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Essay 2

Transmedia Storytelling: A Young Adult's Response to
The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

Name: Mamie Cox

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Supervisor: Zoe Jaques

College: Newnham

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Introduction: Emergence of Transmedia

The seemingly ever-present nature of computers in the lives of young readers has led to what Reynolds describes as a “proliferation of media[...]giving rise to eclectic textual forms such as email, blogs, and hypertext that mix codes and modes” (2007, p.155). According to Dresang's theory of Radical Change (1999;2009), this rise of new digital media “affects the way digital youth think, learn, socialize, and seek information,” suggesting a positive fundamental shift in reading interaction for children in an age of hypertexts (2009, p.33). As digital age readers' needs and understandings shift, the literature made for them must shift as well. The “transtexts” discussed by Reynolds and Dresang have led to a new form of storytelling in which these web-based forms of literacy are actively integrated into traditional storytelling narratives; this mode of storytelling is known as transmedia.

First coined by Marsha Kinder in 1991 as “transmedia intertextuality,” Kinder defined transmedia as a work in which characters appeared across multiple media (what today would most likely be described as an entertainment franchise) (Phillips, 2012, p. 14). Henry Jenkins has since reframed Kinder's definition and brought the term to popular attention, most recently in his book *Convergence Culture* (2006). Jenkins serves as a critical voice in the new and rapidly developing genre of transmedia storytelling, and has established the definition as we know it:

Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story (Jenkins, 2007).

An early popular example of a transmedial story for young audiences is *Pokémon* – a narrative world in which there is no holistic text containing every piece of information on its many characters and rules. Readers must, instead, collect information through various medias including a television show, video games, comic books, and playing cards (Jenkins, 2006, p.132). This content is developed, released, and collected over periods of time, allowing a deep understanding of its characters and plot points, while encouraging a sustained relationship between the participant and narrative world.

Thanks to the enhancements in digital technologies and the proliferation of social media, transmedia stories are growing far beyond television shows and comic books. They are incorporating social media platforms, allowing for a new, multi-platform, engaging, interactive, and immersive literary experience. One such narrative, the groundbreaking production of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012-2013), tests the hopes of transmedia, as it pushes, and ultimately questions, every boundary of the genre to date. Created by Hank Green and Bernie Su, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (hereafter referred to as LBD) is an adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* for the social media age. LBD reimagines the novel around a fictional online video blog (vlog) filmed in the bedroom of a 24-year-old graduate student, Lizzie, studying Mass Communications and living at home with her marriage-obsessed mother, endlessly patient father, and two sisters. Lizzie's vlog updates viewers on the sisters' dating lives, her burdening amount of student debt, her best friend Charlotte, and of the seemingly unappealing William Darcy. The vlogs are not LBD's only mode of storytelling, as it expands across numerous social media platforms, including three other YouTube channels, and multiple Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Lookbook accounts. Created over the course of one year (July 2012 – August 2013), LBD consisted of Lizzie's bi-weekly vlogs, along with a host of tweets and posts updated "live" from

various characters' social media accounts. This constant influx of narrative content and information, straight to participants' personal social media accounts, allowed for a year-long immersive, virtual world.

This particular adaptation of Austen's novel, while permitting for strikingly modern twists, bears a great resemblance to its urtext, repeating its narrative structure almost to the letter. The relatively small amount of scholarly work published on LBD focuses on its quality as an adaptation (Baeva, 2015; Zerne, 2013). Its success as an adaptation is applauded, and given the dedication to its urtext, the adaptive nature of LBD cannot be overlooked. However, I am interested in LBD, not in regards to its role as an adaptation, but to its mode of storytelling, and more importantly that mode's narrative longevity and sustainability.

Becoming the first YouTube series to ever win a Primetime Emmy, and boasting over 265,000 subscribers and 64 million total video views to date, LBD was a veritable success. According to YouTube certified data collection site, Social Blade, as of July 2012 (one month into the series), LBD had amassed nearly 72,000 subscribers, and by the final video in June 2013, had a total of 208,000 ("The Lizzie Bennet Diaries", 2016). Nearly three years later, as of February 2016, LBD has a total of 265,311 subscribers. This shows a dramatic decline in new subscribers to the series since the final episode, and raises important questions about the ephemeral nature of transmedial narratives. The narrative's dependence on the temporal and interactive nature of social media, means LBD can never again exist as it did during its year of live production. In the following essay, I will explore how LBD functions in this post-production state, analyzing how the narrative is experienced, received, and understood after the ephemeral platforms it originally depended on no longer offer the same level of interactivity and engagement.

In the following sections, I will outline LBD as a transmedial story, placing it within an analytical framework and developing an understanding of the text as it was meant to be experienced. I will not only be examining LBD from a theoretical lens through the perspective of an imagined reader, but will also look at it in “concrete and particular ways” (Mackey, 2011, p.4), by analyzing one young adult’s response to LBD as it presents itself today, addressing the story’s transmedial power and possibly ephemeral nature.

Literature Review

While digital media proliferates through the life of today’s young adults, relatively little research exists on their understanding and interaction with it. Reynold’s discusses the need for more “transtexts” (2007, p.155), and Dresang highlights transmedia stories for their ability to engage digital age readers (2009, p.35). However, there is no substantive empirical research examining transmedia stories in relation to their young adult audiences. Thus, when compiling a literature review, I have instead read *around* the field of transmedia texts, including discussions of children’s interaction with virtual worlds, digital picturebooks, and video games.

Guy Merchant (2009) has demonstrated a need for a pedagogical shift in the treatment, implementation, and understanding of digital literacy in the classroom, specifically in relation to online virtual worlds. Merchant writes that “While debates about the educational worth of virtual world game play and gaming attract considerable attention, empirical research that investigates their learning potential in classrooms is still in its infancy” (2009, p.41). Merchant’s call for more research is echoed by other digital literacy researchers. Margaret Mackey writes that “we have much to learn” in regards to another aspect of children’s media literacy- digital picturebooks. Evaluating children’s responses to picturebook apps, Mackey explores the

difference in “picturebook choreographies” between digital and print picturebooks, analyzing the movements and environments allowed by reading a picturebook app (2016, p.170). While there has been a definite trend in research into digital age texts and narratives, many researchers seem to currently be focused on them in relation to early childhood (Mackey, 2002; Marsh, 2004; Gillen & Merchant, 2013), as opposed to young adults. One researcher who has moved into research with young-adults, Mackey, focuses on “behaviors of ordinary [young adult] readers, viewers, and players, and on what we can learn from their ability to articulate the tacit and explicit skills and strategies they bring to bear on on these [...] stories” in *Narrative Pleasures in Young Adult Novels, Films, and Video Games* (2011, p.4). It is clear that digital-based narratives and texts are not going away anytime soon, and there is a clear need for a better understanding of just how these stories function and are experienced by the young readers who utilize them.

Textual Analysis: The Lizzie Bennet Diaries as a Transmedia Story

The vlogs found on *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* channel look just like thousands of others easily found and popularly watched on YouTube. Lizzie, the subject and presumed creator, sits in front of a handheld camera, talking directly to her viewers through cyberspace. From this fixed position, the audience gets both a close up of Lizzie and her bedroom. Surrounded by belongings, books, and photographs, there is an immediate sense of intimacy with the viewer gleaned from Lizzie’s straightforward position and the clearly private setting. The familiarity does not end there, but continues with the personal nature of her stories. Describing herself in episode one as a “24-year-old grad student with a mountain of student loans,” Lizzie ends her intro, “My name is Lizzie Bennet, and this is my life” (Lizzie Bennet Diaries, 2012, April 9). As the video jump cuts to a black title page accompanied by a synth-pop instrumental, it is clear that

the audience is about to get a personal look into the young woman's life. The entire production of Lizzie's vlogs, including the intimate setting, familiarity of the subject, subject's self-identification, musical opening sequence (similar to the opening credits of a television show), and the numerous jump cuts (39 total in the 3 minute, 19 second video) allude to a heavily edited product that is a customary to the genre (Frobenius, 2011, p.818). While every effort has clearly been made to to make Lizzie's vlogs as authentic as possible, LBD is not a "real" look into the young woman's life at all, but is a fully produced, directed, scripted, and edited transmedia series.

While the 100 three- to five-minute vlogs found on Lizzie's YouTube channel are the main narrative device of the series, LBD producers have incorporated numerous paratexts in the narrative framework of the story. These are too extensive to explore in full within the confines of this essay, but examples include various YouTube and social media accounts reflecting characters' personalities. For example, on her YouTube channel, *The Lydia Bennet*, Lizzie's younger sister chronicles her daily life, and eventually, her painful and abusive relationship with George Wickham. Fashion merchandiser, Jane, has a frequently updated lookbook.com page showcasing her favorite outfits, and Gigi Darcy keeps audiences tuned into her favorite music with thisismyjam.com. Additionally, all main characters have their own Twitter pages that often update viewers on the narrative before Lizzie's bi-weekly videos. The integration of multiple social media platforms into one story is an element of what Jenkins has called a "convergence culture," representing a modern cultural shift where consumers are encouraged to "seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content" (2006, p.3). By following all of the characters, viewers could see and actively participate in conversations unfolding between them on events discussed in Lizzie's vlogs.

Lizzie's vlogs are clearly the core narrative device, and while extratextual elements like company websites, playlists, and fashion portfolios do not work to advance the plot on their own, as Tepper discusses in "Lizzie in Real Life: Social and Narrative Immersion Through Transmedia in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, "they create a depth to the world of LBD that is rarely achieved in other media properties that focus solely on a singular narrative text" (2015, p.47). Part of the narrative depth LBD fans enjoyed was a result of the series nonlinear narrative structure, which used what LBD producer, Jay Bushman, describes as a "rabbit hole" technique in which:

you lay out a large amount of content before alerting the audience to its existence [...] These were some of my favorite parts of the show – not just the surprise element, but the way it makes the story suddenly coruscate out into a much wider world (Tepper, 2015, p.46).

The integration of William Darcy's younger sister, Gigi, into the narrative is an excellent example of the nontraditional narrative structure of LBD. While Gigi was not seen on Lizzie's vlog until episode 77 (released on January 7, 2013), she existed within the series long before. Viewers first found Gigi on Twitter in July 2012, when she tweeted to William Darcy and her account was casually mentioned in one of Lizzie's videos. Curious viewers who looked up this Twitter page found a new active character page to follow. While this was the first instance of creators leading audiences to follow Gigi, the writers of LBD had been tweeting from her page for two months prior, allowing Gigi an immediate sense of history. To audience members familiar with Austen's original text, Gigi's emotional tweets and hyperlinks to typical breakup songs allude to her relationship with George Wickham. Months later, when Gigi was introduced to Lizzie in her vlog, the audience already had an established relationship with her and a vested interest in her backstory.

This type of engagement suggests a highly interactive narrative experience and requires multitasking abilities of the viewer. Discussing the interactivity of adapted video games, Hutcheon asserts that it “brings a great degree of immersion, both mentally and physically, in the here and now. Response must be rapid: successful hand-eye coordination and puzzle solving involve learned skills and moves” (2006, p.135). While LBD is arguably less kinesthetically active than a video game, it presents similar interactive physical and mental qualities, as the user scans screens for salient details, clicking and linking their way through the story and various character profiles. As Jenkins refers to digital age readers as “informational hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels” (2006, p.21), this kind of engagement with a multi-platform narrative would offer both a heightened sense of connectivity and an element of game-play that keeps users coming back for more.

There is a seemingly endless amount of paratextual details engrained in LBD, and while LBD producer, Jay Bushman, states that “[...] if you don’t consume all of the transmedia content, you haven’t seen the full show” (Tepper, 2015, p.47), it is clear that many viewers are selective in which storylines they follow and significant amounts of material goes unwatched by many fans. Lizzie’s video diaries built up over 265,000 subscribers, Lydia gained a healthy 77,000, and Ricky Collins a meager 9,000. Of Lizzie’s 265,000 YouTube subscribers, over 36,000 of them followed her on Twitter. William Darcy (@wmdarcy) has just over 23,000 followers, and Jane (@LooksByJane) just at 20,000. These numbers suggest that different users utilized different characters’ stories, thus omitting parts of the story they felt unnecessary. Dresang states that hypertexts, like those presented in LBD, gives participants “choices [emphasizing] the richness of unexpected nonlinear patterns,” something which appeals to and is important for many digital age readers (2009, p.37). This type of narrative control allows users

to “make their own choices about what they want and need to explore” (2009, p.37), resulting participants finding their own path through the story.

This fan-centered and controlled production is very much removed from what Jenkins calls the classic model of media engagement in which, “individuals were defined through their roles as ‘consumers’ rather than being seen as producers of – or better yet, participants within – the surrounding culture” (Jenkins and Deuze, 2008, p.5). Film and media scholar Louise Stein writes that LBD integrates “fan creativity in substantive ways, while still progressing a particular, defined story and set of performances” (Stein, 2013). LBD created opportunities for fan interaction, conversation, and production, but those fans had no effect on the outcome of the story. The audience’s impact on the narrative was not felt so much in the plot itself as it was in the narrative world, because fans had their own visible place in it.

Based on the awards, millions of YouTube views, tweets, fan art, and press surrounding the series, LBD clearly engaged audiences at the time of its production and active dissemination. However, viewers today will have a dramatically different, if not wholly altered, experience of LBD as its original audience. My reading thus far has situated LBD as a well-received, highly interactive and one-of-a-kind digital narrative within the context of its creation. However, what happens to a story like LBD post-production? While original 2012-2013 viewers of the series had to wait week to week for new LBD vlogs, tweets, and posts, new audiences have all of the information at the touch of a button. But can the narrative be equally effective, and do participants retain the same level of intimacy with the world as they once had? How can a narrative that depends on the “vibrancy and richness of fan production” (Stein, 2013) exist when that interactivity is no longer possible, and how will fans interact with LBD when they no longer hold a visible space within its world?

Today, Lizzie's vlogs seem to operate just as any other completed serialized narrative, in that viewers can watch them at their own pace; in fact, LBD creators seem to count on this continued viewing. An end frame appears immediately following each episode with a direct hyperlink to the next video.

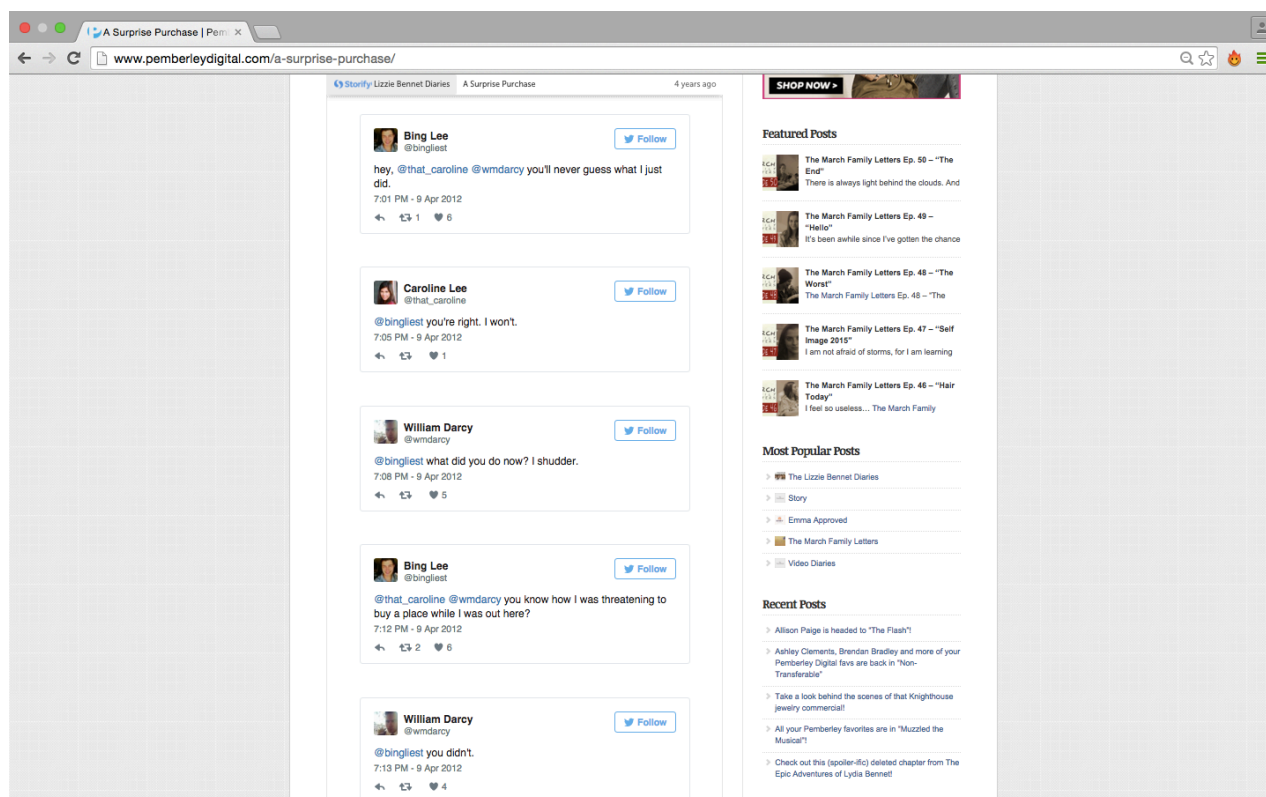


This feature allows a seamless transition between sequential videos and encourages continued viewing, but in doing so, possibly decreases the audience's desire or ability to also follow the social media paratexts. While viewers lose the element of narrative suspense LBD creators expertly weaved throughout the series, they gain the ability to "binge watch" the series in its entirety. This allows consumers to watch videos in quick and uninterrupted succession at their leisure, however, the quick consumption of the series might not allow for a sustained and time-developed relationship with the narrative world or characters.

The second most utilized platform of the series, Twitter, does not carry over for new audiences as easily as YouTube. This is because Twitter, unlike serialized television, "is

conceptualized as a *live* stream of uninhibited, unedited, instant, short, and short-lived reactions—a stream that supposedly taps a *real-time* undercurrent of opinions and gut feelings” (Dijck, 2013, p. 78). The real-time application and immediacy of Twitter made it an optimal platform for LBD creators to utilize during the year the series was being presented, but that same nature of the platform could make it all but inaccessible to new LBD audiences. Lizzie’s last tweet was published on 10 June 2014, along with the final vlog of the series. All of the created Twitter accounts are still available online, but are no longer updated, and it is impossible to read conversations and interact with characters in the way 2012 audiences experienced. This is, possibly, the greatest difficulty to incoming audiences of LBD, in that they do not get full integration of reality and fiction.

LBD creators have attempted to make concessions for this obvious disadvantage to new audience members, creating a feature that allows new viewers to “experience the story from the very beginning across all platforms” via “Follow the Story” (Pemberley Digital, 2016). The figure below represents this comprehensive listing, allowing users to click through a day-by-day collection of YouTube videos, tweets, and Tumblr and LookBook posts in chronological order. Entire Twitter conversations have been collected and put into one story, allowing viewers to see conversations in way that would not have even been possible for 2012 viewers of the series.



While this feature assures viewers have access to all of the paratextual components, this kind of post-series collection completely negates the original transnarrative aim of LBD and does not allow full immersion into the created world. But does this loss of immediacy and real-time application make LBD a “dead” narrative, or can it still engage incoming audiences? While transmedial narratives are proving to be engaging and interactive forms of storytelling in their moment of production, they seem to run the risk of losing audience engagement with their final tweet, post, or uploaded vlog. In the remaining sections of this essay, I will address these issues in a concrete way, by analyzing how today’s viewer experiences LBD in its current state, working to understand how its narrative exists today.

Research Design

My research presents itself in the form of a single case study, in order to gain a “rich, detailed understanding” (Thomas, 2013, “Case study,” para 1) of a young adult’s response to a post-production digital transmedia narrative, and provide a “unique example of real people in real situations” (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011, p.289). As single case studies often focus on critical, extreme, unique, and revelatory cases (Ibid., p.291), LBD’s distinctive nature fit well with the design. I am aware of the limitations having only one participant presents, as it limits the overall scope and impact of the finished research. In an ideal situation, I would have had the opportunity to interview multiple participants over the course of the entire LBD series. However, given the time and word constraints, a single case study was the best option, and still allowed for a deep exploration of engagement. Borrowing from picturebook scholars Arizpe and Styles (2016), my methodology centered around a semi-structured interview over the course of my participant’s interaction with LBD. While Arizpe and Styles’ participants were much younger and research addresses a much different kind of visual text, their systematic approach and interview style are easily transferable to an older participant.

I set out to find my participant for this study with the knowledge that I would be using LBD as my chosen core-text. Given its rather complex intricacies and affordances, I had specific requirements for my participant, the main one being that they be familiar with the use of social media and (ideally) vlogs. Due to the content, nature, and perceived demographic of LBD, I looked for a young adult, aged 15 – 18. As my research was not interested in LBD as a work of adaptation, I was cautious that the interview not become a review of LBD’s adaptive quality, and therefore, wanted a participant with no strong ties or opinions on its urtext. I also believed that having a participant with no knowledge of *Pride and Prejudice* would assure that the narrative

clarity, understanding, and engagement with the story would be as a result of LBD itself, and not a prior understanding and affection for *Pride and Prejudice*. I was put in touch with Aubrey¹ (16), by another colleague on the Children's Literature course. Fulfilling all of my main requirements for a participant in the study, Aubrey was an experienced and literate social media user, familiar with vlogs, and had no previous experience with *Pride and Prejudice*.

Before the interview took place, I met Aubrey at her place of work for a quick introduction and to outline the methods of the project and the core text. I provided Aubrey with a consent form (see Appendix A), which was signed by both herself and her mother, promising her anonymity and explaining the interview as an “[interaction] with a serialized modern adaptation of a classic novel produced for YouTube”. While I originally envisioned a home-based interview, thinking the space would be more comfortable for Aubrey and conducive to better discussion, schedules did not allow it. As she attends school nearby, it was most convenient for the interview to take place in a small, pre-booked, private classroom in the Education Faculty.

While I planned to keep an audio recording of the interview to aid in later analysis, much of my research was focused on non-verbal responses. Given that my research rested so heavily in the way Aubrey physically interacted with the virtual narrative through hyperlinks and mouse-clicks, I thought carefully on how best analyze her interaction with the computer. In addition to an audio recording, I also kept a computer monitor recording, chronicling every mouse-click, scroll, and cursor movement. Much like Mackey in her exploration of young-adults' responses to narrative video games, I was “interested in how the participants [...] make sense and explore the potential pleasures of the [story] they are given” (2011, p.13). Because of this interest in the

¹ In order to assure anonymity, the name of the participant has been changed.

physicality of LBD as it stands today, I instructed Aubrey that she would have full control over the computer and navigation through the story.

Our interview was divided into three parts. During the first section, I had Aubrey watch the first five episodes of LBD. This allowed her a good introduction to the narrative, a set up of its major plot point (Lizzie and Darcy's relationship) and introduced most of the major characters in the story. I wanted to get an understanding of Aubrey's engagement and understanding of the story as it progressed, and encouraged her to speak whenever she felt compelled. I then conducted a semi-structured interview after the episodes had been completed. Louise Rosenblatt distinguishes between an "efferent" reading (reading to take away information) and an "aesthetic" one (reading for experience or feeling) (1982, p.269). As my focus for this project was my participant's interactivity and engagement with the narrative world of LBD, I was mindful of not turning the interview into an efferent content exercise. Therefore, when developing interview questions and structure, I drew from Rosenblatt:

Questions can be sufficiently open to enable the young readers to select concrete details or parts of the text that had struck them most forcibly. The point is to foster expressions of response that keep the experiential, qualitative elements in mind. Did anything especially interest? Annoy? Puzzle? Frighten? Please? Seem familiar? Seem weird? (2005, p.85)

My goal in my interview with Aubrey was not to test her level of understanding of the narrative, but was instead attempting to test the ability of LBD to work as one. It is a fine line, but a distinctive one.

After our discussion, I pulled up three pre-selected Twitter conversations from Follow the Story, allowing her to scroll through, read, and discuss. These tweets corresponded with the episodes Aubrey had previously watched, and I was interested to see if the information they offered enhanced Aubrey's understanding or engagement with the episodes. The final part of the

interview consisted of another Follow the Story section; this time she chose and navigated through the selection at her own pace. While in the last two sections Aubrey watched only videos or read only tweets, this time she watched the video, read tweets, and looked at Tumblr pages in the order they would have been available and read by live viewers.

Interview Analysis: A Young Adult's Response

First sitting down with Aubrey, I wanted to better understand her knowledge of *Pride and Prejudice*. While I knew she had not read the novel or seen any of its film adaptations, there was still a possibility she knew parts of the narrative through its overall presence in pop-culture. When asked about any general knowledge she had of the story, she responded that she knew of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy as characters of cultural significance, and as a famous couple, but that was the extent. Linda Hutcheon writes, “if we are not familiar with the particular work that [a story] adapts, we simply experience the adaptation as we would any other work” (2006, p.120). She warns, however, that some adaptation-makers rely too heavily on the audiences’ prior knowledge of the urtext and, “the resulting adaptation makes no sense without reference to and foreknowledge of the adapted text” (Ibid., p.121). Aubrey’s inexperience with *Pride and Prejudice* would help me gain a clearer insight as to if, after the live and transmedial aspects of the story had been stripped away in its post-production state, LBD could stand on its own at a narrative level.

I explained to Aubrey the three-part structure of the interview, laying out its sections and content. I also told her that she would have control over the computer, urging her to click on anything she found interesting or useful. Our first task was to watch the first five episodes of the series. Within seconds of the first episode, Aubrey had disabled the automatic closed captions (a

feature inserted by the production team) and also the pop-up adverts in the lower part of the video screen. She did this instantly with the subsequent four episodes. While the production team inserted hyperlinks to the next sequential video at the end of every vlog, Aubrey first ignored the feature and instead, scrolled through the YouTube sidebar to locate the next video herself. After episode 3, however, she realized the hyperlink was an option, and utilized that for the following episodes. Aubrey's progression through videos and dismantling of adverts was the extent of her physical engagement with Lizzie's vlogs. Twitter pages and Tumblrs were referenced throughout the videos, linked in the video descriptions, and in the end screen hyperlinks, but Aubrey never made a move to link to them. While this can be partly attributed to her unwillingness to stray from what she thought was the task at hand (watching a set number of episodes), it can also be credited to the stream of available episodes and the expectation that viewers are to watch multiple episodes in one sitting. While the immediate progression to subsequent vlogs and content is satisfying and enticing, the other content might be sacrificed in the process.

The second part of the interview consisted of Aubrey reading three Twitter conversations in Follow the Story, coinciding with the episodes she had just watched. While the conversations are ones that occurred at the same time as Lizzie's uploaded videos, they are between characters that had not yet been officially introduced to the series.

[Reading Twitter conversation between Bing Lee, Caroline Lee, and William Darcy]

Aubrey: Caroline Lee, she's his [pointing at photo of Bing Lee] sister?

Interviewer: Yes.

Aubrey: Yeah, she seems very protective of them. [motioning to photos of Bing and Darcy].

This exchange demonstrates the narrative capabilities of the Twitter platform within LBD. While they had been mentioned, Caroline, Bing, and Darcy had not been formally introduced on Lizzie's vlogs, and their presence on Twitter is their first engagement with the series and its fans.

Those familiar with *Pride and Prejudice* will know that Aubrey's comment is astute, foreshadowing Caroline's ultimately dubious intentions. Aubrey's takeaway from the conversation that Caroline is "protective" shows a narrative reading of the Twitter story, rather than an extraneous one. The Twitter chatter between characters in LBD might first seem like simply extra or "fun" information, but it actually aids character and story building and understanding.

As I pre-selected the first set of Twitter conversations from Follow the Story for Aubrey to read, there was no freedom for her to explore the online narrative on her own. That freedom was returned to her for the final section of the interview, when I instructed her to click and link herself through a section of Follow the Story on her own. Aubrey first clicked on another vlog episode, midway down the Follow the Story list. After the episode ended, she scrolled her mouse around the screen, expecting find a link taking her back to the Follow the Story homepage, or a link progression to the next moment in the story. As this did not exist, she hit the "back" button and scrolled through the long list to locate the next element of the story. Constantly having to hit the "back" button to go back to the main list and relocate her position took up a lot of time, but Aubrey seemed to do it quickly, effortlessly, and without thinking. While I initially assessed the Follow the Story feature as a poorly constructed and relatively unnavigable interface, Aubrey had no qualms navigating the webpage, stating that it was "quite easy" to operate. In fact, she found Follow the Story a better alternative to what I explained to her as LBD's original presentation form, stating that it would be much "easier to follow".

Interviewer: How would reading these Tweets on your actual Twitter feed compare to reading them like this?

Aubrey: You get less of a timeline sort of thing, I guess. It all is just compiled and you don't any of the gaps in time. But then, on the Twitter thing if it's jumbled up with

everything else it's a bit more confusing. You can't follow it as much – it will just randomly pop up.

Interviewer: So you think it would get lost?

Aubrey: Yeah.

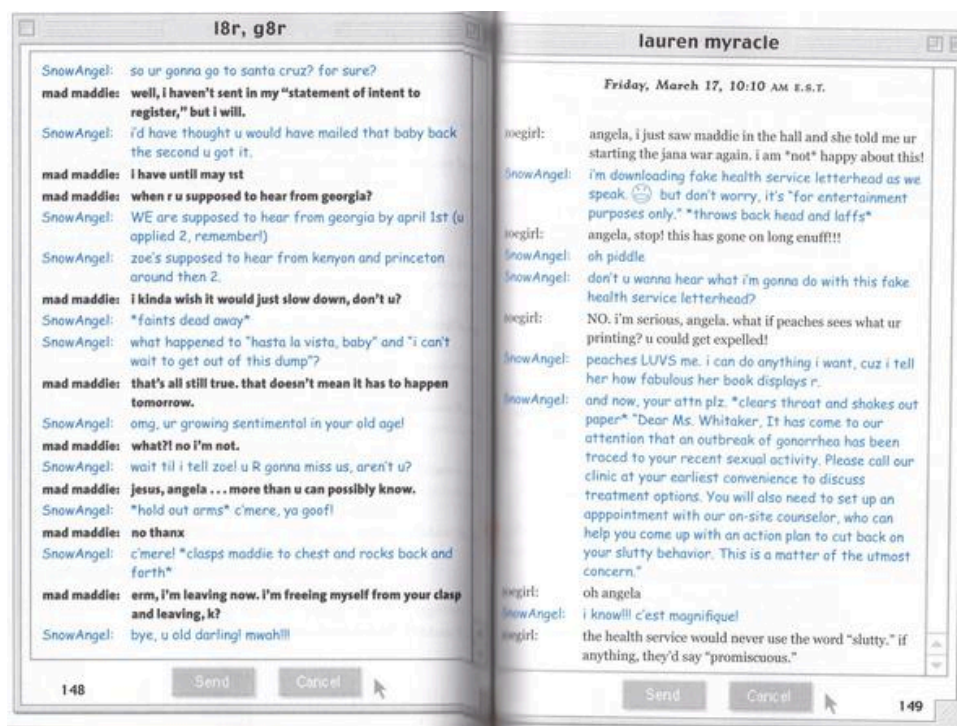
Aubrey's fear that key information would be confused with everyday Twitter chatter on her newsfeed goes against every aim of transmedial storytelling discussed thus far. While Aubrey sees the blurred sense of fiction and reality as a potential problem, it is what transmedial narratives depend on for a full immersive experience, and what makes them inherently transmedial. LBD producer, Jay Bushman, sees this as the story's greatest asset:

If a fan using Twitter to catch up with friends, colleagues, and breaking news sees an exchange between @ggdarcy and @FitzOnTheFitz, it blurs the line between his or her everyday reality and the LBD narrative, which creates an immersive relationship between the audience and the property. The ability to create a real-time continuum for the story is an advantage that transmedia storytelling boasts over film and even television (2015, Tepper, p.47).

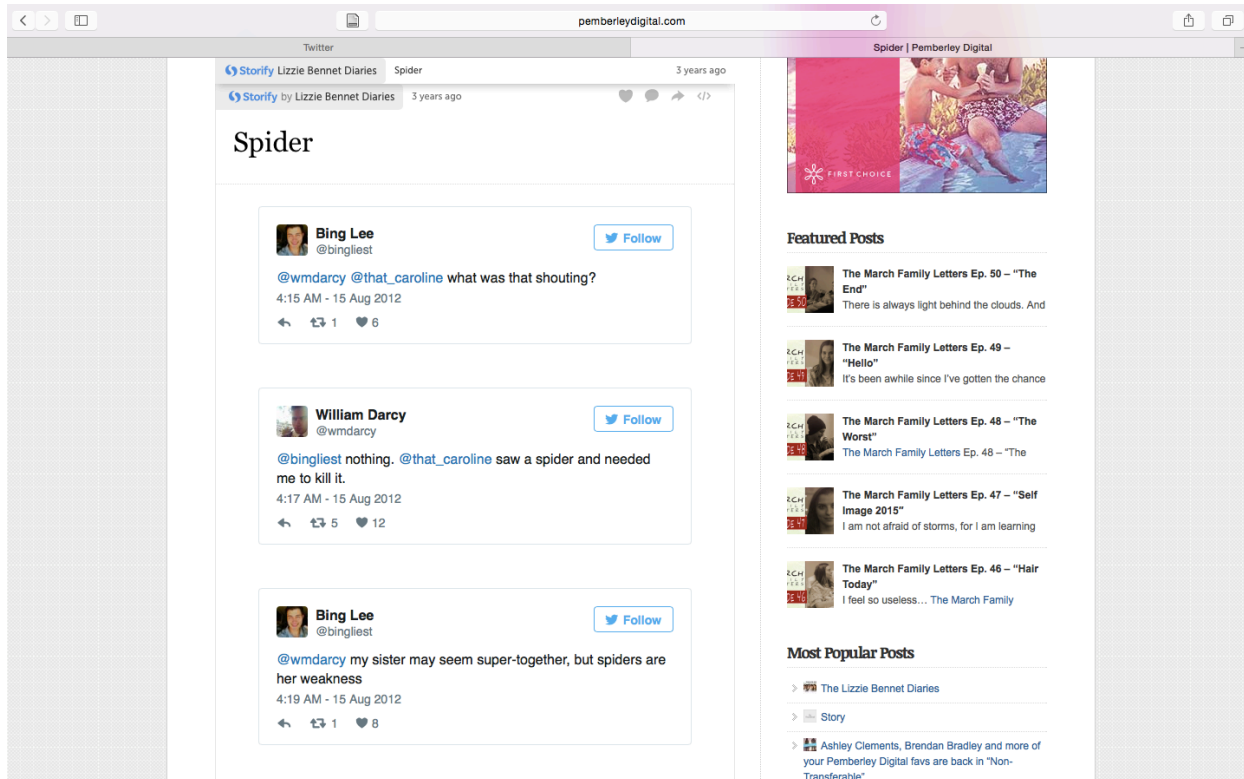
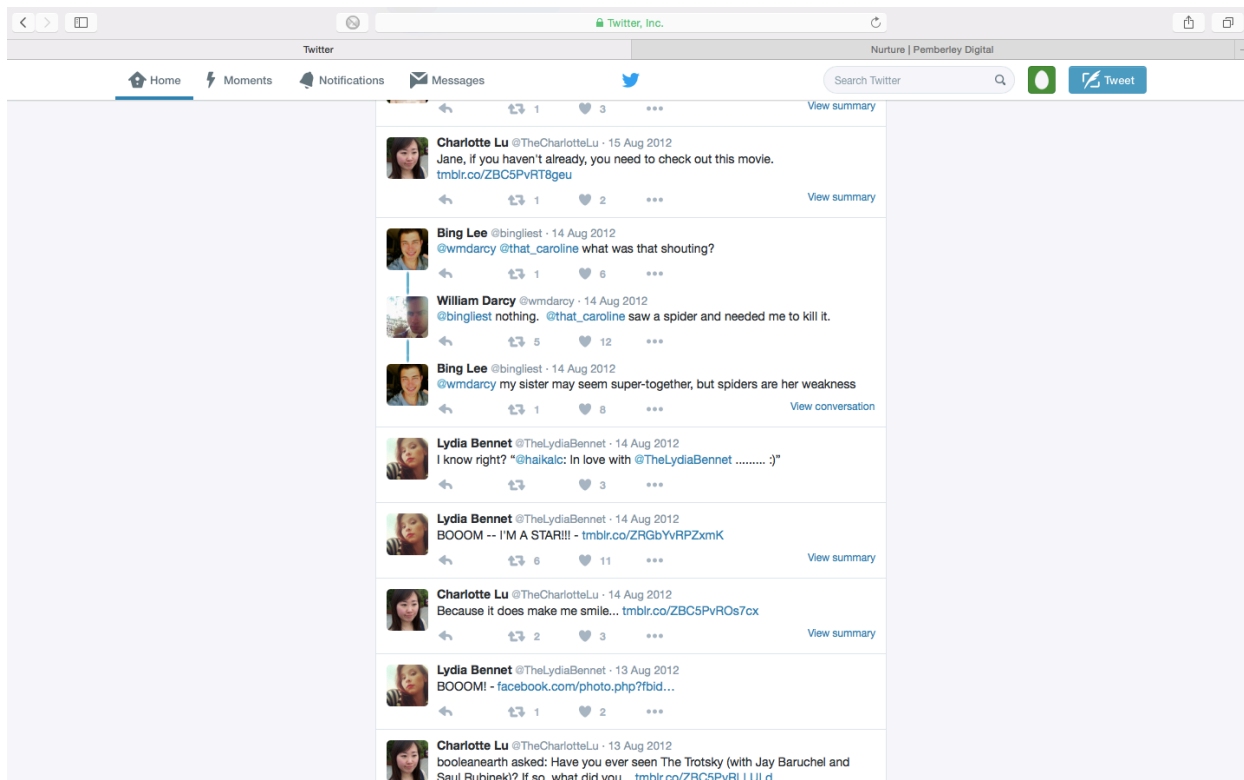
Aubrey's comments and clarifying questions throughout her experience with LBD demonstrate the narrative quality of the story and allude to an engaging experience with the narrative. However, the stripping away of the content from its original platform, and onto the Follow the Story website, means that experience was not transmedial. What new audience members like Aubrey, who utilize the Follow the Story feature, get is essentially a modern online epistolary novel.

While traditionally utilizing the act of letter writing to tell a story, Betty Herzhauser writes that epistolary novels have recently expanded into the digital age to include email, instant messaging, and social media to “connect characters and inform them about events happening outside the scene of the narrative” (2015, p.2). The figure below, a page from Lauren Myracle's *18r, g8r* (2007), is an example of such a novel, with the pages of the book set to look like an

instant message chain, complete with screen names, text-speak (ie “l8r”, “g2g”, and “ttyl”), and a send button. More than simply writing the text as it would appear in an instant message, the book attempts to replicate the entire interface of the instant message system. There is, however, a distinct disconnect between the pages of Myracle’s book and the system it is attempting to replicate. While the page is meant to look like a computer screen, it is still, unquestionably, a book, with rough pages as opposed to a smooth screen, disrupting page numbers, and title and author signifiers along the top of the page.



In the post-series Follow the Story of LBD, one clicks through a list of links instead of turning pages, but the same disconnect exists. The two figures below show this disconnect between Follow the Story and the social media platform it is trying to replicate. The first is a photo of how a conversation between LBD characters would have looked on a viewer’s Twitter page in real time. The following photo is what Follow the Story viewers now see.



The two images are dramatically different, and the latter bears little to no resemblance to Twitter's platform at all. The conversational nature of Twitter is stripped away, and the post is even titled like the chapter of a book. This disconnect was reflected in Aubrey's interview, as the tweets taken from the context of their original platform seemed to initially confuse her. A comment section follows each Follow the Story post, to which Aubrey asked "Is this the comments on the post, or...Twitter?" As she is familiar with Twitter, it seems that the inability to engage with the platform as it is meant to be was perplexing. This removal of tweets from their original platform has many implications for fans who wish to engage with the story through comments, as Follow the Story does not allow participants to comment on the original platforms.

While noting the removal of the social media posts from their perspective platforms, Aubrey appreciated Follow the Story for its comprehensiveness, and enjoyed the ability to have all narrative information at once, stating, "...it's very easy to kind of binge on it as such, and [...] you could probably follow the story a little bit better because you won't forget it." While the concept of "binge-watching" is relatively new and associated with modern viewing platforms like Netflix, it is describing the long-appreciated and traditional linear narrative structure. While Jenkins calls young readers "hunters and gathers [...] gathering information in bits and pieces" (2008, p.36), and Dresang states that digital age readers like to "seek information nonlinearly and nonsequentially" (2009, p.34), Aubrey shows a preference for a completely linear narrative frame.

Conclusion

My goal when beginning this research project was to better understand the new and exciting genre of transmedia storytelling by analyzing one such story's longevity and narrative

capabilities post-production. Can a transmedia story like LBD exist after its temporal platforms are no longer actively accessible in their original form? Frustratingly, the answer seems to be, yes and no. Aubrey's engagement and understanding of LBD suggests that while the series was wholly altered post-production, it still maintained its narrative structure and quality. However, while the narrative and main plot points remained intact, by stripping the social media platforms of their original format in *Follow the Story*, LBD loses the label of a transmedia story.

Gillen and Merchant discuss immersion into the virtual world as a physical one:

“...keystrokes, mouse-clicks, and other operations provide a physical interface for users to navigate their way around online space, to interact with others, and to act on the environment, [...participating] in the virtual through physical interactions with material objects” (2013, p.11).

While LBD originally had a virtual reality presence, this interactivity is not achievable today. *Follow the Story* forces viewers to click through links to access parts of the story, but links are of one-time use. Instead of giving the viewer the ability to click their way through the world, they had to continually return back to a pre-determined list of story points. In the end, it seems that while LBD was originally created to stand against a traditional narrative structure – to engage digital readers in a non-linear, fragmented, informational hunt – it has now shifted back into a standard linear narrative utilizing ideals of social media platforms.

It is strikingly poetic that the very structure this specific transmedia story attempted to antagonize was, ultimately, its final form. But, at a time when digital technologies, medias, and narratives are changing at a seemingly breakneck speed, it is also a bit of a comfort. Initially, I feared the social media paratexts of LBD would be all but obsolete, but, thanks to the production team, they were preserved and remain an important narrative feature of the story. There is, for

many, a fear traditional print or linear narratives are slowly being usurped by digital ones, but, as exemplified by post-production LBD, it seems they will not so easily be forgotten.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am a MPhil student with the Faculty of Education at Cambridge University. I am currently conducting a research project on interactivity in transmedial visual narratives for young adults, and I request permission for your child, _____ to participate.

The study will consist of a one-on-one discussion and interview with _____, in which we will watch and interact with serialized modern adaptation of a classic novel produced for YouTube. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you or your child will remain confidential.

Only I will have access to information from the interview, and at the conclusion of my study, a summary of your child's participation will be presented in a final paper under an anonymous pseudonym.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Even if you give your permission for your child to participate, they are free to end their involvement at any time.

Should you have any questions or desire further information, please email me at mec69@cam.ac.uk

Sincerely,

Mamie Cox

Please indicate whether or not you wish to allow your child to participate in this project by checking the statement below and signing your name.

_____ I grant permission for my child to participate in Mamie Cox's study on interactivity in transmedial narratives.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Printed Parent/Guardian Name

Signature of Participant

Printed Name of Participant

Date