



Bridget Jones: Midlife Crisis

The third diary catches up with her life, but readers may wish they hadn't

BRIDGET JONES: MAD ABOUT THE BOY, by Helen Fielding. Alfred A. Knopf, 400 pp., \$26.95.

BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

Thursday 3 October 2013.
Pages read: 386, Times laughed out loud: 0, Actual emotions felt: 0, Believable male characters: 0, Interesting romantic plots: 0, Times cringed in horror due to weak jokes about flatulence, vomiting, head lice or the planet Uranus: 695.

Not since Louisa May Alcott wrote "Little Men" has such a bad thing happened to a beloved female character. In Helen Fielding's follow-up to "Bridget Jones' Diary" (1998) and "Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason" (2000), the once-adorable London nincompoop has become an unfortunate parody of a middle-aged, widowed single mom with a bunch of two-dimensional friends and an eating disorder involving bags of grated cheese. To anyone who fell in love with Bridget as she appeared in the first installment: Proceed with extreme caution. The humor in this book is pounded home so hard, you end up feeling defensive even of Twitter.

You've probably heard, since Great Britain's Sunday Times ran an excerpt, that Bridget's husband, Mark Darcy, is dead — killed off by a land mine in Darfur in 2006. Honestly, he was lucky to get out of it. By the time this book opens in April of 2013 (amazingly recent, and yet it really does seem possi-



UNIVERSAL PICTURES PHOTO

Renée Zellweger in the 2004 movie "Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason" ■ Photo gallery: Literary adaptations at newsday.com/books

ble that this book was written in a matter of weeks), 51-year-old Bridget has mostly recovered from her loss and is desperate to find herself a man. What she finds is a ripped, comely 29-year-old lad with the Twitter handle @Roxster, whose appearances consist of incessant, tedious back-and-forth tweeting sessions and a few actual dates. What @Roxster and @Jonesy BJ have in common, at bottom, is that they both like to overeat and are both wildly amused by the digestive mishaps that can follow such piggery (see above). To say that @Roxster does not come to life is like saying your cup of coffee this morning did not turn into George Clooney. It was never, ever in the cards.

The first "Bridget Jones"

really was hilarious, remember? The book, definitely, and the 2001 movie with adorable Renée Zellweger as well. A set of feverish running jokes about female insecurity that any girl could relate to, it was fresh in both its level of extreme hysteria and its quirky Britishness. Here again, we have the hysteria, but sadly the targets of Bridget's panic have already been flogged to death. Have you heard the one about helicopter parenting/dieting/Botox/drinking/self-help books/Internet shopping/the Dalai Lama/moronic movie-industry meetings? I fear you have.

As for the Britishness, it is amusing that English people call nursery school "Junior Branch" and boy-toys "toy boys," that their favored brand of dishwashing soap is "Fairy Liquid," and when they're too tired to make a proper dinner for the kids they heat up a dish

called "spag bog." Funny, right? But not that funny.

Similarly insufficient is this book's classic literature reference. The first "Bridget Jones" was a sly takeoff on "Pride and Prejudice"; hence Mark Darcy. Well, here we get "Hedda Gabler by Anton Chekhov." This is the title of a screenplay Bridget is writing. Instead of clever plot parallels, this time the entirety of the joke is that Bridget learns quite late in the game that Gabler has only one "b" and the play is by Henrik Ibsen. Oh yeah, and that the movie people want to move the action from Norway to a yacht in Hawaii. #really?

The last 20 pages of "Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy" are almost worth reading for their utter, untrammelled bizarre ness. These insane pages include a shocking, sort-of-violent near-tragedy at the Junior

Branch; a sudden, life-changing revelation of true love by a minor character and, instead of a wedding, a "coming-together" party including a couple of never-before-introduced stepchildren. In a single page of this onslaught, we get both the world's laziest sex scene — "He was pressing now, gently at first, teasing, till I was desperate for him, melting" — and a ridiculously condensed explanation of a character's darkly hinted-at war trauma — "He told me what had happened in Afghanistan: an accident, a mistaken attack, women, children killed, the aftermath." Did I mention that it's Christmas? And our heroine spills hot chocolate on her coat and leaves her sausages in a pub?

Even Christmas is sort of sullied by its appearance in this book. As Bridget would say, Gaaah!