borrowed much of the plot of Austen’s famous novel for *Bridget Jones’s Diary*.

It is clear that Julio's race and ethnicity matter to Bridget and her family. His language, his violence, his state of drunkenness – his very “Latin-ness” – make him both dangerous and desirable to Pam Jones, who is aroused by his intense sexual jealousy.

Indeed, Fielding was probably trying to amuse her readers by having Julio literally “crash” a stodgy British luncheon where the guests spend most of their time arguing over the gravy. But any laughter at this scenario must also be accompanied with feelings of discomfort. We are never really encouraged to think of Julio as more than a stereotype based on his race and ethnicity, for Fielding does not bother to flesh out his character in the novel. In spite of Fielding's attempt to use Julio as part of a comic plot illustrating the silliness of Bridget's mother, beneath the civilized veneer of his “distinguished-looking” physical self lies a dark, sexual predator who threatens the sanctity of white, middle class, heterosexual, British marriage. And while Pam is subjected to the patriarchal, capitalist bindings of women's labour, she, in turn, exploits Julio. Both Pam (as a white woman) and Julio (as a man of colour) are oppressed by white men. However, as bell hooks points out in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, “white women may be victimized by sexism, but racism enables them to act as exploiters and oppressors of [non-white] people” (15). Perhaps this is why Pam is never charged for the crimes she and Julio commit, and why Julio simply disappears from the narrative. In the end, the only words Julio speaks in the entire novel confirm his animalistic sexual and violent energy: “You sleep with my woman.” And Mrs. Jones, purportedly “collect[ing] herself,” returns to her domestic role as wife and mother after a brief adventure with the beast (304).

In spite of Pam's decision to leave home, find a career, and take a lover, the way her story ends encourages the reader of *Bridget Jones's Diary* to believe that if married women of a certain age leave the home, they can only cause mayhem and destroy the institutions of marriage and family. Pam's feminist language and actions not only drive a wedge between herself and her family, but lead her to participate in a crime spree. With an example like her mother, it is no wonder Bridget's flirtation with feminism never flourishes into a serious commitment to the cause.

Throughout *Bridget's Jones's Diary*, the reader is pushed to believe that while women should protest the sexist hegemony of patriarchal, capitalist society, feminism is simply not the answer to their prayers. In fact, feminism and feminists only makes things worse for themselves and everyone around them. Fielding's first novel alludes to Faludi's work on the trends in anti-feminism throughout the text by critiquing the way women are pressured to conform to a certain kind of femininity, one that insists that women believe that they would be better off remaining in the private, domestic sphere. Yet, in spite of Fielding's knowledge and use of Faludi's backlash theories, in the end, Fielding's writing is anti-feminist. *Bridget Jones's Diary* serves as a sharp reminder to women that the answer to their problems is not to be found within feminist knowledge, solidarity, and action, but within the "safe" arms of white-supremacist, capitalist patriarchy.

## CHAPTER TWO

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### *Discourses of Difference in Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*

This second chapter will discuss discourses of difference in Fielding's second Bridget Jones novel. Throughout her first book, Fielding makes it clear that those characters who are not white, middle-class, and English are abnormal – even dangerous. The discourse of otherness in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* becomes even more complicated as Sharon, Bridget, and her mother all leave England to travel overseas, inevitably associating with the inhabitants of “foreign” lands. What is most interesting about these cross-cultural meetings is how confusing and frightening they can be for the white, British characters. Ultimately, Fielding relies on what Judith Mayne calls “white fantasies of race relations” (156) in the Bridget Jones novels. As a result, while Fielding makes it clear that both singletons and feminists in England are treated as though they are strange anomalies, regarded as even more aberrant are the non-white characters in the novels. This chapter will explore the ways in which otherness – racial and ethnic difference – is used by Fielding to complicate and threaten the relationships of the white, British characters in *The Edge of Reason*. The desire for distance between the white, British characters in the novel and those who represent the Other shows that whatever threatens the identity of the white and English must be eschewed.

### Darcy, Bridget, and the “Oriental”

Unlike Jane Austen’s Elizabeth Bennet, Fielding’s Bridget Jones is in constant need of rescuing by her Darcy. Certainly, Elizabeth is, it may be argued, “saved” by Darcy through his exertion to force Mr. Wickham to marry her youngest sister, thus salvaging the respectability of the Bennet family. However, Elizabeth, unlike Bridget, never finds herself in need of actual physical rescue, and what Austen makes clear to the reader is that while Elizabeth would have suffered if she had lost Darcy, she would certainly have been able to survive without him. Conversely, Bridget not only seems utterly lost with Mark Darcy, she seems incapable of living her life without needing rescuing from the impossible situations in which she finds herself in again and again, especially in *The Edge of Reason*. In this novel, Bridget’s life is not only threatened by Gary, a man she hires to renovate her flat, she also ends up spending several days locked up in a Thai prison.<sup>1</sup> Mark must play the role of the white knight in shining armour on both occasions and Bridget, of course, is eternally grateful. However, Bridget is not the only character in the novel who is in need of rescuing by Mark.

Encounters with non-white, “foreign” characters in the novel also usually result in Mark Darcy having to play the role of rescuer. His heroism and omnipotence not only prevent non-white characters from harming white characters; such qualities also allow him to rescue foreigners from themselves. Throughout the Bridget Jones novels, Fielding uses Mark’s legal work with political agents such as Amnesty International in order to set

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<sup>1</sup> While Bridget is able to bluff her way out of the Thai prison to some extent, it is Mark Darcy who flies to Dubai and assists in the capture of Jed, the man who frames Bridget for smuggling narcotics. Bridget’s fantasies, which involve “Mark Darcy/Colin Firth/Prince William bursting in saying: ‘In the name of God and England, release my future wife!’” clearly show whom she prefers performing the rescuing (257).

him up as a kind of superman – an intelligent, sophisticated hero who specializes in international human rights work, combating the policies of corrupt foreign governments. He is everything that Bridget (and those readers who identify with her) should desire in a man. Like his predecessor, Austen’s Fitzwilliam Darcy, Mark is not only strong, silent, and handsome. He also seems to embody the perfect mix of stoic conservatism and liberal empathy. And like Mr. Darcy, Mark Darcy’s enormous wealth and ownership of land is balanced by his kind and fair treatment of those who work for him.

Yet Fielding also makes critical changes to the character. While both Darcy’s are, to a degree, upper class “snobs,” Fielding’s Darcy is not merely a facsimile of Austen’s. One of the major differences between the two involves their homes. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen’s Darcy resides in Pemberley, an estate that combines both structural strength and natural beauty so perfectly, even Elizabeth Bennet must admire its aesthetic grace. Some time after she rejects Darcy’s proposal, she visits his estate and is suitably wistful:

It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills;—and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste... and at that moment she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something! (259)

On the contrary, Fielding does not allow Mark Darcy the pleasures of such a home. Although Mark Darcy's wealth seems comparable to Fitzwilliam Darcy's, Bridget's analysis of Mark's home in *The Edge of Reason* concludes that it is not at all pleasant and comfortable. In fact, it is cavernous and confusing: "Kitchen is the height of a double-decker bus and one of those stainless steel ones where you cannot tell which one is the fridge. Was a strange absence of things lying around and three pools of cold light in the middle of the floor" (48). This Darcy's home is entirely without warmth. While Fielding is clearly mocking the kinds of cold, modern, mechanical homes that are preferred by the wealthy to the cozy flats and homes of the middle-class, her language may also be read as nostalgic. Fielding's Darcy may have as much money as Austen's Darcy would have had, but his wealth cannot buy him the comforts of an aristocratic English estate.

In centuries past, large British estates were not only the homes of the wealthy, but also grand, social centres. Such estates were kept running because of the work performed by servants in the home and by agricultural workers, who cultivated the land they worked and lived on. Austen, for example, makes it clear that much of Pemberley's state of grandeur relies a great deal upon Mrs. Reynolds, who plays the role of respectable housekeeper and surrogate mother to Darcy. Not only does she run the house, she even gives Elizabeth and her aunt and uncle Gardiner a tour of the estate, boasting of her master's generosity and geniality all the while (259-264). Mrs. Reynolds is the model of the efficient, ingratiating domestic worker the wealthy British could rely upon to keep their estates ticking along pleasantly like clockwork. Fielding's Darcy, however, cannot rely on such help. This Darcy has not a host of servants working under him, but a Filipina migrant woman keeping his house clean. As the reader learns early on in *The Edge of*

*Reason*, a single woman immigrant from the Philippines simply cannot live up to the standards set by the ghosts of the white, well-bred, British servants of the past.

In a truly bizarre moment early in the novel, Bridget's relationship with Mark suffers serious problems after she visits his home for the first time. Bridget learns why Mark prefers not to share his home with her. Unlike her comfortable, modest flat, his home is sterile and unwelcoming. Bridget's visit becomes nightmarish rather than just uncomfortable after stepping into Mark's bedroom: "There, in the huge white bed, was a little oriental boy, stark naked, smiling weirdly, and holding out two wooden balls on a string, and a baby rabbit" (49). What is exceptionally strange about this encounter with otherness is Bridget's reaction to the situation. Instead of waiting for Mark to explain who the boy is (both Mark and Bridget learn later on that he is Mark's housekeeper's son), and why the boy is on his bed, she panics, assumes the worst, and then runs off. Her first inclination is to distance herself from this strange, foreign presence.

Most, if not all of the strangeness of this encounter relies upon the boy's difference. Certainly, his age accounts for much of Bridget's horror at finding him in Mark's bed. Pedophilia is not only a serious crime, but one of the most disturbing transgressions that can occur. The fact that a sexual encounter between Mark and the boy would be a homosexual one is another cause of anxiety, although Fielding does her best to show that Bridget is not homophobic; in her diary, Bridget writes, "I mean not that being gay is itself a flaw, but definitely is if are girlfriend of one who pretended was not" [*sic*] (53-54). The boy's most visible difference, his race, also makes up his otherness. We might ask ourselves whether finding a white boy in Mark's bed, for example, might have been as disturbing for Bridget as finding an "oriental" boy. The boy's placement in

the room certainly emphasizes his colour. It may be argued that Bridget's description of the boy's placement in the room makes it seem as though the child has almost stained Mark's pure, white bed with his colour. Taking into consideration the boy's collective otherness – especially his youth and his racial and ethnic difference – it is no wonder that his presence in the room is so threatening to Bridget. This alien figure has entered what was supposed to be her shared space with Mark before her and claimed it as his own. Bridget's anxiety at witnessing herself thus replaced is so acute that she must distance herself from the scene immediately.

Bridget's encounter with the nude, "oriental" boy leads to two things. First, it creates the initial major fault line in her relationship with Mark. Instead of trusting that Mark is as surprised to find the boy in his room as she is, Bridget assumes the worst: that Mark is a "gay bestial pervert" (53). In spite of the fact that he phones her later to explain that the boy is his Filipina housekeeper's violent, schizophrenic son, Bridget still has her doubts. Instead of believing Mark's story and expressing sympathy for the woman and her child, she can only focus on Mark's possible deception. Bridget's doubt is not consistent with her character, for Bridget is usually gullible, rather than distrusting of people. Therefore, not only is it difficult for the reader to believe that Mark is a "gay, bestial pervert," it is even more difficult to understand why Bridget does not believe Mark's story. As we learned in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, while Daniel lied to Bridget about their relationship, Mark was entirely trustworthy.

Bridget's concern might be explained if we remind ourselves of Mark's romantic past. Perhaps the presence of an "oriental" in Mark's bed reminds Bridget of Mark's first wife: a Japanese woman who, incidentally, is rarely mentioned in either of the books. It is

also possible that a certain fear Bridget shares with her father is being introduced into the text – that of being replaced sexually by a foreigner. In any case, Fielding has yet again chosen to create a character who is Other merely to introduce conflict into one of the heterosexual relationships in the novel. While it may be argued that the scene was intended to be comical, I would argue that there is, in fact, little potential for humour in this particular setup. Discomfort and confusion are more plausible reactions to this scene.

The second thing Fielding does with this encounter with the Other is to reassert Mark's philanthropic heroism. Mark was depicted as a modern day hero by the author in the first Bridget Jones novel not only through his legal defence of Elena Rossini, a caregiver who murdered her sexually abusive employer, but also through his "rescue" of Pam Jones from Julio, the Portuguese man with whom she had an affair. In *The Edge of Reason*, Mark is set up as a courageous hero yet again through his encounter with the Filipino boy he finds in his room. Fielding even goes so far as to liken Mark's encounter with the young boy to a battle. In the process of leaving the house, Bridget hears "shouting in the bedroom... in manner of American troops being massacred by Vietcong" (53). Surely, Fielding's use of simile in this encounter – referencing a recent, controversial war between white and Asian men – is not coincidental. The danger that Mark (representing the American troops) has placed himself in by attempting to assist the "oriental" boy (representing the Vietcong) underscores his bravery.

Ultimately, Fielding creates not one, but two foreign characters who must be rescued by the chivalrous Mark Darcy: both the "oriental" boy and his mother. Noeleen Heyzer lists the difficulties migrant women must face when looking for employment overseas.

An important concern of the overseas migration of domestic workers is the disruption of their family life. Overseas migration is as much an option for married women now as it is for unmarried females. More wives and mothers are leaving families behind in search of a decent income to ensure their families' survival. In many cases they are now the main breadwinners. A certain percentage of these women are separated or widowed and some of these are migrating to escape from broken marriages or violent/unfaithful husbands... For the domestic worker employed overseas, the problems that have arisen from a disrupted family life include marital infidelity, neglected children and prolonged separation of family members. These problems are compounded when both husband and wife migrate in search of jobs overseas, leaving young children in the care of relatives or even institutional homes. (xxviii – xxix)

If we consider the case of the Filipina domestic employee working for Mark Darcy, it is probable that she is unable to afford to pay for constant supervision of her son. While it is revealed later that the woman has many relatives living in the country, clearly they are also unable to supervise the child (likely because they are working for low-paying jobs themselves). With such problems facing migrant workers who are exported to rich countries to work for rich people, it is no wonder that the Filipino woman seems unable to juggle labour and childcare.

Bridget never considers whether Mark's employment of an Asian migrant woman for domestic work clashes with his humanist, philanthropic ethics (she is too busy

worrying about her potentially troubled love life). It may be that Mark hired the Filipina in order to ensure she received fair wages from an employer, namely himself.

Nonetheless, while a possible language barrier should be taken into account, it is still strange that Mark knows so little about the woman who works for him, such as the fact that she has children. In any case, when Mark does finally learn that she has a son, he is able somehow to resolve the situation and rescue both the housekeeper from her son (the boy tries to strangle his mother while Mark is on the phone with Bridget) and the boy from himself. This results in the first hero-worshipping scene of the novel.

When Bridget finally revisits Mark's home, after finally concluding that Mark is not involved sexually with the Filipino boy, she finds the housekeeper "cleaning the kitchen with fifteen members of her family who all seemed to want to worship Mark as a god" (61). This scene clearly sets Mark up as a white, patriarchal godhead that the Filipinos worship for "curing" a child in their community. Indeed, their gratitude might be exaggerated by Bridget, who uses hyperbolic language consistently in her writing. Nevertheless, what is revealed quite clearly is Fielding's inclination to portray Mark as the saviour of women/children/people of colour/foreigners/immigrants from themselves, rather like a British Indiana Jones. Ultimately, Fielding's choice to delineate Darcy as a knight/saviour/superhero relies not only upon gender-based notions of rescue, but upon white supremacist notions of rescue. Since none of those who are rescued by Mark (including Bridget) are able to rescue themselves, it seems that in the Bridget Jones novels, only an educated white man can rescue damsels in distress and non-white foreigners.

### **Madonna, Bridget, and Thai Prostitutes**

Bridget and Sharon's decision to visit Thailand for a two-week holiday results in several encounters with the Other. The language Fielding uses to describe Bridget's adventures in Thailand relies upon a discourse similar to the nightmare/dream dialectic of Africanist literature.<sup>2</sup> Thailand is a bundle of contradictions: beautiful and harrowing, clean and disgusting, both a safe haven for British tourists and, ultimately, a corrupt country in which law abiding, white citizens may have their freedom and their lives threatened. The nightmarish aspect of Thailand takes over the narrative when Bridget finds herself "wearing leg irons... in stinking Third World cell with eight Thai prostitutes and a potty in the corner" (246-247). Wondering if there is "still... beheading in Thailand," Bridget's only hope is to contact the British ambassador and demand that she, an "innocent Westerner," be released immediately. While Bridget is eventually removed from police custody and transported to the Women's Correctional institute in Bangkok, her situation improves very little. Bridget's main encounter with otherness in Thailand involves the Thai women with whom she shares a jail cell. This cross-cultural meeting causes anxiety for Bridget not only because they are foreigners, but because the women seem to be homosexual.

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<sup>2</sup> John Cullen Gruesser asserts that binary oppositions are one of the "major conventions of Africanist discourse," revealing "the West's ambivalence toward Africa." In this way, Africa is often presented as "either dreamlike or nightmarish or both; or the West is one thing – good, reasonable, bright, and so on – while Africa is its opposite – evil, irrational, dark" (3).

**11 p.m.** Aargh. Had just got off to sleep when was woken by something sucking my neck. It was the Lesbian Ring who had got me. They all started kissing and groping bits of me. I could not bribe them to stop because I had already given away my Wonderbra and no way was I going round with no knickers. I could not scream for the guard as that is the worst thing you can do here. So I had to swap my jeans for a filthy old sarong. Although obviously I felt violated, part of me could not help but feel it was nice just to be touched. Gaaah! Maybe I am a lesbian? No. Don't think so. (252)

Bridget's first real encounter with the Thai women prisoners, then, is fraught with anxiety because of their sexual desire for her. It is unclear whether the women are attracted to Bridget because she is a newcomer, or because she is white-skinned and European (it is also possible that both play a part in their interest in her). What does become clear, however, is that her possession of Western materials and knowledge allows her to keep safe from the clutches of the Thai lesbian seducers.

Bridget's Western-ness proves to be beneficial in more ways than one. Not only does she learn to barter her clothing for sexual protection from the unsavoury, foreign women, but she also comes to discover how valuable her knowledge of Western popular culture is to the women around her. In one of the funnier moments in the novel, Bridget learns that Phrao, the only woman she has been able to befriend, is a fan of Western pop music: "Phrao is my friend as she was transferred at [the] same time as me and I lent her my Wonderbra. Even though she has no breasts to put in it she seems to like it – she is

always walking around in it saying ‘Madonna’” (252). When Bridget begins to teach Phrao the lyrics of some of the singer’s songs, she becomes the most popular woman in the cell and is entreated to perform “Like a Virgin” for her cellmates.

It is difficult not to read this scene without noticing the irony of a room full of women, all of them in jail for sex trafficking, singing this particular Madonna song. Phrao’s desire for Western, female clothing such as the Wonderbra, an article of clothing used to boost one’s bust-line, is not unconnected to the desire to learn the lyrics to this particular Madonna song. “Like a Virgin” expresses the desire to play the dual role of both virgin and whore simultaneously. While the use of the word “like” makes it clear that the woman singing is not a virgin, she insists that her lover makes her feel “shiny and new” – like a new coin or car. Thus, woman herself becomes a commodity: merchandise to be bought and sold to pleasure the male. As Suzanna Danuta Walters points out, Madonna consistently “updates” herself; the poster girl for poststructuralism, both her image and her subjectivity are constantly in flux. The one thing that is consistent about this seemingly fluid identity is that it is always for sale. Madonna has become a “personification of commodity capitalism and its capacity to make human beings into objects for sale and circulation, and a player with codes and conventions” (Walters 2). Mary Beth Mills discusses the link between this kind of capitalist, material production and prostitution as it manifests itself among women in Thailand.

On the one hand, women are urged in a multitude of ways to be up-to-date: to enhance their personal beauty and attractiveness as well as material success

through the purchase of market commodities... On the other hand, they are expected to behave as dutiful, respectful daughters, both towards parents at home and in their actions as subordinate employees. Specially, they must beware the fine line between glamorous, sexualized images of modern femininity and the stigma and degradation of the “bad woman,” epitomized by the promiscuous sexuality of the prostitute. (152-153)

It is unsurprising, then, that Bridget, in spite of her initial desire to distance herself from the Thai women, bonds with them through their mutual adulation of Madonna. The kinds of demands made upon Thai women described by Mills are almost identical to the demands made upon Western women. Madonna’s candid sexuality, as materialist as it is, does challenge patriarchy. Indeed, these women may have been punished for selling their bodies but Bridget, as keeper of precious pop lyrics, allows them to access Madonna and, for a brief moment, revel in their daring to be “bad.”<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly enough, however, Fielding does not choose to align Bridget with the Thai women for very long. Bridget herself becomes idolized through her special knowledge: “Seemed to be considered some kind of goddess as knew words to *Immaculate Collection* all the way through” (253). Instead of emphasizing the similar plane Bridget and the Thai women stand upon, ultimately, Fielding chooses only to focus upon their difference. Thus, once again, Fielding gives us a crowd of unfortunate Asians

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Beth Mills emphasizes that “women who openly express sexual interest risk association with the immorality and shame of the promiscuous ‘bad woman’ (*phuu ying may dii*)” (102).

worshipping a white, British person. In the end, in spite of her rather helpless position as prisoner in a Thai jail, Bridget is still able to command the veneration of a room full of foreign women whose adoration of Madonna reveals not only how much Western pop culture capital is worth to those without access to it, but also how much those who possess it are to be revered.

### **Mrs. Jones, Bridget, and the African**

By now, the reader might safely assume that trips made to foreign lands by women in the Bridget Jones novels will usually result in catastrophe. Thus, when Pam calmly informs Bridget that she and Una Alconbury are heading to Kenya for a holiday, warning bells begin to ring for both Bridget and the reader. What worries Bridget, of course, is that her mother will find another Julio – another dark, violent, sexual man who will replace her father. Bridget's concerns are, of course, echoed by Colin. Nonetheless, when he hears of his wife's intended journey, he makes it clear that he had no plans for joining his wife in Africa: "I've no desire to sit getting skin cancer in some appalling enclave sipping pina colada and watching topless tribal dancers prostitute themselves to lascivious geriatrics in front of tomorrow's breakfast buffet" (28). And yet it is not Mr. Jones' disgust at how African tribespeople are put on display for tourists that prevents him from heading there himself. He informs Bridget that the real reason he will not go to Kenya is because Pam has not asked him to join her. "Your mother would argue that she is a person in her own right, that our money is her money, and she should be allowed to

freely explore the world and her own personality at a whim” (29).<sup>4</sup> Once again, the reader is encouraged to believe that Pam uses feminist arguments only in order to justify her selfish desires. Wellington’s subsequent appearance can only reinforce the idea that Pam Jones’s feminist whims always lead to trouble and anxiety for her husband.

Pam’s attempt to reassure her daughter is not quite successful, and it is not difficult to see why: “Honestly, darling! I don’t know what all the fuss was about! Julio was just a friend – a penfriend! We all need friends, darling. I mean even in the best of marriages one person just isn’t enough: friends of all ages, races, creeds and tribes” (7). Pam’s breezy denial of her sexual involvement with Julio, along with her refusal to promise not to make more “penfriends,” can only serve to heighten Bridget’s anxiety. Of course, as the reader is well aware, Pam is not as altruistic as she declares herself to be; after all, this is the same woman who, in the first *Bridget Jones* novel, refers to the Japanese as a “cruel race,” and who links Julio’s anger, jealousy, and drunkenness to his “Latin-ness.” In *The Edge of Reason*, little has changed. Within the first few pages of the novel, Pam not only assumes that a “surly” waitress who prefers not to make small talk must not be able to speak English (5), she also uses the term “darkest Africa” to describe the continent she will visit with Una (6).

The immediate connection Mrs. Jones makes between the continent of Africa and its dark-skinned inhabitants is part of what Toni Morrison, John Cullen Gruesser, and several other critics have called Africanist discourse. “Africanism” is

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<sup>4</sup> Fielding never bothers to explain how Pam pays for this trip. At the end of *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, the Jones’s are left “destitute.” Little more than a month passes before Bridget begins her new diary in *The Edge of Reason* and Pam’s trip to Africa seems to take place only about a month or two after this.

a term for the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people. As a trope, little restraint has been attached to its uses. As a disabling virus within literary discourse, Africanism has become, in the Eurocentric tradition that American education favours, both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability. (6-7)

Thus, as Morrison explains quite clearly, Africanism is “a discourse at odds with itself” (Gruesser 1). It is contradictory because it was, and continues to be formulated by those interested in emphasizing both Africa’s mysteries and its “knowability.” The supposed enigma of Africa and its peoples led to the creation of scientific, objective “evidence” of the inferiority of the African. As Richard A. Maynard points out,

...in order to rationalize their brutal exploitation, the Europeans began to develop pseudo-scientific explanations for their “innate” superiority over the conquered Black Africans. Thus, in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries a detailed philosophy of racism and European ethnocentrism was written to justify the conquest of Africa. (13)

The use of stereotypes to create a portrait of the “typical” African was an especially powerful tool of oppression. While it is rare to find contemporary Western texts that are blatantly racist, as Pam shows in her use of the term “darkest Africa,” Africanism is still functioning within Western language.

Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1990) focuses on how the presence of Africa/ns functions within American literature, especially “the way black people ignite critical moments of discovery or change or emphasis in literature not written by them” (viii). Using Morrison’s work on Africanist discourse, I will attempt to answer one question posed by Fielding that Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark* goes a long way to answer: “What does the inclusion of Africans... do to and for the work?” (Morrison 16) Specifically, I will question what the inclusion of a young, African character in *The Edge of Reason* has upon Fielding’s narrative. This section of the chapter will discuss how Fielding plays not in the dark but *with* the dark. Her knowledge of colonialism and its detrimental effects on people of colour is evident through Bridget’s concerns about how Wellington is treated. However, in spite of this awareness, Fielding only creates Wellington in order to make *use* of him. His difference is a powerful tool: he is the foreign figure who will first threaten and disrupt the white, heterosexual relationships in the novel, and then, suture these relationships using wise, African tribal counsel.

Pam’s trip to “darkest Africa” is not unfruitful. Along with orange tans and “Bo Derek braids,” Mrs. Jones and Una return to Heathrow with a rather lively souvenir: Wellington, a member of the Kikuyu community in Kenya. The women are clearly excited to have Wellington as their visitor, but they are especially delighted with what

they believe is his cultural authenticity. He certainly looks like what Pam calls a “proper tribesman:” “[Una] was gazing up delightedly at an enormous black youth with a loop of flesh hanging from each ear with a film canister in one of them and dressed in a bright blue checked cloak” (75). The women’s unabashed fascination with Wellington’s race and ethnicity (the women are far too enchanted with the fact that Wellington “lives in a dung hut”) alarms Bridget. Not only has her father’s worst nightmare come true, but she is certain that her mother’s actions are “neocolonialist.”<sup>5</sup> In spite of her mother’s protests that Wellington wanted to come to England, and that he is a “worldwide” traveller like herself, Bridget believes Pam’s desire to show Wellington off as a prized, exotic, new possession is unethical.

Bridget’s assertion that her mother’s treatment of Wellington is improper leads to an interesting rebuttal. A surprised Bridget finds herself accused of impropriety. When she tries to tell her mother that she “can’t parade Wellington around like some sort of exhibit,” Pam coolly turns the tables on her.

“Do you know, darling,” she said icily, “if there’s one thing I really don’t like it’s racism and bigotry.”

“What?”

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<sup>5</sup> The *OED* defines “neocolonialism” as “the use of economic, political, cultural, or other pressures to control or influence another country; *esp.* the retention of such influence over a developing country by a former colonial power.”

“Well. When the Robertsons were up from Amersham we took them to the Rotary and you didn’t say anything about, did you?”

I gawped, trying to untangle the web of warped logic.

“Always putting everyone in little boxes, aren’t you, with your ‘Smug Marrieds’ and ‘Singletons’ and coloured people and homos.” (94-95)

While Pam misunderstands Bridget’s meaning, it is intriguing that she is able to point out Bridget’s own tendency to label groups of people. In spite of Bridget’s worries about how Wellington should be spoken to and treated, the reader is well aware that Bridget’s habit of using hyperbole in her writing results in several occasions where she makes sweeping judgements about other countries and their inhabitants. In order to emphasize the incongruity of situations that arise in her daily life, Bridget all too often resorts to making crude, stereotypical remarks about non-Western countries and people. An example of this is when she compares a moment of awkward silence amongst Mark’s politically conservative colleagues to “being amongst a Papua New Guinea tribe, and treading on the chief’s dog and not knowing whether the murmur of conversation meant it didn’t matter or that they were discussing how to make your head into a frittata” (46).<sup>6</sup> Such

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<sup>6</sup> Another potent example of Bridget’s discriminatory attitude appears in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. In an undeniably Orientalist statement, Bridget, feeling sorry for herself, feels she should “emigrate to a vicious Muslim regime, where at least *all* the women are treated like social outcasts” (290). Bridget’s linking of Islam as a religion that oppresses “*all*” the women who practice it advocates the belief that the values of the West are ethically and morally superior to those of the East. The ways in which Western, Christian values

loaded, throwaway comments not only betray Bridget's own warped beliefs about non-Western cultures and people, they are also examples of how Fielding consistently relies upon stereotypical notions of "foreign" cultures in order to produce laughter. Thus, while Pam Jones is certainly guilty of exploiting Wellington's exotic otherness, we cannot ignore Bridget's (and perhaps Fielding's) own prejudices.

What is most interesting about Wellington's introduction to Bridget in the novel is his silence. While Bridget and her mother first argue at Heathrow over whether Pam's actions are neocolonialist, Wellington remains offstage. The reader is never told whether he hears their discussion, whether he reacts to it if he does, or whether he even speaks at all. In fact, all we know about him is the way he looks. Since it becomes evident later on in the novel that Wellington's command of the English language is quite good, it is strange that we do not hear him speak. He does not even seem to put forth a greeting in his native tongue. It is actually Pam who greets Bridget and Mark in Swahili. Like Julio in Fielding's first novel, and the Filipina domestic worker and her son in the second, it seems that Wellington is lacking a voice. When Wellington finally does speak, however, he is shown to be, unlike Julio, both intelligent and humorous. In fact, while Bridget remains anxious about the way Wellington is treated by her mother, Wellington seems to care little about the way he is revered by her and Una.

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continue to be deemed superior to those of the Oriental, Islamic East, and how such beliefs were used to legitimate colonialist, imperialist ventures, are discussed in Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (1979).

Wellington, far from being a tragic victim of cultural imperialism, looked coolly at home in one of Dad's 1950s suits as if he might have been one of the waiters from the Met Bar on his night off, responding with dignified graciousness while Mum and Una twittered around him like groupies. (103)

Fielding seems to be working against the grain here. Instead of giving us a Wellington who is victimized by Africanism, we have instead a Wellington who is not only well aware of his role as an exoticized Other, but who uses it to his advantage.

While Wellington often warns Mrs. Jones and Una against "cultural pollution" – the attempt to adopt one culture's rituals/practices/productions into another – Fielding makes it clear that the young African is not above disregarding his own advice. When Pam's decides to don the role of the elder of her tribe in order to reunite Bridget and Mark, Wellington chastises her misconduct: "Pamela. Your culture has evolved over many centuries. When outside influence appears you must not allow it to infect and dilute your birthright. As we discussed, worldwide travel brings a responsibility to observe, not to destroy" (117-118). In typical Fielding fashion, Wellington's beliefs about the evils of cultural pollution are undermined immediately, when Bridget wonders "how Wellington's brand-new CD Walkman fitted into all this" (118). Whether Wellington's possession of a CD player may be considered an example of cultural pollution is arguable, but clearly Bridget questions his sincerity. Perhaps this is because, for the first time in either of the novels, a reversal of cross-cultural relations occurs: Wellington, the Other, is practically worshipped by Una and Pam Jones. Thus, while Pam's "neo-

colonialist” actions present a clear example of what Morrison calls “the reckless, unabated power of a white woman gathering identity unto herself from the wholly available and serviceable lives of Africanist others” (25), Fielding intends the reader to see that it is not Pam who takes advantage of Wellington, but Wellington who uses Pam.

Wellington proves to be a savvy business man when he convinces the Rotary Club to donate enough money to set up a small business in Kenya. Creating a presentation for the Rotary that combines both commercial and humanitarian interests, Wellington relies on the club members’ awe of his otherness in order to raise four hundred pounds. Mrs. Jones explains:

...he came up with this marvellous scheme which is right up the Rotary’s street. He said if they donated money he’d not only give the Kettering branch a ten percent share in the profits, but if they’d give half of that to his village school he’d match it with another five percent of his profits. Charity and small business – isn’t that clever!... He did a lovely slide show with Nat King Cole’s “Nature Boy” underneath it. And at the end he said “Hakuna Matata!” and we’ve adopted it as our motto. (180)

While Wellington’s intentions seem disinterested enough, it is strange that he decides to leave as soon as he has collected funding from the Rotary. It is unclear in the novel whether the reader should be suspicious of Wellington’s objectives or trust that he had no

ulterior motive in coming to England with Pam. We cannot forget, of course, that the first foreign man she brought back from holiday also presented her friends and family with a seemingly legitimate business plan. While Julio is clearly made out to be a criminal by Fielding in the novel, Wellington's character remains rather ambiguous; either he is an intelligent, humanitarian businessman (a break from the usual stereotypical presentations of African and black men) or a sly foreigner who is able to dupe a group of white, British, upper/middle-class persons into donating a large sum of money under false pretences. Consequently, by the end of the Jones's adventures with the African, Fielding reverts to instilling her African with silence. Since we never hear from him again, we are left to reach our own conclusions about the Kikuyu man from Kenya.

### **Mr. Jones, Bridget, and the African**

While Wellington physically leaves England for his native home after meeting with the Rotary Club, the effects of his presence at the Jones home are felt long after he has gone. Even though the young man is less than half Pam's age, and there is no indication that they are involved romantically, Colin cannot help but see Wellington as another Julio – another foreign, sexual threat. In fact, Colin is so threatened sexually by Wellington's potential to replace him that he turns to alcohol to soothe his fears. Thus, while Pam's encounters with the Other prove to be pleasurable, for her husband, they can only cause angst and even illness.

Bridget's encounters with Wellington, however, have a different result. As we have seen, she is not only worried that her mother will become involved with Wellington. She is also concerned that Pam's "neocolonialist" behaviour will alienate and offend him.

Wellington's presence may threaten to dissolve Mr. and Mrs. Jones's relationship, but he plays a different role for Bridget – that of a relationship guru. His sympathy for her distress, his quiet strength, and his ability to dole out wise, “tribal” wisdom allow Bridget to question her failing relationship with Mark and rethink what she has been persuaded by her friends to believe about him. The role Fielding creates for Wellington also prevents him from being a potential love interest for Bridget.<sup>7</sup> While he is obviously a threatening sexual presence to Colin Jones, Wellington's role is not to seduce Bridget away from Mark, but to provide solid, sensible relationship counselling. Thus, while Fielding flirts once again with miscegenation through Pam's relationship with Wellington, she ensures her reader that Bridget will not do the same. After all, Pam only brings home foreigners because she obeys selfish, childish whims. Bridget encounters the Other time and time again, whether it be in the form of an “oriental boy,” a Thai lesbian prostitute, or an “enormous” African tribesman. Yet, in the end, as the protagonist of the novel, Bridget must always distance herself from the Other. Any possibility of forming a relationship with the Other is thwarted because Fielding has determined that in spite of everything, Bridget will end up with Mark Darcy at the end of the novel.

Ultimately, Wellington's Africanist persona serves as what Morrison calls “surrogate and enabler” (51) – he acts as a replacement parent/friend/lover for Bridget

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<sup>7</sup> See Tania Modleski's analysis of the 1988 film *Gorillas in the Mist*, which includes a similar critique of the role played by a black character in the film named Sembagare: “Mostly what Sembagare cares about is that the heroine's sexual and romantic needs be fulfilled... By attributing a kind of maternal concern to the black male as well as granting him a degree of moral authority, the film can appear to be, in liberal fashion, empowering the character while at the same time relieving the audiences' anxieties about the proximity of white womanhood and black manhood” (123).

when she needs advice concerning her relationship with Mark. When Bridget begins to doubt Mark's fidelity, it is Wellington who enables Bridget to question the true nature of her feelings for Mark. It is he who provides her with quiet support. When Bridget sees Mark with another woman, for example, it is Wellington who expresses sympathy. "The only silent people were me and Wellington, who took my hand and held it, very still and strong, without saying a word" (105). While Wellington continues to insist that cultural pollution be avoided at all costs, a Kikuyu tribal tradition that is adopted by Pam leads to a reconciliation between Bridget and Mark. In a conversation about unmarried women in Britain, we learn that marrying off older, single women is "the responsibility of the elders of [Wellington's] tribe" (103). Soon afterward, Pam takes it upon herself to play the elder of the Jones tribe and confront Mark's parents about Bridget's relationship with their son. While Wellington warns Pam against this kind of behaviour, at the end of the novel, Bridget believes that the advice given by tribal elders, specifically, Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Darcy, enabled her to resolve her problems with Mark.

Although Wellington supports Bridget through his advice that Pam avoid confronting Mark's parents in a pseudo tribal meeting, ultimately, Pam is proven once more to know best how to catch and keep a man. As a result, Wellington's warnings about the dangers of cultural pollution, again, seem rather hollow. Perhaps Fielding's message here is that preserving separate cultures must not take precedence over exchanging knowledge between cultures and respecting difference. Still, it is difficult to read the entire novel in this manner. As this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, the cross-cultural meetings in *The Edge of Reason* prove that distance from otherness almost always preferred to closeness and exchange.

This chapter has not been written in order to prove that Fielding is a racist or a bigot. It merely explores the ways in which one particular popular, white writer has used people of colour in her novels for narrative convenience. After cross-cultural encounters in the novel have provoked a few laughs in the reader and disrupted the sanctity of white, heterosexual relationships, they are abandoned by both Fielding and Bridget, never to be mentioned again. While Wellington's storyline is certainly far more substantial than the Thai women's or the Filipino boy's, Wellington is still never really developed into a round character. He is merely a black man who is used by Fielding "to define the goals and enhance the qualities of white characters" in the novel (Morrison 52-53). In the end, Wellington's character is not so different from the nude, mad Filipino boy or the pop-culture-savvy Thai prostitutes. Just like the other foreign figures in the novel, he is present in the novel because he is Other. Racial and ethnic differences are what allow those who interact with foreigners to reassert their own white, Western identities and re-examine the meaning of their lives. Mark and Bridget, especially, must overcome these encounters with otherness. Their ability to "survive" meeting the Other only seems to strengthen their relationship in the end. While encounters with the Other threaten their relationship, the laws of chick lit that Fielding abides by demand that the couple they will reunite happily by the end of the novel, no matter what, or *who*, they must face.

While those working in the realm of popular culture, whether it be popular film, television, or literature, continue to create characters representing otherness who serve only to threaten, destabilize, and then reassert whiteness, cultural critics must continue to question these representations of difference. What past critics have failed to do is to emphasize how Bridget's identity as a white, middle-class, British woman has been used

to emphasize her universality, her very “woman-ness.” Like the prostitutes she interacts with in Thailand, indeed, Bridget is oppressed because of her sex. The way Fielding illustrates how her sexual difference – the fact that she is not a man – is used to subjugate her is what has made Bridget a character with whom countless women readers have identified. However, in their quest to recognize themselves in Bridget, such readers must also contend with her privilege as a white, British person: an identity that always seems to demand distance from difference.

## CHAPTER THREE

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### *From Page to Screen: Making it Mainstream*

This last chapter will discuss the disappearance of feminism, feminist language, and otherness in the film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* by illustrating how the plot and characters from Fielding's original work were changed to create a conservative adaptation. My own introduction to Bridget Jones was not through Fielding's fiction but through the extremely popular film adaptation of her *Bridget Jones's Diary*, directed by Sharon Maguire in 1999. I enjoyed both the humour and romance in the film, along with the spirited performances by lead actors Renee Zellweger, Colin Firth, and Hugh Grant. However, when I finally read the novel itself, I was struck (as are most readers of novels that are adapted into films) by the difference between the book and its adaptation.

Thus far, I have illustrated how Fielding's Bridget Jones novels argue against the necessity of feminist thought and action to improve the condition of human life. The ways in which the author relies on racial and ethnic stereotypes to induce laughter have also been discussed. This chapter will show how feminism and otherness are virtually erased in the film adaptation, making it even more "mainstream" than Fielding's novel and thus, helping to ensure the adaptation's profitability.

As I began to look critically at the book through a feminist lens, I could not help but notice that feminist language and action, which appear so often in the first Bridget Jones novel, disappear in the film. There are no feminist diatribes in the film, and Bridget never seems to struggle with the problem of making the personal political through

feminism. In her chapter on sisterhood in *Feminism without Illusions* (1991), Elizabeth Fox-Genovese reviews what the well-known feminist motto “the personal is political” actually signifies.

Feminism has led the way in demystifying personal relations, forcefully insisting that women’s personal experience be recognized as political to its core. Many feminists have moved from naming their personal experience as political to naming established political norms and practices as personal – as the embodiment of men’s perspectives and values – and, accordingly, as inappropriate models either for feminist politics or for a desirable social order. (11)

The Bridget Jones created by Fielding is not a feminist. As I demonstrated throughout the first chapter, in Fielding’s novel, Bridget usually embraces feminist thought only when she is drunk and angry. And yet, Bridget is still *aware* of feminist language, and she does participate in feminist rant sessions with her friends. While these sessions are not always entirely coherent, in her reader’s guide to Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, Imelda Whelehan points out that the women do “rightly identify that, even in the twentieth century, there is a greater stigma attached to being female and single after a certain age: spinsters have always been cast in a less attractive light than bachelors” (2002, 27). Thus, the women are able to link their personal experiences with the political in this instance by recognizing how spinsters are regarded negatively for being unmarried (often because

they “give up” motherhood for career success), while bachelors are “traditionally seen as carefree, worldly wise and, most importantly, *consciously choosing* to be alone” (27).

Therefore, while Bridget rejects feminist language and action in the novel whenever she believes they will thwart her chance of finding a man to love her, she never stops struggling with popular and conflicting notions of feminism and femininity. As Whelehan points out:

...*Bridget Jones* became a bestseller because women recognized within its irony their own experiences of popular culture, and especially the tensions between the lure of feminist politics and the fear of losing one’s femininity. This perception of the incompatibility of feminism with having a meaningful heterosexual relationship has unfortunately been perpetuated beyond reason to its current status as self-evident “truth.” (2000, 151)

While Fielding’s Bridget does not adhere to feminist principles, this Bridget still struggles to understand what feminism is and what it means to those who use its language and theories. In the film, the tension in the novel between feminism and femininity that Whelehan describes is missing. The film presents to us a Bridget who merely accepts the degrading, sexist treatment she experiences without ever really challenging it. This alternative Bridget seems utterly unaware of the advent of feminism.

The film also presents to us a new and colourless Sharon. Sharon, the woman in the novel who is a self-identified and angry feminist, in the film becomes simply “Shazzer: journalist; likes to say ‘fuck’ – a lot.”<sup>1</sup> Changes are also made to the character of Pam Jones. In the adaptation, Pam no longer uses feminist language confidently to express dissatisfaction with her life, and her story ends even more conservatively than in the novel. Thus, the film offers its audience “lite” versions of the women Fielding created in her novel: a Bridget without much spunk, a Sharon without righteous feminist anger, and a Pam Jones who never really leaves home.

### **Romancing Bridget Jones**

Time constraints must always be taken into consideration when moving a story from page to screen (romantic comedies such as *Bridget Jones’s Diary* usually run for no longer than 90 minutes). Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that the adaptation uses only the major romantic plots from the story, with Bridget’s relationship with Mark Darcy and Daniel Cleaver headlining the show and with Mrs. Jones’s story simmering away on the back burner.<sup>2</sup> The filmmakers also over-emphasised the love triangle aspects of the plot

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<sup>1</sup> This and all other excerpts from the film adaptation of *Bridget Jones’s Diary* were copied verbatim from the film.

<sup>2</sup> Almost all of the storylines in Fielding’s novel that do not involve Bridget, Mark, and Daniel are missing in the adaptation. In her commentary on the film, found in the *Bridget Jones’s Diary* DVD, director Sharon Maguire reveals that “there were a lot more of [Bridget’s] friends in the book and in the original screenplay but some of that had to get cut so we could focus on the main plot between Bridget and Daniel... and Darcy... you make a lot of cuts for economy’s sake and because I don’t think a romantic comedy really should be any longer than an hour and a half, which this one [isn’t].”

far more than Fielding did, making it seem like the biggest dilemma the Jones women have to face in their lives is choosing between two available men (Bridget between Mark and Daniel, and Pam between Colin and Julian.) For example, in the film, it is made to seem as though Bridget cannot go anywhere without running into the increasingly intriguing Mark Darcy, even while she is dating Daniel Cleaver. In Fielding's novel, however, after the uncomfortable conversation Bridget shares with Mark at the New Year's Day party (16), she does not run into him again for more than three months (98). In fact, in the novel, Bridget's relationship with Mark is not formed until nearly a year after she is introduced to him, months after she broken up with Daniel. In the adaptation, however, Bridget must not only face the men together often, they even fight over her while she stands by passively awaiting the outcome.

David R. Shumway's essay on the structure of screwball romantic comedies<sup>3</sup> provides a useful analysis of why the romantic triangle plotline is prevalent in such films.

Narrative succession occurs because the excluded third subject [of the love triangle] always seeks to be included in the pair. When he or she is included, this will necessarily displace someone else... The viewer or reader of a romance is typically sutured into the position of exclusion; like the odd person out in the

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<sup>3</sup> The *OED* defines the screwball comedy as "a kind of fast-moving, irreverent comedy film produced in the U.S. in the 1930s, of which eccentric characters were the chief feature." While the adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* was produced more than fifty years after the heyday of the screwball comedy, its romantic triangle structure, comedic themes, and "eccentric characters" certainly make it a contemporary example of the genre.

narrative triangle, the viewer experiences a lack, and the resulting desire motivates and structures his or her attention... When the right man or woman is found and returns one's love, the subject will be satisfied, will lack no more. (399-400)

Thus, in order to keep the viewer "hooked," the structure of the screwball comedy sustains the love triangle plot as long as possible to suspend both the viewer's and the excluded subject's desire.

The most marketed posters advertising both the first and second film adaptations of Fielding's *Bridget Jones* novels set up the characters involved in the main love triangle.<sup>4</sup> Each presents Bridget plopped in between Mark and Daniel. The poster for *Bridget Jones's Diary*, for example, shows a Bridget who confidently gazes back at her audience with pen in hand and diary open, ready to record. In spite of her being confined on either side by the men (Daniel gazing at us and Mark craning his neck to get a peek at what Bridget has written), the poster encourages us to believe that it is Bridget who holds the pen and, therefore, she who controls the way her story gets told. However, as Shumway points out, the control a heroine has in a screwball comedy is restricted: "But even if women in screwball comedy are free subjects capable of choice, their choices are limited to the option of whether to marry one man or the other" (402-403). Thus, while the film adaptation's poster seems to promise viewers that they will be witness to a heroine who will, literally, write her own story, as this chapter will reveal, this is certainly not the case.

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<sup>4</sup> Please see Figures 1 and 2 in the appendix.

The film adaptation begins in a similar way to Fielding's novel: Bridget attends a New Year's Day party thrown by her mother and, through voiceover narration, gripes about her life as a single woman. What is unexpected is the way her introduction to Mark Darcy plays out. In the novel, this meeting is awkward for both parties. Bridget and Mark attempt to make conversation but are well aware that they are being set up and spied upon by Bridget's mom and Una Alconbury. After a few garbled attempts to stimulate conversation by the pair, Mark excuses himself rather abruptly and leaves Bridget by herself, worrying the other guests at the party will assume that she "repulses men" (15).

The scene showing Mark and Bridget's first meeting in the film is drastically different. While Bridget bravely attempts to muster up conversation, Mark looks haughty and bored. She continues to speak, in spite of Mark's inattention, until he walks off rudely and leaves Bridget standing by herself. While the main thrust of the scene remains the same as it was in the novel (the two meet, are unable to connect, and Mark walks off), in the film, Mark is firmly in control of the situation, with Bridget floundering desperately to gain and keep his interest.<sup>5</sup> In the novel, Mark tries just as hard as Bridget to make small talk and when he walks off, it seems as though he is overwhelmed by Bridget rather than repulsed by her.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mark's actions in this scene, including the way he averts his gaze from Bridget, display the same desire for control that is evident in the poster for the film, where he stares at Bridget's diary in order to literally "read" her, attempting to gain control of the narrative she seems to have determined for him.

<sup>6</sup> Near the end of the novel, we learn that Mark was, indeed, intimidated by Bridget. He reveals that Una Alconbury told him Bridget was "a literary whiz-woman, completely obsessed by books," as well as "a radical feminist" with "an incredibly glamorous life... with millions of men" asking her out (236).

In the novel, while Bridget is embarrassed by what she believes is Mark's dismissal of her, she wins back her self-respect. When Bridget is making rounds with appetizers later on, Una insists that Mark ask for Bridget's phone number. Bridget is discomfited, but able to take control of the situation.

“Can't I tempt you with a gherkin?” I said, to show I had a genuine reason for coming over, which was quite definitely gherkin-based rather than phone-number-related.

“Thank you, no,” he said, looking at me with some alarm.

“Sure? Stuffed olive?” I pressed on.

“No, really.”

“Silverskin onion?” I encouraged. “Beetroot cube?”

“Thank you,” he said desperately, taking an olive.

“Hope you enjoy it,” I said triumphantly. (16)

Bridget is never able to trump Mark in such a subtle manner in the film. In the exchange shown above in the novel, both she and Mark know that she has “triumphed” through her ability to force him to accept the finger food. She uses her mother's brand of “feminine” hostess skills cleverly to undermine the upper hand Mark seemed to gain by dismissing her. In the film, however, the dynamics of this scene are reversed. It is Mark who “triumphs” over Bridget. In fact, in the film, Bridget is not only humiliated by Mark

when he walks off in the middle of their chat, a little later she overhears him insulting her cruelly in front of his mother: “Mother, I do not need a blind date. Particularly not with some verbally incontinent spinster who smokes like a chimney, drinks like a fish, and dresses like her mother.” After listening to this devastating assessment, Bridget, with a brave smile, walks past Mark and his mother, who are aware that she has heard them.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly, the filmmakers have altered the nature of the scenes where Bridget and Mark first meet in order to mimic Elizabeth Bennett’s introduction to Fitzwilliam Darcy in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. When Mr. Bingley suggests that Darcy ask Elizabeth to dance at a ball, Darcy snidely remarks that “she is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men” (51). Playing on the fact that Colin Firth, who played Mr. Darcy in the popular 1995 BBC television presentation of the famous novel, is now playing another Mr. Darcy (whose character, Fielding says, was inspired by the original Austenian Darcy), the filmmakers likely believed it would be humorous to have Firth reprise the role (and the extreme haughtiness) that made him famous.<sup>8</sup> However, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth may be annoyed by Darcy’s rejection of her but she is not devastated by it. In fact, she spiritedly mocks Darcy’s snobbish behaviour later on to amuse her friends (51). Elizabeth, using the lively humour that is always at her

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<sup>7</sup> Shumway points out that “rather than speaking seductively, the males in screwball comedies typically scold, lecture, admonish, or preach. In the codes of screwball comedy, what this tells us is that the man cares, but it also mimics rational persuasion, something that corresponds to the presumption that the woman must choose her mate” (404).

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Davies, the writer of the 1995 BBC version of *Pride and Prejudice*, was one of the screenwriters for the adaptation of *Bridget Jones’s Diary*.

disposal, is able to laugh it off. In the film, Bridget is not able to do this. Unlike Elizabeth, who battled anyone who concocted judgements about her she believed were false, Bridget just gives in: “I realized that unless something changed soon, I was going to live a life where my major relationship was with a bottle of wine. And I’d finally die, fat and alone, and be found three weeks later, half-eaten by wild dogs. Or I was about to turn into Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*.”<sup>9</sup>

Bridget’s fear of imitating the murderous actions of perhaps the most notorious onscreen femme fatale in 1980s Hollywood cinema is not unfounded. According to Susan Faludi, *Fatal Attraction* (1987) was a film that was fashioned in accordance with the anti-feminist backlash.

The backlash shaped much of Hollywood’s portrayal of women in the ’80s. In typical themes, women were set against women; women’s anger at their social circumstances were depoliticized and displayed as personal depression instead; and women’s lives were framed as morality tales in which the “good mother” wins and the independent woman gets punished. And Hollywood restated and reinforced the backlash thesis: American women were unhappy because they were too free; their liberation had denied them marriage and motherhood. (113)

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<sup>9</sup> In her commentary on the film, director Sharon Maguire claims that “this is what a thirty-something’s life is like... believe me.”

In his humiliating assessment of Bridget's life in the film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Mark associates her "liberation" (her "verbal incontinency," her chain smoking and her drinking) with her spinsterhood status. By showing Bridget watching *Fatal Attraction* right after showing her take in Mark's mean words, in the adaptation, singleton life is not only linked to alcoholism, loneliness, and depression, but taking a cue from *Fatal Attraction*, even murder and death. As though steeling herself for what may happen to her in the future, we watch Bridget wince through the climatic scene in *Fatal Attraction* where Glenn Close's character, the "bad woman" Alex, is shot to death in a bathtub by Anne Archer's character, the "good woman/mother" Beth. It is no wonder Bridget is so affected by Mark's words. His humiliating assessment of her life only confirms what powerful backlash images predict for single women: that spinsterhood is not only depressing, but potentially fatal.

This leads to a scene that sets the tone for the rest of the film. As the title, cast, and crew of the film are put up on the screen, we see a drunk, pyjama-clad Bridget moaning around her apartment, checking her answering machine (it coldly informs her she has no messages) and singing along spiritedly with the soundtrack of the film, which blares out Jamie O'Neal's "All by Myself." Mark's dismissal of Bridget not only causes Bridget to be utterly miserable, but also leads to her decision to change the way she lives her life. Rather than creating resolutions to change her life on her own terms as she does in the novel (the very first chapter in Fielding's novel is made up of a list of Bridget's

New Year's resolutions), in the film, Bridget's resolutions are made in order to prevent people like Mark from dismissing her as just a sad, single woman.<sup>10</sup>

After this scene, Bridget decides to stop wallowing in self-pity. She concludes that she "will find [a] nice, sensible boyfriend to go out with and not continue to form romantic attachments to any of the following: alcoholics, workaholics, commitment-phobics, peeping toms, megalomaniacs, emotional fuckwits, or perverts." This list echoes the one found in the "New Year's Resolutions" chapter in Fielding's novel. However, the original list also states that she will not fall for misogynists and chauvinists. It is strange that these particular terms, linked to the sexist and woman-hating thinking and behaviour of many individuals, are not included in the list Bridget rattles off in the film. Surely, misogynists and chauvinists are just as undesirable as commitment-phobics and peeping toms! However, since the words "misogynist"<sup>11</sup> and "chauvinist"<sup>12</sup> are terms that are often linked to feminism and feminist thought (both are concerned with sexism), they are "loaded" words. By failing to include these words in the list, the filmmakers may be playing it safe by removing any remnant of feminist thought.

The irony is, of course, that Bridget does not find herself a "nice, sensible boyfriend." In fact, in both the novel and the film, she becomes involved with Daniel Cleaver quite quickly, in spite of the fact that they work together. In the novel, the nature of their courtship is tumultuous, to say the least. A pattern develops. The pair flirt with

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<sup>10</sup> Director Sharon Maguire avows that her "vision for *Bridget Jones* was always that the book was really about loneliness but dressed up as a comic anecdote."

<sup>11</sup> The *OED* defines "misogynist" as "a person who hates, dislikes, or is prejudiced against women."

<sup>12</sup> The *OED* defines "male chauvinist" as "a man who holds the belief that men are superior to women" and "a man who is prejudiced against or inconsiderate of women."

each other and Daniel says he will call. Then, he either fails to call, or plans a date and then fails to show up. At one point, he even makes a date and then cancels it right after Bridget lets her guard down and agrees to meet with him. After much see-sawing, they finally do go out on a date. Bridget nearly has sex with him, but stops herself when she senses that he is merely using her for sex.

As he started to undo the zip he whispered, “This is just a bit of fun, ok? I don’t think we should start getting involved.” Then, caveat in place, he carried on with the zip. Had it not been for Sharon and the fuckwittage and the fact I’d just drunk the best part of a bottle of wine, I think I would have sunk powerless into his arms. As it was, I leapt to my feet, pulling up my skirt.

“That is just such crap,” I slurred. “How dare you be so fraudulently flirtatious, cowardly and dysfunctional? I am not interested in emotional fuckwittage. Goodbye.”

It was great. You should have seen his face. But now I am home I am sunk into gloom. I may have been right, but my reward, I know, will be to end up all alone, half-eaten by an Alsatian. (33)

Bridget’s state of drunkenness causes her to act out in feminist ways and refuse to give Daniel access to her body. Instead of being “powerless,” she is powerful in her ability to walk away from someone she knows will usurp her control in any kind of relationship

(including one based solely on sex). She may regret her actions later, but only because she believes they will drive Daniel away, not because she was wrong to confront his callous intentions.

The filmmakers, on the other hand, remove all obstacles that are placed between Bridget and Daniel in Fielding's novel and thus, also erase Bridget's more powerful acts of resistance. Bridget's relationship with Daniel evolves in a much more straightforward manner in the film. After the audience is privy to some office flirtation, Daniel approaches a vulnerable Bridget where she has just embarrassed herself at a book launch, and after a late dinner, she does, indeed, sink "powerless into his arms." Bridget is shown walking to work the next morning with a grin on her face as a duet called "Love" croons away on the soundtrack.

In the novel, when Bridget finally sleeps with Daniel, things do not sail so smoothly. Immediately after they have had sex, Daniel creates an excuse to depart, and leaves her in a tizzy, wondering about the status of their relationship. Once again, she is left alone and Daniel has taken control of the reigns. Like a horse with blinders on, Bridget does not know where she is being led. Utterly despondent, she not only identifies the sexism present within patriarchal relationships based on control, she articulates the powerlessness women feel in such relationships. "How can it be that the situation between the sexes after a first night remains so agonizingly imbalanced?" she asks (60). The Bridget in Fielding's novel may not identify herself as a feminist and discard feminist notions whenever she feels they threaten her chance of finding a boyfriend, but at least she detects sexism and asks important questions about why women are treated as

they are. In the film, Bridget merely accepts whatever she is offered. After she and Daniel have been seeing each other for a few days, she questions him about their relationship:

BJ: ...do you think people will notice?

DC: Notice what?

BJ: Us. Working together, sleeping together.

DC: Hang on a minute, Jones. Just slow down. It started on Tuesday and now it's Thursday. It's not exactly, um, a long-term relationship, is it?

BJ: [Kissing Daniel] You're... very... bad.

Gone are the warning signals and Sharon's reminders about being aware of "fuckwittage" and "game-playing." This Bridget is ready to put up with Daniel's vague meanderings about their relationship without a fight.

One could argue that there are feminist moments in the film. In both the novel and its adaptation, Bridget's relationship with Daniel ends when she discovers that Daniel has been cheating on her with a younger, American woman. Bridget's "power" moments in the film occur when she learns of Daniel's infidelity and hits rock bottom. As Chaka Khan's "I'm Every Woman" is pumped onto the soundtrack, we are witness to another Bridget makeover, this one looking more positive than the one inspired by Mark's mean-spirited words. Bridget throws away her alcohol, her cigarettes, and her collection of getting-and-keeping-a-man self-help books. We watch her work out at a gym, search for

new employment, and restock her shelves with books such as *Women who Love Men Are Mad*. Nonetheless, Bridget's decision at this moment in the film to try to reform her life is still based upon judgements made of her by a potential suitor. The words she uses to describe her reformation are also telling:

At times like this, continuing with one's life seems... impossible. And eating the entire contents of one's fridge seems... inevitable. I have two choices: to give up and accept permanent state of spinsterhood and eventual eating by dogs – or not. And this time, I choose *not*. I will not be defeated by a bad man and an American stick insect.

According to Bridget, then, once again, spinsterhood – if permanent – is deadly.<sup>13</sup> While the alternative to remaining a single woman goes unnamed, whatever it is, it is certainly preferable to being alone. There are those who will argue that such claims are constantly made by Bridget in Fielding's novel. Indeed, they are. My point here is that Bridget's *only powerful moments in the film* continue to be grounded in backlash notions about unhappy and incapable single women.

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<sup>13</sup> I am reminded here of a scene in the 1946 Capra classic, *It's a Wonderful Life*, when George Bailey must confront his worst fear: that had he never been born, his wife Mary would have become a spinster and, even more horrifying, a librarian!

One scene in the film that is particularly triumphant for our heroine occurs when she informs Daniel that she is not only leaving the publishing house, but starting a new career in television working as a reporter for *Sit-Up Britain*, a tacky breakfast show that covers human interest stories and celebrity gossip. When Daniel tries to persuade her to stay at the publishing house, telling her that there are “lots of prospects for a person who, you know, perhaps for personal reasons has been slightly overlooked professionally,” Bridget saucily replies that she’d “rather have a job wiping Saddam Hussein’s ass” than work anywhere near him. Right on cue, Aretha Franklin’s “Respect” pops onto the soundtrack and we watch Bridget walk out of the office with a proud grin on her face. Maguire, director of the film, makes an interesting observation about this scene in her commentary: “It’s kind of more of a wish-fulfillment scene. This is what we wish we could do when we want to leave our jobs, but usually we just shuffle out the door quietly. I think that’s what movies are for: so you can have scenes which are about what you wish you said or what you wish you could do.” Thus, in spite of the improbability of such a scene occurring in real life, the audience is invited to cheer along with Bridget when she is able to find a new job and give Daniel his comeuppance. However, the way Bridget attains her new career undermines her triumph.

In an earlier scene, when Bridget is interviewed by Richard Finch for the position at *Sit-Up Britain*, she honestly informs him that “I’ve got to leave my current job because I’ve shagged my boss.” Instead of being appalled by her lax work ethics, Richard’s eyes gleam. “Fair enough”, he tells her, “start Monday... And, incidentally, at *Sit-Up Britain*, no one ever gets sacked for shagging the boss. That’s a matter of principle.” Thus, not only does Bridget jump-start her career merely to avoid Daniel (in the novel, rejuvenating

her career is one of her New Year' resolutions), the only person who hires her makes it clear that he is solely interested in her body rather than her mind. As Maguire affirms, "Bridget thinks she's going into a job where, finally, she can exploit her intellect and that she's going to be recognized for her brain... but she's back where she started in short skirts and sliding down phallic fireman's poles." The way Bridget gains new employment in the film is a far cry from what occurs in the novel. In Fielding's book, Bridget is set up for an interview with Finch by her mother and while she lies to him about having a degree in political science, she is still able to prove herself in person when Finch drills her for ideas for the show during an interview. Instead of allowing Pam Jones to have the resources to help her daughter as in the novel, or allowing Bridget to be competent enough to give a good job interview, the filmmakers give Bridget little opportunity to show that she is more than a "ditzzy" blonde.

In the book, a major break in Bridget's career occurs when she is asked to cover the Elena Rossini trial. Rossini is a nanny being charged for the murder of her employer, who kept her locked up for a year and a half, during which she was raped repeatedly. Finch, who in the novel is a misogynist thirsting for stories involving sex scandals, tells Bridget to get "a hard-headed interview" with Rossini and demands that she ask her whether "this means it's OK for us all to murder people every time we don't fancy having sex with them" (239). In the film, not only is Finch's character softened, but so is the nature of the legal case Bridget covers. Instead of interviewing a woman who has been raped (a contentious, feminist issue), the story Bridget tackles in the film is the Aghani-Heaney Case, which involves a British aid worker named Eleanor Heaney who has been battling in court to keep her husband, Kafir, from being deported and executed. Not only

is Bridget unaware of the details of the case in the film (she knows all about the Rossini case in the novel), when we are shown the interview, Bridget only seems to direct her questions at Mark Darcy, who is the couples' lawyer, and Kafir Aghani. Eleanor Heaney remains silent. Not only do the filmmakers alter the nature of the case Darcy is working on to a less controversial, more straightforward, male-centered "heroic" story, their Bridget cannot even stay focussed during the interview, and spends most of her time staring deeply into Darcy's eyes.

In both the novel and the film, Bridget's relationship with Mark begins to bloom after this interview. In the film, after a couple of setbacks, including the re-emergence of Daniel (who is reintroduced into the love triangle plot merely to prolong the get-together of Bridget and Mark), Mark and Bridget finally seem like they will be able to make things work. And yet, the filmmakers concoct another way to delay what most people in the audience are waiting for – the final note of "affirmation,"<sup>14</sup> the kiss they will share at the end of the film. While Bridget is in her room looking for "genuinely tiny knickers," Mark happens to stumble upon her diary and read some rather appalling things Bridget has written about him. Mark, looking cross, leaves the apartment. Bridget hears the door shut and then realizes that Mark has read her diary. In a panic, she runs out of her apartment in her underwear and searches the dark, wintry streets for him.<sup>15</sup> When he

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<sup>14</sup> See Lester Asheim's "From Book to Film: The Note of Affirmation" (Autumn 1951).

<sup>15</sup> Maguire calls the decision to have Bridget run out in her underwear "an interesting feminist dilemma." She reveals that she and Renee Zellweger, the actor who plays Bridget in the film, "went with it" because it was funny – "it said more about Bridget's spontaneity than anything else." Why the filmmakers then chose to fetishize Bridget's bottom using close-up shots in this scene (and in several others throughout the film) is unexplained.

emerges from a nearby shop, she attempts to explain herself: “I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean it. I mean, I meant it, but I was so stupid that – I didn’t mean what I meant. Oh, for Christ’s sakes. It’s only a diary. Everyone knows diaries are just... full of crap.”

What is most astonishing about this scene is not that Bridget pleads with Mark instead of explaining that the words he read were written long ago (and justified by his own rude behaviour), but that Bridget utterly dismisses her diary: the one tool she has been able to use, in both the novel and the film, to expose the sexist nature of her world and reveal herself so honestly to her audience. The film ends, then, with Bridget denying the power of women’s private language in order to coax Mark back into her life, expressing the perfect backlash sentiment: that a woman must trivialize her creativity, her work, her independence, and her privacy in order to keep her man. In the novel, while Bridget must be “rescued” by Mark from her heinous family, her diary – her safe haven – remains an integral part of her life.

### **Feminism and the F-Word**

In *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism* (2000), Imelda Whelehan discusses the backlash against feminism: “...somewhere along the line, feminism has become the ‘f-word,’ perceived to be an empty dogma which brainwashed a whole generation of women into false consciousness of their relationship to power” (16). Whelehan’s argument here is similar to Faludi’s in *Backlash*. According to Whelehan, “feminist” and “feminism” have become dirty words, words that conjure up images of thoroughly unattractive, humourless, man-hating and mannish lesbians who just want to spoil everyone’s fun. Whelehan argues that “backlash rhetoric specializes in

over-simplifying issues that have quite complex and wide-ranging implications in order to repeatedly make the banal point that feminists are just a nasty bunch of spoilsports” (2000, 32). Indeed, Sharon’s character in the novel could be understood as a spoilsport; instead of ignoring the sexist thinking and behaviour of those around her, or just “laughing it off” (as supposedly humourless feminists are asked to do time and time), she tries to spoil the fun for those who use women, especially singletons, purely for selfish sexual pleasure. Bridget and her friend Jude both fear that if Sharon succeeds, they too will be perceived as feminist spoilsports. Jude and Bridget know that most men would still prefer to form a relationship with women who do not challenge their imbedded sexism. Jude and Bridget do not want to be called the f-word.

If we apply Whelehan’s theory about the word “feminism” signifying the f-word to the adaptation of *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, we may glean insight into the change that is made to Sharon’s character in the film. Her consistent use of the controversial f-words “feminist(s)” and “feminism” in Fielding’s novel is replaced by a different f-word in the film – the original f-word, “fuck.” Sharon’s language is still startling brusque in the adaptation, but it does not contain even a whisper of feminism. For example, in a scene early in the adaptation that establishes the characters of Bridget’s friends, Bridget asks how she can make amends at work for lying to Daniel (she informed him she was speaking to critic F.R. Leavis on the phone, only to learn that Leavis has been dead for decades). Sharon’s career advice is, indeed, gruff, but not very helpful and certainly not feminist: “Fuck ‘em. Fuck the lot of them. Tell them they can stick fucking Leavis up their fucking asses.” In the novel, Sharon’s feminist rants might be over-the-top and uninformed, but she at least opposes sexism outright. In the film, Sharon is reduced to,

literally, a one-note character who is, as we learn throughout the film, not only uncouth and inarticulate, but devoid of all feminist inclinations.

Admittedly, Sharon does use the original f-word in the novel quite often, but she usually employs it in the word “fuckwittage,” a term invented to reference the games men play with women in heterosexual relationships. In other words, Sharon uses the word “fuck” to express her frustrations with the power struggles that occur in patriarchal relationships. Her use of the term “fuckwittage” in the novel, however, is replaced with her use of the word “fucking” as an adjective in the film. The one time Sharon does speak up in the film without using the f-word occurs near the end of the film, when she asks Mark why his wife left him during Bridget’s birthday dinner party. Bridget, finding Sharon’s abrupt question inappropriate, changes the subject. Even though her question is one that Bridget, and probably the audience, would like to have answered, Bridget does not want to upset Mark and risk losing him. In the end, even when Sharon’s forthright language does not include any f-words at all, her ability to ask important questions about men is taken from her. Ultimately, Sharon’s angry, poignant, and often funny use of feminist language is omitted. She becomes just another one of Bridget’s friends, who happens to swear “*a lot*” and who is there to play cheerleader to her friend’s wacky adventures in romance.

### **Mrs. Jones Onscreen: Major Changes in Mum**

As I illustrated in chapter one, throughout Fielding’s novel, the reader is pushed to view Pam Jones’s feminist frustrations as hypocritical. Bridget believes her mother’s complaints are merely an excuse to have an affair with Julio. In spite of Bridget’s view,

however, Pam's positive, independent achievements paint a different picture of herself.

Even Bridget is awed by her mother:

My mother has become a force I no longer recognize... She looked stunning: skin clear, hair shining... I know what her secret is: she's discovered power. She has power over Dad: he wants her back. She has power over Julio, and the tax man, and everyone is sensing her power and wanting a bit of it, which makes her even more irresistible. So all I've got to do is find someone or something to have power over and then... oh God. I haven't even got power over my hair. (65-67)

Although Bridget is most envious of her mother's sexual prowess, Pam's other impressive achievements include her ability to file for a tax refund for the first time (when a worker at the tax office mocks her confusion with the forms, she asks him tartly whether *he* can "make a brioche"), and her ability to find both herself and her daughter employment. Unfortunately, none of these achievements are transferred onto the big screen. We may have cause to doubt Pam's feminist commitments in Fielding's novel but in the film, her feminism almost vanishes entirely.

While Pam is first presented onscreen at the New Year's Day turkey curry buffet, where she tries to set Bridget up with Mark, we learn more about her in her subsequent appearances in the film. Contrary to Fielding's novel, the film shows Pam already working outside the home. In the first scene in which she is shown outside the home, we

watch Pam work as a demonstrator in a department store, attempting to sell a rather phallic egg-peeler called “Have it Oeuf.” The work is embarrassing. “Have it Oeuf” not only looks like a dildo, it requires pumping by hand and shoots out what Pam politely euphemizes as “overspray.” While it is unclear whether she performs this work full-time, clearly, she is looking for other options. During a conversation that resembles one she has with Bridget in the novel, Pam reveals her dissatisfaction with her husband and her work.

Darling, if I came in with my knickers on my head he wouldn't notice. I spent 35 years cleaning his house, washing his clothes, bringing up his children... To be honest, darling, having children isn't all it's cracked up to be. Given my chance again, I'm not sure I'd have any. And now it's the winter of my life and I haven't actually got anything of my own. I've got no power, no – no real career, no – no sex life. I've got no life at all! I'm like the grass hopper who sang all summer. I'm like *Germaine sodding Geer!* [emphasis mine] ...Well, anyway, I'm not having it.

At first glance, Pam seems to express herself as poignantly as she does in Fielding's novel. She seems familiar with feminist language and even mentions famous feminist Germaine Greer. And yet, in the film, Pam mispronounces Greer's name. This rather careless mistake, which Bridget has to correct, insinuates that Pam is not really all that familiar with Greer's work. It makes her feminist complaints sound insincere. In Fielding's novel, Pam is perfectly capable of not only pronouncing Greer's name, she is able to reference

Greer's theory about the Invisible Woman. In the film, while Pam's complaints sound valid initially, her slip-up undermines her statements. In the novel, we are at least told that Bridget attempts to understand her mum's point of view "as a feminist." In the film, Bridget merely looks concerned and confused.

Pam's knowledge of feminism is not the only change made to her character in the film. The filmmakers also revamp her career. She no longer works as a talk show host, but is demoted to working as a presenter on a home shopping television show. While Pam was able to find her own employment in the novel, in the film, she must rely on Julian (the anglicized version of Fielding's hot-blooded Julio) to find new work. Admittedly, Pam's work in the novel was not exactly fulfilling. However, working with Julian in television means that she must not only exploit her body to sell overpriced jewellery, in Vanna White-esque fashion, she must remain silent while doing so. Pam's limited power over her career in the novel dwindles to silence and dependence in the film.

In the film, Pam soon ends both her sexual and working relationships with Julian. Mean-spirited, vain, and abusive, Julian ends up being (as Pam succinctly puts it) "a bit of a shit." While her ability to end her ties with such a person is certainly admirable, it also seems to necessitate her return home to her husband. In other words, she goes from one patriarchal relationship to another and then back again, fulfilling the requirements of the love triangle storyline. On Christmas Eve, a meek looking Pam Jones enters the family house looking frightened and dejected, and pleads her case to her husband.

The thing is close up, [Julian] was almost purple. You're such a lovely normal colour. He had a filthy temper. And, although the jewellery is fabulous, and really very reasonably priced... I thought I might ask if we could have another go. I mean, obviously with some effort on your part to pay a bit more attention to me. I do realize what I'm like sometimes. It doesn't help that you and Bridget have your lovely grown-up club of two and always saying, "What's silly old Mummy gone and done this time?" You used to be mad about me. You couldn't get enough of me. What do you think?

There is no reference in Pam's speech to the unequal sharing of housework she complained of earlier in the film. There is no reference to her desire for independence and meaningful waged work. This apologetic speech in the film insists that Pam's only problem with Colin was his lack of attention. In the end, both mother and daughter must grovel to get their men. As Shumway contends,

[screwball comedies] suggest that spunky, strong women are attractive but that their submission is required for the romance to be consummated, for marriage to take place. In this sense, they are comedies of conquest, the woman being not like one more bird taken in the hunt but like the duchy one wishes to annex. (406-407)

No matter how “in control” Bridget and her mother seem of their lives, once again, the structure of film’s genre (and the expectations of the viewer, who has likely been trained to predict and anticipate the happy endings that occur in such films) requires that Bridget and Pam not only excuse the selfish, ill-mannered behaviour of the men in their lives and place the blame upon themselves, but that they also beg for affection.

### **Anglicizing Julio**

Feminism and women’s autonomy are not the only things that disappear in the adaptation. So does otherness. In both Fielding’s novels, the characters often comment on race and ethnicity, though these comments are usually offensive. The racial stereotypes used in the first novel, including Bridget generalizing all Turkish people as wearing “weird headscarves” (84), and Mr. Jones calling Julio “a filthy wop” (282), fail to appear in the film. Indeed, there is a single comment made concerning race by Pam in the film, when she calls the Japanese a “cruel race” (a statement which is lifted directly from Fielding’s novel). However, the adaptation and the city in which it was filmed remain white. In reality, the streets of London are filled with both white people and people of colour; in the film there are barely any persons shown onscreen who are not white.<sup>16</sup> The filmmakers do not only deracialize and “sterilize” the city of London. Fielding’s Latin

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<sup>16</sup> According to my count, there are only four people of colour in the film. One is a brown-skinned woman (likely Pakistani or Indian) who works at a convenience store. Another is a mixed-race man (half black, half white) who Tom is sexually interested in. The third is Mark’s Japanese ex-wife, whose blurred, naked body we see fornicating with Daniel in a brief flashback. The fourth is Kafir Aghani, the Kurdish freedom fighter whom Mark Darcy defends in court. The roles played by these actors mostly fulfill stereotypes – the

character, Julio, is also anglicized. The filmmakers not only do away with the women-only trip to Portugal Pam takes in the novel, they also do away with the Portuguese man she brings back with her to England. Julio becomes Julian.

There are several reasons why the filmmakers may have traded in Julio for Julian. Perhaps they replaced him to try to ensure that Pam's story remained "uncomplicated"; as was demonstrated in Chapter One, Fielding does not shy away from including racial tensions in her novel. Perhaps they wanted to prevent presenting Pam as a villain. The changes made to her character in the film, it may be argued, make her more likeable. Or, perhaps her sexual attraction to a dark-skinned man was simply too controversial to put onscreen. In the end, we can only speculate about the motivation for replacing Julio. bell hooks asserts that "no Hollywood insider really wants to publicly disclose the role white supremacist thinking plays in casting. Or the degree to which it is simply easier for everyone to follow the continuum of a racist filmic legacy rather than challenge it." hooks also reminds the reader that "there has still been no collective political demand that Hollywood divest itself of white supremacy" (1996, 73). While the filmmakers do not shy away from emphasizing Pam's sexual desire, in the film this desire is for a white, British man. Therefore, even if Julian is "a bit of a shit," he may be considered a "safer" partner for a middle-class, white, British woman than Julio. Whatever the reason, the result is the same: Julio is replaced by a British white man. While traces of Julio remain within Julian (it is odd that the running joke about Julian in the film is his strangely-coloured skin), nevertheless, by the end of the film Pam still makes the "safest" choice

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brown woman through her employment, Kafir through his Iraqi rebel status, and the mixed-race man and the Japanese woman through their exoticized sexuality.

possible: to return home to her husband. Creating a happy ending for the couple in the film (in the novel, Mr. and Mrs. Jones share an uneasy relationship after Julio is arrested), the filmmakers give us a Pam Jones who returns home because she truly believes she has left a good man (or W.A.S.P.) behind. In the novel, Pam is *forced* back home by Mark Darcy, who acts as the white knight rescuing her from Julio, the criminal foreigner. In the film, Pam not only wants to return home, she makes it clear that what she has missed the most is her husband's white skin: "You're such a lovely normal colour," she tells Colin, expressing her distaste of Julian's deep tan. Perhaps her preference for whiteness echoes the sentiments of those who created the adaptation.

### **Disappearing Acts**

Was there really no place for otherness and feminist thought in the adaptation? Fielding certainly did not fail to include both in her novel. The decision made by the filmmakers to remove racial/ethnic and feminist subject matter was likely encouraged by both the studios they worked for, and the white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist Hollywood institution as a whole. Removing such controversial themes from the film would make it more "mainstream," and therefore, more profitable. Keeping both the plot and the subject matter simple might make the film more acceptable to moviegoers who many filmmakers believe are incapable of dealing with unhappy endings, racial tensions, and feminist language (especially in what is supposed to be a light-hearted, romantic comedy). While the changes made to Bridget and Pam's characters in the film are interesting, even more telling are the changes made to the two "dangerous" characters in the novel. Sharon and Julio are not just altered in the film, they are *erased* and *replaced*.

In Richard Maltby's work on politics in *Hollywood Cinema* (2003), the author reminds us that mainstream Hollywood films are created mainly to entertain their viewers for profit:

...entertainment is utopian. Movies offer their audiences a sense of escape or displacement from their immediate surroundings into a more nearly ideal environment. Paradoxically, however, the Utopian world is always partially familiar. Descriptions of Utopian space and social organization almost always involve a tension between elements we recognize from our present situation and elements that have been altered in some way. In the details of this tension, we can discover the central political concern of a particular Utopian point of view... Absent from the list of tensions or absences addressed by this Utopian sensibility is any mention of class, race, or patriarchy. (300)

Thus, in order to create films that will entertain and be profitable for movie studios, entertainment films such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* must not deal with the real-life tensions described by Maltby above.

While Helen Fielding may not have consciously intended to write a book about the conflicting pull many women experience between feminism and femininity, this is exactly what she accomplished.<sup>17</sup> And, as Whelehan has argued, this is what drew so

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<sup>17</sup> In an interview on the *Bridget Jones's Diary* DVD, Fielding insists, "I wasn't trying to make her a symbol or anything. I was just trying to make myself laugh, really."

many readers to identify with Bridget. Firstly, while I believe Fielding's book ultimately draws on backlash ideas about single women and feminism, at least Fielding attempted to address these issues. Secondly, while I believe that Fielding also uses racial and ethnic stereotypes to often "colour" her non-white character in the Bridget Jones novels, at least people of colour are present in these books. The film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* barely acknowledges that such people even exist.

Whelehan writes that "perhaps in a world where women's real needs and motivations are silenced and marginalized, fantasy seems like a viable option" (2000, 140). Instead of presenting a world illustrating the conflicting pressures the women in Fielding's novel must deal with on a daily basis, including the pressure to form relationships with men of a certain class, race, and ethnicity, the adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* shows us that, sadly, Whelehan may be wrong. Even in the realm of fantasy, the needs and desires women have other than the desire for romantic love are simplified and stifled, if not erased entirely. As Anneke Smelik writes, in certain kinds of cinema, "'the desire to be desired' seems to be, then, the only option for women" (75).

## CONCLUSION

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This thesis has explored how Helen Fielding's extremely popular Bridget Jones novels and the film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* ultimately portray feminism as an ineffective political tool with which to combat sexism and the oppression of women. This thesis has also shown how characters who are Other are used merely to threaten white, heterosexual relationships in Fielding's novels, and how otherness disappears from the adaptation. White Bridget Jones has been called a kind of everywoman because of her struggles with contemporary womanhood, her identity as a white, British person still dictates the highly constrained ways in which she interacts with otherness.

While Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones novels have attracted some scholarly attention, there has been little written about Fielding's other novels, including her first novel, *Cause Celeb* (1994), and her most recent novel, *Olivia Joules and the Overactive Imagination* (2003). While the heroine of the latter is similar to Bridget Jones because of her quirky, humorous outlook on life, and her tendency to let her imagination get the best of her, the heroine of *Cause Celeb* is quite different from Fielding's other major female characters. Disenchanted with the celebrity lifestyle she has attained by dating a famous television star, Rosie Richardson decides to leave London in order to help run a refugee camp in Africa. When a famine threatens to kill thousands of Africans, Rosie travels back to London in an attempt to organize a celebrity campaign to raise money for and awareness of the plight in Africa.

Having paid considerable attention in this thesis to Fielding's more popular novels, I think it might be worthwhile to consider how they stand in relation to some of

Fielding's lesser known fiction. What might be of interest to scholars interested in discourses of difference is how Fielding represents otherness in her first novel. Almost all of *Cause Celeb* takes place in Africa. How are Rosie's interactions with the Africans in the novel, for instance, different from the cross-cultural meetings involving Wellington and the Jones family in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*? How does Rosie, a white-skinned British woman, come to represent the Other in Africa? And, perhaps most importantly, how do we reconcile Fielding's sensitive portrayal of African peoples and cultures in *Cause Celeb* with the trite, stereotypical portraits she paints of foreign characters in both Bridget Jones novels?

Further study might be conducted on the genre of chick lit as a whole. While Imelda Whelehan believes that "chick lit is a very 1990s phenomenon" (2002, 67), the continuing popularity of the genre in the first decade of the new millennium may prove otherwise. Whelehan calls chick lit "a new form of literary separatism," one that is based upon the notion that "the sexes [are] intrinsically different and [fail] to communicate because they [don't] try to understand each other's differences" (2002, 68). Focus might be placed upon the way this "literary separatism" reasserts the notion that one's biology ultimately determines one's behaviour. Whether all chick lit heroines share this belief, and whether they express antagonism towards feminism might also be of interest. For those feminists who have paid attention to the popularity of romance novels such as the Harlequin and Mills and Boon series,<sup>1</sup> an analysis of the relationship such books share with the chick lit genre might be performed, opening another area of scholarly inquiry.

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<sup>1</sup> Fielding herself wrote a romance novel early in her career that she attempted to have published by Mills and Boon (Whelehan 2002, 11).

As Whelehan points out, the Bridget Jones books fail to “capitalize upon the opportunity to revolutionize the romance [genre]” (2004, 39). By choosing to shine a spotlight on Helen Fielding’s extremely popular Bridget Jones novels and the successful film adaptation of *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, I hope to have shown that there are more sophisticated sites of struggle located within the work of a writer firmly ensconced within popular culture than might at first have been imagined.

## APPENDIX

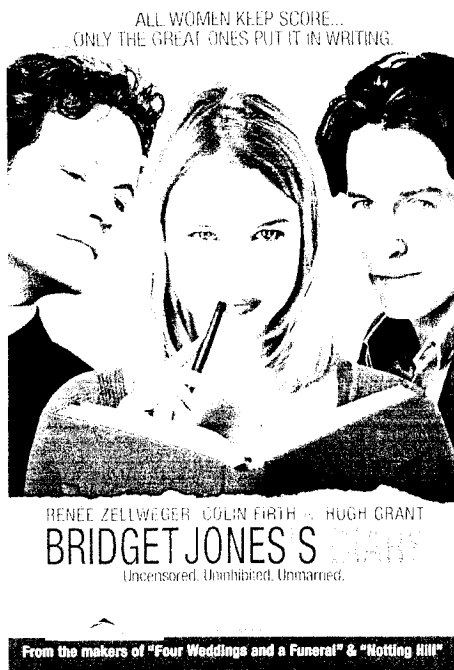


Figure 1: Movie poster of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001)

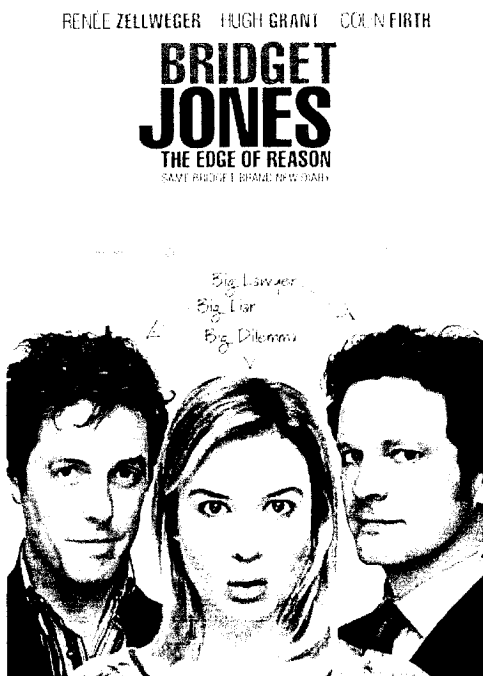


Figure 2: Movie poster of *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004)

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