Her mother and his hand? A study of possessives and nouns in *Bridget Jones's Diary and fan fiction*

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The interdisciplinary project "Cyber Echoes" analyses fan fiction, texts written by fans who use characters, places and themes from a source text, place them in a context they construct, and publish the texts on the Internet. One part of this project is linguistically oriented, and sets out to examine the language of a source text (a novel, a tv-series, a movie etc.) and the texts written by fans. This is where this paper is initiated. Is is also inspired by a Danish article by Scheuer (1995, english title: 'His wife and her breasts'), who has made a quantitative study of the possessive pronouns in the dictionary "Den danske ordbog" ('The Danish Dictionary'). What is interesting is of course not the pronouns themselfs, but rather what follows. "His" followed by a certain noun tells us something about male ownership, while what follows after "her" shows some relation between certain objects/ phenomena and women. While such a study can be interesting in itself, this paper aims to compare a source text – in this case *Bridget Jones's diary* by Helen Fielding – with some fantexts that take place in the Bridget Jones universe. The object of the study is the nouns that follow the possessive pronouns, and the focus is to detect similarities and differences in the texts with a gender aspect in mind.

Introduction

"I just noticed the utter lack of connection between my feelings and my self, as evidenced by the lack of "I/me/my in the above entry. Maybe I do need therapy".

M. Darcy

What is fan fiction?

The term fan fiction refers to texts by fans, posted on the Internet, in which they develop stories within an existing fictional universe and use a source text as inspiration. The term *source text* is broad and can refer to a novel, a film, a poem, a short story, a TV series and so on, and even combinations of those. What they have in common is that they make up the *canon*, whereas the *fanon* consists of what the fans produce. Or, as Hellekson & Busse (2006:9) put it: "Most important to treatments of fan texts are understandings of *canon*, the events presented in the media source that provides the universe, setting, and characters, and *fanon*, the events created by the fan community in a particular fandom and repeated pervasively throughout the fantext". The *fanon* can also be defined as "the noncanonical knowledge about a source text" (Kaplan 2006:136).

Even though the variety of fantexts is great, there are certain rules and practices that fanfic writers tend to follow. For instance, most fanfic texts have a disclamer in the header, to make explicit that the characters and setting have been borrowed for the story. A disclamer can be: "I don't own the characters... etc. but sure wish I did!". Since they are so common, fans really write "etc.", confident that their audience knows what they mean. Critique and comments from the readers are usually welcomed. It is often understood that you are supposed to be faithful to the canon and try to respect the characters and their style as well as the language of the source text and not change anything that would not be logical in the canon universe. Having said that, I also need to acknowledge that there are different genres and subgenres, each with their own logic and that individual fanfic sites will have their own rules that decide to what extent writers may or may not deviate from the canon (or fanon) style and universe. One possibility, often explored, is to create romantic or sexual parings that are not explicitly stated (though sometimes hinted at) in the canon. The most well-known genres that play with this are *het* (where heterosexual relationships are either developed or created) and *slash* (the term used for same-sex relationships, often invented by the writer). Fantexts may also play with a number of possibilities such as *AU* (alternative universe, a "new" universe explored, in which familiar characters can be put in new contexts), *crossovers* (where characters from different canons can meet) or *missing scenes*, where writers explore scenes that did not take place in canon but could have done so.

Fantexts make an interesting study object because they not only provide new texts, but also expose different ways of interpreting or developing the canon. Furthermore, they show relations between different texts and sometimes between different medias and they very concretely display relations between the writer/-s of the canon and the fans.

Method and material

When working with fan fiction, there are some methodological issues to take into consideration, one of which is how to choose which texts to analyse. Today, fanfic texts are published en masse on the Internet. Consequently, there is no risk of running out of material. So while there is enough material on which to base a study, it can never be exhaustive in the sense that the complete material can be examined. New texts are constantly posted, so even if

one would find a study object with a limited amount of texts, there's always a chance/risk that new texts will be added overnight.

Kaplan (2006:134) points out that, "Fan fiction has not been much studied *as fiction,* as texts [...]" and stresses that most studies on fan fiction so far have been undertaken by social and cultural theorists[1]. While a short introduction on fan fiction in general was perhaps necessary, this study will look at the texts in their own right and takes on a linguistic rather than a literary perspective. The source text I use is the novel *Bridget Jones's diary*[2] by Helen Fielding. For this article, I choose to work with only one fanfic writer[3] to examine how he/she develops the source text. I have used five fanfic texts by S. Faith: *The Journal of M. Darcy, Esq.*, *The Journal of M. Darcy, Esq. Vol. 2*, *Passport and Pants*, *The space between [1/2]* and *The space between [2/2]*[4]. It is interesting that two of the fanfic texts are also written in diary form, but from Mark Darcy's perspective. This may (or may not) affect the number of possessives referring to a male owner. The three others are not in diary form, nor do they have a first person narrator, which means they will add a new perspective since the narrator is not a character in the story.

Another aspect to consider is that there may be more than one possible source text. Hellekson & Busse (2006:9) point out that a canon may consist of many combinations and give the example of *Lord of the Rings,* for which there are several films to choose from but also an animated movie. Even when working with the books, there are supplementary works which may or many not be included. In the case of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, there is the novel by Helen Fielding, but there is also a film based on it. Fantexts may be based on either one. There is also a sequel; *The Edge of Reason* (also both a novel and a film).

The quote by Kaplan above holds true for fantexts based on *Bridget Jones's Diary*. I have not found any studies on fan fiction based on the novel. Studies about *Bridget Jones's Diary* itself are not hard to find. It is often stated that "chick lit" was born with Fielding's novel (See for instance Gill 2007:226, Modleski 2008:xxi or Nilson 2008:13) or that Bridget Jones is the "singleton par excellence" (Whelehan 2000: 136). Feminist issues concerning Fielding's texts are discussed (Harris 2004, Gill 2007, Modleski 2008) and there is even a "Reader's Guide" (Whelehan 2002).

The fantexts studied here are explicitly stated to be based on the film, but also on the novel "to place entries chronologically" (S. Faith). They remain rather close to the style and plot of both the film and the novel, even when filling gaps for missing scenes, but S. Faith takes the liberty to include some details that are not in the canon. The story *Passport* is an AU, according to S. Faith. She states: "I've always been rather fond of 'alternate universe' stories (aka "What if [x] had happended instead of [y]?") and was led to ponder in the shower one night how things might have gone if Mark Darcy had shown up to Bridget's flat just five minutes later than he did after his return from London. And so this little story was born". S. Faith's disclaimer is: "It all belongs to the strange mind of Helen Fielding. Strange in a good way, of course".

Objective

Inspired by Scheuer's article "Hans hustru og hendes bryster" ('His wife and her breasts') (1995), a quantative study of the possessive pronouns in the dictionary *Den Danske Ordbog*, I set out to examine the use of the English equivalent of those – and some other – pronouns in Fielding's novel and in a selection of fan fiction. What is interesting in Sheuer's article is of

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1   See for instance Jenkins 2002.
2   Henceforth "Bridget"
3   Among fantexts based on *Bridget Jones's Diary*, a majority is by this particular fanfic writer, S. Faith (november 2009).
4   Henceforth "Fanfic".

course not only the pronouns themselves, but rather what follows. "His" followed by certain nouns tells us something about male ownership, while what follows "her" consequently shows some relation between certain objects/phenomena and women.

For the sake of comparison, I give some data from Scheuer (1995). The 10 most significant combinations with the pronoun "hennes" ('her') in the Danish article were; *hair, eyes, mother, cheeks, body, voice, parents, father, leg/-s* and *face,* 6 of which belong to the category 'body'. For the male pronoun, the list looks as follows: *sons, brothers, work, man, opinion, death, collegues, friends, pictures* and *party*, thus no nouns from the 'body'-category. If combinations of pronouns and certains words and/or categories show significant differences for male and female owners in such a study, chances are that peoples' expectations of ownership, at least in some cases, are influenced by the gender of the owner.

While a quantitative study of pronouns and what follows can be interesting in itself, and from a gender perspective, the objective is here to compare a source-text (*Bridget*) to fantexts. The objective is to identify the nouns that follow the possessive pronouns, the focus being to detect similarities and differences in the texts with a gender aspect in mind. In this study, the selected pronouns are "my", "his", "her" and "your" as well as any nouns that follow. In the data thus collected, notice has been taken of if the owner is male or female.

Background

A brief background may put the present paper in a more logical place. This research started as part of an interdisciplinary project with participants studying literature and linguistics in the English and French languages. The study object is fan fiction and the idea is to do close readings of a number of text and compare *fanon* and *canon* from different aspects, with a gender perspective in mind. As the project develops, it will be more and more interesting with possibilities to compare not only source-text and fantext, but also different genres and texts in both English and French.

Being the linguist in the group, my task is to focus on the language, that is on linguistic similarities and differences revealed in the different texts. I will also look into potential gender issues expressed.

Terminology

It is important to bear in mind what possessive pronouns actually represent and mean. Focusing on those pronouns and their presence in a literary context, has little to do with grammar but more to do with the relation between the "owner" and the "owned". The use of quotation marks indicates, of course, that a possessive can indicate something other than the relationship owner – owned. Taylor (1996:5–6) gives the example of *John's car* and states that it can cover many more relations than the (maybe prototypical) assumption that John is the owner of the car. He says (1996:6):

> the expression could denote the car that John has rented from a car-hire company, in which case the car is not strictly speaking one of John's 'possessions'. Or it could be the car that the car-hire company intends to allocate to John. Alternatively, supposing John to be a car-designer, *John's car* could be a car that John has designed. And so on. In fact, one might even be inclined to say that *John's car* could invoke any one of an indefinite number of pragmatically plausible relations that could hold between a car and a person.

There are obviously many ways to categorise nouns. When dealing with possessives, the first fact to take into account is thus that a possessive can indicate something other than the relationship owner – owned. In her extensive study of possessives in French, Heinz (2003:20) writes that a relation that involves possession is a relation between two units. She calls them "possessor" and "possession" and claims that both can be represented either by a human being

or by an object. She then makes a more detailed classification, where the "object" in question can be divided into several subcategories (*animal, natural object, concrete object, part – body part* or *some other part*, *product* and *collectivity*). This may be useful to keep in mind, especially when looking at mere numbers – it would be hasty to conclude that every noun that follows a possession represent an owned object.

Frequent nouns

Bridget is written in diary-form, thus, the pronoun "my" is very frequent and obviously often refers to a female "owner". The fact that the source text is written in the first person will have to be taken into account, since mere statistics would show many female "owners" for that reason alone.

To look at some results, let's start with the most frequent nouns with a female "owner" in the source text and in the fantexts: (indicated is the number of total tokens):

Table 1: Frequent nouns in the texts.

Bridget		Fanfic	
Female "owner"	**Male "owner"**	**Female "owner"**	**Male "owner"**
mother/mum (43)	mother/mum (6)	mother (42)	hand/-s (21)
head (13)	hand (3)	hand/-s (19)	eye/-s (16)
flat (8)	arm (2)	arm/-s (17)	mother (16)
arm (7)	car (2)	head (17)	arm/-s (15)
skirt/-s (7)	girlfriend (2)	face (16)	finger/-s (9)
life (6)	woman (2)	flat (14)	voice (7)
eye/-s (6)	(+ only single	eyes (13)	face (7)
hair (6)	instances)	mouth (11)	life (6)
hand/-s (6)		hair (10)	wife (5)
heart (5)		leg/-s (9)	cheek (5)

We can conclude that half of the most frequent nouns after a possessive in the fantext appear frequently with both female and male owners; *mother, hand, arm, eye* and *face*. Most of them are also among the most frequent nouns in the source text. Four of the words belong to the category "body". Eight of the ten most frequent nouns with a female "owner" belong to this category, while for a male "owner", the figures are six of ten nouns. In the texts, the most frequent words that appear with both female and male owners are *mother* and *hand*.

The case of "mother"

While those nouns may tell us something just by being there and having the frequency that they have, it is more interesting to look at them all in the context in which they appear. Some examples deserve more attention. The noun "mother", for instance, is frequent both with male and female "owners" and in both the source and the fantexts. What does this tell us? Why are the people in those texts mentioning their own and other persons' mothers? In what contexts do they appear? (In the examples that follow, the "owner" is indicated between square brackets). The majority of the examples from the fantexts are clearly pejorative vis-à-vis the mother, with words like 'hideous', 'insanity', 'ad nauseum', 'mistake', 'nonsense', 'off-center' (paired with the expression 'Oh, heavens') and 'slam the door shut in her mother's face' being connected with the mother in question.[5]

> Maybe I do need therapy. If any of my colleagues saw me in the *hideous* reindeer jumper my dear **mother** gifted me with this Christmas, they would undoubtedly

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5   In all the examples quoted in this article, boldface and italics are by me.

second that opinion. [M. Darcy] (Faith, *Journal*)

[…] she had a cigarette in one hand, drink in another, verbal incontinence of the highest order, and dressed as *hideously as* her **mother** in something resembling a floral tapestry drape. [B. Jones] (Faith, *Journal*)

I sometimes wonder if my **mother** is verging on *insanity*. [M. Darcy] (Faith, *Journal*)

I suspect this bit of information was something parroted *ad nauseum* to her by her **mother**. [B. Jones] (Faith, *Journal*)

I'd made the *mistake* of calling my **mother** on Saturday or Sunday […] [M. Darcy] (Faith, *Journal*)

Her **mother** was hot on her heels, nattering *nonsense* all the way. [B. Jones] (Faith, *Passport*)

Oh, heavens. It was her slightly *off-center* **mother**, Pamela. [B. Jones] (Faith, *Space*)

The urge to *slam the door shut in her **mother's** face* became overwhelming, but it was too late […] [B. Jones] (Faith, *Space*)

There are some examples not as outspokenly negative, but still I would argue that this next example is very sarcastic and not in favour of Bridget Jones's mother's taste:

[…] her **mother** thinks gherkins on toothpicks are haute cuisine [B. Jones] (Faith, *Journal*)

The next example is more neutral, but the interpretation, once again, is arguably intended to ridicule Bridget Jones's mother, since the reader, probably has other examples fresh in mind:

[…] her **mother** was beside herself with glee that Bridget had hooked such a magnificent catch […] [B. Jones] (Faith, *Space*)

Are there really no examples with the word "mother" in a more positive context? They are few, but there is at least one:

He smiled. How he loved his **mother**. [M. Darcy] (Faith, *Passport*)

And in the first example quoted the mother seems to be appreciated even if the jumper offered was not:

Maybe I do need therapy. If any of my colleagues saw me in the *hideous* reindeer jumper my *dear* **mother** gifted me with this Christmas, they would undoubtedly second that opinion. [M. Darcy] (Faith, *Journal*)

We can note though, that this concerns Mark Darcy's mother and not Bridget Jones's. Also, we cannot be sure that the "dear" is not ironic when it appears in the same sentence as "hideous jumper".

Among the examples just quoted, the most neutral ones were excluded ("I'd told my mother" etc.). It is thus clear that with only some exceptions, the majority of the examples do not associate the most frequent noun with very positive connotations.

Let us now turn to some examples from the source text, to see if they are equally negative. Interestingly, while they are not entirely positive, I retrieve no examples as negative as the ones found in the fanfic. The more negative ones include those that either hint at a negative reaction in Bridget Jones or refer to her mother's somewhat intense manners (but without explicit adjectives like 'hideous' or 'insanity' or the like):

Humph. *Just what I needed.* My **mother** *burst into my flat,* last week's Grashopper Who Sang All Summer crisis miraculously forgotten. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 81)

My **mother**, I said, *desperately*, out of the corner of my mouth. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 164)

Why oh why did I give my **mother** a key to my flat? [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 211)

[...] there, frozen in a video-effect diamond [...] was my **mother**, *all bouffed and made-up* as if she were Katie *Bloody* Boyle or someone. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 90)

I spent the rest of the party wearing [...] a [...] dress of Janine's with Mark Darcy's Natasha and my **mother** periodically rushing past going, 'That's a pretty dress, darling' [...] [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 170)

I was just desperate to start running around opening and closing all the cupboards like my **mother** [...] [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 174)

Most other examples are in fact rather 'objective' in the sense that Bridget Jones is reporting what her mother does (or is), without actually labelling or otherwise qualifying her:

[...] the doorbell rang. It was my **mother**, on the doorstep, in floods of tears. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 71)

[...] and revealing, [...] that my **mother** was thrusting a microphone under the nose of a mousy-looking woman. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p.90)

[...] the phone rang. 'Hello darling'! My **mother**. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p.134)

[...] only to find my **mother** had not noticed my absence [...] [B. Jones] (Fielding, p.163)

When I retrieved the phone my **mother** was still talking. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p.164)

My **mother** is sleeping with a Portuguese. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p.181)

Found myself describing my **mother** as being 'Caucasian' and 'of medium build'. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p.277)

[...] wondering how my **mother** was going to manage for two weeks in Portugal on 200 pounds. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p.296)

In some examples, Bridget Jones seems to admire her mother's strength and is grateful or even jealous of her:

My **mother** has become *a force* I no longer recognize. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p.65)

I experienced the *totally novel sensation of being grateful* to my **mother**. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p.274)

[...] mainly *extreme sense of jealousy* of failure and foolishness at being in bed alone on Sunday morning while my **mother** aged over sixty is probably just about to do it for the second... [...] No. I can't bear to think about it. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p.61)

Of course, only quoting some examples does not do justice to the study material, no matter how they are chosen. Also, the impression a reader gets of the characters is not merely based on what follows possessive pronouns. What seems clear though, is that the word "mother" makes enough material for a study of it's own and that something in the text by Fielding triggered a negative impression of Bridget Jones's mother, which is explored in the fantext. Maybe this is not so strange after all. According to Nilson (2008:15), many so called "chick lit" texts are about liberation and breaking up (in general) but also about coming back home and accepting one's mother (for instance). She also states that family relations in general are important in chick lit (Nilson 2008:78).

The dedication by Helen Fielding at the beginning of the novel cannot be left unquoted in this context:

"To my mum, Nellie, for not being like Bridget's".

Categories

Some nouns are not very frequent. But even if there are only a few of them or they are single instances, their appearance in a certain category may be relevant. For this study, the only relevant possessor is, of course *human being*, with the subcategories *male* or *female*. I will continue to use the term "owner", having explained the somewhat broad definition of it. The possessions can of course be of various kinds. In this study, I have classified the nouns into the following categories:

abstract (some examples are: chance, commitment problem, emotional failure)
body
clothes
family (mother, father, brother, parents)
food (including drinks; eggs, meals, Chardonnay)
object (flat, answerphone, desk, car)
relation (boyfriend, friend, relationship)
work (boss, career, employer)

Obviously, some categories are more problematic than others. Even though all of them can be problematized in some way, I would argue that the most straightforward categories are *body, clothes, family, food, relation* and *work*. But even those are not always easy to deal with. Even a seemingly homogeneous category like *food* may contain an abstract noun, (for example

'mouthful'). The two most problematic categories are *objects* and *abstracts*. This is partly due to their size. To deal with them, we will have to look more closely at the examples. I stated above that many frequent nouns belong to the *body*-category. Below, I will therefore discuss the categories *objects, abstracts* and *body* more in detail. Since the word "mother" is so frequent, and since many words denoting people are among the most frequent in Scheuers study, I will start with a brief overview of *people*, where I have collected *family, friends, partners* and *others*.

People

The table below (number of tokens in brackets) shows that *Bridget* and the fantexts to a large extent match each other in the number of words denoting people that follow a possessive. The largest group in both texts is *family*, which is not surprising, the word "mother" being so frequent. The total number of instances with a female owner is exactly the same in source- and fantext, and it is the largest. That is not surprising either, since the protagonist in the story is a woman. Instances with a male owner are about twice as frequent in the fantexts, which seems logical, since two of those have Mark Darcy as a narrator. This is bound to change the perspective of the story, even if Brigdet Jones is still at the center of attention. The amount of friends and partners are almost exactly the same, but the choice of words differ a little. The word "boyfriend" is not present after a possessive in the fantexts, who instead include the proper names of the protagonists.

Table 2. Nouns denoting people in the texts.

Bridget		Fanfic	
female owner (63)	**male owner (15)**	**female owner (63)**	**male owner (32)**
family (55)	*family (8)*	*family (52)*	*family (24)*
mother/mum (43)	aunt (1)	mother/mum (42)	mother/mum (16)
brother (3)	mother (6)	parents (6)	parents (4)
father/dad (6)	parents (1)	daughter (2)	father (2)
parents (3)		father (1)	daughter (2)
		son (1)	
friends (8)	*friends (1)*	*friends (8)*	*friends (1)*
friend Tom (2)	friends and colleagues (1)	friends (8)	mate (1)
boyfriend (3)			
friend Simon (1)			
friend/-s (2)			
partners (2)	*partners (5)*	*partners (2)*	*partners (7)*
current boyfriend (1)	wife (1)	fiancé (1)	wife (5)
perfect new boyfriend (1)	woman (2)	Mark (1)	Bridget (1)
	girlfriend (2)		ex-wife (1)
others (3)	*others (1)*	*others (1)*	*others (0)*
boss (1)	driver (1)	work colleague (1)	
employer (1)			
camera man (1)			

Others than family, friends and partners are not very present in these texts. As we have seen above, the mother plays an important role not only in *Bridget*, but in chick lit stories in

general (Nilson 2008), as well as in other romance narratives (Smyczyńska 2007:88–89). Our statistics confirm these statements.

Objects

There are 38 instances of nouns that I classify as *objects* that follow a possessive in the source text. Of those, only the eight most common appear more than once: *flat* (8 instances)*, answerphone* (3)*, car* (4 – inlcuding 'Sierra'), *desk, door, phone, suitcase* (2 instances each). The rest are single instances: *bankers' card, book, watch, castanets, champagne glass, cigarettes, computer screen, dog collar, driver, earpiece, handbag, house, tapeworm, straw donkey* and *trolley*.[6]

Table 3: Nouns denoting objects in Bridget.

Objects – Bridget		
Female owner	**Male owner**	**F/M owner**
bankers' card	book	*answerphone*
castanets	driver	*car*
champagne glass	house	
computer screen	*phone*	
desk		
dog collar		
door		
earpiece		
flat		
handbag		
straw donkey		
suitcase		
tapeworm		
trolley		
watch		

In the fantexts, there are 75 objects, of which *bed, bedroom, briefcase, building, car, takeaway/curry container, door, key, place, flat, flute, home, list, phone, robe, room* and *watch* appear more than once (in italics in the table below).

The single instances are: *answerphone, bath, bureau, clock, cupboards, diary, dining room table, dinner plates, doorstep, driving-license, fork, hairbrush, handbag, house, journal, noisemaker, paper top hat, pillow, razor, sofa, table, taxi, tiara, things, towel, tree*, and *wine cellar*.

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6   Tables 3 and 4: The words in boldface appear in both *Bridget* and the fantexts and the words in italics appear more than once in the text in question.

Table 4: Nouns denoting objects in fanfic.

Objects – Fantexts		
Female owner	**Male owner**	**F/M owner**
bath	answerphone	*curry/takeaway container*
bedroom	*bed*	*key*
building	*briefcase*	*list*
bureau	*car*	*phone*
cupboards	clock	place
diary	driving-license	
dinner plates	*flute*	
door	fork	
doorstep	*home*	
flat	house	
hairbrush	journal	
handbag	paper top hat	
noisemaker	pillow	
(terrycloth) robe	razor	
room	things	
sofa	watch	
table	wine cellar	
taxi		
tiara		
towel		
tree		

Now, looking at all these objects, let's see if there are any evident gender issues in ownership. When looking at gender issues, I will refer to conventions and stereotypes. I make no claims about what individual men and women (or even men and women in general) usually own or not. Even if some claims about stereotypes can be – and have been made – those are also complex. Some studies show that femininity is routinely associated with domesticity and sexuality and that women are stereotyped at sexual objects and/or housewives (Pilcher & Whelehan 2004:167). There is also a conventional association of masculinity with the public, whereas femininity is associated with the private (Pilcher & Whelehan 2004:124–128). Studies of masculinities can further problematise this, since there are obviously several 'masculinities' (see Gill 2007:29–32).

In the texts I have read, the most obvious, and maybe only, examples of stereotypically "female" objects are probably *handbag* and *tiara*. A man could obviously have a handbag, but in the majority cases where a man carry a bag, it would be named differently.

> For the first two hours this morning I kept staring at my **handbag** as if it was an unexploded bomb. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 118)

> She fumbled with the contents of her **handbag**, found her quarry, and held up a packet of Silk Cut. [B. Jones](Faith, *Space*)

> She set her new **tiara** on top of her head. [B. Jones](Faith, *Space*)

Of course, there *are* gender issues in the novel (and in the fantexts). There are numerous examples of womens subordinated or secondary status both in public and private spheres (see for instance Pilcher & Whelehan 2004:125). And even if *Bridget* takes place in the -90's in a society where women appear in both private and public spheres, it may not be a conincidence that Daniel Cleaver is her boss and that she has a subordinated status in relation to him, nor

that Mark Darcy is a successful lawyer, wich is usually highly ranked on hierarchical scales. But these issues are not necessarily reflected in the nouns studied here. We can also note, that 'flat' has a female owner in both Bridget and the fantexts whereas 'house' has a male.

> It turned out Magda had booked at big table at 192 and told everyone to go there instead of my **flat**, and there they all were waiting with presents, planning to buy me dinner. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 84)

> When I got to the building, I found that the main door was already opened, so I found myself at the door of her **flat**. [B. Jones] (Faith, *Journal*)

> 'What about my **house**?' said dad. 'And the savings?' [B.'s father] (Fielding, p. 281)

> As soon as we arrived back to my **house**, I poured us each a glass of wine, excused myself to use the loo, every intention of having a reasonable, adult conversation when I came out. [M. Darcy] (Faith, *Journal*)

Mark Darcy himself describes the differences between his own and Bridget's homes in one of the fantexts:

> Her **flat** is cosy, which usually translates in real estate adverts as "too bloody small", but I like being there. It's more of a home than my **oversized brushed steel Spartan place**. (Faith, *Journal*)

I leave to the reader to judge the possible gender issues here…

In Sheuer's article there were more nouns in the "work-category" appearing with male owners, but "computer screen" and "desk" are not stereotypically gendered, not in the context of Bridget Jones's Diary nor in a contemporary western society. Maybe 'briefcase', appearing in the fantexts, would be more easily associated to a male owner.

> Suddenly , `Message Pending` flashed up on the top of my **computer screen**. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 29)

> Eventually, when Perpetua was out, he walked past my **desk**, stopped for a moment and murmured, 'Jones, you gorgeous creature. Why are you ignoring me?' [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 73)

> Remembered to stash this into my **briefcase**. Interpol's information currently places Jed in Dubai, where it's terribly difficult to get criminals extradited from. [M. Darcy] (Faith, *Journal*)

One might be inclined to think of men as owners of a "razor", but stating that women can also be owners of razors, even if they don't use it for the same body parts as men do would not be too bold.

My conclusion for the category "objects" is that there are no big differences between the source-text and the fanfic-texts. Nor do either of them conflict with any expectations one might have of stereotypical links between objects and gender.

Abstracts

Abstract nouns that follow a possessive equally make up a large group. They include words like *chance, love-life* and *ego*. There are 60 types and 76 tokens with a female "owner" in Fielding's text. Consequently most of them are mentioned only once.

The abstracts can be further categorized into: *emotions* ("feeling", "worries"), *pertaining to relations* ("commitment problem", "love-life"), *pertaining to self* ("mind", "ego", "personality"), *time* ("birthday", "seconds"), *conversation* ("comment", "words"), *actions* ("christmas shopping") and *words possible to concretize* ("phone number").

According to Pilcher & Whelehan (2004:166–169), there are gender stereotypes suggesting that women are (stereotypically) emotional and unpredictable. They are also supposedly bad drivers and like chocolate. Men are (stereotypically) rational, instrumental, bad at housework and like sport.

Most of the nouns in *Bridget* are gender-neutral in the sense that they are not stereotypically associated with male or female "owners". Since the data are unevenly spread (there are very few abstracts with a male "owner" in Fieldings text), it is difficult to draw conclusions. Of all the examples in *Bridget*, only two appear with both a male and a female "owner"; *mind* and *party*. In the table below I give all the examples with a male "owner" and the examples with a female "owner" that I consider the least neutral.

Table 5: Nouns denoting abstracts in Bridget.

Abstracts – Bridget	
Female owner	**Male owner**
(least neutral examples)	(all instances)
(premature) ageing	Achilles' heel
christmas shopping	capability
(bitchy) comment	freedom (from alcoholism)
commitent problem	(glad) rags
excuses	(special) hugs
	intelligence
	invitation
	lack (of smoking)
	mind

Words that are typically gendered are hard to find within this category. Even if there are dichotomies like reason/emotion or knowledge/experience, where the first terms are or were conventionally associated with masculinity (and thus having a higher status) (Pilcher & Whelehan 2004:24–25), it is hard to claim that those dichotomies are valid in the Bridget Jones universe. The words fitting in those dichotomies would be *capability* and *intelligence*, but again, I don't think they can be claimed to be gendered in this context.

There are numerous studies that evoque the fact that the protagonist in *Bridget* is obsessing about her body (see for instance Whelehan 2002:49 and Gill 2007:228–229) and that Bridget Jones herself associates this with being a woman. (See Smyczyńska, 2007:158, who reasons about the gendered body in chick-lit fiction). Bearing this in mind, we might be able to consider the example *(premature) ageing* as gendered. Also taking into consideration the huge market of make-up and magazines aimed at the appearance of women, one could consider *premature ageing* and *unattractiveness crisis* as more typically "female", although I'm sure that in contemporary culture, men can also suffer from those conditions.

Shopping may also be associated with the female stereotype. At least it is often mentioned as an important feature in chick lit (see Modleski 2008:xxi, Gill 2007:247 and Nilson 2008:13). However, one single example, taking place around christmas which is when many

consumers in western societies spend a great part of their money, is not enough to build stereotypes on.

A *comment* can of course be made by men as well as women, stereotypes considered or not. But I doubt the attribute "bitchy" can be said to be associated with men.

In the fantexts there are 109 instances with male "owners", of which 19 types appear more than once. The most common noun is "voice", followed by "life". Those are fairly neutral. As was the case with the examples from Fieldings text, it is hard to find gendered nouns. There are 75 types and 96 tokens, with a female "owner". Here, the most common one is *voice*. After that follow *life, speech, way, words, attention, faulty internal editor* (the main word being "editor" but less straightforward without its attributes), *message, mind* and *time* with 2–3 instances each.

Of all the instances, below are the least neutral ones.

Table 6: Nouns denoting abstracts in fanfic.

Abstracts – fantexts	
Female owner **(least neutral examples)**	**Male owner** **(least neutral examples)**
ability (to sit up)	advances
attention	amazement
apology	anger
confidence	(unending) consideration
curiosity	courage
embrace	deceit
feelings	disappointment
imagination	(friendly) embrace
insecurities	(professional) façade
outburst	feelings
reconciliation	fidelity
reverie	hopes
senses	interest
unease	love-life
	(appreciative) smile
	status
	talent (for saying the wrong thing)
	(cultured) veneer

The examples expressing emotions (or reactions to emotions) are: *attention, confidence, curiosity, feelings, imagination, insecurities, outburst, reconciliation, reverie, senses* and *unease*. Some examples with context:

> She had no retort to that, and instead turned her **attention** to the food [...]. [B. Jones] (Faith, *Space*)

> Bottle of wine in hand, clearly expecting Bridget to be alone, and clearly in search of a pity reconciliation for sex (I know him all too well). He was undoubtedly aware of my **attention** to their conversation, so he pulled her into another room. [M. Darcy] (Faith, *Journal*)

> Instead of denying it, Jude and Shazzer were accepting my premature ageing as read, tactfully trying to change the subject to spare my **feelings**. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 147)

That is precisely my **feeling** about Darcy and Elizabeth. They are my chosen representatives in the field of shagging. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 246)

(Side note: she must have gone to my home first and encountered Rebecca, who must have confessed her **feelings**. I have no other way to explain Bridget advising me that my girlfriend is a lesbian.) [Rebecca. Gillies] (Faith, *Journal*)

I just noticed the utter lack of connection between my **feelings** and my self, as evidenced by the lack of "I/me/my" in the above entry. Maybe I do need therapy. [M. Darcy] (Faith, *Journal*)

Abstracts nouns appearing with both a female and a male "owner" in the fantexts are: *address, attention, birthday (feast), comment, life, love-life, number, party, speech, self, way, lack (of smoking), lack (of response)* and *mind*.

The most obvious difference between the source text and the fantexts is that there are very few instances with a male owner in Bridget. One example is the rather humoristic "his lack of smoking".

"Mind" is the only example with both a female and male "owner" that appears in both types of text.

The abstracts being "owned" by a female are either typical of the Bridget-universe and plot (*attention, birthday, birthday feast, life, love-life, party* and *self*) or rather neutral (*address, comment, number, speech* and *way*).

In the present context very few of the nouns involved are typically male or female stereotyped. As mentioned, the attention to grooming present in the fanfic-texts could be a male or a female preoccupation just as anger can be experienced by men as well as women (although traditionally, "violence" is stereotyped as more male. See for instance Fejes, 1992 and Modleski, 2008).

Body

I stated above that four of the most frequent nouns that follow a possessive in the fanfic texts belong to the category "body" and that this is true for as many as 8 of the 10 most frequent nouns with a female "owner".

In Fielding's text there are as many as 107 instances of a noun consisting of a body part with a female owner. These instances make up 39% of all tokens with a female owner. The nouns in the "body"-category with a male owner are only 11, but since the total amount of examples with a male "owner" is considerably smaller (both compared to those with a female owner and compared to those with a male owner in fanfic), they still represent 37 % of the nouns with a male owner.

Of all tokens (all categories), the "body"-instances with a female owner represent 44 % in fanfic. The male owner-examples make up 40%.

Looking at mere numbers, the "body"-category is an important one.

Table 7: Body: Statistics of types and tokens.

Bridget		Fanfic	
Female owner	**Male owner**	**Female owner**	**Male owner**
Types: 42	Types: 8	Types: 51	Types: 38
Tokens: 107	Tokens: 11	Tokens: 207	Tokens: 143

As the statistics show, the types of nouns referring to the body are not few. Some are obvious, like: *arm, hand, head, face, eyes, mouth, hair, leg, feet, shoulder, ear, hips, fingertips* and so on. Inner organs are also placed in this category, for example: *brain, heart* and *earlobe*. But I have included some that may be less obvious, which I concider tightly connected to the body, like *make-up, breath,* and *smile*.

Coming back to the issue of the source text, one difference between written and visual material will now be obvious. The following two passages would obviously be different (and with much fewer possessives being explicitly spoken) on film:

> She pulled back to look at him and found she couldn't look away, even if she wanted to. Slowly their lips met for the first time. The genle, tentative kiss quickly turned passionate, even hungry. Raising **her hand** to **his face**, she wove **her fingers** into **his hair**, then wrapped **her arms** around **his neck**. [...] His reply wasn't spoken so much as emanated past **his lips** in a low, guttural rumble, only the most miniscule hint of his cultured veneer remaining: "Oh yes, they fucking do." (Faith, *Space*)

> He placed **his hands** upon **her hips** and pulled her against him, kissing her once again, fingertips moving to toy with the elastic edge of her ridiculously skimpy tiger-striped panties. That was definitely not a mobile in his pocket. Her head was swimming. As **his teeth** grazed **her bottom lip**, it was only **his arm** encircling the small of **her back** that kept her from actually falling backwards. She could feel **his mouth** smile aginst her own, and he broke away to speak in a low voice into **her ear**. (Faith, *Space*)

In these cases, the difference between written and visual is bound to be greater than the difference between fanfic and source text. The quoted passages are to be found nor in the novel(-s), nor in the movie (-s), since this is a gap filled by the fanfic texts. I have stated above (see "Abstracts") that the body is an important issue in Fielding's novel. This, however, is not necessarily appearent in the nouns that follow possessives. Nor are there great differences between *Bridget* and the fantexts.

Humour

Humour is obviously not one of the categories I have listed for what is being "owned" by someone in the texts. It is clear though that it is very present both in Fieldings' novel and in the studied fantexts. Many examples can be revealed by looking at the attributes surrounding the identified nouns. A great deal of humour is expressed by unexpected or unusual nouns or adjectives or by their combination. For a richer comparison between the source text and the fantext, the descriptive words around the nouns should be taken into account. In fact, the attributes surrounding the noun in question often carry meaning that is crucial in the examined context.

In some examples, Bridget Jones states all the good qualities that Mark Darcy has. Among his qualities we find his "capability", "intelligence" and "chauffeur-driven cars", but also some "qualities" that he doesn't have, typically lined up right next to the ones just mentioned

and expressed as nouns: his "lack of smoking" and "freedom from alcoholism". This is Bridget Jones's way of stating that Mark Darcy doesn't drink or smoke. Some other examples of this kind of "negative" description (i.e. expressing something you actually do *not* have with a noun) are "my temporary speechlessess" and "my emotional failure":

> 'I'll just pop the telly on,' said Daniel, taking advantage of **my temporary speechlessness** to press the remote-control buton, and moving towards the curtains, which were those thick hotel ones with blackout lining. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 159)

> It is very kind of them and I appreciate it v. much but it only seems to highlight **my emotional failure** and isolation [...] [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 212)

Examples like those are echoed in the fantext by examples like the following;

> She stopped. Great. Damn **her faulty internal editor**. [B. Jones] (Faith, *Space*).

> I did not think she was an idiot [...] with **her faulty internal editor** allowing her to blurt out whatever came to mind without regard to the consequences. [B. Jones] (Faith, *Journal*)

And, as we have seen among the examples of abstracts, one can have a 'talent' which is actually the opposite of a talent:

> She said to me that despite my haughtiness, my **talent for saying the wrong thing** in every situation, […] I'm a nice man and that she likes me as I am, as well. [M. Darcy] (Faith, *Journal*)

Not all examples express missing qualities. Some display the very opposite, in *Bridget* as well as in *Fanfic*:

> [...] since it had happened to me in a previous incarnation and would never have happened to **my new improved self**. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 185)

> And as **my Perfect New Year's Eve list** has you on it and not Jude, Shazzer, Tom, et cetera, I can say with utmost confidence that I've chosen well. [B. Jones] (Faith, *Space*)

And some are just very creative and descriptive:

> Somehow I got through those hundred and eighty seconds – **my last hundred and eighty seconds of freedom** – picked up the stick and nearly screamed. [B. Jones] (Fielding, p. 118)

> "Bizarre what some men find attractive," Natasha said smugly (and, I fear, possessively) when she spotted Bridget in **her unfortunate bunny outfit**. [B. Jones] (Faith, *Journal*)

I have not carried out a comprehensive study with all the attributes, but some examples clearly reveal the fan author's ambition to imitate Fieldings humoristic style of writing.

Conclusion

Overall, the fantexts do not deviate much from *Bridget* in the aspects studied. There are small differences when it comes to the choise of words, and no great suprises when it comes to gender issues. The most obvious difference found in this study, is the negative representation of Bridget Jones's mother. A similarity between the source text and the fantexts is the humoristic style well preserved for example in attributes surrounding nouns.

One possible reason to this ressemblance is the genre of both the source text and the type of fan fiction. Even if chick lit is not identical to classic romance, it is clearly influenced by and associated with it (there are explicit implications to Austen and several features belonging to romance narratives). This may not be the most popular genre to alter in fanfic writing (although there are examples that are more subversive). This is echoed by Modleski in her new Introduction to the Second Edition: "The assumption underlying many fan studies seems to be that these texts are in some sense already oppositional to what is called the 'source text' by virtue of the fact that the fans are manipulating it rather than being manipulated by it. The fact that in much (not all) fan writing many of the ideologically troubling aspects of the source texts remain unquestioned and unchallenged is disregarded" (2008:xxix). The type of fanfic may also be important. The texts I have studied are regular texts, not classified with any specific label (like *slash, hurt/comfort, adult texts* etc.), except for an AU which is more like a missing scene.

Interestingly, this study, although restricted to possessives and nouns, shows that those nouns illustrate many of the phenonena that others have associated with the genre (chick lit/romance) and with this particular text (*Bridget*). The fan writer clearly imitates these features, since there are many similarities between source text and fantext.

It would be interesting to make a similar study based on other types of texts (both genre of source text and type of fanfic) to see if that would reveal greater differences.

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