



**Radboud University Nijmegen**

**Broadcast your Fictional Self**  
**The metafictional, transmedial and interactive**  
**world of YouTube adaptations**  
**MA Thesis**

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## Abstract

Deze scriptie belicht het relatief nieuwe concept literaire webseries en hun unieke relatie met het publiek. Theorieën over transmedialiteit en interactie met het publiek worden toegepast op vier literaire webseries om meer inzicht te krijgen over de manier waarop de makers omgaan met de consumenten, en hoe er een metafictionele wereld gecreëerd wordt rond de fictionele personages die toch dicht bij het publiek komen door de eigenschappen van de media waarop ze gepresenteerd worden. Het gebruik van sociale media in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *Emma Approved*, *Frankenstein MD* en *Carmilla* geeft het publiek een unieke kans om zich te bemoeien met wat ze voor zich zien. Twee van de series proberen realistisch over te komen en de twee andere hebben duidelijke bovennatuurlijke elementen die het inlevingsvermogen van het publiek zou kunnen beïnvloeden. Echter, niets blijkt minder waar, aangezien de spiegeling met de realiteit in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* en *Emma Approved* juist de aandacht vestigt op de botsing tussen fictie en realiteit, terwijl de afstand tussen de wereld van de serie en de wereld van het publiek in *Frankenstein MD* en *Carmilla* de metafictionele elementen vermindert en daarmee het inlevingsvermogen ten goede komt. Alle series creëren een metafictionele wereld door de transmedia elementen in te zetten om interactie met het publiek te faciliteren, maar dit is niet de enige manier. Ook kleine details uit het verhaal kunnen ervoor zorgen dat sommige van deze series meer metafictioneel zijn dan andere.

## Keywords

YouTube, adaptations, metafiction, transmedia storytelling, audience interaction

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## Introduction

YouTube is everywhere. It has become our cookbook, our sports instructor, and most importantly our entertainment. According to alexa.com, a research tool that analyses web traffic, YouTube is the second most visited website in the world, ranking just below Google, but above Facebook and Twitter. ("The Top 500 Sites on the Web"). Since its creation in 2005 by PayPal employees Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim and its very first video titled "Me at the zoo" the site has become one of the most important sources of information, communication and entertainment in the world. Google purchased the company in 2006, after which it continued to grow and more and more people started to see its potential. Anyone with a camera and an internet connection can put their content up on YouTube and reach an audience on a scale that was impossible before:

The contributors are a diverse group of participants – from large media producers and rights-owners such as television stations, sports companies, and major advertisers, to small-to-medium enterprises looking for cheap distribution or alternatives to mainstream broadcast systems, cultural institutions, artists, activists, media literate fans, non-professional and amateur media producers (Burgess & Green vii).

At first, many people shared parts of their lives or their creative achievements just for fun, but as YouTube became bigger and more popular, contributors with large followings were given the possibility to earn money by allowing YouTube to play ads on their videos. Although it was not a viable career option in the beginning, it was a function that attracted more and more people to the site, uploading content. More content also meant more viewers, and the YouTube business began to take off, not just for the company, but for the creators as well. With the option of subscription, many channels gained a loyal and steady audience.

Nowadays, there are over a million channels that have over a million subscribers each, and the absolute top in terms of subscriber count is the channel run by Felix Kjellberg, known on YouTube as PewDiePie, who as of June 2018 has over 63 million subscribers on his main YouTube channel (PewDiePie). PewDiePie is a gaming channel, one of the most popular genres of videos on the website, together with music videos. However, another important category is that of video blogs, or vlogs. This category consists of a wide range of videos in which the creator takes a camera along in their daily life, or in which they sit down and talk about important events or topics that are relevant to their lives. In essence, they allow the audience to have a behind the scenes look at their lives. All the videos that they post online are written (in the case of sit-down videos), recorded and edited by the same person who also

appears in the videos, giving it a special quality unseen in other media. The popularity of this genre of video rose sharply and has caused many large brands to see these YouTube celebrities as a marketing tool for their products, as the reach of these videos is significantly large (Smith). This popularity has given rise to a lot of marketing research into the potential of YouTube advertising, to the point where famous YouTubers are considered to be influencers (Khamis, Ang & Welling).

With the rise of popularity of vlogs and them consequently becoming a fully developed medium for entertainment also came the idea of adaptation in the form of this new medium. There had always been YouTubers who were interested in discussing literature in their videos, and people filming their own staged versions of plays, but it was not until 2012 that the first people started to think of the vlog as a medium that could be used to adapt literary classics. The first novel to be adapted into vlog form was Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Its adaptation, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, was an immediate success, sparking much more interest in the vlog-style adaptation. It was created by Hank Green and Bernie Su in 2012, with its first episode going live on 9 April, 2012. At that time, Hank Green was already an established figure on YouTube, with a channel that he shared with his brother John, called "Vlogbrothers" and so he was an insider in the YouTube business (Vlogbrothers). They were the first to use the potential of not only YouTube, but other social media as well for the purpose of storytelling, and they were successful. Many other people followed in their footsteps, every single one giving their adaptations their own spin. Most of the adaptations were of works that were in the public domain, so that there would be no trouble with copyright laws. By far the largest number of adaptations are either based on a nineteenth century novel or a Shakespeare play, with only a few others. For this thesis, the focus will be on the nineteenth century novels.

The format of these new types of adaptations create possibilities in terms of interaction, not only for creators but also for audiences. YouTube is by nature a social platform, meant as a place to share your own content and engage with other people's content. Many of these adaptations were not limited to YouTube but crossed boundaries between several different social media, such as Twitter, Tumblr and the written online blog. When it comes to adaptations, many novels were previously adapted into several different media, but none were as interactive as the social media adaptation. These new media allowed for audiences to interact with the characters, the videos and the producers, as explored by Henry Jenkins in his extensive work on participatory culture. Henry Jenkins was part of the first generation of researchers to take an interest in the way fans interacted with the content of

producers and has written a lot on the subject since (5). The audience has a new place in these adaptations, as they are no longer only a passive consumer of the media, but also active contributors. The fact that these adaptations are released on a social media platform makes them different from conventional adaptations, as there is a direct connection between the audience and the content. The audience can post comments underneath the videos that are uploaded, and the creators and actors are operating on the same level as the audience, as they can answer them in the same comments section of the video. Then there is also the aspect of transmedia storytelling that is unique to online-adaptations. Most of the time, the characters portrayed in the series have their own Twitter account, from which the creators send out more content towards the audience, but from a completely different medium. In connecting with the audience, a situation is created, in which the characters, originally from the novel, exist both in the audience's 'real' world, in which they are characters in the series, but also within the world of that series.

Very little research has been done into these types of adaptations that blur the lines between what is real and what is fictional, as it is a very recent phenomenon in an emerging field of study. However, there have been a few studies into the more popular web series based on nineteenth century novels. The *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* seems to have been the basis for the format of all the other webseries (Seymour, Roth & Flegel 101). In adaptation studies, therefore, most attention by far has gone out to this adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, and even then it is not nearly as well-researched as more standard adaptations of the same novel. Other web-adaptations that have received scholarly attention are Shakespeare-adaptations (Lanier) and other popular 19th century adaptations, such as *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre* (Pietrzak-Franger). Many of these studies compare these new adaptations to more traditional adaptations such as films, or to the novel it is based on. When it comes to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, some researchers study it as they would a regular adaptation (Halvorsen Zerne) while others, such as Seymour, Roth and Flegel have written on the way in which this transmedia storytelling is different, especially regarding the relationship between the producers and the audience, who have also become co-producers. This relationship, and the position that it gives to the audience is also the focus of this thesis. The audience has a unique role in these adaptations, which begs the research question:

In what way do YouTube-adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, *Frankenstein* and *Carmilla* use the knowledge and input of the audience to create a metatextual world?

To better understand the way in which these adaptations engage with their audiences, I will first discuss the theories of metafictionality, transmedia storytelling and audience interaction in the first chapter. The following chapters will be devoted to the four case studies that I have selected for this thesis. Chapter 2 will deal with the more ‘realistic’ adaptations: *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Emma Approved*. Through analysing the way these adaptations deal with their transmedia elements and the interaction with the audience that this brings about, I will show the metafictional world that is created around these series. The third chapter will focus more on adaptations that involve supernatural elements, for which the case studies will be *Frankenstein MD* and *Carmilla*. For these series, too, the transmedia elements and the interaction with the audience will be analysed. Although it may seem like supernatural elements detract from the immersive experience of the adaptation, it will be shown that this is not necessarily the case, and that realism may not always create a realistic experience for the audience.

## Chapter 1 – Theoretical Framework

When it comes to YouTube-adaptations of classic literature, there is relatively little research, especially into the adaptations that did not gain larger popularity like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* did. To answer the research question, it is important to first define what exactly is involved in creating a meta-world, especially when looking at online-adaptations, before analysing the specifics for every adaptation. There are several factors that contribute to the metafictional aspect of the adaptations, which are all interconnected as well. Firstly the fact that these adaptations are transmedia adaptations, and adapted across social media is an important factor. This enables many characters to connect to the audience in a way that is impossible in more traditional forms of adaptation, although the extent to which this is done varies for every adaptation. The fact that these are transmedia adaptations across social media allow for a lot of interaction between the audience and the producers. This interaction between the characters, producers and audience has caused the audience to become ‘prosumers’, both producers and consumers at the same time. The term was coined in the 1970s related to the economy, but it has become more relevant in adaptation studies the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the internet as an ideal place to be both a producer and a consumer (Ritzer, Dean & Jurgenson 380). When applied to the study of new media, Henry Jenkins uses a similar notion: “Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands” (3).

Audiences, then, are no longer passive consumers of content. This can be applied to web series as well. On one hand, the audience consumes the entertainment offered to them by the producers, but on the other hand they have influence on the production of the series, as they can voice their opinion and ask critical questions to the characters. This influence, if unchecked by the producers of the series, may cause serious problems for the storyline. On the side of the audience, there is also the level of awareness to consider that is the same with all adaptations, but different with each member of the audience. These elements of transmedia storytelling and audience interaction and knowledge create a metafictional world in which the story takes place.

## Meta

To start, a working definition of ‘meta’ is necessary. The concept of metafiction has existed for a very long time, but it was not given a name until William H. Gass coined the term metafiction in 1970. It was used to describe self-conscious fiction, which makes the audience aware of its construction as a text. Classic examples of this are *Don Quixote* and novels which directly address the reader, like *Jane Eyre*. Since the inception of the term metafiction, it has become associated with postmodern literature that points to its own construction or existence as a text. As Patricia Waugh in her important 1984 study on the subject described it:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text (2).

Metafiction, then, draws attention to the fact that it is a text and questions the relationship between the fictional and the real, blurring the boundaries between the two. She also says: “Life, as well as novels, is constructed through frames, and it is finally impossible to know where one frame ends and another begins” (29). Examples of these frames are the frames of reality and of fiction, they question where the novel ends and where the real world begins. Linda Hutcheon also explains the paradox that metafiction can create for the audience: “On the one hand, [the reader] is forced to acknowledge the artifice, the “art” of what he is reading; on the other, explicit demands are made upon him, as a co-creator, for intellectual and affective responses comparable in scope and intensity to those of his life experience” (“Introduction” 5). A reader, then, becomes a co-creator through reading a metafictional text. Since the inception of the term many scholars have applied the theory to many different texts, with varying results. These same theories can also be applied to videos, when considering that these videos are also texts performed for an audience. When applied to the adaptations that are studied in this thesis, the videos are not the only component of the narrative, as it is spread across several different platforms. These adaptations, then, can be called metanarratives. A narrative can be meta on several different levels, as it blurs the lines between what is real and what is not, and specifically in the case of these YouTube adaptations there are several ways in which the narratives can be said to be metafictional.

Firstly, it can be self-conscious and directly refer to the fact that it is a text. Additionally, in the case of adaptations, it can refer to the sources that it is based on. This is the classic example of metafiction that is used by The lines between fiction and reality are blurred because of the inherent self-consciousness of vlogs, which may to a larger or lesser extent be exploited by the creators of this fictional story. In Talbot's article on metawritings it is stated as follows: "Particularly in metawriting, writers admit, via self-consciousness, self-reference, and self-reflection, the artifice, the representation of the I, the author, the narrator, the essayist, and how that artifice shapes the artist's reality" (xxii). This also means that the creator admits their own presence in their creation and that the creation shows its constructedness to the audience. As Julie Levinson formulates in her article on *Adaptation* and metafiction: "Metafictions hold a mirror up to their own processes and turn their gaze back on themselves, giving us a double vision of both the product of the creator's endeavors (the story told) and the processes that go into creating that product (the storytelling)" (158). Exactly this is also the case with YouTube-adaptations specifically, but the medium of vlogs in general. In vlogs, the creator gives viewers a curated view of their lives. They represent themselves in a certain way, which is often a way they want to be seen, and not necessarily a way they actually are. Vlogs are also a medium that forces a producer to reflect on themselves, as they are constantly scrutinized by an audience who are not afraid to voice their criticism or love. Either way, producers have to deal with this response in some way and reflect on how to make their view count go up, as that is the way to make money on YouTube. The viewers, too, are made very aware of the artifice of the video they are watching because vloggers will often talk about the way they created the video or plans they have for the next video. This draws attention to the fact that these videos have been thought about in advance and are not spontaneous outbursts of creativity. It also shows them that these videos need to be edited, which takes a lot of time, and vloggers often talk about their busy schedule making enough videos to make money. This grants viewers a peek behind the scenes of the creation of the videos that they watch every day.

The fact that creators are so candid about the way they create their videos makes their content seem more 'authentic' and creators try to make it so that it looks more 'real', and not as polished as a TV-series can be expected to be. This concept of reality is often considered problematic as vlogs often give a skewed view of the life of vloggers, giving viewers unrealistic standards to adhere to. This concept of reality is especially problematic when a fictional story is told through a medium that feigns this 'reality'. However, for storytelling

purposes this type of reality can be used to show one particular point of view, as is often the case in novels. Even so, the boundaries between the fictional and the reality are blurred, because the characters from the series create a reality around themselves and try to appear authentic while their whole life is fictional. This is, again a prime example of Waugh's idea that different frames start blurring together.

Secondly, it can blur the lines between the text itself and the audience, and in the case of these YouTube adaptations, thereby blurring the frames of fiction and reality. As we will see in many of the series considered here, there is a significant blurring of the lines between the in-world characters and the out of world audience. This happens on several levels, including, as mentioned before, the line between the producers and consumers. When the audience finds its voice to influence the way the story is told, they are no longer only an audience, but they engage with the material in a way that makes them a producer. This blurring of the lines between the producer and the consumer is something that is very clearly visible in YouTube videos in general: the content creator is very clear about the fact that they use input from their audience to create new videos, and some are also very clear on the problems that went into creating a certain video or the idea behind it. For a normal vlog, this is nothing out of the ordinary, although it already blurs the lines between the creator and the audience.

In the case of adaptations on YouTube, however, this blurring is stranger, because the life of the person creating the video is entirely fictional. Here, it can be said to become a blurring of the lines between reality and fiction. The medium of YouTube is a unique one in the field of adaptation. It is, at its core, a social network, intended for conversation and interaction rather than the one-sided transmission of entertainment that would apply in a cinema or on television. In this way, the audience becomes involved in the production of the content that they are watching. There are even more blurred lines, as Bryan Alexander explains in his book about the new digital storytelling: "One intractable question persists in discussions of such modern, distributed hypertext: Where does a story end? If there is no physical story container, nor formal file limitation, then digital stories appear to have ragged edges, at least from the consumer's perspective" (138). In saying this, he touches upon the fact that these digital stories are different for every consumer. One person may want to explore the entire story until there is nothing left to explore, while another may be satisfied with just one part of the story, or just one of the media that the story is distributed on. And even when all the official sources are exhausted, an online story may live on through

fanfiction or the community that they have built around themselves and in which the audience can discuss endlessly with each other on every little detail of the story.

Analysing the way in which a series blurs the lines between what is fictional and what is real may also give an insight into the immersive experience of the audience. Web series are unique in their interaction with the audience and in creating an immersive experience. It happens to an extent that is unseen before, which is mainly because of the fact that it is able to do so through the media it is published on. The web series are published across several different social media sites, thereby creating an ideal environment for interaction.

### Transmedia

The web series are told across several different social media, creating a transmedia story experience for the audience, which facilitates audience interaction. The producers use several media to convey the story to the audience. Many of these media are social media, which are intended for interaction between people. In the case of these adaptations the social media they are published on facilitate interaction between producers, actors, and their audience. While this interaction can also occur in the case of more traditional adaptations, web series are unique in the sense that they often have social media accounts for their characters. In this way, the audience can not only interact with the creators, but also with the characters from the series. They can directly ask characters from the series a question and expect to receive a reply. In the adaptations that will be dealt with in this thesis, the main medium is the vlog, which is uploaded to YouTube. However, the story is continued through other media such as Twitter and blogs, which are added to this to enhance the story and offer a more in-depth perspective into characters' motivations or background. The videos can be watched without the accompanying other media, although there may be some minor gaps in the storytelling. However, this division across media differs for every adaptation as some rely on a greater or lesser degree on the other media outside the videos, and even the videos have different functions in every different adaptation.

The fact that the story is distributed across several different media, but that it still is one coherent story fits with the idea of transmedia storytelling. Henry Jenkins is critical of the idea to call adaptations transmedia storytelling, as in his view the role of the producers should be defining. He defines transmedia storytelling as follows: "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”(qtd. in Ryan 529). Even though Jenkins does not categorize adaptations as transmedia storytelling, the adaptations that are studied in this thesis do fit very clearly with this definition. One thing that Jenkins does not consider in his definition are these new forms of digital adaptation. If he had, he may have reconsidered his statement, as everything he says is very clearly the case in many of the series discussed in this thesis. Ryan uses this definition when discussing several adaptations and the question of whether or not they are transmedia storytelling. However, Ryan also only considers the more traditional forms of adaptation, such as TV and film. In YouTube-adaptations, different parts of the story are told through different channels and different media, and most importantly it is done so purposefully, and it is not a “haphazard accumulation of documents by various authors around a common storyworld” (Ryan 529). This is what Ryan would hesitate to call a transmedia experience. However, this is not applicable to YouTube-adaptations, as these forms of adaptations are thought through very carefully by the creators and all information that is distributed across several media all form one coherent story.

Considering Ryan’s article, YouTube adaptations are definitely forms of transmedia storytelling, but she completely disregards the way stories are told across social media. Ryan sticks very closely to more traditional forms like film and music, but forgets about the newer forms, while they would fit perfectly into her theories. She proposes six varieties of transmedia storytelling: 1. Multimodal narratives, which are narratives with different types of signs within the same physical package. She gives films as the ultimate example. 2. Narratives with one physical copy that gives access to other media, for example a book with a tie-in website. 3. Narratives that are accessed through multiple technological devices, by which she means physical devices. 4. Narratives on a platform that gathers different types of documents to tell the story in one place. 5. Different objects that together form a story, by which she means a film with tie-in books or merchandise. The objects are located in different places. This is, according to Ryan a classical case of transmediality. 6. Spatial dispersion of narrative elements that requires the participant to locate all the clues to unlock the next ones, whether they be in physical form or on the internet. None of these six examples exactly fit with the web series, but several of them do touch upon aspects that are also present in these transmedia web series. Therefore a seventh example could be added to these six, namely the social media component. This example is similar to number three, in the sense that it requires multiple platforms to access the narrative, but not the physical devices that Ryan mentions. It can also

be similar to Ryan's fourth example, in the case of some stories which are archived in one place to grant an audience easy access to all components of the story. However, these social media stories are not intended to be stored in archives and experienced through them, rather they are stored there for posterity.

As mentioned earlier, the audience is able to follow these YouTube adaptations by only watching the videos, but they will experience some essential gaps in knowledge. However, exactly these gaps in the storytelling show that the adaptations are transmedia storytelling. Each new medium adds something to the world of the story. Ryan also talks about the encyclopaedic way in which transmedia storytelling often works: people find more information from different media. Her approach is very much geared towards more traditional forms of adaptation. However, she is right in saying "only the most dedicated problem-solvers enjoy the game of putting a story together like a jigsaw puzzle out of elements deliberately dispersed across multiple documents" (529). In the case of the YouTube-adaptations, this is especially true for the people who only start watching after the series has already aired. Whereas the original idea of these adaptations is that people can follow them in real-time, after the airing all the accounts that were used for this immersive experience become nothing more than an archive of all the communications, with an occasional new addition to promote a new series or to give a short update on the life of the characters. When the social media accounts have become archives, it becomes very difficult for viewers to follow the entire story in the correct order. Especially websites such as Twitter do not facilitate an easy reading of the history of an account, simply because the medium is not in the first place a device for storytelling, but rather for communication. The extent to which content is available to the audience both during and after the airing of the show may also influence the immersive experience that audiences have.

Sarah Schaefer Walton has researched the way a transmedia adaptation of *Persuasion* could work. She takes as her case study the blog-adaptation of *Persuasion* and investigates the way adaptations like this could bring Austen's world closer to modern day readers. Even though the primary way of communicating this story is through text, there are still some connections to be made to the YouTube versions which inspired this adaptation. Walton talks about the way a blog is a lot like a diary, but it has a unique quality that it reads more like a serialized story. Walton calls this unique to the internet, and it also goes for the vlog-form: many people call it video-diaries and indeed the most famous adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* is called *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. She interestingly notes the role of time in a

transmedia adaptation: every single output is precisely dated and “each post or tweet or video is always already archived, already a historicized document that can be located in a particular moment and webspace.” While this is true, as mentioned before it can be increasingly difficult for an audience to dig back into this archive after it has been ‘closed’. This is one of the largest drawbacks to a curated transmedia experience across social media, it only really works in real-time. If it becomes an archive, or if everything is stored in one place, it can still be a transmedia story, but it is not as much of an experience anymore.

How social media are used and the extent to which the series are transmedia adaptations will show a lot about the way the series interact with the audience and about the way they use the knowledge and input of the audience. The transmedia element helps in establishing a connection between the creators and the audience, thereby breaking the walls between the fictional and the real.

### Audience Interaction and Knowledge

Transmedia storytelling across social media facilitates audience interaction in a way that has not been seen before. However, it is important to keep in mind that interaction with the audience is not completely new to the newer forms of adaptation such as the YouTube-adaptations discussed here. Kyle Meikle makes a very important point when he says that all adaptations invite some form of audience interaction, it is just different what kind of interaction that is. Therefore, he poses that it is wrong to just say that older forms of adaptation have no interaction and that interaction with the audience is something that is inherent only to new media (545). Instead, he proposes “rethinking the difference between old and new media as one of degree, not kind” (546). This means not regarding the YouTube-adaptations as completely radical, but rather maybe as an extra step on the scale of interaction. He also suggests that the real difference lies between adaptations and non-adaptations, as the real interaction already lies in recognizing an adaptation as such (548). If this is taken even further, it could even be argued that making an adaptation of a novel in itself is the audience interacting with the source material, as filmmakers have to interact with the source material to be able to adapt it for another medium, whatever that medium may be. This means that the new media adaptations that this thesis deals with are not the only adaptations that are interactive, but they are interactive to a different degree than previous, older adaptations. As Lanier proposes: “This type of web serialization, extended far beyond the bounds of a typical TV series, presents viewers with a kind of immersiveness once confined to the reading

experience of the classic novel” (Lanier 191). The immersiveness of these adaptations, then, goes beyond the bounds of a TV-series, but it is not a radical deviation from the interactions possible with these more traditional forms of adaptation. However, Lanier also adds that this immersiveness is different from the classic reading, as instead of looking forward to a conclusion, a viewer is always looking forward to a next installment in the life of the characters that they are watching. These lives are made to look as realistic as possible.

Stephen O’Neill, in his chapter on vlogging Shakespeare, shows that the vlog form gives viewers a false sense of reality, because vlogs pretend to be spontaneous. Meanwhile, especially webseries have become more and more scripted (199). The fact that the characters are fiddling with the camera, which only highlights the way it is made, is often left in there with the sole purpose of making it seem more real or authentic. As already mentioned, this sense of realism only serves to further blur the boundaries between the fictional and real.

The sense of reality that is created in these adaptations returns in Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O’Flynn’s book on adaptations. They show that women in particular want to be able to immerse themselves in the stories that they interact with (116). They also use the term “knowing” audiences to distinguish between the different levels of background knowledge that audiences may have. By choosing to make an adaptation instead of an original storyline, the creators want to appeal to a certain audience, but this audience also demands things from the content that the producers create. It depends on how much an audience knows about the fact that they are watching an adaptation and how well-versed they are in the background of these adaptations. To a certain extent, the same is true for all adaptations. However, what is new in these web-adaptations is the fact that audiences can influence the making of the rest of the series to a certain extent.

This is also noted by Seymour, Roth and Flegel, who discuss the problematic nature of the disruption of the hierarchy of producers and consumers that these web-adaptations bring. In their piece on audience involvement in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, they use the idea of the audience member as both a consumer and a producer, a prosumer. This works well, but there is still a tension between this new form and the more traditional hierarchy between producers and consumers. In the article, they question the effectiveness of the LBD model in creating full fan immersion. “In the *LBD* model, prosumption practices, the practices of consumers who actively produce transformative works based on existing texts, are required in the text’s production, and the new genre relies on an archontic approach that engages an actively immersed, socially networked, online fandom” (100). This creates tensions, however, when

story-wise things have to go wrong to arrive at the correct conclusion in the eyes of the producers. The intervention from the fans could disrupt the narrative. Seymour, Roth and Flegel do not seem to touch upon the fact that this is inherent on it being an adaptation. If it were an original story, the interaction between the producer and the audience could be even more free. However, as it is also an adaptation, there are certain key points that have to resurface in some way. “The fans thus occupied a liminal space alongside the characters, creating a deep intertextuality between the many and increasingly blurred layers of production and consumption, fictional character, real person and textual body, and at times like the hacking intervention, like characters in the story, they were ultimately directed by the producers’ vision” (104). However, this is also dependent on the level of involvement from the audience again. “Importantly, *LBD* has revolutionized transmedia storytelling possibilities by creating character personas who occupy the same virtual world as fans and who engage with the fans online, thus providing fans with the ability to become characters themselves in the *LBD* universe as textual bodies” (102). However, there are also many fans to whom this does not apply as they are not as involved or started later and thus do not have the opportunity to become as involved as others. This also differs for every adaptation, as every YouTube adaptation engages with the audience in a different way.

What is important to note, then, is that these adaptations, even more than traditional adaptations, depend on the level of involvement of the audience. Because of the transmedia aspect of these adaptations, audiences can be more or less involved in the storyline, depending on how many of the media outlets they follow. There are people who have watched the videos only, and people who have followed the social media accounts of all the different characters and have become far more involved. Then there is also the special case of people who only started watching the series after the whole or a part of it had already aired. For these people, it is far more difficult to become as involved as the ‘original’ audience, as they will have to scroll back through a lot of tweets and posts to get to the ones that belong with a specific episode. One could even call such an effort impossible. The intentions of the audience are different too. Some people become involved in the webseries because they loved the original, while others may encounter the series first and develop an interest in the source from there.

The metafictional and transmedia aspects of these adaptations go beyond what can be seen in traditional forms of adaptation, but it is no radical deviation from the norm. Rather, it can be said to be a step up from the interaction and immersive experience that a film or tv-series can be. The transmedia nature of the adaptations only adds to the metafictional elements of it,

as the different media allow for a blurring of the lines between fictional and reality in a way that only videos or text would not allow. However, it depends entirely on the audience to what extent their experience with the adaptation is immersive or interactive in any way, as ‘just’ watching the series also remains an option.

## Conclusion

As shown, transmedia elements in combination with the possibilities for interaction that social media offer can create a metafictional world. However, the question remains how that is achieved in several adaptations. This will be discussed in the following chapters, in which a division is made between the more realistic adaptations of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Emma Approved*, and the adaptations with a supernatural element to them *Frankenstein MD* and *Carmilla*. Each of these adaptations has their own way of dealing with all these different elements and the resulting meta-fictional world that they create for their audiences to immerse themselves in is therefore also different.

## Chapter 2 – The Lizzie Bennet Diaries and Emma Approved

This chapter will cover the two more ‘realistic’ web series of the four. First, there will be a discussion on *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, which is the series that paved the way for all the others, and according to Seymour, Roth and Flegel functions as a template that all the other series have based themselves on. The second series in this chapter is *Emma Approved*. Both series are based on novels by Jane Austen, which are similar in style. However, as will be shown, both series use the audience’s input and knowledge in very different ways. This is due to the different storylines set by the producer and some details of the format that cause great differences in immersiveness and interaction. Both series also have very different metatextual elements, even though they are both produced by the same company and are both based on books by the same author.

### The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was the first web series created by what would later become Pemberley Digital. It gained a lot of attention from a larger audience. Whereas many other web series remain in a niche part of YouTube that is only accessed by people with an interest in this particular type of video, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* even went so far as to win a Primetime Emmy-Award for Outstanding Creative Achievement in Interactive Media: Original Interactive Program (“The Lizzie Bennet Diaries”) Many of the other web series followed the example of this success, but failed to reach the same level of popularity. The series is a modern retelling of *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. It sets the story in a contemporary American town, where the five Bennet sisters from the novel have been given new backstories that fit with a modern audience: Jane is struggling with her career in the fashion industry, Lizzie is a graduate in new media studies, Mary is a cousin instead of a sister, Kitty is a cat instead of another sister and Lydia is a party girl. As part of her final independent studies, Lizzie starts a video diary, recording the events in her life. Coincidentally, at the exact same moment, a large house in the neighbourhood becomes occupied by Bing Lee, a rich medical student, his sister Caroline Lee, and William Darcy, a friend of the family. This sends Mrs. Bennet into a frenzy, as she sees the perfect opportunity to get one of her single daughters married off to the rich man that has become their neighbour. This makes Mrs. Bennet perhaps the most similar to her counterpart in the novel. However, the story replaces the balls with parties at the bar, and the officers of the militia are now a

swim team who are training in the area.

Every part of the story is updated. Where Charlotte Lucas in the novel accepted Mr. Collins' proposal of marriage, Charlotte Lu in the series accepts his proposal to become his business partner in his new media company, where she eventually takes over as Mr. Collins joins his fiancée in Canada. In that way, career has become more important over romantic relationships, as none of the characters that were married in the novel, get married in the series. Lydia Bennet's relationship with Mr. Wickham in the novel ends with a forced marriage to preserve Lydia's reputation. In the series, this is replaced by an unhealthy relationship with a manipulative Wickham, who tries to gain a lot of money by putting a countdown to Lydia Bennet's sex tape online and having people subscribe. In the end, this is resolved by Darcy, who buys out the web company that hosts the site and has a copy of the tape. In this case, there is no marriage, and Lydia shows the first signs of recovery from a traumatic experience during the last few videos in the series. The main storyline of the relationship between Lizzie and Darcy is also quite different, as many people have remarked that the nature of a romantic relationship in the series is very different from the permanence of marriage from the novels (Halvorsen Zerne). This is also supported by the fact that, instead of coming to San Francisco to work for Pemberley Digital, Lizzie starts up her own company, which may become a rival to Darcy's own company. The fame of the source text causes the series to become meta on several different levels, both in itself and in relation to the audience.

The story is told through several different YouTube channels, of which the main one is "The Lizzie Bennet Diaries". Other channels are hosted by Lydia Bennet, Maria Lu, and Gigi Darcy. There is also a channel for Collins and Collins, Ricky Collins' company which produces ridiculous episodes on better living, such as examples on how to use a light switch ("Troubleshooting"). Lydia's channel is the only one that is essential for the storyline, as it shows her relationship with Wickham. Other channels provide more background information on how certain resolutions come to pass. One example is the Pemberley Digital channel, hosted by Gigi Darcy. On it, there are videos showing how Darcy, Fitz and Gigi worked together to get Wickham to take Lydia's sex tape down. It is possible to understand the story without this background knowledge, as it is also unknown to Lizzie, much like in the original novel. However, it adds more depth to the story, as it also shows Gigi's background with regards to Wickham, and it shows more of Darcy, whose presence is already very scarce throughout the series. These different channels all make up the in-world story. Despite a lot of

interaction between the audience and the creators, the story is still structured along the lines of the original story and the view of the producers.

### Constructedness

One way in which the series can be called meta is through its format, the vlog. The series constantly points out its own constructedness, which is very common in regular vlogs, with YouTubers often referring to the fact that they are going to edit this video, or thinking out loud about the day a video is going live and how far away that is from the moment of filming (Sprinkleofglitter “Nursery Tour!”, “So Much To Tell You”, MoreZoella ). This also happens throughout *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Especially Charlotte often enters a conversation and makes the audience aware that what they are watching is constructed and not spontaneous. Charlotte is the one who supposedly edits all the videos, especially in the beginning, and so she is the one who points out things like: “You need a better signoff, something that sticks to your audience, but isn’t so incredibly lame” (“My Sisters”). She also makes one very pointed remark in episode eight when she says: “People like the DIY look. The video feels more authentic when it’s not too polished”. However, right after saying it, she points out to Lizzie that she should stick to the script, which entirely contradicts her earlier point, and Lizzie tells her so. If Charlotte was really the one who edits these vlogs, then she could have easily cut parts out that make it seem less “authentic”, but the viewers still get to see these parts.

The plays that Lizzie and her friends put on to represent what happened with other characters also point to the unreliability and bias of the narration. Viewers only see what happened off screen through Lizzies eyes, and it is regularly pointed out that her point of view is biased. This is acknowledged in the videos as well, as in episode 12, Lizzie says that she received “comments that say I may be a tad bit biased” (“Jane Chimes In”) This is pre-recorded, which means that they did not really receive these comments, but that the bias is written into the story. A few episodes later, characters also comment that the plays are not very realistic: “Did he really say that?” “No we’re dramatizing” (“Lizzie Bennet is in Denial”). This shows that the characters themselves are also aware of the bias that they have when it comes to some of the other characters. However, when Lizzie is questioned over this, she does not explicitly admit her bias, even though she does object to something that Jane says when playing her (“After the Wedding”). This shows the hypocrisy of Lizzie, as she says: “I would never say that”. It draws the audience’s attention to the fact that everything they see in these little plays that are put on by the characters is a dramatization, and while it

may generally convey what happened off screen, it does so in a prejudiced way. This also becomes clear when Lizzie later regrets everything she said about Darcy when she begins to understand him better and even like him.

### The trouble with sources

*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is based on *Pride and Prejudice*, but there is never any mention of the book existing in-world. Given the fame of the novel and the striking similarities between the names of the people in the series and the novel, it would be unlikely for the novel to exist in-world or there would have been references to it. If this is the case, then there are several things that should not exist in-world. The most prominent example of a reference to something that should not exist in the world of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is when the Bennets first encounter Darcy. When his name is mentioned, Lydia says: “Darcy, isn’t that Colin Firth’s name in that chubby Zellweger movie?” (“Bing Lee”). Lydia here refers to *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, a modern-day loose adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, starring Colin Firth, who already played Darcy in the 1995 mini-series, as Mark Darcy, and Renée Zellweger as Bridget Jones. This adaptation should not exist if the novel *Pride and Prejudice* does not exist, as it would have no source text. Yet in the world of the series, it does exist. As this particular film is quite a loose adaptation, it could be argued that in-world it is just not based on the book. At the same time it seems that Lizzie has named her video diaries after that film, or at least the producers did. This is another good example of the blurring of lines between what is real and what is fictional. If the film does indeed exist in the world of the series, that may mean that in their world, it is not an adaptation of anything, but then the film would not exist without a source.

The series in general is very ambiguous about what does and does not exist. So much so that it is often difficult to follow. The characters in the series are based on Jane Austen’s novels. The series also tells roughly the same story as the novel. However, the characters in the series are not aware that their life story is based on a previous source text. To them, they are living their own lives and creating their own story. However, if the novel in-world were as popular as it is in the world of the audience, that would mean most people have a basic knowledge of the story, especially if these people attended school in an English-speaking country. However, in the series, there is no indication whatsoever that the characters are aware of a novel that is very much like their own lives. This would indicate that the story and the novel do not exist in-world, making the people in the series the ‘originals’. If *Pride and*

*Prejudice* does not exist, it would logically follow that other novels by the same author also do not exist. However, *Sense and Sensibility* is mentioned as a book that Charlotte's and Lizzie's mothers read during their pregnancy. This would suggest that the author does exist, but she did not write the novel that inspired these characters. When looking more closely at some references that are made in the series to other novels, there is one remarkable thing that becomes clear: while *Sense and Sensibility* does exist, other novels, such as *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* do not. This could be explained by the fact that *Sense and Sensibility* was Jane Austen's first published novel, making her a one-hit author in the world of the web series. *Emma* is the inspiration for the next web series by the same production company, which will be discussed later and which features several characters that also appear in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. *Mansfield Park* is referenced by Lydia, who buys a fake ID that says she is Mary Crawford, 26 ("Questions and Answers #1"). Mary Crawford was originally the main character from *Mansfield Park*, and in one of Lydia's vlogs, Mary Bennet also mentions going to Mansfield Park with her boyfriend ("There's Something About Mary"). The location from that novel exists in the world of the series, as do the characters from *Emma* and Austen's unfinished novel *Sanditon*, which is now a California beach town, and it "replaces the novel's protagonist with LBD's Gigi Darcy" ("Welcome to Sanditon"). In this way, it ties Austen's later novels all together with characters crossing over from one adaptation to the other, creating a digital 'world of Austen'. The only exclusion from this is the characters from *Sense and Sensibility*, as that novel is the only one to exist both in the world of the viewer and in the world of the story.

### Interaction

With regard to the audience being knowing or not, the show works on several different levels, depending on the knowledge of the audience. There are the more general references to period dramas scattered throughout the episodes, which can be caught by any audience member who knows *Pride and Prejudice* from the novel or from an earlier adaptation where it was a period piece. There are also the more intricate references to other novels by Austen that were mentioned before. These references will only be understood by people who have a more in-depth knowledge of Austen's works, or a desire to use this web series to find out more, in which case they can Google it. However, audience knowledge is more than just the knowledge that they already have about the original story or its context. It is also the question of whether or not they know they are watching a production or an adaptation at all. Although

this may become very clear from the description boxes of the videos, people who are not as familiar with vlogs or YouTube may be fooled into thinking that what they are watching are real people.

Because this series was published on platforms that lend themselves very well to interaction, as they are social media, the audience has the unique ability to directly talk to the characters in the series. However, there is one limitation on the interaction with the audience which becomes clear when it comes to the reactions of the audience to Darcy and the situation with Lydia. The series is pre-recorded, which means that all the episodes were recorded before the first episode was uploaded. The problem with this is that the characters ascribe a certain reaction to the viewers that was very negative of Lydia, for example. However, the opposite is true, with many reactions trying to warn Lydia and point out the unhealthy nature of her relationship with Wickham. For the purpose of the storyline, the reactions from the audience had to be harsh towards Lydia, because that is one of the reasons that drives her even further into the arms of Wickham. In reality, however, a large part of the audience knew the turn the story was about to take, even if it was not clear in what way this part would be modernised. Readers of the book or people who had seen a previous version of the story knew that Wickham was bad news, so they tried to protect Lydia from his bad influence. This shows an instance where the interest of the story and the opinion and reactions of the audience did not align. The knowledge of the audience might actually have interfered with the storyline, as a number of audience members threatened to hack the website that showed the countdown to Lydia's sex tape. If this had happened, Lizzie's storyline would not have been able to continue, because a large part of her feelings for Darcy are also born out of gratitude for what he did for her sister (Seymour, Roth & Flegel). These discrepancies between expected or necessary reaction in the story and actual reaction becomes quite obvious during the regular episodes. For this reason, the Q&A-videos were made at a later point and added in between the regular episodes. This helps with addressing actual comments and questions posed by the audience, even though a Q&A form is still very curated, with people sometimes asking the producers whether or not the questions that are answered during these videos were actually asked by viewers, or were made up by the producers for the purpose of furthering the story.

For *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, there are Twitter accounts for all the characters. These accounts, according to the FAQ on the Pemberley Digital website, were managed by the transmedia team, consisting of Jay Bushman, Alexandra Edwards and one of the creators,

Bernie Su, with help from the writing team. This means that the actors had little to nothing to do with the social media accounts, even though pictures of them as their characters do appear. These accounts are also kept strictly for these characters, without any promotion appearing on them from Pemberley Digital. This makes them more realistic even than the videos, in which the end screen often shows promotion for merchandise that is barely talked about in the series, as well as references in the description box to the creators and the production company. The fact that Pemberley Digital exists both as William Darcy's company within the series and as the production company for all these other web series that followed the success of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* blurs the lines between what is real and what is fictional even more.

There is a strange interaction between all the social media accounts, with some seemingly belonging exclusively to the characters, while others, with as the most important example the YouTube channels, are a mix of both the characters and the producers. The channel is named after the characters that feature most prominently and all the videos are supposedly made by the characters. In the case of a normal vlog, it is expected that they use the description box of the video to summarize their video and link people to products or other things they use in the video. However, in this case the description box is completely claimed by the producers, with no trace of personal messages by the characters. This diminishes the 'reality' of the YouTube channel, while the Twitter accounts offer an additional realistic insight. This juxtaposition between the reality of the vlog they are watching and the constructedness of it that is shown in the description box may force viewers to consider the fact that they are watching a scripted series and it can also detract from the immersive transmedia experience that the series is supposed to be. If the audience is constantly confronted with the fact that what they are watching is produced like a television series, they may be less likely to want to engage with the characters. Even though the Twitter accounts are kept by the transmedia team, and not the actors as the characters, this does not necessarily detract from the immersive reality of the experience, as the audience has to do quite a bit of research to find out who is behind the Twitter accounts, and both the actors and transmedia team are creating the spirit of the characters in the same way. It could be argued that there are just different people taking up the mantle of the same character on the different media platforms.

There are social media accounts for all the characters, including supporting characters such as Mary Bennet, Maria Lu and Fitz Williams, Darcy's best friend. Even Kitty Bennet, Lydia's cat, has her 'own' Twitter account, on which pictures are posted with captions that are

very much in Lydia's style, but are in reality written by the transmedia team posing as Lydia. There are many tweets going back and forth between all these Twitter accounts, which is the part that was scripted by the producers. Then there is also a number of tweets in response to questions or remarks from audience members, which is where, apart from the Q&A videos, the majority of the direct interaction takes place. Audience members address the characters as if they were real and sitting on the other end of the screen reading and replying to their messages as they would with any other person. The difference in this case is the fact that these characters are supposed to be fictional, so by any traditional standard, interaction should not be possible. The viewers are actually talking to the writers and producers, and an important question to ask is to what extent the viewers are aware of this fact. For the story, it is not necessarily a problem that they are not talking to the actual characters, as the spirit of these characters is represented by the creative team behind it. The social media accounts are also not necessary to understand the story, as Jay Bushman said in an interview: "We had to keep the different audiences in mind...We had to make sure everything in the social sphere was reiterated in the videos" (qtd. in Bueneke). For this reason, it can be questioned to what extent this can be said to be a transmedia experience. The entire story is on YouTube, with only extra information being published on other social media. For some fans, the story may be a transmedia experience as it is publicized to be, but for others the transmedia element may be entirely absent.

The ultimate blurring of the two worlds came when the cast of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* appeared at Vidcon 2012, a convention where YouTube content creators and fans got the opportunity to meet each other. The cast of the show did a panel, as many creators do, but there were also several videos in the series of Lizzie meeting Ricky Collins at Vidcon ("Vidcon Interruption", "Mom's Convoluting Plan"). Additionally, there was a short clip in a Q&A-video following the Vidcon vlogs, in which Lizzie met Hank Green, the creator of Vidcon and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* ("Question and Answers #3"). As mentioned before, Hank Green was already an important figure in the YouTube community before he helped create *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, and so the fact that Lizzie states that she admires him is, in general, not a surprise, but the fact that the creator seems to exist in the same universe as the created is a paradox which only adds to the metafictional element of the series. A similar situation is created as with Jane Austen herself, who only seems to have written one successful novel, *Sense and Sensibility*. Hank Green seems to be an important figure in the YouTube community, but in the world of the story he never made the decision to create *The*

*Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, as that is Lizzie's own idea and does not need to be written or based on anything. For both creators, there seems to be a kind of alternative timeline for the in-universe story. However, this clashes with the established history of the author and the creator in the timeline of the audience. Both Jane Austen's timeline and Hank Green's timeline do correspond to each other, for if Jane Austen never wrote *Pride and Prejudice*, Hank Green could not have adapted it for YouTube.

The fact that Lizzie takes seminars on interactive media not only adds to the idea that it would be believable for her to make a vlog series as her final assessment, but it also adds to the metafictionality of the whole series. In episode 80, Lizzie uses a theory from one of her seminars, saying: "there's this theory about levels of mediation in media that says it's possible for artificiality to both remind the audience that what they're seeing is a construction while at the same time adding to their level of immersion." The 80th episode of the series is called "Hyper-Mediation in New Media", and is all about the way in which the costume theatre that Lizzie always puts on in her videos is an extreme version of reality, in which the people that are portrayed are severely exaggerated. However, Lizzie's quote can also be applied to the series itself, not only to the costume theatre that Lizzie uses to convey her story. When applied to Lizzie's vlogs, Charlotte's quote about the DIY-look of the videos attracting more audiences can be considered relevant: it shows the audience that what they are seeing is constructed, but at the same time it gives them a feeling of being included in the 'behind the scenes' process of that construction. Additionally, when they see a play being put on, they may be prompted to think about whether or not what they are seeing is real or biased in any way, which in turn may prompt them to find out more, in which case they will most probably come across the social media accounts of the other characters mentioned in the plays.

In March 2017, there was a rerun of the entire series in honour of its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary. "Videos will be posted every week in real time, just like during the original run!" (Rivkin, Pemberleydigital.com). In this way, the audience could once again experience the live run of all the videos. However, in all the time in between the original run, this could only be achieved by very dedicated fans who would watch one video each week. Otherwise, the YouTube channel functioned as an archive of the story, without the possibility of interaction, but with all the references to the previous interactions. As also stated in the official announcement of the rerun: "The Lizzie Bennet Diaries is a transmedia story, with many components spread out across different platforms and then spread out even more across different accounts on those platforms. It is a lot to follow along with, let alone go through

after the fact” (Rivkin) For this reason, the creators decided to do the rerun via Facebook. However, they also emphasise the transmedia element of the story heavily, but this element is absent when the entire series including everything that was originally posted on other media is now shared via Facebook, one medium only. The creators hoped to make it easier for new viewers to experience by having it on one platform (Rivkin), but this diminishes the transmedia element for those new viewers. It almost seems like the producers rethought the idea of the transmedia element, which is a barrier for some of the viewers. This has also already happened on the Pemberley Digital website, where the entire series can be found, with additional tweets and other important social media. While it may have started out as a transmedia story, and to some extent it still is, this is diminished by bringing it all together in one place. Both these instances, the rerun on Facebook and the summary on the Pemberley Digital website problematize the idea that Bryan Alexander posted, of an online story with ragged edges, and the question of when the story ends. If the creators decide to rerun the entire series on one medium, they will include certain parts, but exclude the world that has grown around a series in the five years since it first aired. They are giving a story with ragged edges clearly defined borders.

*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was the first web series based on a famous literary text to take on the challenge of creating a transmedia experience with audience interaction. Many series that came after were inspired by its success and tried to recreate it. However, for every series, the interactive and transmedia parts worked in a different way, even within the same production company. Both *Emma Approved* and *Frankenstein MD* are playing around with the format and create a very different experience than *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, and *Carmilla*, which clearly also took pointers from *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, also uses different ways of communicating with their audiences.

### [Emma Approved](#)

*Emma Approved* was the third full-length adaptation of an Austen novel by Pemberley Digital, the second being a loose adaptation of Austen’s unfinished novel *Sanditon*. It takes place in the same universe as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, as there are some characters that cross over between the two series. The original series ran from 7 October 2013 to 21 August 2014 and covered the whole of the original novel. However, as of 29 May 2018, new tweets have started appearing on the characters’ Twitter accounts, indicating that a continuation of

the series may be imminent. However, as this is a very recent development and not yet very clear, this thesis will only focus on the original run of the series.

The series is structured by month, with each month having a different client or event. Annie and Ryan are the first, followed by Harriet, James Elton, Izzy Knightley, Maddie Bates, Elton's engagement, the bachelor auction and Boxx Hill, with the last month of videos wrapping the whole series up. Emma Woodhouse is a businesswoman, who runs a lifestyle coaching and matchmaking company with the help of her lifelong friend Alex Knightley, who takes care of the actual business side of things, while Emma is left handling the clients. She decides to start filming her experiences for a future documentary about her life, which will be produced when she has become very successful. The fact that she believes such a documentary will ever exist shows her self-confidence, which is found to be very annoying by many people. To facilitate the documentary, she has several cameras installed in every office, and she even complains about the fact that there is none in the conference room at times. Her co-workers do not seem very pleased with the camera, with Knightley sometimes even saying that he took the batteries out of the camera in his office, but Harriet tries to point out that it is recording ("Should Have Listened"). Although this series is produced by the same company as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, there are several key differences between the series, especially regarding the role the videos play in the storyline. This in turn has an impact on the way the series interacts with its audience and the immersive experience of the story.

The series starts when Emma's best friend Annie Taylor wants to call off her wedding to Ryan Weston, a match that Emma approved, Emma does everything in her power to keep the couple together, which sometimes verges on the manipulative, and includes having Frank Churchill, who is Ryan's step-brother, send a gift to show his approval of the marriage. This very first case already shows Emma's determination to do anything to get what she wants, while it also shows that Alex Knightley is the more reasonable person in the company, aligning nicely with the book, in which Emma's childish antics are also often reprimanded by Mr. Knightley's more mature view of the world. After Emma starts coaching Harriet and change her style, she tries to set up Harriet, who actually has feelings for the IT-guy Bobby Martin, and Senator Elton. However, he turns out to be in love with Emma herself. When she refuses him, he leaves and when he returns he is engaged to Caroline Lee, sister to Bing Lee from *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Emma also tries to mend the relationship between her sister Izzy and Alex Knightley's brother John, but her meddling almost destroys the relationship. Senator Elton asks Emma to plan his engagement party, and Emma dislikes the experience so

much that she decides to focus the company more towards charities, which worked out well for them when they organised a fundraiser for Maddy Bates, who has a struggling accounting business. After the bad experience planning the engagement party, the company decides to focus more on charity work, which leads them to hire Jane Fairfax, who has experience with charities, to help them. Emma does not want to involve her arch nemesis – which Jane is, but only in Emma’s mind – but in the end, Jane is an asset to the company, and her presence draws Frank Churchill to the office a lot as well.

Emma and Frank strike up a friendship in which they seem to grow closer and closer. When Frank suddenly has to leave for Berlin, he leaves Emma very confused about her and his feelings towards each other. However, she does not have time to contemplate it, because the next two events are already lined up: the opening of Boxx Hill, a celebrity restaurant, and Annie Weston’s baby shower. These two events at the same time mean that the pressure is on. A misunderstanding leads Emma to believe that Harriet is in love with Frank and she tries to set them up. She starts missing signs left and right. All the stress, combined with Frank Churchill’s influence culminates in a Boxx event where Emma humiliates Maddy Bates. Afterwards, both Jane Fairfax and Alex Knightley leave the company, leaving Emma in tears with only Harriet to support her and keep the company afloat. Emma comes to realise that the way she acted was unacceptable. After this low point in the series, slowly everything between Jane and Frank is revealed and apologies are made to Maddy and Annie. In the final video all issues are resolved and Harriet gets together with Bobby Martin, the guy she liked from the very beginning, but who Emma judged to be beneath her. However, the new and reformed Emma, now in a relationship with Alex, just wants her friend to be happy and herself.

#### Part of that world

A large issue with *Emma Approved* is the question of in-world or out-of-world. As explained by Bernie Su on the Pemberley Digital website: “The world is the world of the characters. Lizzie, Emma, Gigi, Lydia, they all exist in one world. They all are aware that they are being filmed, which is why they’re always looking towards the camera.” With *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* there was a direct link between the world and the audience, as Lizzie and other characters were aware of the fact that they had a large audience and were also able to find these videos themselves. However, for *Emma Approved* the creators felt a need to change things: “A lot of things that she does, she would be called out upon immediately by her supporting colleagues. For Emma to be effective she needs to be covert and secretive, thus Emma’s videos are not seen by anyone.” (Su). This means that all videos, including the ones

on the Emma Approved channel with Q&As that directly address the audience, are out of world.

The story of *Emma Approved* is told through several different media, with the main medium being the YouTube videos on the Pemberley Digital channel. In addition to that, there is a fashion blog and an advice blog, there are Twitter accounts for most of the characters, and Harriet starts her own music club on YouTube. However, in-world, the videos that tell the main part of the story are not supposed to even exist, as Emma only records them and never mentions that they are going live. Harriet's music club does exist in-universe, and in the videos she addresses 'the internet', but Emma's videos never refer to 'the internet' or the fact that there is a possibility of people watching the videos right at that moment. In episode 49, the first appearance of Jane Fairfax, Emma tries to explain to Jane why the cameras are there, but when Jane keeps asking who is watching these videos, Emma evades the questions and tries to change the subject, only answering "everyone" ("The New Girl"). By keeping the audience as a vague concept, it reinforces the idea that 'the audience' is something that is not relevant at that moment, but rather something to be considered at a later stage, when the videos will be made into the documentary about Emma's greatness. The characters in the show do not know that the videos that are being filmed are put on the internet, adding to the suggestion that these videos are being stored until they can be used. The only person who ever seems to actually use the videos is Emma herself, which makes the producers' explanation about the fact that the videos do not exist in-world fall short. In episode 55, Emma uses her cameras and the footage that they record to spy on Jane and Knightley meeting, to try and find proof that they do not have feelings for each other. Emma uses the footage that she recorded to confront Knightley and ask him directly, which indicates that she did watch the footage ("Mythbusters"). However, no one is aware that anyone except Emma has access to these videos.

The videos that are not a part of the world of the characters create the very prominent blurring of the lines between in-universe and outside-universe worlds, as the blog that Emma keeps does have links to the YouTube videos, but the characters do not acknowledge that these videos exist. Emma's blog, then becomes a meeting place of the two worlds. In-between Emma's blogposts about fashion and lifestyle are links to the videos. The creators try to solve this by saying that everything that refers to a video in any way is out of world, while everything else is in-world (Su). However, the fact remains that for the audience, everything appears on the same platforms, mixed together to form one giant blur of in-world and out of

world. It is very complicated for the audience to keep track of who knows what and why, which was the reason for the creators to write a piece on their website explaining their reasons. However, the fact that this is necessary shows that the behind-the-scenes considerations have impacted the comprehensibility of the series heavily.

### Interaction

The fact that all the videos only exist to the audience outside the universe makes the interaction very different from *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Whereas people had the feeling that the comments they put under the videos would be read by the people in them, with *Emma Approved* this is very different. The Q&A videos that are scattered throughout the series answer questions from social media, which, to viewers of the videos seem prompted by the series. When analysing these questions more closely, many turn out to have been inspired by the posts on Emma's blog and by her sharing some news on social media. In the first Q&A, Emma states that she wants to 'document' some of the questions, what follows are very general questions for the most part. As the series progresses, the questions clearly point to the furthering of the storyline, with people asking Knightley whether he wants to settle with a girl ("Emma Approved Ep: QA3"). This makes it less and less believable that the videos are non-existent in-world. The Q&A videos are published on Emma's own YouTube channel, instead of on the Pemberley Digital channel that all the other videos are published on, supporting the idea that maybe these videos are available to the characters as well as the audience, but the producers declared that this is not the case. However, for the people who are not aware of this, it means a difference in interaction between the regular videos and the Q&As.

To the characters in the videos, all the questions are asked on other media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, and they are prompted by those same media and the blogs kept by the company. They answer these questions 'for posterity', just like they document all the goings-on at the office for this same reason. In-world it would make much more sense, however, to answer these questions on the platforms that they were asked on, as that would create more traffic on the pages that actually matter in-world. This is also what Jane Fairfax tries to do in the sixth Q&A video. Frank asks her a question and the first thing she tries to do is find the person's Twitter handle to answer them directly. However, Frank stops her and says that she has to answer to the camera instead. This choice for videos as a place to answer the audience's questions shows that the producers may have valued the number of people watching over the seeming authenticity. One viewer on YouTube commented that they missed

something in *Emma Approved* that they did have in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, and the comment sparked an entire discussion underneath the 31st episode:

“I feel like increasing the production value of the show has made this seem more like a television show than video's from someone's webcam [which] has harmed the show somehow. There is a certain charm of having something filmed on a webcam, but for me personally the videos don't give off that same vibe. LBD was popular because it felt real and sincere. It felt like Lizzie was an actual human being posting videos online and not an actress filming up close in front of a camera, especially since in the series Charlotte "edited" the videos, adding her own personal touches like the annotations here or there and having The Lydia Bennet as a companion to the series. All of this only served to add realism to the show. Sadly, *Emma Approved* is missing that.”

*JesseMunoz* “Listening, Again”

This comment also touches upon the situation around the uploading of the videos. The largest part of the videos are uploaded unto the Pemberley Digital YouTube channel, but this is not because of any reason that is mentioned in-world. Instead, when asked about the reason for changing this from *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the producers answered: “The business reason for this is that Pemberley Digital will hopefully have a long future of adapting novels into the YouTube format. Thus we are putting all of our future shows on one channel, being Pemberley Digital” (“FAQ *Emma Approved*”).

This, combined with the fact that the videos do not exist in-world makes the entire series seem more produced than normal vlogs would be, or even more produced than *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was. The comments sections on videos do contribute to the image of this series being more produced than previous series were, as the actor who plays Bobby Martin, James Brent Isaacs, follows the series closely and leaves a comment on most of the videos that he is in himself. An example is one of the last videos, in which Bobby Martin is called to install accounting software on Emma's computer. James Brent Isaacs left a comment on that video saying: “Yo my typing skills were on POINT in this episode!” (“Strange Days”). As many fans were aware that he plays that role in the series, his comment was liked many times, which caused it to be at the top of the comments section, as that is how YouTube works. It singles out the most liked comments and puts them at the top, so that they can be liked even more. Bernie Su, as a producer, also occasionally commented on videos, especially one of the last ones in the series, giving the audience a look behind the scenes to show his

perspective. In this case, that draws attention to the fact that this is one of the actors or producers being part of an audience and it breaks the illusion that the people on the other side of the camera are in any way real.

The twist with the videos existing in-world comes at the very end. In the last video, Alex asks Emma what she is going to do with all the footage that she has recorded, as he believes it will make for an interesting documentary. At that point, Emma admits that she has been sending the videos to a production company, which means that people have been watching them for quite a while. The statement “Wait, people have been watching us?” (“After All”) in-world may mean the people of the production company, or the people on YouTube, but as no one else seems to be aware of these videos, it is more likely that Emma and Alex are referring to the production company who may make a documentary out of it. However, for the YouTube audience, it can also be taken as the first direct reference to them as an audience in the entire series. This makes the statement from the producers that all videos do not exist in-world fall short of being true in the last part of the series. However, as this is only revealed at the very end of the series, the statement still holds true up until the last few minutes.

Direct audience interaction in videos is also visible in Harriet’s music club videos, in which she asks her audience to send in their own versions of her songs. There is a significant difference between the comments sections of Emma Approved videos, which are not meant to be interactive, and the comments section of Harriet’s music club, in which people compliment her new songs and ask questions to Harriet directly. In this way, *Emma Approved* is much more like a television series which happens to be published on YouTube, with an additional website and twitter accounts that devoted fans can go and look up to interact with their favourite characters. However a major way in which fans can interact with this series is through Emma’s fashion blog. Each entry deals with an outfit seen in the series and Emma comments on the way the outfit works. Next to the pictures, there is a link to a website that sells these clothes, or clothes that are exactly like them, giving readers an opportunity to buy the fashion they see in the series.

#### Intertextual vs. Metatextual

Although there are very few references to anything outside the source novel, the series does contain some intertextual references, but they are not necessarily metatextual. They are well-

hidden and many are never referenced directly. The most obvious reference is in episode 67, when Annie tells Emma about the relationship between Frank and Jane. Emma is very surprised and calls herself the most clueless person in the company, of course referring to the movie *Clueless*, which was based on *Emma*. However, she never acknowledges the existence of that movie, which makes this reference more intertextual than metatextual. If she had, the entire problem of source text and adaptations would have been a problem, but in this way, it is a nice reference for people who know the movie exists, but it is meaningless if the movie does not exist in-world, or to people who do not know that the movie exists.

While the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was entirely focussed on the YouTube side, with additional accounts on Twitter and other social media, the transmedia element of *Emma Approved* is largely achieved through her vlogs in combination with the lifestyle-blog attached to the company. When asked what the difference was between the two-media series *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Emma Approved*, one of the creators, Bernie Su said in an interview:

“Emma Approved is actually a five media series. What are the five medias, you ask? Video, which you know; social, again, which you know; there's a fashion blog, Emma's fashion series, that is a completely photo-driven narrative. It supports the narrative, complementary, and so forth. And of course, text. Emma has a blog, and that stuff also supports the narrative. It's in character, it supports the scenes through the month, through the episodes. Finally, as you just saw, music. It's not a soundtrack, it's not a score, it's characters writing songs as part of the narrative. This is how we feel, this is what I'm saying, and is the song you see. Communicating through song” (qtd. in Buenneke)

However, as with the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the story can also be followed if people just watch the videos. All the other media add a more in-depth experience, but are not necessary for the storytelling. On the interaction front, *Emma Approved* has the possibilities of interacting with the audience via Twitter, as well as via the comments on Emma's blog.

## Conclusion

Even though both series were produced by the same company, it has already become clear that there are large differences between the two. Where *the Lizzie Bennet Diaries* were personal and direct, *Emma Approved* was more detached and produced. In terms of

transmedia elements, both series were spread across several different media, but for both stories the transmedia element can be questioned, as the main story for both played out on YouTube, with the other media offering a more in-depth look, but no essential elements of the storyline. However, looking back at the definition that Ryan used for her article on transmedia storytelling, these series do fit in very nicely, as they both fit the requirements that the stories are told across multiple media, but together they form a unified experience. The ideal that every channel should contribute something unique to the storyline is something that is adhered to as well in both these adaptations, as the main storyline is on YouTube, but additional, in-depth looks or interactive elements can mostly be found on other media such as Twitter or Emma's lifestyle and fashion blog.

Both series are mainly published on social media, but they both deal very differently with the interactive possibilities that these media offer. While Twitter is used mostly in the same way in both series, YouTube videos fulfil a very different function in both series. In *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* the videos are Lizzie's direct link to her audience and therefore the direct link between in-world and out of world. Most of the blurring between the two occurs on her YouTube channel. Lizzie places the camera in her own home, and therefore in her own life and that of her family. The footage is edited by Charlotte and uploaded onto Lizzie's own channel, with several other characters having their own channel as well. All the characters are aware that they are being filmed and are aware of the audience, which facilitates more interaction between the audience and the characters. However, some of this interaction is written into the series and represents what the producers expected the reaction to be, even though the actual real-time reaction of the audience was very different. The videos play an essential role in who knows what and they are linked to Lizzie's line of study and the way she meets Darcy as well.

This is very different in *Emma Approved*, where the videos are edited and uploaded by an unknown entity, and where they play no role in the storyline at all. They do not even exist in-world. This unknown entity between Emma and her friends, and the audience watching the videos makes this series more like a television series than a vlogseries. Where Lizzie's videos were her main way of connecting with an audience in-world, for Emma this is her fashion and lifestyle advice blog. However, there is a discrepancy between the importance of this blog in-world and out of world. In-world, this blog is the main way for Emma to communicate with her audience, in addition to Twitter, but out-of-world, the main source of the story for the audience are the YouTube videos. Emma's blog is also the platform on which the lines

between in-world and out of world are blurred the most, as her blogposts are interspersed with links to her new videos, which are not even supposed to exist in-world.

## Chapter 3 – Frankenstein MD & Carmilla

This chapter will deal with two adaptations that are in some ways more and in some ways less realistic than the ones discussed in the previous chapter. As opposed to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Emma Approved*, the series that are dealt with in this chapter include some form of supernatural element, which should detract from its realism. However, as will be shown, this is not necessarily true for both these series. The first web adaptation that will be discussed is *Frankenstein MD*, which is presented as a medical and scientific web series in which the videos serve an educational purpose. However, the medical procedures that are explained are still considered impossible, and so this series can be said to include science-fiction, as the original novel did. The second series that will be discussed is *Carmilla*, an adaptation of the novella of the same name by Joseph Sheridan LeFanu. The central figure in this novella, and in this adaptation, is Carmilla, a female vampire. The supernatural element in this series, then, is not of the science-fiction variety but rather it belongs to the category of mythology and folklore. It will be shown that although both series include impossibilities from the point of view of the audience, this does not diminish their interactive value or the immersive experience. Both series utilize transmedia elements to convey their story, but both do so in a very different way from each other as well as from the series discussed in the previous chapter.

### Frankenstein MD

*Frankenstein MD* is a web series based on Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein, or the modern Prometheus*. However, whereas the protagonist in the novel is Victor Frankenstein, this series centres around Victoria Frankenstein, a female student who is training to become a doctor. With the help of her friends Iggy and Robert she creates a show about science and medicine, in which she explains many different theories and practices. In the first episode, she tries to influence the heartbeat of her friend by giving him electrical shocks. When he fiddles with the controls he manages to stop his own heart permanently, and Victoria has to revive him. This already shows that this show is quite different in tone from the other shows that are produced by Pemberley Digital, as is only fitting with the source material. Another difference is that this show is distributed by PBS Digital Studios, and not by Pemberley Digital themselves as the other shows were. For PBS Digital Studios, this was their first attempt at a scripted series

published online (“Frankenstein MD”). This results in a web series that is still very much like a television series.

The first three episodes serve as an introduction to Victoria, Iggy, and the kind of work that they are doing. They want to create an educational science show on YouTube, explaining and demonstrating certain procedures and theories. What is interesting about the series is the fact that these three videos are the only three to be openly available on YouTube. All the other videos are marked as ‘hidden’, even though they are easy to find, as there is a complete playlist of all the videos. ‘Hidden’ on YouTube merely means that someone would need the link to be able to watch the videos, not that they are not freely available or difficult to find, but the audience does need to know where to look. This could be done for the purpose of the story, as the videos later on in the series could be considered ethically ambiguous, or in-world as something that should not be discovered by everyone. Victoria seems to be completely detached from the possible consequences of her experiments, and this already becomes clear from the first episode in which her friend Iggy’s heart stops and he is dead. Victoria’s only reaction to this is to declare he is dead and start the machine to revive him (which in turn already foreshadows what is coming next). There is no emotional reaction at all, which seems strange, even for a doctor in training.

The same thing happens with other experiments. Victoria tries out all sorts of procedures on her friends, which sometimes causes side effects. However, Victoria seems to brush all these consequences off like they are nothing. In the third episode for example, her behaviour towards her friends and the experiment they are participating in is described by a reviewer as: “playful when she nonchalantly points out their sleeping together, playfully creepy when Eli inquires how long Rory will be prone, and then legitimately concerning as the episode ends with Rory suffering a panic attack in her paralyzed state” (McNutt, “Frankenstein MD”). She shows no concern for the ethical side of the experiments. Her only goal is to advance science to do what it could not do before. This characterization sets the scene for the latter part of the series, when everything starts spiralling out of control.

## Victoria

In making Victor Frankenstein into a woman in this series, the producers have added a motivation for Victoria’s actions. Her being a woman in a male-dominated field of research gives her that extra push to go beyond expectations and set lines. In the first few episodes, we see the introduction of Dr. Waldman, who cautions Victoria to not overstep any boundaries.

However, Victoria gets into a heated debate with him in which it is revealed that Victoria feels a constant need to prove herself, as a woman in a man's world of STEM, and as a daughter of a mother who did not succeed in medicine and is assumed to be dead, although it is never explicitly stated. This leads her to become very ambitious and she wants to improve medicine by thinking beyond the limitations that ethics have put on innovation. Dr. Waldman is exactly the representation of everything that she tries to fight against, and yet he also admires Victoria for her determination. Because of this gender swap of the main character, the motivations behind the disturbing ethics are a little more clear. As one of the creators also mentioned:

“In the book, Frankenstein's madness comes from people ostracizing him and telling him he can't do those experiments. We had to examine the field and figure out what makes sense for that currently—and [making the lead a woman] really did. [...] It's still sort of a male-dominated profession” (Strassberg).

Although the first eight episodes of the series seem an innocent enough demonstration on the possibilities of science, the boundaries of ethics are being questioned and the rest of the series is foreshadowed when Victoria and Iggy try to bring a cryo-frozen rat back to life and when they try and control the mind of rats as well as humans. However, one of the most poignant moments comes when Victoria has experimented on her friends Eli and Rory and needs to record the aftereffects of that experiment. When they both tell her that they have been losing sleep, she tries to chalk it up to the effects of the experiment, but when they tell her that they have broken up and that is the most probable reason, Victoria is more concerned about the fact that her results are now no longer valid than about the fact that her friends are going through an emotionally difficult time (“Frozen Rats”).

The darker tone of the series which is already under the surface in the first eight episodes, clearly shines through far more clearly from episode nine onwards. At the end of episode eight it is revealed that Victoria and Iggy's assistant and friend Robert Walton has had an accident on his mountain hike and has died (“Sleep Deprivation”). For Victoria, this means the beginning of her spiral downwards as she is determined to bring him back to life. Even though the people around her are very hesitant about the subject, they do try to help her in the end. Even Dr. Waldman, who was often the moral compass that Victoria lacked, agrees to help. As the series progresses, Dr. Waldman is seen to turn a blind eye to more and more. He allows Victoria to shoot a gun at a new type of synthetic bone that she has produced and he lets goats into the laboratory, causing mayhem at the university (“Build-a-Bone”). For both

these incidents there are student notices put out by the university to apologize, both are written by Dr. Waldman. He also makes excuses for the lab being destroyed by the monster after it comes alive and does not inform the university in any way, thereby covering up the simultaneously ground-breaking and very dangerous feat that Victoria has achieved. After the creature escapes from the lab, Victoria tries to find him again by following a trail of newspaper articles that leads her to Geneva, where her father lives. By now she has started to realise that the boundaries that she was so determined to cross are actually there for a reason. She and Iggy start operating from her father's basement to find the creature. Meanwhile, they receive the news that Rory Clerval has died while hiking. The monster comes to confront Victoria and demands that she make him a mate, suggesting Rory should become that mate. However, all the violence and death that has resulted from her experiment made Victoria morally opposed to repeating it. She refuses to create a mate and in response, the monster also kills Eli, who just declared his love for Victoria and with whom she was supposed to run away to Costa Rica. Just as at the end of the novel, the audience is left wondering who exactly is the monster in this case. Victoria, however, does grow a moral compass, but things have to go radically wrong first before she realises that ambition in excess can be very dangerous to the people around her.

#### Constructedness and intertextuality

Although many of the episodes look very polished and well put-together, there are some instances that point to their own constructedness. In the very first episode, Victoria tells her assistant Robert how she wants the video to look, with her name card being "something sleek and stylish, but understated" ("Introducing Victoria"). This shows the fact that there is someone behind the camera who will presumably also edit the videos before they are put on the internet. Additionally, in the video that shows the creation of the monster through medical procedures that bring Robert back to life, there is a moment where a fight breaks out in the lab and the camera is knocked over ("Lesson One"). After that, the video cuts out. The attention is hereby drawn to the camera, which many people will have forgotten was there, as they feel they are in the room where the scene is unfolding, which is exactly the intention of many films as well as vlogs.

Throughout the series there are several references to the previous depictions of Frankenstein in film and other adaptations. An example is the mention of Fritz in episode 22. This character does not appear in the books, but rather is an addition to the story from a 1931

adaptation of the novel. This character would later evolve into Igor, whose name resurfaces as the name of one of the main characters in *Frankenstein MD: Iggy* (Gutelle). Although his name sounds very similar to Igor, his full name is Ludwig, but Iggy is a clear reference to Igor. Both Fritz and later Igor often serve as lab assistants to Frankenstein, but also to Count Dracula in several adaptations, which shows that even though the character has no place in the original, it is very much alive in popular imagination. Iggy's last name also refers to an important character from the book, namely the man who unknowingly teaches the monster to read: DeLacey. The fact that Victoria even has a lab assistant in this version is already very much influenced by previous adaptations, as such an assistant never appears in the novel. This shows that the series definitely also takes its inspiration from the many adaptations that came later.

### Transmedia

The story of *Frankenstein MD* is told through the videos on YouTube, as well as a science blog and the social media accounts of the characters and letters and announcements from the university that Victoria and Iggy study at. There is also one newspaper article on the sightings of the monster near the university. Far more than with the adaptations in the previous chapter, there are events that happen only off-screen. These events are often relayed through blog posts and Instagram pictures. There are Twitter accounts for Victoria, Iggy and Rory and Iggy also has his own Tumblr, on which he shares his enthusiasm for all things science. His Twitter account is the main way where the audience can interact with the characters, as Iggy seems to be the only one who actually answers the questions that are asked on there. As mentioned, the first three videos of the series are openly available on YouTube, but the later episodes are hidden, meaning the audience needs the link to be able to access the videos. This serves as an explanation as to why the University did not interfere in any way with the experiments conducted by Victoria and Iggy. The University could be said to have been unaware of the videos as they were hidden.

The science blog that Victoria and Iggy keep is filled with articles on all kinds of medical and scientific procedures that relate in some way to their own experiments, but also to other things that they may find interesting. It also includes examples of interactions with a Q&A with Victoria and Iggy. Even though these may have contributed to the transmedia experience when the show was airing, they are far less valuable now, as the main website of the blog still exists, but all the links to the individual articles are not working anymore. Every

link shows an error 500 warning, meaning that the server does not support that particular link. This means that people trying to catch up on the series now are missing a large part of the story that they would have otherwise found on the blog. The only way that people could still access these texts is through the Wayback Machine on the Internet Archive, which has snapshots of websites from when they were still online. However, this is a very circumspect way to get to these texts. On the surface, the website still contains every part of the story with the exception of the social media accounts, as the home page with the short introductions to every text is still there, but it is difficult to gain access to the actual texts, which makes the website nothing more than a front, taking one medium away from the transmedia experience it once was.

The blog, when it was still in use, was far more extensive than the one seen in *Emma Approved*, as it delved deeper into science and its purpose was clearly educational. It gave scientific background to the things that Victoria and Iggy were demonstrating on video, and some even discussed the ethics of what they were about to undertake. One example is the blog where Victoria discusses the effect of the lack of oxygen on a human brain and the effects that limited brain function may have on a person's personality. She gives several historical examples and concludes: "I feel that for this time and the technologies we have available to us, my work with Robert is worthwhile. Even if we don't know who the person on the other side will be. We owe it to the memory of Robert to find out" ("The Brain Formally Known as Robert"). In this way, even though a large part of it is educational, it is also used to legitimize the morally ambiguous experiments that Victoria and Iggy conduct. By giving all these historical examples of things that went well and things that went wrong, Victoria is placing her own work in the context of her predecessors, declaring her actions the next logical step. The blog, then, adds another layer to the story that cannot be found in the videos. When watching the videos in isolation, it seems like Victoria has no concern whatsoever for ethics, but on the blog there are several posts that show that she has definitely thought about it more than the audience can learn from only the videos.

Another example of how the story is continued via other media comes when Victoria and Iggy go looking for the monster. The camera is set up in the basement of Victoria's home in Geneva, so they cannot take it with them. However, there are several Instagram posts depicting the surroundings as Victoria and Iggy trudge through the woods. Iggy always seems to have reception as well, as he live-tweets the experience. Afterwards, there is also a detailed report on the blog ("Field Notes: Creature Tracking"). This fills a gap in the storytelling of the videos, where only their departure and return are shown. The other media that are involved in

the story contribute missing factors to the story in a way that was not as clear in the web series discussed in the previous chapter.

### Interaction

Interaction with the characters is possible through Iggy's Q&A videos, but in them he mostly answers questions relating to medical problems or procedures, or his opinion on these. These Q&As, as opposed to those seen in previous episodes, do not serve as a way for the audience to gain more background knowledge, they only add to the premise of the 'educational science vlogs'. Iggy even states in one of his Twitter announcements that there is a new video: "New #AskIggy, where I answer your pressing science & medical questions! Unless it's about the dead guy" (@IggyDeLacey). As the entire story at this point in time revolves around the dead guy, this statement makes it explicitly clear that any storyline-related questions are not going to be answered. Interaction does not seem to play a very large part in the vlogs themselves, as each video deals with a new scientific subject and the audience is hardly mentioned at all. In that way it is much more like a television series than the other web series that are discussed in this thesis. Victoria and Iggy also answer questions via the blog, but there is only one instance of this happening. Most of the questions are simply about medicine or science, but there is one question about the ethics and boundaries of medicine that serves to illustrate more about the story. When asked if there are any boundaries that should never be broken, Iggy answers: "Scientists should focus on moving progress forward in any way they can instead of getting caught up in the ramifications or consequences of what their discoveries could mean. Science should only answer to the laws of nature – not the laws of government or society" ("I Answer Your Questions").

Another way in which there is a possibility of interaction between the characters and the audience is through their Twitter accounts. However, Victoria only seems to interact with Iggy on her Twitter account, or post links to blog posts, Instagram pictures and videos. Iggy, too seems to only interact with Victoria, meaning that the audience has little to no contact with the characters on their Twitter accounts. Additionally, Iggy has his own Tumblr account, but it is very empty and the only things that he promotes on there are his own Q&A videos and scientific ideas that he finds interesting. Social media play a fairly minor role in this series when it comes to audience interaction. It is a way for the audience to ask questions, but there are rarely responses from the characters. The conversation is rather one-sided, and if it is not,

like with Iggy's Q&A videos the questions mostly serve the educational purpose that the series seems to portray.

An interesting point to raise about this series is the fact that the videos have very different purposes in-world and out-of-world. In-world, the series is meant to be educational but while they are making the series something goes wrong. However, everything around it is geared towards the educational side of YouTube. Out-of-world, the series has a double purpose, as the audience can benefit from the educational side of the videos but the title is well-known to the audience as a story about a monster. Out-of-world then, the series is a story in addition to being an educational series. This can also be a reason for the minimal audience interaction. In-world, the series is not meant to be a story, so the questions from the audience that are about the storyline are not incorporated. *Frankenstein MD* is supposed to be a scientific show, so the questions from the audience that are picked to be answered are also ones that deal with science or medicine. The format of the show is also such that episodes could be watched in isolation, if a member of the audience wanted to know more about one particular topic. However, as the videos progress, this format is broken down, as everything is leading up to a certain point, making the entire series into a story. This is not what Victoria and Iggy intended when they started their own web series, but it was the intention of the producers, as they were adapting a well-known novel. This is different from the other adaptations that are dealt with in this thesis, as they are supposed to tell the story of their life and what they experience on a day to day basis, as is customary with vlogs. On this count, as well, *Frankenstein MD* is much more like a television series.

What sets this adaptation apart from the previous ones is its element of science fiction. However, as opposed to the time of the novel, the bringing back to life of someone who is supposed to be dead is no longer something that is considered very far beyond the reach of medicine, or at least of fictional medicine. Whereas in the nineteenth century at the time of publication of *Frankenstein* the science still seemed very far-fetched, much of *Frankenstein MD* is grounded in real medicine, and it is not difficult to imagine that something like this could be possible someday in the near future. What is striking about this format is the fact that every separate step of the process of resurrection is tested and shown to be working on YouTube before it is attempted on the corpse. Setting aside the ethical constraints, the medical procedure sounds legitimate. Bernie Su, one of the producers, stated: "we're putting real science into this as if they're science personalities online just like many that work with

PBS today (except ours are fictional and doing crazier things)” (McNutt, “Cultural Interview”).

As has been shown with *Frankenstein MD*, impossible events can be used and even shown in the format of a YouTube video, and even a web series. However, whereas *Frankenstein MD* was still very much in the format of an educational television series posted onto YouTube, there are also series that incorporate events like these but are more like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* in terms of the video format, with a camera set up in someone’s bedroom to film their lives. An example of this is *Carmilla*, which will be discussed next.

### Carmilla

*Carmilla* is a web series which has gained a large fanbase since its first release in August 2014. Even more than *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* it has become popular with online audiences. The first episode of the first season has over 2.5 million views and the success of the first season caused another two seasons and a movie to be produced. Although the series consists of three seasons and a movie, this thesis will only focus on the first season of the series, as that part corresponds to the novella most. Out of all the web series, *Carmilla* differs the most from the source, a novella by Irish writer Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu first published in 1872. The characters are largely the same, but whereas in the novella Carmilla was considered the main antagonist and it was only revealed to the people around her at the very last that she was a vampire, in this adaptation she is as much a victim of her mother’s machinations as the girls that are kidnapped. Additionally, by setting the story at a modern-day university the suggestions of a lesbian romance between Laura and Carmilla that were present in the book but never more than just suggestions are now an accepted part of the story that is not commented upon. Most of the main characters in the web series are queer in some way and whereas in the novella the issue of sexuality was dealt with in a very circumspect way, as was appropriate for the time, in the adaptation this is in no way seen as strange, with LaFontaine even taking offense when someone insists on calling her Susan, when they want to be known by their last name, and addressed with they/them pronouns.

The series starts with Laura’s resolve to begin documenting her life as a first-year student at Silas University in the region of Styria, Austria for her journalism course. Soon after she starts this, her roommate Betty Spielsdorf, who is based on General Spielsdorf’s daughter from the novella, goes missing. However, the university does not seem to want to cooperate in any way to find out what happened to Betty. Laura is assigned a new roommate:

Carmilla, who comes to live with her unexpectedly, like she did in the novella. Laura is very frustrated by the fact that the university does not seem to care that students go missing and her new roommate does not help matters at all by keeping strange bedtimes and having blood in a milk carton 'as a prank' ("Freak OUT"). She starts posting the videos she films on the intranet of the university, but soon after she uploads the first video, a Town Hall meeting is called and she is reprimanded for posting the videos by the dean of students of the university. However, this does not stop her as she continues to document everything that happens around her, including her budding relationship with Carmilla. Laura and her friends Danny, LaFontaine and Perry start investigating the disappearance of several other girls and the strange behaviour that they exhibit when they return. Much like in the novella, Carmilla is involved in the disappearances. They find out that all the girls are taken at a party where Carmilla seems to always be lurking in the background. They also discover that although the girls who were taken were very much into parties, they were not like that before. Slowly but surely they become convinced that Carmilla is somehow involved in the disappearances and they realise that she is a vampire fairly early on in the story. In the novella, this is only really revealed when General Spielsdorf recounts his story about the death of his niece. The fact that Carmilla is a vampire seems to be accepted without any strange looks. This already indicates that the supernatural is an accepted presence and the later in the series, the more strange and supernatural elements are introduced.

As opposed to the novella, where Laura only finds out at the very end that Carmilla is a vampire and has no role in disposing of this threat, the girls decide to try and capture Carmilla to confront her with everything that they have found. They recruit the Zetas, members of the Zeta Omega Mu fraternity, to set up a trap in which Laura is the bait, playing on the feelings Carmilla seems to have for Laura, giving Laura a far more active role in the story than she had in the source text. After they have captured Carmilla they try to starve her and get her to talk, which she finally does. She tells them that she is involved in the disappearances, but not because she wants to be. Her mother is forcing her to act as bait for girls, who she then takes away to be sacrificed. However, Carmilla does not know anything about what happens after the girls are turned over to her mother. It turns out that Carmilla's mother is the Dean of Students at the University, explaining why she objected to Laura's investigations into the disappearances. With the help of Carmilla, Laura and her friends Perry, LaFontaine and Danny decide to try and find out what happens to the girls who are taken and try to save them. Along the way, they get help from a sentient library search engine from

Victorian times called J.P., the ghost of Carmilla's former lover Elle and an ancient Sumerian book, and they figure out that the girls are to become sacrifices to the Angler Fish God. This God takes the form of a light that devours everything and is hidden away in the basement of one of the university buildings. This entire storyline was added for the benefit of the series and has no real basis in the novella. It also serves to set up the story for following seasons.

When LaFontaine is taken, the group of friends become determined to save them and the other girls that have been taken. Carmilla retrieves a special sword that should be able to defeat the evil in the school, but it will also consume its wielder. In helping them, Carmilla seems to turn from the villain she was in the novella into one of the good guys, with her mother as the driving force behind all evil happening at the University. After Laura is possessed by the Dean, who offers Carmilla a deal to spare Laura in exchange for one of the Zeta guys, Carmilla and Laura have a falling out. However, when Carmilla discovers that Laura and Perry have gone through with their plans to interrupt the sacrifice, she charges in and sacrifices herself by pushing the Dean into the light, but being consumed as well. This mirrors Carmilla's death at the end of the novella, where her body is staked. However, the suggestions that Laura still hears Carmilla's footsteps later in her life are here mirrored by the resurrection of the vampire and the ending of the first season of the series is far less final than the ending of the novella was. As the mess surrounding the defeat of the Dean is being cleared up, Carmilla's body is found and brought to their dorm. After Laura feeds her some blood, Carmilla wakes up and shares a kiss with Laura. The friends afterwards share their doubts about the defeat of the Angler Fish God, as it thrives on powerful sacrifices, and by pushing the Dean into the light they have just sacrificed a very powerful vampire. The first season ends with an alarm going off across campus, setting the stage for the Christmas special and following seasons.

#### Transmedia and interactions

For the series, there are only five official Twitter accounts. Laura and Carmilla both have one, but there is no interaction with the audience on those accounts. Laura's Twitter account never replies to any questions from fans, it just documents the adventures that she and her friends are having in real-time. The same thing goes for Carmilla's Twitter, there is no interaction, just little snippets of the story from her point of view. Her Twitter account provides many clues to the mystery that she seems to be at the very beginning of the series. She talks about her meetings with the Dean of Students and tries to think of bad excuses when she slips up

about eating people. The other Twitter accounts belong to LaFontaine, Silas University and one of Laura's floormates, who does not appear in the series itself. The Silas University Twitter account does appear to interact with other Twitter users, but they always address them as students, answering their questions in a slightly dubious way, for example: "Replying to @mejampo: financial assistance is available to those who qualify or are willing to sacrifice a little extra". These tweets contribute to the story by adding to the mystery surrounding the University, which already shines through a little in the videos, but is shown more explicitly in the tweets.

In contrast to the Pemberley Digital series, the Twitter accounts add something more substantial to the story than just the rehashing of what happens in the series or the other way around. The format of the vlog is such that all events that happen outside Laura's dorm room are only reported and never explicitly shown. What these tweets add are the live experiences of the events. On Halloween, when the group decided to go to the library to investigate, Carmilla tweeted: "L, meanwhile, spent the whole ordeal trying to live tweet our near death experience". And indeed, on Laura's Twitter there are several tweets describing the preparation and the trip to the library itself from that same date.

Although this adds to the immersive experience of the series, it also highlights a problem with this series' supernatural elements. The creators tried to make the experience as authentic as possible, but the series is set at a university where the supernatural is all around. There are vampires running around and there is an angry God in the basement of one of the university buildings which demands human sacrifices. However, apart from the initial surprise on Laura's part, the characters in *Carmilla* seem to gladly accept that all these things just happen to exist. On one hand the interactions with the audience point towards the idea that everything in the series is happening in the same world as the audience live in, but on the other hand the supernatural elements and the fictional setting make it abundantly clear that it cannot be, as there is a general consensus that vampires and other supernatural creatures do not exist, hence the name 'supernatural'. They do, however, use several devices that make it look like this series is possibly set in the same world as the audience. When asked where their university is, Laura's answer was: "We're totally in Austria, but through some fluke of the admissions office, most of the students are international - and even the Austrian students here aren't from the area. Come to mention it, none of the locals seem to attend here, or come within twenty miles of the campus..." ([laura2theletter.tumblr.com](http://laura2theletter.tumblr.com)). There are also some tweets on the Silas University twitter account that suggest there is some sort of force field

surrounding the university campus, which keeps the supernatural contained. This all would suggest that the university does exist in the same world as the audience, but that it is merely kept hidden for the protection of one of the two parties, the humans or the supernatural creatures. However, this would create a problem for the application process at the university. There are students from all over the world at the university, but if it is a hidden place that is a secret from the world, how come there are so many people who do know about it and have applied to study there?

Additionally, if it is a secret the question remains about how the videos on YouTube can be allowed to exist. Laura originally seems to upload them to the internal network of the university, which causes trouble for her, and maybe even caused the Dean to put Carmilla in her room. However, the videos continue afterwards, but there seem to be no consequences from the university anymore, even though the videos clearly show all of the group's plans to the world. This is where the in-world of the story and the out-of-world of the audience clash with each other, as the videos are becoming very popular out-of-world, but seem to receive little to no attention anymore in-world. It also seems no problem for the characters to interact with the outside world off-campus, as Laura can contact her father and connect with a large audience through her videos. This creates the strange situation of a well-known secret which is spread all around the world through a few people on campus. Millions of people watch the videos and connect with the social media and thus become aware of this supernatural university, and for the people in-world this audience is real. For the audience, however, the series is fictional, but they are able to interact with the people in-world through the gateway that is social media, and Tumblr in particular.

#### Tumblr-famous

When it comes to interaction with fans, this series largely relied on Tumblr, a very popular micro-blogging website, where people post pictures, quotes and snippets of their lives. However, contrary to other blogging websites, these blogs are not formatted like a website, as most other blogs are. Rather, Tumblr is a kind of crossover between those regular blogging websites and Twitter, with a timeline to show users everything from people they choose to follow. Laura has her own Tumblr account, on which she posts about things that interest her, which consists mainly of Victorian-style pictures, quotes and the occasional fandom post (meaning she uses images or quotes from series or films she likes, which she then posts on her blog).

Before the series started, there were already a few posts on her Tumblr page, such as fan creations for Doctor Who, Harry Potter, Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Veronica Mars. However, after the start of the series, the fan posts and images were replaced with answers to questions from the audience. The questions range from general questions about fandom preferences to answers that give a little bit more insight and backstory to the relationships as seen on the show. These questions also give the producers a good opportunity to put in several metatextual references, such as on November 10<sup>th</sup>, when Laura was asked whether she preferred *Sherlock* or *Elementary*, both modern-day adaptations of Arthur Conan-Doyle's stories. Her answer was: "I love a good Victorian mystery so I'm sure to love most modern adaptations of the characters" ([laura2theletter.tumblr.com](http://laura2theletter.tumblr.com)). In this answer, she obviously also refers to the fact that she and her friends all are in a modern adaptation of a Victorian novella. Her referring to that fact will have added an extra layer for viewers who were familiar with the novella and it suggests an awareness of her own fictionality and source text. In response to another question about her classes at the university, Laura answered that she is taking a 19<sup>th</sup> century literature class, which is another example of small and subtle references which contribute to the metafictional aspect of the series because to many viewers, they explicitly point out the constructedness and the source of the adaptation. However, this only works if the viewers realise they are watching an adaptation of a 19<sup>th</sup> century novella, and in this case only if they follow more than just the YouTube videos. There is little to no interaction in the videos, every interaction with audience members on the part of the characters takes place on their Tumblr accounts. Even their Twitters, which featured heavily in the interactions with the audience in previous series, are here only used to communicate within the series itself.

Viewers are not only the audience for this story, by asking these questions they can collect small hints and feel like they are part of the story. However, they do not have any control over the storyline, as only questions that are picked by the producers were answered and thus it is very possible that there were questions left in the ask box. Another feature of the questions that are asked via Tumblr is the possibility of anonymous questions. When a member of the audience is asking a question, they can have the option of asking something anonymously. This means that it is unclear who asked a question, and it could very possibly be someone on the production team to put forward a particular side to the story that they want to highlight. This question arises with input like: "To tell you the truth Laura, I kind of do blame you (a bit) for Carmilla's death. Now, I know, I know, it's nobody's fault; that it was Carmilla's choice, but I just can't stop thinking that had you done some things a little

differently, Carmilla would still be alive” (29 Nov. 2014). This type of comment does not seem to fit with all the other questions by the audience, which in general are much more supportive and trying to cheer Laura up. This leads to the question of whether it was put in by the producers to legitimize certain feelings that Laura has. Her response already sets up the events of the next video: “Then why say anything at all? How is this going to do anything other than make me feel miserable?” (29 Nov. 2014). This would mean that even the audience interaction is even more curated and can even be staged. This can also be seen in the interactions between the audience and the Twitter account for Silas University. On it, there are several questions asked by people who want to apply to the university or have questions about the university. All of these questions are answered by the University Twitter, but when looking at the people behind the questions, it turns out that many of them are producers, writers or otherwise involved in the making of the series. They use their personal Twitter accounts to pose as prospective students of the university, prompting other people to join in the discussion on which sacrifice they would be willing to make to be admitted. In this way, audience interaction then is curated by the people producing it. They prompt an interaction, but questions asked by a member of the audience do not show up. This shows that the interaction on the Silas University Twitter account is largely fake and most likely staged to make it look more realistic, even though the tweets are mostly about the ridiculous supernatural rules that apply at the university.

Carmilla herself also has a Tumblr on which she answers audience’s questions with her trademark snark. However, the account seems to become self-conscious at the same time the group of friends manage to capture Carmilla. An anonymous question asked: “Why do you speak like an old person?” to which the answer was “Because I am dark and broody and, you know, also a vampire. My diction was drilled into me long ago and I can’t help myself.” (heycarmilla). As it turned out later, LaFontaine had taken over Carmilla’s Tumblr and was answering questions in her name. However, these questions reflected the character that was put forward by Carmilla to the audience, but at the same time it reflects the character that the creators wanted to show the audience. The descriptions given by LaFontaine, but actually written by the producers, show a self-consciousness in the series about what it should be and how they want the audience to see Carmilla.

Social media in this series gives a lot of extra background in general, adding to the story and filling gaps left in the videos. When it comes to interaction, the only platform that has any is Tumblr, on which the questions the audience asks lead to more hints which could

help the audience figure out the story sooner. Whereas in previous series, there were crossovers between the different platforms, this series keeps the different social media very separated. The YouTube videos are the main driving force of the story. The Twitter accounts provide background information and the Tumblr accounts provide the interaction with the audience. There are no real crossovers where questions from Twitter or Tumblr are answered in the videos. When characters are impersonating other characters, the questions asked on Tumblr by the audience serve to create a type of self-awareness in the series. Apart from the in-world social-media accounts belonging to the characters, there are also the more general Twitter and Tumblr accounts for the series as a whole, which are managed by the creators and are used to promote the series as well as give special interviews with the cast and crew. This causes impossible overlaps in the world of the series, as the audience can address both the characters and the official account for information about the series in one tweet, and this happens regularly. However, in-world, this account for the series should not exist, as it is not a product of a production company and a team of writers, but the personal vlog series of a girl who attends Silas University. This is, again, a clash between what exists in-world and out-of-world. The characters' Twitter accounts generally seem to ignore the existence of this other, out-of-world account, but for the audience the two worlds meet in the tweets.

### Popularity-paradox

Additionally, there seems to be a paradox between the popularity of the series and the transmedia presence that it has. *Carmilla* is only active across three media platforms and the series only interacts with its audience on one of those platforms. It can be assumed that a larger digital presence also influences popularity, but in this case it is the other way around. This may partially be explained by the fact that the series actively uses Tumblr as a device for communicating with an audience. Tumblr is well-known for its active and loyal LGBT+ community (Mccracken), and *Carmilla* has a large cast of characters who are all part of that community in some way. The fact that this series has a good representation of LGBT+ characters instantly made it a favourite on the platform that they use most for communication, enabling the audience to connect with the characters on their own familiar ground.

*Carmilla* creates a world which is nearly completely analogous with the audience's own world. However, some aspects of this are problematic, such as the secrecy surrounding the university, and the existence of Twitter accounts for the production team. Generally, the series tries to be as realistic as possible, relying on the audience's capability to suspend their

disbelief when it comes to the supernatural elements in the series. They are not addressed as being anything special, even though they are the main reason that the series is not realistic in the way that the previous series were. On the one hand, the supernatural side of the series makes the audience very aware that it cannot be real in any way, but by not addressing the supernatural side as anything special the series may seem more realistic to the audience, as the characters' wordless acceptance of supernatural happenings around them helps their own suspension of disbelief. The disbelief of the characters is non-existent, which prevents any prompting of difficult questions in the series, which in turn does not prompt those same questions in the audience.

## Conclusion

All these adaptations create a metatextual world through the use of transmedia elements. These transmedia elements, in turn facilitate interaction with the audience, which blurs the lines between the fictional and the real as the creators and the characters are put on the same level as the audience itself, creating a bridge between in-world and out-of-world. As these four examples have shown, web series can most definitely be classified as transmedia storytelling. Therefore, the suggestion of a seventh addition to Ryan's six types of transmedia storytelling can be made. The seventh example of transmedia storytelling is a story for which all the different elements are dispersed across several different social media or other digital platforms. Each of these platforms adds something to the storyline and one or more of these platforms is intended for interaction with the audience. Adaptations like the ones seen in this study are not the only stories that could fall into this category, but they are definitely included.

As the previous chapters have shown, each of the series discussed has their own way of interacting with the audience and with different transmedia elements, and there is not one way in which all of them use the input and knowledge of the audience. In that sense, coming back to Kyle Meikle's statement about the difference in interaction being one of degree rather than of kind, it can be said that this too, is different for every YouTube adaptation, as every adaptation interacts with the audience in different ways and to different degrees, and these degrees even differ over time, as watching a series in real time gives a completely different experience than watching it after everything has aired and even after some parts of the story have become unavailable.

The adaptations that were discussed previously all have very different levels of interaction. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* incorporated audience interaction to promote its transmedia experience, as the questions were asked on social media like Facebook and Twitter, but they were answered in Q&A videos. *Emma Approved* was quite similar to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* in terms of audience interaction, as it had Q&A videos in which questions from other social media were answered. However, the function of their videos in-world made the metafictional world different from that of Lizzie Bennet, even though there were overlaps in characters. This already shows that even though the transmedia and interactive elements may contribute to the metafictional world, they are not the only factor, as details from the story can also be important. *Carmilla* had no videos in which they answered questions from the audience, but their transmedia team answered a lot of questions on Tumblr, where the series

gained a very large following. They also relied heavily on other social media filling in the gaps that were left by the videos, which the previous more realistic series did not. For *Carmilla*, the different elements of the story were very much divided over the different media, with each medium serving their own purpose within the story, instead of the crossovers between the media that could be seen in the other adaptations. The supernatural element was very prominently present in all the videos, but this did not necessarily influence the way the creators interacted with the audience. *Frankenstein MD* had videos in which Iggy answered questions from the audience, but because of the premise of that particular show, they had nothing to do with the storyline of the show, like the questions in the previous three series did. All of these shows were interactive to a certain degree, Therefore, it is too simple to say that the difference between these adaptations and films is one of degree, as the level of interaction within YouTube adaptations is also one of degree.

On the level of interaction between the characters and the audience, the series could be categorized from more to less meta. However, the level of metatextuality of a series also determines how immersive something is and how realistic it looks. There is a large difference between the two series that are supposed to be ‘realistic’ and those that contain supernatural elements, but there are also differences within this category. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was made to look as if it were set in the same world as the audience. However, this brought many metatextual elements to the series, which constantly reminded the audience that what they were watching was constructed. By trying to make a series look very realistic, the creators draw attention to exactly the way in which the series differs from reality by trying to imitate it and by the small parts of the story which should not be possible, such as Lizzie meeting the creator of the series. The overlap between the world of the story and the world of the audience was too great, which only served to highlight the impossibilities. By having Lizzie be an important figure in the world of vlogs, she had to have some connection to the world as it was known to the audience. However, in the other series, this was not necessary. In *Emma Approved*, which took place in the same kind of world as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, as evidenced by the overlap in characters between the two, the metafictional elements were less prominent, which was partly caused by the fact that the videos did not exist in-world as videos for everyone to watch. This in itself was a strange part of the story, but it did serve to create a kind of bubble in which the series existed, with the videos serving as a window on what was happening in the world of the story without the characters knowing.

The series which had a more supernatural element also had fewer metatextual elements, as the world of the series was already further removed from the world of the audience by virtue of these worlds having supernatural elements. Even though *Frankenstein MD* was quite realistic when it came to medicine and science which could exist in the world of the audience as well, the step that it took to put this into practice is still science-fiction. Additionally, the series was set further away from its largely American audience, as it was set somewhere at a fictional university in Switzerland, whereas *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Emma Approved* were set in a nondescript American village or somewhere in San Francisco, where any company building could be that of Pemberley Digital or Emma Approved. The same thing is true for *Carmilla*, which is set at a remote Austrian University in an area which not many people will have visited. In addition to this, the University Twitter also suggested that there is something surrounding the university grounds which keeps the local people out. The fact that these locations are further removed from the audience's world removes any expectation of them being realistic or meeting any of their creators, as it is even questioned whether or not these take place in the same world as that of the audience. In that sense, the last two series are less metatextual, which also puts certain limits on the interactive element of the series.

Immersive experience is different for every audience member, as their level of involvement is different and the possibilities of every show are limited to what the producers want there to be. Every series uses the knowledge and input of the audience in a different way, but every audience member uses the input of the content in a different way too. In doing so, they create their own story, and they become the prosumer that collects different parts of the story to create their own experience, even outside the boundaries of what the producers decide to show them in the form of fan-fiction and fan communities. "Transmedia storytelling responds to a basic need of the imagination, the need to inhabit storyworlds and return to them over and over again, not to relive the same experience, but to make new discoveries" (Ryan 539). These experiences may change over time and for every person who is involved. If a series is very successful in creating an immersive experience, the decision may be made to create more 'canon' content, as with any other TV-series or film franchise.

These adaptations are prime examples of classic stories reaching out to new audiences through the media that they have made their new home. It is undeniable that the current generation of teenagers are more familiar with the workings of all kinds of social media and digital technology than previous generations, and it has long been a concern that these new

media will drive away reading. If younger people no longer try to find the stories, these series prove that these stories can find new audiences by adapting to the new circumstances. These series may rekindle the interest in classic literature or they may draw new audiences, as the adaptations are just as media-savvy as the teenagers who may be watching them.

For further research, it would be interesting to look at adaptations made by less professional creators, as their budgetary and time constraints may influence the way they interact with the audience and the way they incorporate the audience's view into their series. The later series of *Carmilla* were also sponsored by a large brand, which could also be interesting to look at from a business and marketing perspective. Another way in which these series could be researched is through interviews with both the production side of the series, as well as the audience. This could serve to provide a more in-depth insight into the way these series work as an interactive experience for the audience as well as a challenge to produce for the creators.

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