

# The Concept of Beauty in Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones's Diary

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i  
njemačkog jezika i književnosti

Laura Franjić

**Koncept ljepote u *Dnevniku Bridget Jones* Helen Fielding**

Završni rad

Mentorica: izv. prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

Osijek, 2021.

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## **Abstract**

This paper deals with the concepts of beauty in Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* as the main character Bridget Jones obsesses over beauty and looks throughout most of the novel. Bridget, however, is not the only character who is concerned about her outer appearance. Many other characters, such as her mother, her friends, and even some love interests, show concern about her semblance, especially when it could make or break the status of Bridget's love life. Throughout the novel, Bridget keeps track of her weight and intake of calories per day. Although some days seem to be rather successful, the results quickly crumble as Bridget experiences another misfortune in her row of unfortunate events. On the other hand, Bridget's determination to get in shape is questionable as she puts almost no effort into maintaining her diet, when and if she even has one. She never mentions exercising and she never restrains herself from enjoying a calorie packed meal. Another concern is that she is struggling to make her outer appearance look presentable only because she is trying to find a suitor as her family and friends constantly remind her that the clock is ticking and that she is getting old. Yet, nobody is concerned about the amount of stress Bridget is experiencing, which is visibly shown in her smoking habit that she also keeps track of. The concept(s) of beauty in Fielding's novel will thus be analysed through the comparison of what the experts in the fields of diet, nutrition, and exercise find healthy and what Bridget considers as healthy. Bridget's thoughts, actions, and behaviour as well as her friends' and family's will be utilized to demonstrate how brittle one's self-image really is and how easy it is to head in an unwanted direction.

**Keywords:** beauty, Bridget Jones, family, stress, Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*

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## Introduction

This paper deals with the concepts of beauty in Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones's Diary*, which portrays the life of a 30-something year old Bridget Jones and her every day struggles. The novel revolves mostly around Bridget's love life or lack thereof. She is portrayed as an ordinary woman dealing with real life situations but in her own funny and clumsy way. Throughout the novel, Bridget faces many critiques about her looks (and behaviour), coming from both herself and the people she chooses to surround herself with.

The paper will attempt to show how obsessed Bridget and her family and friends are with her looks. All of them believe that if Bridget wants to find a good and handsome suitor, she must look her best. Many times Bridget's personality itself is completely disregarded and mostly out of focus as they concentrate only on the outer. Bridget's concern about her appearance consumes her life even more after a failed relationship and her constant parents' nagging about her age.

The first chapter deals with Bridget's own perception of herself and her fixation on her outer shell. Bridget literally tracks her weight and calorie intake at the beginning of each day, sometimes even commenting on the "results." As the novel progresses, her comments stay pretty much the same, doubting and resenting her own looks. Sometimes she shows progress in accepting the way she is, but that lasts shortly. The second chapter will concentrate on the people close to Bridget and discuss their attitudes and views on Bridget's and other characters' appearance.

## 1. Bridget and the Concept of Beauty: How Bridget Sees Herself

From the beginning until the very end of her diary, Bridget writes down her weight, the number of consumed alcohol units, the number of smoked cigarettes, and her calorie count, with only a few missed days in between. On the first page of her diary, she makes a set of rules for the coming year trying to better herself, not only her looks but also her overall mental health. “Bridget sets goals—to get to work on time, to stop smoking, to lose weight, to read *The Famished Road*—and proves incapable of accomplishing any of them” (Marsh 52). The first rule to “[s]top smoking” (Fielding 8) clashes with the latter two rules, which are heavily directed at her appearance: “Reduce circumference of thighs by 3 inches (i.e. 1 ½ inches each), using anti-cellulite diet. Purge flat of all extraneous matter... Go to the Gym three times a week not merely to buy a sandwich” (Fielding 8). Even though you could technically fulfil both goals in a year, this is highly unlikely: “Quitters can expect to gain six to seven pounds on average once they stop smoking . . . In fact, the stats on quitting are grim even if you aren’t trying to lose weight . . . you have only a 19 percent chance of success after seven weeks” (Clayton and Vanderkam 36). Thus, Bridget’s goals become unfeasible from the start. Dieting is one of the means Bridget wants to achieve her ideal body weight. She even claims that “[i]t is proved by surveys that happiness does not come from love, wealth or power but the pursuit of attainable goals: and what is a diet if not that?” (Fielding 15). Bridget’s calorie count per day is a form of diet, but in order for it to work, a certain amount of physical activity needs to be done. It is arguable if Bridget has ever taken her diet seriously as she says herself: “I realize it has become too easy to find a diet to fit in with whatever you happen to feel like eating and that diets are not there to be pick and mixed but picked and stuck to, which is exactly what I shall begin to do once I’ve eaten this chocolate croissant” (Fielding 42). Not only does Bridget often overstep her calorie count, but she also rarely does any form of physical activity. This leads to the “yo-yo” diet Bridget unconsciously ends up doing: “Many people . . . probably put more emphasis on thinness as being important to health . . . This has helped lead to the ‘yo-yo’ dieting syndrome. . . We know that for the majority of people diets do not work in the long term. Therefore, people’s weights cycle up and down” (Kotsonis and Mackey 67). Bridget’s weight constantly fluctuates between 8 and 9 stone, only to end up at her starting weight. However, as the idea of dieting was extremely popular in the 1990s, Bridget probably fell under the influence of many Gossip Columns and Diet-pill commercials.

One of the goals Bridget had set for herself at the beginning of the year was that “[she will not] [s]ulk 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” (Fielding 7). As opposed to all the other goals, this indicates that Bridget wants to become graceful and elegant in matters of personality. Yet again, she connects this personality development goal with the possibility of greater success at finding a man, which implies that even Bridget’s inside beauty seems to be targeted at obtaining a relationship with a man. Everything about her, not only her appearance, but also her personality, has to change in order for her to meet the beauty standard, or better said, men’s beauty standard.

Although Bridget writes these rules with a humorous undertone, it is clear that those things really do bother her as she constantly reminds herself of them. In fact, most days she adds her own comment next to her weight and calorie status, often criticizing herself yet continuing to break those same rules a few hours or days later, just to eventually get back to them. For example, January starts off with an excuse: “9st 3 (but post-Christmas)” (Fielding 9). Amongst other things, her diary entries often include a list of all the food Bridget consumed during that day, depicting her as almost obsessed with her food intake. As days go on, Bridget does not seem to relax one bit, in fact, things slowly start to get worse for her. She starts to overanalyze her appearance, ending up in very unhealthy thoughts: “2 a.m. Oh, why am I so unattractive?” (Fielding 14).

It is more than once that she actually expresses how she feels about herself. In some instances, her appearance bothers her so much that she does not want to leave her house: “Cannot face thought of going to work . . . since am fat, have spot on chin, and desire only to sit on cushion eating chocolate” (Fielding 14). This could potentially be a sign of an eating disorder as Bridget shows “fear of weight gain, unrealistic body image. . . One symptom of binge-eating disorder is eating large amounts of food rapidly until feeling uncomfortably full” (Ambrose and Deisler 5). Those symptoms do eventually come up in the novel, Bridget even describing them, but whether she has one of them is never confirmed (nor denied) as she never seeks professional help. The extreme Bridget goes to, to be or stay skinny, is visible in the conversation with Tom when he suggests that she might have a tapeworm, hence why she lost weight: “‘Listen,’ I told him, ‘this tapeworm is staying. I love my new tapeworm. Not only am I thin, but I no longer want to smoke or glug wine’” (Fielding 58). It is concerning that Bridget would rather have a parasite inside of her than weigh a little bit more.

One of Bridget's most thought-provoking statements is:

Wise people will say Daniel should like me just as I am, but I am a child of *Cosmopolitan* culture, have been traumatized by super-models and too many quizzes and know that neither my personality nor my body is up to it if left to its own devices. I can't take the pressure. (Fielding 36)

Bridget's thoughts can actually be seen as her confession about where all her struggles come from and what and who has made her so insecure. As she mentions, she grew up reading *Cosmopolitan*, a popular magazine with more than fifty international editions, giving advice on love, sex, fashion, careers, and more. Many argue that *Cosmo* is actually an anti-feminist and female-objectifying women's magazine because the advice they give is often about how to get better at sex, how to lose weight – mostly directed at women, instead of empowering women that all shapes and sizes are equally beautiful and that it takes mutual effort for things to work in a relationship. Bridget's thoughts also demonstrate how much the media truly has to do with shaping a person from a young age. In 1996, when the novel was published, the look the models went for were either “heroin-chic” or “super-waif,” both carrying the characteristics of extremely underweight and tired people. Those looks could have easily been triggers for many young girls, including Bridget, to start practicing dieting and exercise, some taking it to unhealthy extremes just to achieve “the look.” Wykes and Gunter argue that “[t]he effect was theorized as negative due to magazines consistent preference to depict fashion and beauty as inexorably linked to extreme slenderness with the effect of creating self-destructive attitudes to food amongst young female readers in particular” (70). A noteworthy part is also when Bridget muses about how unrepresented she feels in the media: “Find self constantly scanning face in mirror for wrinkles and frantically reading *Hello!*, checking out everyone's ages in desperate search for role models (Jane Seymour is forty-two!)” (Fielding 44). She stresses that she desperately tries to find a role model, a woman of older age with a successful career who she could look up to. It is also interesting to note that *Hello!*, which Bridget mentions, is also a celebrity-gossip based magazine, again an unhealthy source of both entertainment and inspiration for Bridget.

Furthermore, Bridget mentions she “[d]ecided needed to spend more time on appearance like Hollywood stars and have therefore spent ages putting concealer under eyes, blusher on cheeks and defining fading features” (Fielding 77), indicating that she again takes inspiration from celebrity looks, an almost unachievable goal considering the amount of

money these stars possess as well as the unlimited access to beauty clinics, spas, doctors, and personal trainers. Not even to mention the close link between the look of Hollywood stars and *Cosmopolitan* cover models:

already-thin models were losing work to even skinnier women and had to become even more willowy to keep working with top-rated designers. The increasingly close links between Hollywood and the fashion industry has led female movie stars in the same direction. (Gauntlett 194)

Bridget eventually achieves the weight she finds acceptable for her appearance, but her confidence quickly gets shattered as Tom says:

“I think you looked better before, hon.” Now I feel empty and bewildered — as if a rug has been pulled from under my feet. Eighteen years — wasted. Eighteen years of calorie- and fat-unit-based arithmetic. Eighteen years of buying long shirts and sweaters and leaving the room backwards in intimate situations to hide my bottom. Millions of cheesecakes and tiramisus, tens of millions of Emmenthal slices left uneaten. Eighteen years of struggle, sacrifice and endeavor — for what? Eighteen years and the result is “tired and flat.” I feel like a scientist who discovers that his life's work has been a total mistake. (Fielding 59)

As the quote indicates, Bridget has been struggling for a long time with her weight. Considering that she turns 32 years old in the novel, it would mean that she has been watching her weight since she was a 14-year-old teen. This is both disturbing and saddening, but does not come as a shock as humans are most impressionable in their teen years: “Practitioners also need to be aware of the fact that young children are uniquely susceptible to media influence, but that their behavior may not show that influence until they are older. Media represent a major influence on adolescents” (DiClemente et al 413).

In addition, Bridget’s obsession, and maybe even disorder, about looks is clearly visible in a conversation with Tom. Tom is the only male character in the novel that visibly cares about his appearance (in an unhealthy manner) and talks to Bridget with full transparency. After commenting on his nose, Tom starts to question his weight. As we know, Bridget is obsessed by calories and her calorie count, but her true craze is revealed when Tom questions her on a row of food items whose calorie percentage Bridget knows by heart. An important thing to notice is how bluntly Tom accused Bridget of being sick, which she

denies: “Tom says I am sick but I happen to know for a fact that I am normal” (Fielding 131). Not only does she deny her own ill-being, but she also pushes this narrative onto Tom: “he is becoming insecure, appearance obsessed and borderline anorexic” (Fielding 131). The topic of men’s body image issues has been a taboo for a very long time, however, that does not mean it did not exist as Rumsey and Harcourt indicate:

Although the diagnosis of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are increasing amongst men (e.g. Strong et al., 2000), rates are still significantly higher amongst women . . . Of concern, however, is the finding that outcomes for men with an eating disorder are often worse; only 20% of men compared with 50% of females had a good outcome. (181)

Tom’s anorexia was never confirmed, but his insecurities and appearance obsession were to an extent visible when he actually got his nose surgically altered: “Turned out Tom had secretly had the operation on Wednesday but was too embarrassed to tell us because we’d all been so dismissive about his minuscule nasal bump” (Fielding 134).

Another important thing to notice are Bridget’s multiple assertions that she in fact knows what type of society she lives in: “Our culture is too obsessed with outward appearance, age and status” (Fielding 46) – “the pressures we women have long been subjected to” (Fielding 131). Although she is aware that the problem lies in society itself and not within her, she does not give up her wishes to be skinnier and to fit in. According to Michele A. Paludi’s *The Psychology of Women at Work: Challenges and Solutions for Our Female Workforce*, whose research is based on the late 1990s and early 2000s, the problem may be caused by society but is active because of women:

Several theories have been examined in the scholarly literature to explain the phenomenon of judging women more harshly than men: sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Masser & Abrams, 2004), competition (Loya, Cowan, & Walters, 2006) . . . a few researchers associated women’s hostility toward women as a reflection of jealousy caused by current beauty and body image standards (Forbes, Collinsworth, Jobe, Braum, & Wise, 2007; Loya et al., 2006). (1).

What this study is alluding to is that women are almost forced by society to compete with each other, which creates a negative competition among them. They instantly see one another as competitors rather than role models, friends, etc.

As previously mentioned, the novel started with a list of rules and goals for the upcoming year. At the end of her diary, Bridget writes the results of her goals. The most important one to mention would be her weight goal as that was the one she struggled to accept the most. Her results show: “Weight gained 5st 2lb/Weight lost 5st 3 lb” (Fielding 157). Firstly, this shows how much Bridget actually cared about her weight or more specifically her weight loss: over the course of a year she managed to lose only one pound. All the unnecessary disappointment comments, all the time spent thinking about what has less calories, all the trials to substitute one food or drink with the other – all of them ended up being just extra work Bridget did only to accomplish nothing. Secondly, this also demonstrates what type of role weight actually has. Bridget was constantly concerned that the lack of “ideal” physical appearance would reflect her inability to find a boyfriend, which proved to be wrong. In the end, she ended up with Mark Darcy who never once mentioned Bridget not meeting the standards (of society), even though throughout the novel he dated women Bridget described as: “tall, thin, glamorous girl[s]” (Fielding 55). Ironically, she even mentions at the beginning of March “9st (what is point of dieting for whole of Feb when end up exactly same weight at start of March as start of Feb?” (Fielding 38), not realizing how senseless this will sound, as she spent a whole year dieting only to end up at the same weight she started out with.

### **1.1. Bridget and the Concept of Beauty: How Bridget Views Others**

Although Bridget gets quite many unsettling comments about her looks, this does not stop her from commenting others. One would think that because of her own endurance of such hurtful words she would not feel the need to criticize those surrounding her. Yet, the novel proves otherwise. Not only does Bridget comment herself in a negative way, she does so to her colleagues, acquaintances, and friends. Her boss, Perpetua, seems to be a recurring figure: “her vast, bulbous bottom swathed in a tight red skirt with a bizarre three-quarter-length striped waistcoat strapped across it. What a blessing to be born with such Sloaney arrogance. Perpetua could be the size of a Renault Espace and not give it a thought” (Fielding 15).

Even though Bridget describes her boss as being bigger in size than the beauty standards command, the thing that bothers her more is her confidence and nonchalance: “How many hours, months, years, have I spent worrying about weight while Perpetua has been happily looking for lamps with porcelain cats as bases around the Fulham Road?” (Fielding 15). Perpetua does not particularly care about her looks. She knows her high status will automatically put her in a superior position compared to other women. Bridget envies her poise so much that she constantly mentions her appearance. Another thing Bridget might hold against Perpetua is the amount of men that want her. We know that Perpetua has quite a few admirers judging from the amount of flowers she receives on Valentine’s Day: “Got into the office to find Perpetua had a bunch of flowers the size of a sheep on her desk” (Fielding 31).

Moreover, while at an event, Bridget is supposed to introduce Perpetua to Mark and accompany their names with fun facts about them. The only things she could think of Perpetua were: “Perpetua is very fat and spends her whole time bossing me around” (Fielding 55). Besides Perpetua being Bridget’s boss, she showed no extremely inappropriate behaviour nor was she rude towards her or others. In fact, Perpetua seemed to try to befriend most of the characters she came in contact with and stood up to Daniel in Bridget’s favour: “You selfish, self-indulgent, manipulative, emotional blackmailer” (Fielding 105). This was actually one of the rare occasions when someone told Daniel off as his rude behaviour often gets disregarded in favour of his good looks. Except the occasional money flaunting, Perpetua did not portray any behaviour worthy of the constant body shaming. It seems that the only problems were Bridget’s issue with Perpetua’s getting away with her looks because of her wealth (while Bridget gets criticised by her family and others) and Perpetua’s ability to live her life freely since comments on her looks could not offend her as she knew she always had the upper hand. An important message Bridget and many others from the novel seem to dismiss is that “[l]osing weight doesn’t give you more confidence; self-confidence leads to weight loss . . . It was always about how we chose to see ourselves and stand up in the world” (Ortner and Rankin16). Although bigger women were not the beauty standard at the time, Perpetua proved that success, respect, and men do not come from looks.

On another occasion, Bridget’s acquaintance Fiona asks her why she is not married yet. In response, Bridget thinks to herself: “Because I don’t want to end up like you, you fat, boring, Sloaney milch cow” (Fielding 26). Considering the fact that Fiona is pregnant at that time and we know Bridget is aware of her pregnancy because Fiona is showing, her comments are highly inappropriate. Even though we know Bridget struggles with her own



weight, this one was uncalled for as no pregnant woman should be judged for her appearance while in that state. We can see that not even pregnant women get a time out for being shamed when that “extra fat” is, in fact, creating life. Bridget could also be potentially jealous for two reasons: one being that even “fat and boring” Fiona found a suitor, the other that her confidence bothers her – as Bridget sees her more fat than pregnant.

There is also Daniel, Bridget’s love interest. Without overseeing Daniel’s superficial criteria for his love interests, Bridget seems to be almost as shallow as him: “Daniel’s enormously wellread brain may turn out to be something of a nuisance if things develop. Maybe I should have fallen for someone younger and mindless who would cook for me, wash all my clothes and agree with everything I say” (Fielding 35). She knows that Daniel is smart and that could potentially be a problem in their relationship as Bridget likes to keep everything in check (while simultaneously keeping nothing in check). We already learned from her previous descriptions of Daniel that he is in fact handsome, which is essentially the core reason Bridget kept yearning for him even when he led her on and stood her up on a date, later also ignoring her. Bridget years for Daniel because

[a]ttractive people are generally viewed as more interesting, sociable, sexual, competent, successful, intelligent, and well adjusted than unattractive people. Compared to less attractive people, attractive people are not only perceived more positively, they also tend to be treated more positively by others. (Worell 196)

Daniel’s attractiveness brings him many advantages, both in his career and his love life. He has no problem keeping a second woman around and neither does the other woman mind Bridget. He knows how to play his “handsomeness-card” well and even gets Bridget to miss him while he did still cheat on her and announced that the woman is actually his fiancée.

Bridget also shares her views on her mom Pamela. When Bridget visits her mom, who recently left her dad in search for a more adventurous love life and younger love interests, she contends: “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” (Fielding 38). Though Bridget describes her mom in another scene to look as “Cilla Black on *Blind Date*” (Fielding 99) who looks like an average middle-aged woman, Bridget acknowledges that her mom’s beauty and irresistibility come more from her confidence rather than her change of appearance. Her mother realized that neither clothes nor make up can make you look “better”

– only a change of attitude can. Later on, she even reiterates this by saying: “Can officially confirm that the way to a man’s heart these days is not through beauty, food, sex, or alluringness of character, but merely the ability to seem not very interested in him” (Fielding 41).

Other small comments about looks have been made outside Bridget’s circle as well: “At this point Alex Walker, who works in Sharon’s company, strolled in with a stunning blonde who was about eight times as attractive as him” (Fielding 16). This is a rare occasion in the novel when a man is being criticized and not a woman. However, this criticism also comes across as very rude and unnecessary as two people do not have to share the same attractiveness level to be together. With the society based on looks, the main criteria are to be pretty and handsome even when coming in a pair. Alex and the woman that accompanies him appear to be a torn in their side as they do not necessarily comply to those standards.

To further analyze the appearance-based world Bridget lives in, another Bridget’s view can be used:

As my friend Tom often remarks, it’s amazing how much time and money can be saved in the world of dating by close attention to detail. A white sock here, a pair of red braces there, a grey slip-on shoe, a swastika, are as often as not all one needs to tell you there’s no point writing down phone numbers and forking out for expensive lunches because it’s never going to be a runner. (Fielding 13)

What she means is that certain clothing items carry a set of characteristics for the person that is wearing them. For example, a white sock is stereotypical for college guys, red braces symbolize the younger ones, a grey slip-on shoe depicts a man who needs to be able to get dressed (and leave) quickly. A swastika would be a symbol for someone who just has wrong viewpoints, and so on. All of these are clues based on clothes women use to see if a man is worth their time and if he even intends to stay. Although there might be a few exceptions, Bridget seems to know a guy by just taking a closer look at his clothes. Meaning that most of them will not even get the chance to start with just because of the way they dressed that day. The proverb “Do not judge a book by its cover” does not seem to apply to Bridget’s, Tom’s or any other character’s life.

Another instance of stereotyping occurs in the dressing rooms when Bridget tries to find herself some new clothes:

I hate communal changing rooms. Everyone stares sneakily at each other's bodies, but no one ever meets anyone's eye. There are always girls who know that they look fantastic in everything and dance around beaming, swinging their hair and doing model poses in the mirror saying, "Does it make me look fat?" to their obligatory obese friend, who looks like a water buffalo in everything. (Fielding 68)

Not only does Bridget criticize young girls, in a way making them feel bad for being confident, but she also seems quite jealous of them. The obligatory obese friend is probably a projection of herself when she was younger as she talks about this situation with a hint of bitterness.

## **2. Bridget's Family and Love Interests' Concept of Beauty: How They See Bridget**

Although Bridget gives herself a hard enough time about her looks as it is, her family and acquaintances seem to “care” just as much if not even more. Everybody is so concerned about Bridget, often asking her “How’s your love-life, anyway?” (Fielding 11) and other really intrusive and uncomfortable questions. Bridget does seem bothered by them, but she quickly shrugs them off. Besides those uncomfortable questions, the main issue for Bridget is that she is surrounded by such judging people. Throughout the novel, many of her loved ones, her mum and her (ex) boyfriend, give really harsh comments about her appearance.

### **2.1. The Ex-Boyfriend**

Daniel, the ex-boyfriend, often sexualizes and objectifies Bridget, many times baiting her with nice words to get what he wants: “PS. I like your tits in that top” (Fielding 21), only to leave her confused whether she was good enough in the first place. His comments on her skirt eventually led to a date. Another example of a harassingly sexualized conversation occurs in relation to another clothing item:

“Come on, Bridge,” he said, leaning towards me seductively. “I need to have a serious discussion about your blouse. It’s extremely thin. Almost, when you examine it, thin to the point of transparency. Has it ever occurred to you that your blouse might be suffering from . . . *bulimia*?” (Fielding 57)

To receive such kinds of comments from anyone else except a handsome, potential love interest, would be immediately marked as harassment, but because of his looks Daniel gets away with it: “Bridget allowed herself to be objectified by her male co-workers, she deliberately dressed provocatively inviting Daniel to see her as a sexual object and according

to her own admission even enjoyed being sexually harassed by him” (Weiß 3). His comments provoke Bridget to think: “Am irresistible Sex Goddess” (Fielding 20) and make her completely get dolled-up for him “legs to be waxed, underarms shaved, eyebrows plucked, feet pumiced, skin exfoliated and moisturized, spots cleansed, roots dyed, eyelashes tinted, nails filed, cellulite massaged, stomach muscles exercised” (Fielding 22), only to be stood up by him, making her feel horrible yet again: “[Daniel] is probably out with someone thinner...Am going to get weight” (Fielding 22). The by far worst incident involving Daniel Cleaver is when Bridget gets a hunch that he may be cheating on her. Bridget wanted to bring him as a date to a family event but Daniel cancelled last minute. When Bridget comes unannounced to his flat, Daniel does not seem too bothered to see her; yet, after a few minutes of investigating, she finally goes out onto the roof top where she finds “a bronzed, long-limbed, blonde-haired stark-naked woman” (Fielding 92) who said “Honey . . . I thought you said she was thin” (Fielding 92). The woman’s comment makes Bridget feel awful as she has struggled with her looks for months at this point and the things she is most concerned about herself (her weight) seems to have taken a toll on her as she doubts herself over and over again: “Oh God, what’s wrong with me? Why does nothing ever work out? It is because I am too fat” (Fielding 94). Furthermore, the fact that his secret lover is “prettier” and comments Bridget in such a rude way makes things even worse.

Another Daniel’s rude comment occurs when Daniel meets Bridget’s mother: “Bridget, why can’t you get all done up on Saturdays like your mum?” (Fielding 73). Taking into account that Bridget is not only extremely insecure, but that her insecurities also come from her mother’s constant nagging, this comment seems to really hit home for her as the diary entry ends with this sentence. It acts as a statement that she has given up on defending herself. Not only did Daniel try to get Bridget’s mother to like him by giving her a shallow compliment, but he also (un)intentionally hurt Bridget. As we learned so far, Daniel likes to sweet talk and this could have easily been just a subtle manipulation towards Bridget to try and change her appearance in the way he would like it the most.

This is not to say that Bridget was not warned about Daniel’s ways. On February 15<sup>th</sup>, before Bridget official began dating Daniel, her friend Sharon confronts her: “lay off Daniel as he is not a very nice person and no good will come of it” (Fielding 32). Sharon seems as one of the few characters that really cares about personality as well as looks. Bridget, however, completely overlooks Daniel’s immature behaviour and jumps right at the possibility of a new love interest because of his smooth comments and maybe because of

despair.

## 2.2. Pamela, the Mother

A recurring character that had a revelation of herself and wishes the same for Bridget is her mother. In many scenes, she is depicted as pushing Bridget towards a number of men, often implying that either her looks or her behaviour are in the way to achieve a stable relationship:

I'm taking you to have your colours done...I'm sick to death of you wandering round in all these dingy slurries and fogs . . . if you'd had something a bit more bright and cheerful on at the turkey curry buffet Mark Darcy might have shown a bit more interest. Nobody wants a girlfriend who wanders round looking like someone from Auschwitz, darling. (Fielding 70)

The narrative of the perfect woman is so much embedded into Pamela's mind that she believes that, without looking her best, Bridget will not be able to find a man, when in reality she did not even need the help: "Thought better of boasting to her about having a boyfriend despite being dressed from head to toe in slurry" (Fielding 70). This is not the only occasion where her mother questions her appearance: "Oh, now you're not going to go looking like a *sloppy tramp* in dull colors. Put something smart and bright on. What about that lovely cerise two-piece you used to wear?" (Fielding 107). This part is especially important because Bridget was going to her first day at work and we can see how much emphasis her mother puts on making a good first impression. Just as in the real world, in Bridget's society looks also play a big role. As Klehe and Hoft assert: "physical attractiveness was found to have a stronger effect on interviewer ratings of performance than impression management behaviors, verbal communication and nonverbal communication exhibited by the candidate" (332). Taking this into consideration, her mum's intentions were probably not ill-willed. The real question should be why looks matter more over skills when trying to get a job.

Her mum's criticism can, however, sometimes be helpful: "Go into work looking drop-dead gorgeous. Leave no one-especially Daniel-in any doubt that you've thrown him over" (Fielding 94). Rather than saying this in a harsh undertone, she suggests that getting

“dolled-up” and showing up like that to work might make Daniel regret his action. This appearance-based suggestion leaves a rather positive impression in their beauty-centered world as she meant no harm. The advice could have been aimed at a more personal level such as taking care about herself, doing the things she likes etc., but this is as good as it gets under the societal pressure.

## **Conclusion**

The novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* has been one of the most popular novels of the chic-lit genre, resulting in two sequels as well as movie adaptations. The purpose of this paper was to analyze Bridget, her friends, family and partners, and present each of them with their beauty standards and struggles. At first glance, Bridget Jones seems just like any modern woman, struggling with her looks and love life. However, upon looking deeper into the contexts of the novel, it can be seen that Bridget carries a lot more than presented at first glance. Her craze with her looks only becomes more prominent as days go by, but her possible health problems get unraveled in a series of conversations she has with both her diary and her social group (including her parents, friends, work colleagues, and love interests). Although Bridget is the focal point of the novel, she is not the only one struggling with society's beauty standards as many other characters also showcase some concerning opinions. This novel was originally proclaimed to be a feminist work of art, however, given that the main character starts to change her appearance to find a man, that statement is debatable. *Bridget Jones's Diary* gives us the possibility to analyze what marks can be left by society and media on a developing individual and how those marks will translate in their adult life. The thesis of this paper is thought to be proven – both Bridget Jones and other characters have been analyzed. Their opinions on society's beauty standards as well as their will to comply to them have been showcased and explained through a series of examples.





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