2014-12-01

Blogs, Books, & Breadcrumbs: A Case Study of Transmedial Fairy Tales

Kristy Gilbert Stewart
Brigham Young University - Provo

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Blogs, Books, & Breadcrumbs: A Case Study of

Transmedial Fairy Tales

Kristy G. Stewart

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Jill T. Rudy, Chair
Dennis Cutchins
Jacqueline Thursby
Melvin J. Thorne

Department of English

Brigham Young University

December 2014

ABSTRACT

Blogs, Books, & Breadcrumbs: A Case Study of
Transmedial Fairy Tales

Kristy G. Stewart
Department of English, BYU
Master of Arts

Understanding transmedial storytelling is particularly important to fairy-tale studies. Monomedial views have long been unable to account for all of fairy tale tradition. Although the form originated in oral culture, it has long been a liminal, hybrid form that retains aspects of orality even while its principal mode of transference for some time has been something other than face-to-face communication. Transformations and adaptations across different media and contexts has resulted in a system of fairy-tale tradition that is massively intertextual and transmedial. No one medium can claim primary control over the fairy-tale tradition. Throughout time, oral tellings have inspired literary adaptations; literary renditions have influenced oral and theater performances; oral, print, and theater performances have spawned any number of retellings and adaptations within audiovisual media.

This case study, investigates one example of adaptation to social media and integration across media: Tim Manley's satirical blog *Fairy Tales for Twenty-somethings* and his book *Alice in Tumblr-land*. In Manley's fairy tale creations, we see an instance of what Henry Jenkins calls convergence culture. This convergence should be of particular interest to folklorists because corporate and mass-media systems continue to influence and integrate with existing forms of interaction. Manley's overall narrative approach integrates two media, which permits him to use fairy tales to express a broader range of narrative impulses than would a project tied to only one medium. Media integration is an important concept to recognize and investigate because so many individuals see different media as inherently combative rather than mutually beneficial systems. Just as intertextuality has become a foundational concept in many humanistic studies, intermediality needs to enter the folklorist's discussions as well. With only some media under consideration, we only get some of the message.

Keywords: *Alice in Tumblr-land*, blog, convergence culture, fairy tale, *Fairy Tales for Twenty-somethings*, intermedia, Internet folklore, social media, Tim Manley, transmedia, weblog, wonder tale

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Blogs, Books, & Breadcrumbs: A Case Study of

Transmedial Fairy Tales

The genre of the fairy tale constantly repositions itself within new social contexts and media. These media "mediate" tales as they move from their tellers to their audiences. In an increasingly computer-driven age, especially in the Western world, some folklorists are turning their attention to what Trevor Blank calls "technologically mediated folklore" (3). In some senses, technological mediation is a relatively new concept—using technologies like the Internet to share, perpetuate, and adapt folklore depends on those technologies being invented and used in casual contexts. However, technology has been mediating various aspects of folk culture for ages: technologies like writing and the printing press permitted the collection and wide dissemination of folk ballads, songs, and tales long before the birth of the microchip.

Many recent studies on Internet folklore have focused on what makes Internet folklore similar to preexisting forms, perhaps because initially Internet folklore has been a difficult concept to justify in a field devoted to tradition. However, some, like John Miles Foley in his monograph/website *Oral Tradition and the Internet*, have attempted to tackle human interactions mediated by the Internet on their own terms, because to do otherwise would be "a mistake, a missed opportunity" (3). Foley's monograph expounds on the similarities Internet culture has with oral culture and contributes significantly to studies of technologically mediated folklore. However, little of his research examines storytelling in online media, which is most relevant to the study of fairy tales on the Internet and in transmedial contexts. In addition, since his study is primarily concerned with 10,000-foot level analyses (that is, analyses that deal with the big picture and not as much with in-depth examples), it often separates textual, oral, and electronic media in a way that does not fully reflect the way those media are used in everyday interactions.

In practice, many interactions function within multiple media systems, meaning that more than one medium is mediating the experience. They bear the marks of Foley's concept of "citizenship in multiple agoras [or media]" (51–55). I use a more focused case study to better illustrate the ways in which storytelling in more than one medium—in transmedial storytelling—facilitates broader communication than using a single medium because the weaknesses of one medium can be paired with another's strengths.

Understanding transmedial storytelling is particularly important to fairy-tale studies. Monomedial views have long been unable to account for all of fairy tale tradition. Although the form originated in oral culture, it has long been a liminal, hybrid form that retains aspects of orality even while its principal mode of transference for some time has been something other than face-to-face communication (Harries 3–4). Fairy tales currently appear in print (in the form of books, poems, and single-sheet printings), film, television, still-image art, advertising, music, and dance. As Cristina Bacchilega has noted, contemporary incarnations of fairy tale are full of transformation "within the tales' storyworlds; *in the genre's ongoing process of production, reception, adaptation, and translation*; in the fairy-tale's relation to other genres; and more generally as action in the social world" (3; emphasis added). The transformations that occur during production, reception, and adaptation are often transformations that occur in part because of the pressures, possibilities, and limitations found in different media. Each medium mediates differently, so creators transform fairy tales to suit the medium. These transformations across different media and contexts have resulted in a system of fairy-tale tradition that is massively intertextual and transmedial. No one medium can claim primary control over the fairy-tale tradition. Throughout time, oral tellings have inspired literary adaptations; literary renditions

have influenced oral and theater performances; oral, print, and theater performances have spawned any number of retellings and adaptations within audiovisual media.
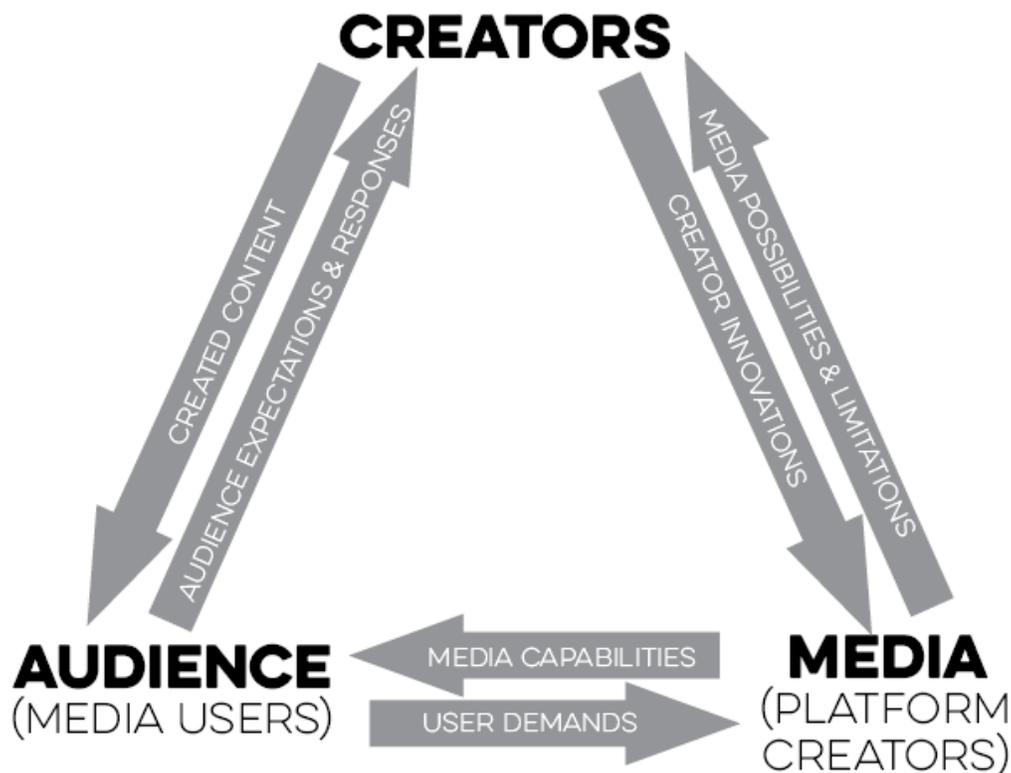
In this paper I investigate a case study of fairy tale's transformation within Internet social media, specifically weblogs (blogs), and the way old and new media forms interact with one another rather than simply supplanting one another or functioning in discrete arenas. This case study highlights the importance of a transmedial awareness of tale-telling and the limitations of monomedial approaches. Within online media, fairy tales undergo transformations that represent new evolutions in a longstanding narrative tradition. These evolutions represent human communication adapting to new pressures as society, cultural contexts, and media discourses change. As Barre Toelken has said, folklore lives by two twin laws: conservatism and dynamism. New mediations of human interaction necessitate adaptation (or dynamism) to provide continuity (or conservatism) with existing forms of interaction. Otherwise the new communicative adaptations become wholly un-relatable to previous experience and understanding, thus serving no function in a community. In the case of online media, it is useful to see online storytelling in relation to previous methods of storytelling. The Internet and its sub-media (social media, news websites, etc.) provide fertile ground to investigate the ways present-day, Western humans are changing our expressive arts to accommodate new ways of experiencing being human. However, those expressive arts are not disconnected from existing traditions. Fairy tale has long been one of the Western world's expressive arts, and its tradition is incredibly important to its continued evolution. Adaptations of the form to each new medium leave their mark on the tradition, and storytellers incorporate those marks into new interactions. Because of the sheer size of "fairy tale tradition," it provides an important touchstone for continuity when other aspects of

communication—the medium, the style, the underlying anxieties—are in flux. This is especially apparent in social media adaptations of fairy tale.

For the purposes of this case study, I limit my investigation to one particular example of adaptation to social media and integration across media: Tim Manley's satirical *Fairy Tales for Twenty-somethings* (a blog on the Tumblr platform) and his book *Alice in Tumblr-land* (published by Viking Penguin). Both the blog and the book use a similar narrative style, purpose, and other narrative choices, but they also answer to different media systems and audience expectations. The use of both media in Manley's larger narrative project demonstrates an evolving cycle of technological mediation. Those who create narratives create them based on the capabilities and constraints of the media they use; the audience for those creations (and the users of the media) have expectations that are modified by changing interactions with both author creations and media; and media systems are created and changed to meet both users' needs and desires and creators' demands (Figure 1). Furthermore, creators' and audiences' use of new media can change what they expect and accept from old media. Such is the case with Manley. Although there are techniques and purposes that are unique to his blog or his book, there is significant crossover that grants him a larger array of narrative possibilities that are acceptable to his audiences.

In Manley's fairy tale creations, we see an instance of what Henry Jenkins calls convergence culture (2). Jenkins uses the phrase to describe when corporate and grassroots creations (among other things) collide, interact, and adapt (2). This convergence should be of particular interest to folklorists, because although we prize what Jenkins calls "grassroots" systems of human interaction, corporate and mass-media systems continue to influence and integrate with existing forms of interaction. In the instance of blogging, blogging platforms are,

by and large, created by business-minded individuals and corporations. However, individual blogs on those platforms are used (often for free) to create content, both narrative and otherwise, that functions on a more grassroots or folkloric community level. These blogs can in turn influence corporate-level decisions, as in the instance of Manley's book. The book project was pitched, purchased, written, and published after his blog's success. The two media are integrated in Manley's overall narrative approach, which permits him to use fairy tales to express a broader range of narrative impulses than would a project tied to only one medium. As I discuss later, some of his stories, although they use the same voice and style, do not fit in the boxes provided by one or another of the media. Thus, limiting his narratives to one medium would limit possible modes of expression, leaving some things unsaid.

CREATORS

CREATED CONTENT

AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS & RESPONSES

MEDIA POSSIBILITIES & LIMITATIONS

CREATOR INNOVATIONS

AUDIENCE
(MEDIA USERS)

MEDIA CAPABILITIES

USER DEMANDS

MEDIA
(PLATFORM CREATORS)

Figure 1. Cycles of creator, media, and audience interactions. All aspects of the cycles influence and take influences from the other aspects.

Media integration is an important concept to recognize and investigate because so many individuals see different media as inherently combative rather than mutually beneficial systems. Even as he praises fluency in different media, Foley says,

> With the advent of cloud technology [the Internet] … how long will it be before the hard-core, the brick-and-mortar text is the exception rather than the rule? Even now, we hear early adopters of the latest electronic strategy demeaning the world of texts, just as citizens of the other agoras [users of other media] are so inured in their own marketplaces that they can't credit alternate media. (53)

This combative view is an incomplete one. Although each media revolution has changed the way humans use older media, no significant media revolution has eradicated those that came before. Orality is different in print- and digital-heavy cultures than it is in purely oral ones, but orality is not gone. Print and other static-text media serve a different purpose than they did before broadcast television, film, and Internet media came along, but they still serve a purpose. Although not all expressive art is transmedial, it is important to see that no media transformation destroys what came before. Similarly, as fairy tales are adapted into new media and changed to fit new contexts, they do not stop being fairy tales simply because they change.

True, there are some aspects of an oral fairy tale that will never translate into print, and not every aspect of a literary fairy tale translates into film, theater, or Internet media. However, the tradition of the fairy tale is so vast and so well understood by modern audiences that so long as a tale in a new medium can make itself sufficiently recognizable *as fairy tale*, that tale is absorbed into the tradition. Fairy tale tradition is rife with motifs, imagery, and language that allow new tales, even in new media, plenty of opportunities to bring themselves into contact with existing tradition and declare themselves to be fairy tales. At that point they become new

transformations of the fairy tale. Transformation, as Bacchilega points out, is one persistent feature of the fairy tale.

Manley's narrative project serves as my case study for some of the ways fairy tale transforms in an intermedial environment. In this case study I examine the system his blog works within, the ways fairy tales are deployed within and changed for that system, and the function his blog seeks to serve within Manley's chosen audience community. I then turn my focus to his book, how and why it differs from his blog, how it differs from other books because of its relationship with the blog, and how the book, the blog, and other relevant media interact in a transmedial instance of expressive art that permits him a greater scope of narrative possibilities than a monomedial project.

Social Media Stories

Manley's blog is targeted at American twenty-somethings that are, if his characters are any indication, media savvy, urban, and generally middle class and college educated. His fairy tales are multimedia artifacts that use text, image, and some simple animations. Like many blogs, his has evolved in media use, stylistic uniformity, and professionalism since its inception in September 2012. For the first month, he used already existing images to illustrate his stories. After that, he illustrated the tales himself. The tales range from one or two sentences up to a few paragraphs in length, but no longer. Manley's blog also has a very inclusive definition of "fairy tale." Generally speaking, any wondrous story that is assumed to be targeted at children is fodder for Manley's interpretations. This category includes traditional tales from Perrault, the Grimms, and *1,001 Nights*; characters from Aesop, Hans Christian Andersen, Lewis Carroll, Mark Twain, and J. M. Barrie; and miscellaneous stories adapted for film by Disney. To understand the way

these stories reach Manley's audience, it is first important to discuss Tumblr, the blogging platform he uses.

Tumblr Feeds and Frames

On Tumblr there are several constraints put upon any content. People who want to use Tumblr register with an email address and password. After registering, users can both start their own blogs and follow others' blogs using their accounts. When a user "follows" a blog, that blog's posts will appear on that user's screen in a "feed" just after logging in. The more blogs a user follows, the more types of posts will appear in the feed. The feed is not organized by the posts' authors or blogs of origin; instead it is organized solely by chronology, with the most recent posts coming first. This ordering of the feed is standard across all social media: because social media were created to help people stay current with friends' life events and up-to-date news of other kinds, new content has always been privileged.[1]

By ordering content based on chronology (even on an individual blog's page, the most recent posts appear first), Tumblr and other social media require content to be modular. Modularity—that is, the ability to be read out of order and out of context—is a property of digital content that Marie-Laure Ryan identifies as distinctive to the media (338). Modularity is as important in encyclopedic databases as it is in narratives that are destined to be read out of order and surrounded by unrelated content. Although modularity may initially seem incompatible to traditional narrativity—stories with beginnings, middles, and ends—it is not incompatible with all forms of narrative, especially narratives in brief genres. Modular narratives built of smaller, self-contained narrative capsules can build to a larger picture when taken in aggregate, but can nonetheless function as disparate pieces.

Tumblr has another function that makes the standalone traits of individual posts even more important. Tumblr posts are constantly reframed when readers "reblog" posts they react strongly to (whether the reaction is positive or negative). When a user reblogs a post, that original post appears on that user's blog. The user can add his or her own commentary, and the original blog and author is recorded.[2] Reblogging on Tumblr is similar to sharing on Facebook or retweeting on Twitter. All of these methods of spreading content reframe individual posts, articles, or statements. Reblogged posts enter the feeds of individuals who may not follow the original author's blog, they take on a different frame when shared by a new individual, and they are reframed in a broader readership's feed. Reframing is a key aspect of digital participatory culture as identified by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green: "people […] are sharing, reframing, and remixing media content in ways which might not have been previously imagined" (2). These participatory methods are facilitated by Manley's use of fairy tale forms, but his use of fairy tale is shaped by media expectations, as genre alone is not the only context that his narratives must answer to.

Genre Traditions and Social Media Transformations

In terms of content, rather than framing, *Fairy Tales for Twenty-somethings* is primarily composed of satirical retellings of fairy tales that take place in contemporary times and often involve emerging media. Manley's first post on the blog is a retelling of Little Red Riding Hood, and it sets the tone for the blog as a whole and shows the blog's initial informality of punctuation.

> little red riding hood was being stalked by a big, scary wolf. he cornered her in the
> entryway to her apartment building and started taking off his pants, but she kneed
> him in the balls and got him in the face with pepper spray. later that week she

borrowed money from her parents and moved to a safer neighborhood. (16

August 2012)

The tale is illustrated with an old-timey illustration of an innocent girl-child, which contrasts

with the capable heroine of the text. This retelling does not necessarily do a lot of new things

with Little Red Riding Hood. The fairy tale has been interpreted as a story about sexual

predation for some time, and interpretations that recast Little Red Riding Hood as her own hero

(or even an attacker on the wolf) are not unique. However, that is part of why the story works in

a context that requires modular content and constantly reframes individual stories. Throughout

the blog, Manley's Little Red Riding Hood fills the role of a woman dealing with predatory or

otherwise unsatisfactory men. She is a type rather than a rounded character. Type or archetype

characters are a persistent feature of fairy tales (Joosen 14), especially in shorter tellings. Manley

can use Little Red Riding Hood as a sexually put-upon woman in part because he invokes the

character's existing tradition. Calling his character by that name and putting her up against

"wolves" makes his retelling part of an existing array of experiences in his readers' minds. Given

her prevalence in Western culture, Manley is safe in assuming that readers are familiar with her

position as a victim of the wolf's appetite, be it sexual or otherwise.

Invoking this familiar character grants Manley's three-sentence story a stronger base than

those three sentences could have than if they were about an unknown, completely original

character. Three sentences about an original character would not be as strong in a modular,

reframed context. By using Little Red Riding Hood, Manley creates his own frame that will

carry from one user's feed to the next. Although as Vanessa Joosen points out, "the intertextual

knowledge of author and reader is inevitably discrepant" (10), there is enough of a tradition that

there will always be a semi-constant frame for this story: the frame of the Little Red Riding

Hood tradition. Little Red Riding Hood creates a stable frame because the tale has a gravity to it. It has been told so many times, in so many forms, that it carries cultural mass. Much in the same way a child is told that maples, evergreens, and aspens are all trees, and thus the word "tree" starts to explain other tree-like objects, readers have encountered many different-looking versions of "Little Red Riding Hood," and new tales can easily be drawn into the tradition's orbit.

The tradition's cultural mass is not tied to any one text. It exists in readers' memories rather than in their feeds, so it stabilizes the story within Tumblr's shifting possibilities. Invoking fairy tale tradition enables Manley to create briefer stories with more impact. This allows him to create narratives that function in discrete pieces and in aggregate—there is an arc for Little Red Riding Hood, but because each brief story about her is stabilized within the frame of the tradition of Little Red Riding Hood tales, they all function outside of that narrative arc.

A semi-constant frame is one trait that makes fairy tale a genre that adapts particularly well to social media. There are also some traits commonplace in social media that are readily adaptable to fairy tale forms. Since social media is so intimately tied to chronology, many social media content creators use their creations to comment on current events. Manley does this on occasion. Sometimes he does it in such a cryptic way that the fairy tale ceases to make sense *unless* a reader encounters it shortly after it is posted. This tale of Aladdin has a designed obsolescence to it:

> Aladdin's head was still swimming with thoughts from what happened on Friday. How were you supposed to make sense of life after inexplicable tragedy? He wanted to lose faith in everything, give up on the belief that anything mattered.

But he worked in a school, and on Monday when he went to work the kids

were there, and they were looking to him to explain what happened. And that's

when he realized, *S[***], I'm an adult.*

And then, just as immediately, he started answering their questions. (17

December 2012)

This is a not-so-satirical example of what Russell Frank calls newslore, which is a type of

Internet lore that is tied to current events. Even a year after this post was written, it would be

difficult to recall what "happened on Friday." The full impact of this story could only be had by

someone who knew when this was posted and current events surrounding that date. The story

references the assault on Sandy Hook Elementary School, a shooting that left 20 children and six

adult school employees dead. The story blends the blog's purpose to address issues faced by

emerging adults and a drive to comment on current events. Newslore posts like this one draw

more from the tradition of newslore than the tradition of fairy tale, although fairy-tale tradition

still helps to stabilize them in shifting frames.

The stabilization does not occur the same way it does in the Little Red Riding Hood

stories. The Aladdin tradition in particular is not as important to this story: this character could

still fulfill his function in the story if he were called Tim (at the time of the post, Manley was a

schoolteacher). This tale does not even rely on Manley's previous (or later) use of Aladdin for

characterization. Instead, it simply relies on the fact that Aladdin is a character from a wonder

tale. This brings a story about real-world horror and perseverance into contact with a storyworld

in which everything works out in the end, in which wishes are granted, and in which evil is

always conquered. The contrast between these expectations of an Aladdin story and the real-

world news Manley's post discusses makes the brief story more complex than it would be with Manley as the protagonist.

This use of Aladdin does not persist in the blog. In this post, timeliness overcomes concerns of plot or character in the continuing narrative project. This drive for timeliness is in stark contrast to the common perception of fairy tales as timeless. Although the timelessness of individual fairy-tale tellings has often been questioned and disproved (notably by Jack Zipes), it is still a commonly held ideal surrounding the fairy tale genre. Even contemporary retellings are often set in an indeterminate "once upon a time." Manley, like other non–fairy tale social media content creators, defies this by tying his work to modern media (which will be outdated soon enough) and to current events.

This Aladdin post shows the ways that media constraints like chronology-based viewing and reader expectations for current, relevant content can overtake concerns of genre or continuity, especially when that continuity is largely in flux anyway due to the shifting frames of a Tumblr-based blog post. This represents a common transformation fairy tale undergoes when placed in a social media context. However, this transformation does not leave a lasting impact on the fairy-tale genre. Newslore is fleeting, so the modular setup of social media allows timely stories to fade away quickly when they become irrelevant.

Another transformation that fairy tale often undergoes on social media is a loss of closure. Fairy tales traditionally grant full closure: the main character completes the quest, marries a prince or princess, dies a well-deserved death, and/or lives happily ever after. However, that is not always the case for social media. Although some digital media do not suffer much for putting an "end" to things (online news articles, etc.), social media can easily lose an audience by doing

so. To illustrate this, I use one instance in which Manley *does* provide complete closure for a particular character conflict.

Manley's interpretation of Aesop's story of the Tortoise and the Hare is the first on the blog to have multiple posts in a row containing the same characters and to have a conclusive end. The three-post arc, running from 28 September to 2 October of 2012, describes two acquaintances who take different paths out of college: Hare gets "a high-powered job in the tech industry," and Tortoise travels the United States by train and publishes a memoir. They "Facebook stalk" one another, a practice that involves visiting a person's Facebook page to find photos, life updates, relationship statuses, etc., without communicating with the owner of that page. Each character imagines how the other's life is not as worthwhile as his own. In the final post of their arc, they meet for coffee and try to impress one another with their successes, but eventually go "their separate ways" and realize "there never was a race. There is no destination. There is no winner." Although there is a punchline for the first post, the next two end on either philosophical questions or a pat moral. Manley gives the conflict between tortoise and hare complete closure, something that he does not give Little Red Riding Hood (who continues to have encounters with unsatisfactory men), Aladdin (who persists in clumsily courting Jazmine [sic]), Peter Pan (who is always less mature than he or his peers think he should be), or many other blog characters.

The reason for this habitual lack of closure is apparent when one realizes that Tortoise and Hare never again appear on the blog. There is no reason for them to do so. Their conflict is over. Manley would have to create a new conflict to bring them out of retirement, but that new conflict would probably resonate less with reader expectations of Tortoise and Hare. Closure removed Tortoise and Hare from Manley's pool of possible characters. Manley's blog is

primarily composed of vignettes with transient or nonexistent closure because it leaves his pool of possibilities open. The more diverse that pool is, the better for the blog.

Resolution is not possible, or at least not advisable for the continued health of Manley's blog. Blogs only "live" so long as they are read, and blogs are only read so long as readers are driven to content. Since the highest number of reblogs for a Tumblr post happen around the time it is posted, new stories are the lifeblood of a blog. While books may sit side by side on a shelf regardless of publication date, old blog content rarely makes its way into new feed frames. Thus Little Red Riding Hood is continually put in new unsatisfactory-male situations, because her overall issues with men are left unresolved. Paradoxically, her personal stagnation contributes to a constant renewal of her stories' frames: the blog and its followers' feeds. This character stagnation and removal or delay of closure is perhaps the strongest transformation fairy tale undergoes in a social media setting. Transformations due to newslore are not persistent. Aladdin's one-time response to tragedy soon passes. But the lack of closure and happy endings is a persistent feature of Manley's blog and other social media narratives.

These three examples—Little Red Riding Hood, Aladdin, and tortoise and hare—show some ways that fairy tale both supports social media expectations and comes into conflict with them. They also provide a case study for a few ways that new media force or coax our storytelling methods to evolve. However, it is important to note that not all uses of fairy tales online are similar to Manley's. In analyses of Internet media, it is tempting to draw broad conclusions based on a small sample. However, different social media have different mechanisms for sharing and facilitate different audience expectations, and not all Internet media are social media, so conclusions about one may not transfer to another. For example, Renee Lupica's article "Six Fairy Tales for the Modern Woman" uses fairy tale conventions to frame

her feminist argument, but her tales appear in article form on a larger news and opinion website, so they function very differently than Manley's. Her article is a self-contained unit (not a set of modular pieces of a larger narrative project), and it remains in a static location. Although readers can share links to her article, her article always appears on the same webpage on the same website (not on various readers' blogs, as Manley's work appears when it is reblogged). In addition, her purpose for adapting fairy tale conventions to Internet media is different than Manley's, and it is just as important to examine the purpose behind the transformations as it is to examine the systems that necessitate those evolutions.

Community Commiseration

The purposes behind Manley's works vary from character to character and story to story, but there are some overarching themes. There is the drive to poke fun at one's own failings or one's community's failings, a sometimes surprising thrust for hope in the face of difficult circumstances, and—most interestingly, in my mind—a contrast between an idealized future and a lesser reality. Manley uses fairy tales and fairy tale characters as a layering lens to contrast an idealized happily ever after with mundane realities. In doing so, he not only contrasts his and his characters' realities with fairy tale ideals, but also with the story of how they believe their lives were meant to go. For example, Peter Pan contemplates the differences between himself and his friends: "*All my friends are getting engaged now, and some are having kids*, he thought. *I don't even have a steady job*" (22 August 2012).

This same function of showing contrast between expected life narrative and real life appears in other social media creations outside of the fairy tale genre. It appears that social media are particularly apt for satire of long-established genres. For example, roommates Molly Thomas and Mick Bleyer lampoon the well-known (though not well formalized) genre of the baby

snapshot. With Bleyer as a model, the pair recreate baby photos they have seen, thus contrasting

their status as single, childless adults in their thirties with their expected life trajectory (Figure 2).

As Thomas said in an interview for *Today.com*, "The whole truth is I grew up thinking I'd be

married with kids at my age. I think this blog is a way of comparing the life I thought I'd have at

this point and the life I actually have (which I love) and how different they are and how silly it

all is" (qtd. in Fishbein). Like fairy tales in Manley's work, the genre of baby snapshots—with

the expectations of diapers, food-covered faces, etc.—serves to stabilize Thomas and Bleyer's

creations even when those creations are shared in shifting frames. Their message becomes more

modular—more spreadable—because of their use of established genre. Thomas, Bleyer, and

Manley all tap into similar anxieties and self-awareness in a generation with a rising average age

of marriage and child bearing. However, Manley does not limit his commentary to the systems of

social media; his stories transition into the medium of the book, and in doing so they access

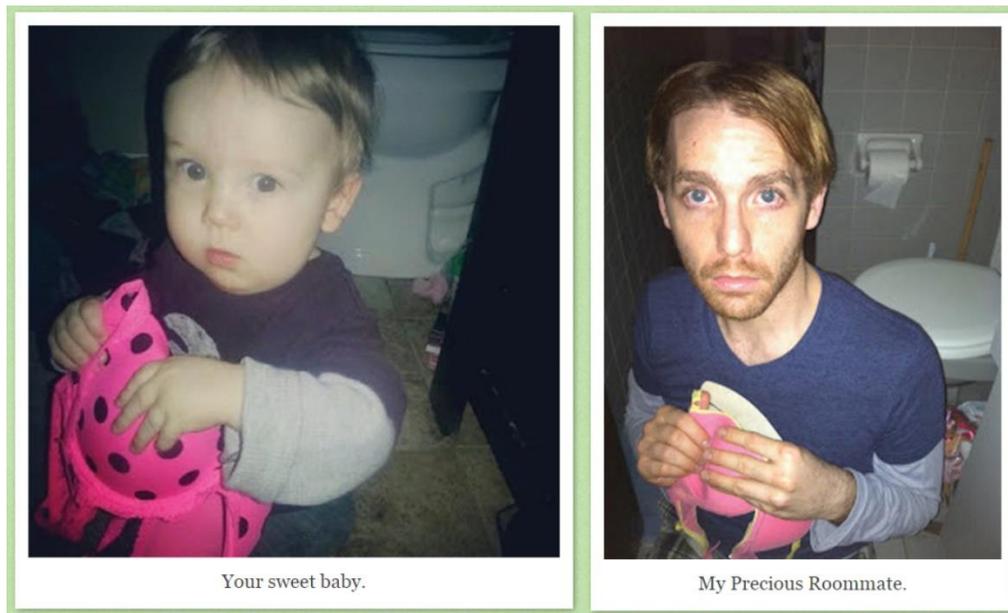different modes of expression that facilitate different messages and narrative possibilities.

Figure 2. Images from *My Precious Roommate* (Thomas & Bleyer).

Book-length Arcs

In the previous sentence, I was tempted to write that Manley's stories transition "back" into the medium of the book. However, his stories didn't originate in book form, so the desire I had illustrates a common conception of media use as a linear, chronological progression. The Internet came after books, so books are backward from the Internet, just as handwriting would be backward from books, and so on. But that perception of media as an inexorable march into the future is precisely what I wish to argue against. A linear progression of media technology implies that new media supplant old media and remove the need for them. Although new media almost always cause disruption in everyday life, economic systems, and information dissemination, they do not always fulfill every purpose for which people used old media. Even Zipes, a fairy-tale scholar who has largely been critical of mass-media adaptations of oral tales, recognizes that new media grant new opportunities and do not eradicate old media (74–75). He says that print culture gave fairy tales "more legitimacy and enduring value than an oral tale" (74) and that "oral tales continued to be disseminated" through face-to-face communication and radio (75). Even with mass printing and radio, oral culture persisted. If a purpose cannot be fulfilled (or is difficult to fulfill) with new media, it will continue to be fulfilled by old media, whether it be face-to-face conversation, live theater, radio, or books. This use of older media to fulfill continuing audience desires or narrative functions is visible in Tim Manley's book, *Alice in Tumblr-land*.

The book shares a lot with the blog: most characters (and interpretations of them) are consistent across both outlets, the style of individual tales is similar, and the combination of text and image persists. Both book and blog have some continuing storylines—characters who make more than one appearance—that Manley interweaves in such a way that no character receives consecutive tales in either book or blog (except Tortoise and Hare on the blog).

However, in the book Manley makes some significant departures from the blog. One of the most apparent, once a reader gets past the first half or so of the book, is that the book undoes one of the key narrative transformations the blog medium created: in the book, all the character arcs get some form of closure. It isn't always positive closure, but it is closure nonetheless. For example, the Prince and the Pauper unfriend each other on Facebook to avoid one another's political rants (256), the Frog Prince falls in love for good even though kissing his girl doesn't keep him from being a frog (240–241), and the technology-addicted Peter Pan finally does an Internet-free detox (262).

This return to closure signals that book readers have an expectation or need for closure that is difficult to fill with social media. Closure is expected from books, and books without closure or at least narrative symmetry are unlikely to find a broad or lasting audience. Books without closure tend to be either gag or gift books or highly literary works that a significant portion of the general audience does not find appealing. This requirement for broad print-based success means that audiences have a strong desire for closure and seek out ways to fill that desire, and if it cannot be filled in one medium they will fill it with another. Although Manley's book does differ from a traditional linear narrative—largely because it adopts many strategies from the blog that are compatible with static print texts—it still offers up the closure and symmetry that audiences go to books to find.

Outside of reintroducing closure, the book also departs from the blog in its use and treatment of LGBTQ characters. There are three explicitly LGBTQ characters in the book: Rapunzel, King Arthur, and Mulan/Ping. One fourth of the narratives that involve romance are lesbian, gay, or bisexual narratives. In the blog, Rapunzel kisses another woman (23 October

2012), but this seems more like a result of her being fed up with being treated like a lesbian after cropping her hair short.

> Rapunzel cut all her hair off and everyone was totally into it but one unexpected consequence was that she kept getting hit on by women.
>
> After like the tenth time it happened she wanted to say to the girl, "Is this still a thing, that only lesbians have short hair? Can't pretty much anyone have short hair now?" But then she was like, *Eh, yolo,*[3] and they made out. (23 October 2012)

That is the last thing the blog says about Rapunzel. At this point, her choice to make out with a woman doesn't seem to be driven by anything internal to Rapunzel's identity. However, in the book, several more Rapunzel episodes occur, and she builds a life as "a bad bitch with a buzz cut, a hybrid car, and a hot girlfriend" (252). What in the blog appears to be a one-off incident becomes, in the book, a defining moment of Rapunzel's life. The book is the only place that Manley discusses other characters' LGBTQ-specific storylines. On the blog, Arthur's sexual feelings for Lancelot are never mentioned—only his difficulties with meaningful responsibility. Mulan/Ping is a character unique to the book, and the transsexual storyline doesn't appear on the blog.

The appearance of these characters—and the fact that two of them are frequently used throughout the book—would seem to refute the common idea that one can say anything on the Internet. Social media are good outlets for experimentation, extravagance, and criticism because they are largely free of institutionalized censorship, and with modular storylines it is easy to drop anything that doesn't work. But if the Internet is the place for edgy, worldview-shattering, stigma-defying, and restriction-free content, then why does Manley save his LGBTQ narratives

for his book? Even after the book's publication, he hasn't posted those parts of Rapunzel and Arthur's narratives or anything about Mulan/Ping (even though he *has* posted some tales that originally appeared in the book). My hypothesis on this point lies in the theories for spreadability that Jenkins, Ford, and Green lay out in their most recent publication. In an evolving cultural landscape in which corporate and grassroots creations are subject to constant reinvention and reframing, it is important to understand *why* individuals share the things that they do. According to Jenkins, Ford, and Green, individuals "who create new material or pass along existing media content ultimately want to communicate something about themselves" (34).

Jenkins et al.'s assertion makes sense on many levels, but especially in the context of social media in general and Tumblr in particular. Take the concept of reblogging on Tumblr: when a user reblogs a post, he or she makes that post a part of his or her own blog, effectively declaring the post to be something about (or at least related to) him- or herself. Many Tumblr users don't add any commentary. This makes the issue of authorship hazy in some instances, and brings it closer to John Miles Foley's ideal of empowered "distributed ownership" (74–76). Although Tumblr now always records the original author of a reblogged post, rebloggers align themselves with the content they reblog in some way. If they don't add any commentary, then they align themselves with that content with no reservations or nuance. They are using another person's creation to articulate something about themselves.

This makes it difficult for envelope-pushing and highly personal posts to spread when authorship can become murky. In the example of Manley's LGBTQ narratives, many heterosexual individuals may feel uncomfortable completely aligning themselves with a heartfelt narrative they cannot identify with fully. Doing so can feel like trespassing on personal territory to which they have no claim. On the other hand, sharing the post about Rapunzel's YOLO

moment is simply sharing a joke that pokes fun at rigid gender roles and expectations regardless of the sharer's sexual orientation and identity (because Rapunzel's actions are driven by societal expectations of her short haircut and because her kissing another woman is marked with "YOLO"). The feeling of usurpation or inaccurate identification is not as big an issue when an individual recommends a book with a specific, easily visible author.

Even though Foley champions the empowering possibilities of distributed authorship, such authorship also imposes limitations. Even when authorship *is* shared online, each specific instance of a particular story, meme, or motif is linked to a particular context, and those contexts often have some sort of attributable author or distributor. This is similar to oral tradition, where the authorship for the corpus of a particular ballad or tale is distributed, but the author/distributor function in each instance belongs to an identifiable individual or group. With print or book media, even if someone besides the author recommends a particular work, the author is always visibly and obviously the origin of the work. So even a highly personal story is easier to recommend and share in book format (whether that is a physical or ebook) because there is no miscommunication about the person that story belongs to. There are other content deviations between Manley's book and blog that can be explained with this hypothesis. When readers and rebloggers do not feel comfortable identifying fully with a post, it is inherently more difficult to spread. These differences in which stories are shared and how that sharing takes place are one aspect that shows how multiple media contribute to the human impulse toward narrativity and toward using those narratives in forming and declaring identity.

Implications of Integrated Media Webs

Manley's fairy tale narratives gain variety in audience and in capabilities because he uses both his blog and his traditionally published book. However, these two media do not comprise

the entirety of his transmedial project. He also uses Twitter and Facebook to distribute links to

his stories, he illustrates the blog with hand-drawn and wood-blocked illustrations, and he

regularly tells stories orally (Manley, "Superhero"). He also integrates more media into his

interactions with readers and into his marketing campaign for his book. Although "marketing"

and "commercialization" are dirty words in folklore, they *have* become important parts of many

Western interactions. Even individuals who tell stories orally, to groups of people they are

actually in the same room/park/theater with, talk about "marketing" themselves and building

personal "brands." When speaking of groups that engage in modernized Western society, it is

reasonable to "accept as a starting point that the constructs of capitalism will greatly shape the

creation and circulation of most media text for the foreseeable future and that most people do not

(and cannot) opt out of commercial culture" (Jenkins, Ford, & Green xii). This pervasive

commercialism has undesirable side effects (Jack Zipes' critiques come to mind), but that does

not mean that it inherently corrupts everything it touches. As Cristina Bacchilega and John

Rieder have pointed out, the mere presence or absence of commercial aspects does not

predetermine the value or purpose of a cultural production:

> The positioning of the traditional fairy-tale genre within mass culture and in
>
> relation to mass culture's organic genre, the advertisement, is far from being
>
> unilaterally determined by the cultural politics of promoting consumption per se
>
> as an avenue to individual happiness and collective well-being. (358)

Manley continues to participate in non-commercial enterprises even following the release of his

book (his blog still does not support ads, nor does another blog he uses that documents an

unrelated artistic project, and recordings of his live storytelling are available for free online). He

is "not too keen on marketing/promotional stuff as a reader/consumer/enjoyer-of-things, so [he's]

tried [his] best, on the tumblr [sic] and elsewhere, to only post stuff related to the book that is in some way fun on its own" ("I'm Tim Manley"). Manley identifies himself as similar to his audience—he identifies as a reader.

This sort of community identification largely keeps him from being a voice that promotes consumption as an avenue to individual happiness. Rather than seeing himself as a producer who pushes content to consumers, he sees himself as belonging to multiple aspects of the three-part cycle I mentioned earlier: creators, audience members/users, and media. His identification with and empathy for the audience node of the cycle keeps him from falling completely into a commercial producer's role in consumerist culture.

Outside of the idea that commercial gain taints narrative, the idea that new media can eradicate older media is an incomplete assessment. For example, Manley's use of mass print media did not stop him from continuing to use his blog, and it actually prompted him to use other media, some of which are older than modern print media and some of which are newer. As a part of Manley's efforts to generate pre-orders for his book, he texted readers in the persona of a fairy godmother and sent readers a limited number of handmade woodblock prints with a story he had not put in the book. These prints also included personal notes to each reader who received one (Figure 3). Hand-making, hand-writing, and snail-mailing the notes and prints involved one of the oldest forms of communication that can occur over long distances. Manley integrates this old medium with stories produced with one of the *newest* forms of communication that can cover long distances. They both serve the same function: to share Manley's expressions with a geographically distributed readership. This wide distribution does indeed make Manley money (the more people read and enjoy his work, the more people will buy his book, the more royalties he makes), but there are other motivations for a broad readership. Manley seems to thrive on a

sense of community with his readers, a sense that is heightened by the "social" aspects of social

media on his blog and how easily he receives feedback on his book. He also invites contact that

is not necessarily connected to his stories. As a cartoon version of Manley says in a post from

December 2013,

> I feel like I know you [readers] … but I also don't know you … so I'd love to talk
>
> a little! ask [sic] below, or send a message via Tumblr, or email me […] you can
>
> also just say hello and share a story if you'd like! (5 December 2013)

The community commiseration of Manley's stories is meaningless without that community, all

commercial and profitable aspects aside.

Figure 3. Handmade woodblock print sent as part of a pre-order thank-you gift (Manley, personal communication September 2013).

New Media, New Messages

This integration underscores my point: new media don't replace old media because new media offer different things. It is true that new media change the way we use old media. Linda Dégh points out that fairy tales used to be entertainment for adults, but by the time the Grimms were created their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, geographically distributed and mass communications had developed to the point that fairy tales moved to "the memory of old, marginal people and […] women restricted to the audience of their nurseries" (34). Although oral fairy tale looked different then than it had prior to print media, it wasn't gone. Investigating the ways that media interact with each other and change to support or reroute human interactions is an important realm of study for folklorists. New media create new contexts for interactions with others, and it is only through those interactions that we build community and individual identities. The new media and new contexts generate new ways of creating and being a part of human communities and folk groups, and as these are central foci of study for folklorists, they should not be ignored simply because they are too new to have generations of tradition to study. As Manley's project shows, existing traditions find places in new media contexts.

Not all instances of expressive art involve as many media as Manley's project uses, and no new media comes without consequences that some will inevitably see as negative. But in Manley's work we can see an instance of an integrated use of media that *works*, and it works because the different media he uses accomplish different things. His blog is a space for extending his audience, engaging a geographically distributed community (through reblogs, etc.), and adding variety and immediacy to his stories; his book adds closure and narrative wholeness[4]; his personalized texts create a more individualized connection than his mass-media productions; his hand-printed, snail-mailed art fills a continuing desire for concrete objects and expressions in a

distant, often faceless community; and his oral storytelling gives face-to-face interaction to him

and a geographically specific portion of his audience. Each of these media or communication

methods has benefits, capabilities, limitations, and weaknesses. No one of them achieves

everything every creator wants, nor does any one of them provide everything every audience

member wants. If, as Marshall McLuhan has said, "the medium is the message," then doesn't

limiting media limit the message?

Persistent Print Authorship Culture

Although the sort of transmedial integration I discuss here is idealistic in its own way, it

is different from the more restrictive utopic ideologies of those who favor one medium's charms

to the point that they ignore the effects and benefits of other media (Foley 53). Even Foley, who

prefers systems over things, seems to see the Internet primarily as a means to return to a way of

thinking that more closely parallels purely oral culture (79). However, some of his idyllic

descriptions of "the norm" in online interactions are not necessarily normal (75). As I have

shown, the "empowering rule" of distributed authorship is not necessarily the rule, nor is it

always empowering. This is possibly because Foley's description of online distributed authorship

is based in his comparison of "always-updatable databases, wikis, websites, and open-source

software" to traditional oral networks of epic traditions (76). The problem with comparing these

two sets of things is that they are not similar enough to make a comparison that can be applied to

all the genres that appear in both oral and digital communications. As Henry Glassie asserts, "all

narratives are simultaneously informational and artful, and […] the more the artful prevails over

the informational, the more likely […] narrators [are] to think of themselves as authors and to be

taken as authors by others" (527). Wikis and databases are purely informational: no one really

sees art in an entry for Wikipedia. The oral epic traditions Foley cites are all narrative traditions,

which means that a comparison to Internet narratives is a better comparison. In the realm of narratives, Internet culture bears the effects of single-author print culture. Knowing who the author is matters. The print culture cult of the author persists into Internet narratives, but this does not mean that any one author tries to be "wholly responsible for the invention or maintenance of" a given tradition (Foley 76). Each author only wants to be responsible for his or her own artful creations. The more artful a creation on the web is, the more likely an author is to claim it as his or her own, and the more likely it is that their audience will respect that claim.

Manley's work is Manley's, and it is attributed to him even when rebloggers share in the distribution of the story. Although there is some blurriness because of the way social media work, it is not nearly as distributed as Foley purports online authorship to be. The "norm" for artful creators online is not to share authorship freely, but to share their work *so long as it is attributed to them*. Some creators fiercely defend their copyrights and do not share at all.

To borrow some linguistic terms, this shows the difference between a prescriptive ideological approach to digital media and an optimistic descriptivist approach. Although as an editor I have a bit of a prescriptivist streak, I know that in folklore it's important to see things *as they happen*, because saying how humans *should* interact doesn't stop them from doing it another way if it suits them. And the way they *do* interact says a lot about what they value, and those values are something that folklorists often strive to identify. Now that folklore scholars at large have a sufficient basis in Internet and transmedial folklore to make broad theoretical claims (like Foley's about distributed authorship), it is time to test those claims against actual usage and readjust and refine them as necessary.

Actual Transmediality

In my case study of Manley's storytelling, here are the things that have actually happened: fairy tales based in social media platforms lose closed endings; social media narratives make space for transient, timely stories, even if they break other genre conventions; the conservative drive in online storytelling often comes in the form of genre choice, which stabilizes stories in unstable frames, and the dynamism comes in the way creators adapt those genres to the media; and media are used based on their suitability to a particular message or purpose, but old media do not go away.

The last point brings me to my common ground with Foley. Although much of Foley's book/website project is critical of static texts like books, he says to "trust multimedia over monomedium, and systems over things" (79). Transmedial systems provide an array of lenses to approach information and art. Jeff Todd Titon has pointed out that "intertextuality would appear to be a quality inherent in thought or consciousness" (74), and I would further that argument to say that intermediality is a quality inherent in modern Western culture. Even when a particular narrative or expression occurs in only one medium, audiences bring experiences from other texts and other media to bear. Just as intertextuality has become a foundational concept in many humanistic studies, intermediality needs to enter the discussion as well, even for folklorists who traditionally favor folkloric interactions that are limited to a handful of concrete, geographically limited forms of expression. If we ignore other media, we ignore some of the ways that groups form identity, some of the ways individuals express emotions like frustration and hope, and some of the ways we have found of being human. With only some media under consideration, we only get some of the message.

Endnotes

1. There are some social media sites that use algorithms that deviate slightly from an order based strictly on chronology. For example, currently (as of November 2014), Facebook privileges new content, but new content with a lot of feedback in terms of comments, "likes," and shares will appear higher in most feeds than new content with no feedback. Still, these slight deviations do not change the fact that the primary organizational principle is newness.

2. The original author was not always recorded on Tumblr. In the past, it was possible for a reblogger to remove the original author's name and blog title from the reblogged post. This allowed for a more distributed authorship, a concept that Foley calls the "empowering rule" of Internet communications (75). However, the Tumblr community at large complained at the lack of attribution, and now the platform always records the original author when a post is reblogged.

3. "YOLO" is an abbreviation for "you only live once." It is often used as a carpe diem–like explanation for doing things one wouldn't normally do. If not used as a substitute for carpe diem, it is used as an excuse for doing something foolhardy, dangerous, or stupid.

4. It's true that not all books provide this closure or any sort of narrative balance. However, Manley intentionally avoided making a gag book that would lack narrative closure ("I'm Tim Manley").

Works Cited

Bacchilega, Cristina. *Fairy Tales Transformed? Twenty-First-Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2013. Print.

Bacchilega, Cristina, and John Rieder. "The Fairy Tale and the Commercial in *Carosello* and *Fractured Fairy Tales*." *Channeling Wonder: Fairy Tales on Television*. Eds. Pauline Greenhill and Jill Rudy. Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 2014. Print, 336–359.

Blank, Trevor J., ed. *Folk Culture in the Digital Age: The Emergent Dynamics of Human Interaction*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2012. Print.

Dégh, Linda. *American Folklore and Mass Media*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.

Fishbein, Rebecca. "Child's Play(er): Grown Man Re-creates Cute Baby Photos." *Today.com*. NBC Broadcasting, 21 Mar. 2013. Web. 1 Jan. 2014. < http://www.today.com/news/ childs-play-er-grown-man-re-creates-cute-baby-photos-1C8995675 >

Foley, John Miles. *Oral Tradition and the Internet: Pathways of the Mind*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2012. Print.

Frank, Russell. *Newslore: Contemporary Folklore on the Internet*. Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 2011. Print.

Glassie, Henry. "Authorship in Oral Narrative." *Marvelous Transformations: An Anthology of Fairy Tales and Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Eds. Christine A. Jones & Jennifer Schacker. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2013. Print. 523–528.

Harries, Elizabeth Wanning. *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003. Print.

"I'm Tim Manley, Author of the Tumblr-to-Book *Alice in Tumblr-land: And other Fairy Tales for a New Generation* – AMA" [Ask Me Anything]. *Reddit*, Nov. 2013. Web. 10 Dec.

2014. < http://www.reddit.com/r/books/comments/1q0fus/

im_tim_manley_author_of_the_tumblrtobook_alice_in/ >

Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York

UP, 2008. Print.

Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning*

in a Networked Culture. New York: New York UP, 2013. Print.

Joosen, Vanessa. *Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales: An Intertextual Dialogue*

between Fairy-tale Scholarship and Postmodern Retellings. Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP,

2011. Print.

Lupica, Renee. "Six Fairy Tales for the Modern Woman." *The Hairpin*. The Hairpin, 11 Jun.

2013. Web. 3 Dec. 2014.

Manley, Tim. *Alice in Tumblr-land*. New York: Viking, 2013. Print.

---. *Fairy Tales for Twenty-somethings*. N.p., n.d.. Web. 4 Dec. 2013.

< http://fairytalesfor20somethings.tumblr.com >

---. "A Superhero Gets Sick." *The Moth*. The Moth, 10 Dec. 2013. Web video. 18 Aug. 2014.

< http://themoth.org/posts/storytellers/tim-manley >

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York, NY: McGraw-

Hill, 1964. Print.

Ryan, Marie-Laure, ed. *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*. Lincoln: U of

Nebraska P, 2004. Print.

Thomas, Molly, and Mick Bleyer. *My Precious Roommate*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Jan. 2014.

< http://mypreciousroommate.blogspot.com/ >

Titon, Jeff Todd. "Text." *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture*. Ed. Burt Feintuch.

    Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2003. Print. 69–98.

Toelken, Barre. *The Dynamics of Folklore*. Logan: Utah State UP, 1996. Print.

Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale*. Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 1994.

    Print.