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## Social Media Storytelling as a Method for Teaching Literature

**Abstract** This paper investigates how a social medium (Facebook in this case) can be a platform for a novel way of teaching literature focusing on social roleplaying of the literary characters. We call this new form “social media storytelling”. Our project transmedially recreates the world of an original work of literature, a Danish medieval ballad. We describe our experiment, contextualise our findings and argue for the potentials of such a dialogic form.

### Introduction

In a blend of design and action research, we developed a teaching resource that made use of social media to teach *Folkeviser* (old Danish ballads of medieval origin) to high school students. The essence of the project was to create a transmedial storytelling platform inside of Facebook where students had to play the roles of the different main characters of a selected ballad. In this paper, we present and evaluate our project from an educational perspective, as well as address the more general questions:

- What is social media storytelling?
- What are the affordances of a social network as a storytelling platform?
- How are stories appropriated and re-enacted by the students?
- What are the opportunities and challenges inherent to this format in relation to education?
- Are there any successful guidelines for the transmedial migration of stories (in our case from text to Facebook)?

### Facebook and *Folkeviser*

Our project joins two very different objects. On one side, we have the social network of Facebook, populated by millions of people who voluntarily share information about their lives in order to connect to others. Facebook has an extraordinary presence in the Danish society (in 2014, 95 percent of the 16- to 89-year-old Danes

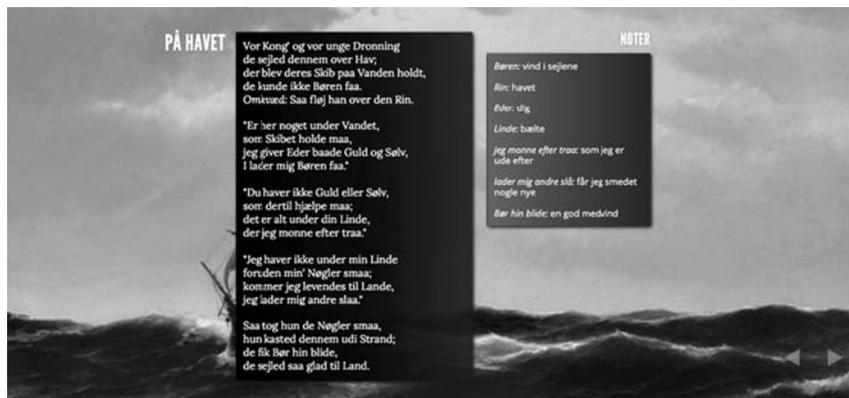
had a Facebook profile).<sup>1</sup> There have been attempts to incorporate Facebook and other social networks as teaching and learning resources,<sup>2</sup> mostly as a social forum in which to expand the classroom digitally.<sup>3</sup> Other projects have embraced the possibility of using Facebook profiles for cultural dissemination purposes.<sup>4</sup> But to date, no projects exist that use Facebook as a scene to transmedially recreate the universe of a literary work as we have done.

On the other side, we have the Danish *Folkeviser*, a series of ballads of medieval origin (starting in the 1200s) that survived in oral tradition until they were written down (mostly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century). Their verses tell stories about knights, battles, magical encounters or unhappy love affairs, and were sung as accompaniment to ring-dances (Fibiger and Lütken, 2012: 64–65). Although originally an entertainment product of the nobility, *Folkeviser* grew increasingly to be perceived as popular songs. As such, they are considered repositories of ancient wisdom, crucial to understanding the development of the Danish national character and modern culture.<sup>5</sup> *Folkeviser* are notoriously difficult to teach because of their archaic form and language and their remote worldview.

The goal of our project was to use the familiar social network as a bridge to connect with the unfamiliar old verse. We decided to combine a digital edition of a selected song with a set of activities where 9<sup>th</sup> grade children (15-year-olds) would produce digital content.

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- 1 As published in the annual report on Danish society media use released by Statistics Denmark, the central authority on Danish statistics (Retrieved from <http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/upload/18686/itbef.pdf>, September 1<sup>st</sup> 2016)
  - 2 Such as in Cape Town (South Africa) (Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02500160903250648>, September 1<sup>st</sup> 2016)
  - 3 For example, see <http://www.ednfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Facebookguideforeducators.pdf>
  - 4 Such as the profile of an 18<sup>th</sup> century girl that the Danish National Museum made to promote an exhibition: Retrieved from <http://www.formidlingsnet.dk/flirt-filosofi-og-facebook>, September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016
  - 5 As stated in the introduction to *Folkeviser* in the literature canon of the Danish ministry of education: Retrieved from <http://pub.uvm.dk/2004/kanon/kap06.html>, September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016

Fig 1. A Folkeviser digital edition



## Theoretical Background

Epistemologically, our project is constructivist in nature, as our premise is that children have to be active in order to learn, engaging in what Freire (2007) has described as a process of inquiry, interpretation and creation. Children contextualise new knowledge according to their own experience, particularly when engaged in production of some kind. More specifically, we align ourselves with scholars like David Buckingham and Allan Martin, who have proposed the idea that digital literacy has different levels (Lankshear and Knoopel, 2008), where the lower levels refer to basic operating skills, and the upper levels are about producing and transforming.

We define **social media storytelling**<sup>6</sup> as the targeted use of social media as a storytelling platform where participants interpret a fictive role, here in the context of a teaching resource. In our project, children perform fictional characters within the environment of a social medium, which is usually built around writing statements of what one is thinking/doing, joining groups and events, or sharing pictures, locations, videos and other material. We were inspired by Sarah Schmelling's humorous book *Ophelia Joined the Group Maidens Who Don't Float: Classic Lit Signs on to Facebook* (2009). Schmelling (transmedially) transforms well-known literary classics into Facebook streams where the story is retold through character

6 We are aware that the term has been used by Bryan Alexander in one of the chapters of his book *The New Digital Storytelling*, but he just considers storytelling through podcasts and video and the user interaction that occurs (2011, pp. 77–90).

statements that behave as real people and use all the social media conventions of sharing material, inviting others to events, etc. The mood is highly parodic, but the transmediation of the stories reveals a deep knowledge of themes, structure and symbolic importance.

It is relevant to note that in this project, storytelling equals fictional storytelling<sup>7</sup> and is not about mediating stories of the true selves of the participants, as in the approach known as “digital storytelling” advocated by Lambert (2006), Lundby (2008) and others. In this respect, it might seem counterintuitive to use social media as a platform, since they are built so that real people share information about their real lives. In fact, Facebook’s terms of service state that users must use their real name when creating an account.<sup>8</sup> We decided to transgress this as we wanted to exploit the interaction dynamics our subjects had acquired by using Facebook in their real lives. Could these in any way help to boost their understanding of literary fiction in the spirit of Sarah Schmelling? To minimise the ethical breach, the fictional accounts existed in a closed circle as they were only friends with each other, and we deactivated them after the experiment had ended.

We will now briefly introduce two other concepts that have been at the core of our theoretical framing.

In a learning context, **creative digital production** can be understood as an activity where children are encouraged to produce their own material (text, image, sound, etc.) in response to a problem/question, which is framed in such an open way that it allows for different resolution strategies not given in advance. Creativity is not about reinventing the wheel every time or arguing that these children are geniuses, but rather about giving them a relevant framework to recombine ideas and complex concepts “into a new structure, with its own unity, but showing the influence of both” (Boden, 1990: 130). In this way, it is close to the idea of problem solving in an unconventional manner, as proposed by Maier as long ago as 1931. Thus, productive practices reinforce processes of learning as they get children to make personal syntheses by putting their experience of the world and the context matter of school together in new meaningful combinations.

The last of our defining concepts is that of **transmediality**, an idea that is present in several disciplines: literature, film and media studies, computer games and even economics (see e.g. Jenkins, 2003; Dena, 2009; Bechman Pedersen, 2009; Evans, 2011). Most work on the subject focuses on industry practices or consumption

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7 As it does, for example, in the work of Marie Laure Ryan (2004, 2014)

8 Facebook Terms of Service, retrieved March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015: <https://www.facebook.com/legal/terms>

patterns (Jenkins, 2003), and some on the storytelling potential of mixing different media (Jenkins, 2003; Klastrup and Tosca, 2004, 2011, 2014).

In the case of our project, the transmedial perspective is useful because we are transporting a world (the *Folkevisen*) from one medium (oral/written) into another (digital/social network). It is not merely a question of adaptation, because adaptation is mostly about transporting content. We are also interested in how each medium renders meaning in different ways. We are “re-coding” the static world of the *Folkevisen* into a dynamic source for analysis and social media performance.

Transmedial worlds are about getting audiences involved and encouraging text production beyond the original text. “Most often transmedia narratives include key story information over a variety of platforms, each used for what it does best; multiple entry points into the storyworld; and the opportunity for collective action rather than passive consumption” (Gambarato, 2012: 84). In our project, we are drawing on a transmedial world that is so strong that school children will be motivated to expand it through personal creativity and common roleplay, as supported by the social network of Facebook. Others have tried to apply transmedial storytelling to a learning context (like Pence, 2011; Lacasa, 2010; Wakefield, Mills and Warren., 2013; Wankel and Blessinger, 2013), mostly arguing that it can develop a nuanced understanding of the affordances, strengths and languages of the different media platforms, that is, focusing on metareflection and communication.

## Methodology

Our project is a blend of action and design methods that we can call “Design Based Action Research” (Magnussen and Sørensen, 2011). We had a set of theoretical hypotheses that led to the design of a teaching resource to be tested in an intervention, which is typical design research (Wang and Hannafin 2005). We also incorporated the teacher’s perspective in various ways: by having a teacher as a part of the design team, and by explicitly working to incorporate the official guidelines from the Danish Ministry of Education pertaining to the teaching of literature at this level.<sup>9</sup> That is, in accordance with the participatory action research perspective, we want to bring about change (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000: 273) from within the praxis we are studying.

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9 Retrieved from <http://uvm.dk/Service/Publikationer/Publikationer/Folkeskolen/2009/Faelles-Maal-2009-Dansk/Undervisningsvejledning-for-faget-dansk/Sprog-litteratur-og-kommunikation>, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016

The research consisted of four phases: a research and documentation phase, an implementation phase (including prototype design, test and improvement), an intervention phase and an analysis phase.

The **research and documentation phase** involved the team extensively investigating the *Folkeviser* as literary form, as well as locating the different teaching materials that have been developed over the years. These materials were mostly traditional literary “activity packs” where children are introduced to the world of the *Folkeviser*, then presented with some of the central texts with modernised language and then asked to analyse or answer questions about the texts. Some alternative materials exist,<sup>10</sup> but most resources are classically formed: studies of themes, characters and symbols meant mostly as reading aids for children.

In our **implementation phase**, we produced a website<sup>11</sup> to gather all the materials: information about *Folkeviser*, a description of the teaching materials and guidelines to using them, the educational goals of the project, and the annotated edition of the chosen *Folkeviser* that would be used in connection with Facebook. This website was mostly conceived as a resource for teachers. In this phase, we did a test run of the learning resource at the IT University of Copenhagen, during which five test subjects tried out the prototype and were interviewed for feedback at the end. As a result of this test, we made some changes to the final design in order to improve the flow of the activities.

Our **intervention phase** was carried out at the school of *Osted fri -og efterskole* on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2014. The participants were 17 students from ninth grade (15-year-olds) and their teacher. The intervention ran for 80 minutes, during which time the students went through the digital edition of the *Folkeviser* and interacted with each other on Facebook. The six roles were played in groups of three students, so we could observe the in-group communication regarding both the meaning of the verses and which action to take on Facebook at each turn. Our role at the intervention was to observe and to take notes. Besides informally talking to the students during the intervention, the following day we also held a 40-minute debrief and evaluation session with the students and the teacher, in which we together discussed the process and the learning that had occurred.

After the completed intervention, we began the **analysis phase**, during which we conducted a design reflection (what worked and what did not in our learning material and the pace of the activities) and an analysis of both the content

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10 Such as Rather Homemade Productions film om Ebbe Skammelsen, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QujVaDO8A0>, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016

11 Project's website: <http://www.itu.dk/~nita/folkeviser/>

produced (all the Facebook pages and their activity) and the process that the students had been through.

## Our Learning Resource

Our learning resource is made of several related parts:

- a digital edition of the *Folkeviser* Germand Gladensvend
- a set of six characters which are to be played by the students and their Facebook accounts
- a series of eight Facebook tasks for each of the six characters to complete in between reading the passages of the *Folkeviser*
- an information package for teachers and students<sup>12</sup>

### The *Folkeviser*: Germand Gladensvend

This is one of the so-called magical *Folkeviser* that deal with the supernatural. The story of Germand Gladensvend has a classic narrative arch with an introduction to the characters and the conflict, a complication of the plot and a climax, in which the story is resolved and the fate of the characters sealed. We have cut it in eight sequences that are presented to the students one by one. They click on the screen to go from one sequence to the next. In between sequences, they receive prompts to interact in Facebook. Here are the sequences of the story:

#### Strophe Plot

- 1–5: The King and the Queen are at sea and get in trouble with an evil Gam (a sort of monstrous bird, not unlike a griffin). They are forced to make a deal with it to save their lives: they will give the monster “what lies under the belt” of the Queen (she thinks it is her keys, but the monster knows she is pregnant).
- 6–8: The Queen realises that she is pregnant and that the Gam has cheated her. She gives birth to a son who is baptised immediately and called Germand Gladensvend (which means “happy boy” as a sort of protection against evil).
- 9–12: Germand grows up in hiding and learns about his fate.
- 12–16: The Gam reappears when Germand is a teenager and asks for him, but the Queen denies having had a son.
- 17–19: Germand is now 15 and in love with the English princess, whom he wants to marry against the wishes of his family.

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12 *ibid.*

- 20–24: Germand flies to England (dressed in his mother’s magical bird costume), and on his way meets the Gam but convinces him to wait for his due payment until he is back from England. The Gam marks him by drinking half his blood and taking one of his eyes, to be sure he can find him again.
- 25–29: Germand arrives in England and meets the English maids; but all are afraid of him because of his terrible appearance. Only the princess, Sølverlad, takes care of him. She curses Germand’s mother, whom she deems responsible for his travails, but he defends his mother: it is just fate.
- 30–33: Germand flies back home, but on his way he meets the Gam and with him, his terrible destiny. Sølverlad follows him and kills all the birds she finds on her way (trying to get to the Gam) but fails. She never finds Germand, only his right hand.

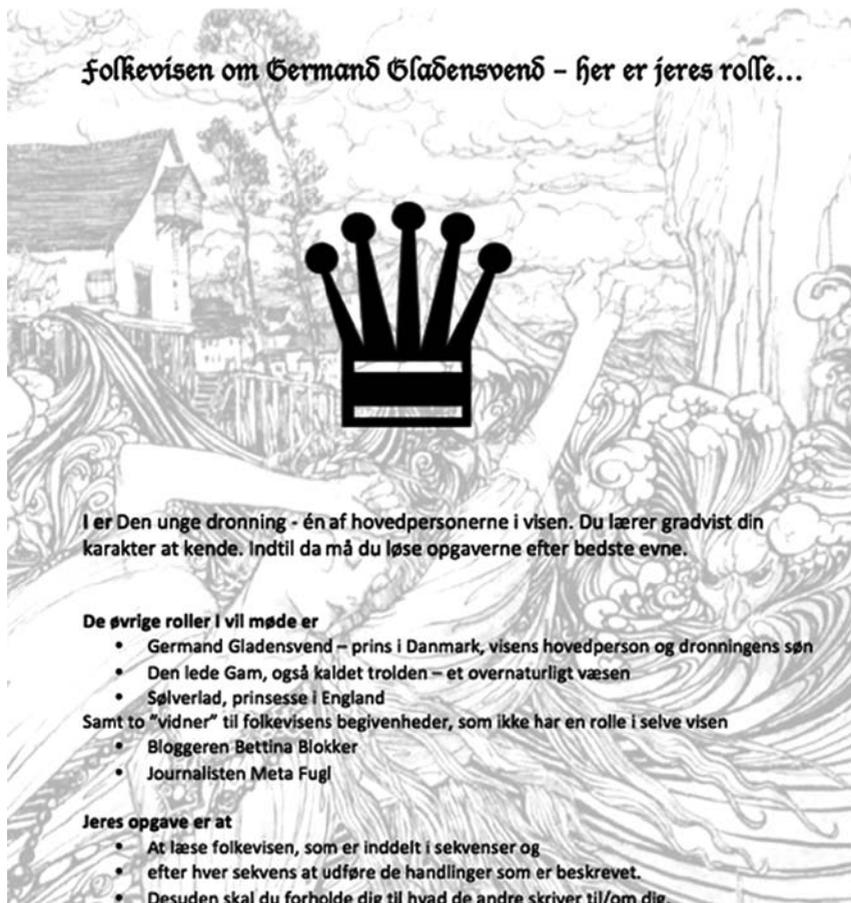
#### The six characters

We created six characters for the students to roleplay:

- The Queen (Ragnhild Mathilde)
- The Gam (also called “the troll”)
- Germand Gladensvend (the Danish prince)
- Sølverlad (the English princess)
- A blogger (Bettina Blokker)
- A journalist (Meta Fugl)

Each had a character-sheet with their profile information to log into the Facebook account. The first four characters are the protagonists of the *Folkeviser*, and the other two are additional characters with a mission to witness and report in genres well known to the students.

Fig 2. One of the characters



**folkevisen om Germand Gladensvend – her er jeres rolle...**

I er Den unge dronning - én af hovedpersonerne i visen. Du lærer gradvist din karakter at kende. Indtil da må du løse opgaverne efter bedste evne.

**De øvrige roller I vil møde er**

- Germand Gladensvend – prins i Danmark, visens hovedperson og dronningens søn
- Den lede Gam, også kaldet trolden – et overnaturligt væsen
- Sølvrelad, prinsesse i England

**Samt to "vidner" til folkevisens begivenheder, som ikke har en rolle i selve visen**

- Bloggeren Bettina Blokker
- Journalisten Meta Fugl

**Jeres opgave er at**

- At læse folkevisen, som er inddelt i sekvenser og
- efter hver sekvens at udføre de handlinger som er beskrevet.
- Desuden skal du forholde dig til hvad de andre skriver til/om dig.

### The Facebook tasks

When reading the digital edition of Germand Gladensvend, each of the eight sequences of the story is followed by a prompt specific to each character concerning a task they have to complete on Facebook; that is, there are 48 different tasks (eight for each of the six characters).

The tasks make use of the most common Facebook features, such as setting profile pictures, writing status updates, liking, sending messages and notifications, and creating events. Moreover, each task fulfils a function (F) related to literary analysis and the competences the students have to develop at this level:

F1: make a synthesis of the story

F2: analyse or hypothesise

F3: explain a word or concept

F4: create something new

F5: deepen personal relations

There is no space here to present all 48 tasks in detail, but as an example, these are the Queen's tasks, with an indication as to their literary analysis function, F:

- After 1–5: You are very confused about what has happened on the ship. Write a status update: what are you thinking most deeply? (F5)
- After 6–8: Write on the Gam's wall what you think about him and create a life event on your timeline. (F5)
- After 9–12: Join the Facebook group "Big thinkers" and answer the question. (F2)
- After 12–16: You don't know what to do. Ask for help – maybe someone knows how to fool the Gam. (F5)
- After 17–19: Post five rules of conduct on your son's wall to guide him in his life. (F2)
- After 20–24: You miss your son. Use Bitstrip to make a short comic strip about your situation. (F4)
- After 25–29: You have heard about Sølverlad's accusations. Explain your version of the story! (F5)
- After 30–33: Create a life event on your timeline. (F1)

Fig 3. A task



To conclude this section, we want to consider the affordances of a social network as a storytelling platform. Facebook makes our inner life visible (who are our friends and relations, what are we thinking now, what do we like and not like) and our dealings with the world explicit (where are we at what point, doing what and with whom). In this respect, Facebook is a machine to perform and situate the self in relation to a network.

On the other hand, The *Folkeviser* are old texts about a long-lost world we no longer understand. The inner lives of the characters are not described or expressed: we do not know what they think or why they did what they did. We believe that Facebook can be the ideal vehicle for the students to explore that old world, as well as the inner life of the mythical characters. Our learning resource will in this way be based on “creativity and stimulate(s) true reflection and action upon reality” (Freire, 1985: 84), allowing students to negotiate and rebuild the ethos, topos and mythos of the transmedial world of the *Folkeviser*.

## Analysis of the Intervention

Our intervention is both product oriented (the reading of the *Folkeviser* + Facebook interaction) and process oriented (group work and evaluation), so our analysis uses data from both sources. We begin with a general introduction to the student and teacher activity, technical issues and flow, and then delve into the two transmedial storytelling topics introduced in the previous section: how students engage in world-building activities and expressive and poetic activities.

### Unfolding of the intervention

The intervention took place in 80 intense minutes, during which the students interacted with the digital edition of Germand Gladensvend and worked with their characters on Facebook. The 17 students were divided into five groups of three (and one group of two). There was an extremely high level of activity,<sup>13</sup> where 85 percent of the students were constantly at work, talking, writing and laughing about the tasks. On the few occasions when a student did something else (like look at their mobile phones), the others would ask them to focus again. The first strophe and activity took longer, as students had to get used to the form and what was expected of them. All groups worked independently throughout, except for one that needed a lot of help from the teacher. The groups organised themselves spontaneously in a similar way: one person read the verses aloud, one posted on

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13 The teacher confirmed that the activity level was much higher than it usually is in literature analysis activities.

Facebook, and the third assisted them. The collaboration flowed easily, with good humour, as in this exchange:

A: “I think you have to write that [...]”

B: “what was that?”

C: “hey, I have another idea [proposes something else]”

B: “is that what we want to say? that is what YOU want to say [writes]”

A: “wait! we’ll find an old word for that!”

There was no break for any of the groups, even though their production volumes varied significantly. Some of the groups struggled more to find meaningful answers to the Facebook prompts, while others were quicker and filled the remaining time with extra interactions with the content posted by others in Facebook. In this way, the activity allows for some differentiation in the classroom.

The teacher had participated in modelling the Facebook activities by giving us some educational constraints, mostly related to the importance of students working with the original text and analysing the plot (related to the “F” analysis functions detailed above), but she had not been sure she had understood how the activity would flow. However, as soon as we got started, she was up to date and supported the process very effectively, focusing on comprehension of the *Folkeviser* and its characters and pushing the students to think for themselves.

The students had their own computers with them, and there were no technical problems of note. The website with all the materials worked perfectly, and all students knew Facebook well. They even used functions we had not planned for, such as the chat and hashtags, took pictures of themselves or played music from the Middle Ages in the background. In this way, they incorporated elements of their daily media use into the activity in a natural way.

Apart from the online “conversation” in which the fictive characters engaged, the groups also talked to each other aloud in the classroom. They were extremely interested in who played which character and in pointing others to their production: “Hey, check out our profile picture!” “Come on, Germand! Answer our interview!” There was a lot of laughter, some shouting and a relaxed atmosphere.

Fig 4. The class



We followed the student Facebook production on-site, as we also had access to their profiles while they were posting. Most groups completed the activities required of them and seemed to understand the text of the *Folkeviser* in a satisfactory way. However, we detected a lot of “noise” in between the answers, with students engaging in playful banter, often of a sexual nature. Some of this noise was unproductive from a learning perspective, but on other occasions it proved an interesting way of re-interpreting the content of the *Folkeviser*. They relished exaggerating the qualities of the characters, turning them into monstrous or funny figures (a bit like the parodies in Schmelling’s book we introduced above), even when completing the activities as required. As an example, here is the answer to the Queen’s fifth prompt (“Post five rules of conduct on your son’s wall to guide him in his life”), written before Germand leaves her to pursue his happiness in England:

*My Dearest Son You shall follow these 5 rules:*

1. *You shall go to bed at 7*
2. *You shall treat your beautiful maiden well*
3. *Fly but be careful. Beware the evil Gam*
4. *Never look for danger yourself*
5. *You shall never fuck Sølverlad Rex*

The contrast provided by the crude fifth rule is a kind of playful appropriation that can earn the other students’ approval. Humour allows for a duplicity whereby the students are both satisfying the teacher’s requirements and distancing themselves

from the texts with typical teenage subversion. But actually, even subversion supports creative learning, since this kind of joke adds an extra interpretive layer which requires that the receiver has understood the context of the *Folkeviser* in order to find it funny. The fifth line quite aptly condenses the implicit fears of the *Folkeviser* mother, even though they have been “translated” into vulgar teenage vernacular.

### Engagement in world-building activities

As described above, much of the production activity of the students (and the accompanying discussion) was centred on understanding and expanding the world of the *Folkeviser*. This is the predominant student activity in the whole intervention because of the very framing of our learning resource in sequences, which have to be understood before moving on to the next “turn”. Three of the five literary analysis functions that informed our shaping of the Facebook prompts were conceived to make the students dig deeper into the world of the *Folkeviser* (make a synthesis, analyse/hypothesise, and explain). Here we present some examples of how these functions translated into Facebook actions.

All groups were very engaged in explaining and talking about what they just had read in order to be sure they understood the plot and what was going on:

A: “who talked to the Queen?”

B: “The Gam”

A: “who is the Gam?”

B: “the one who takes her child”

The same kind of explaining/synthesising intention can be traced in many of the posts:

Fig 5. *“The other day I walked past the Queen’s apartments and I saw a fine diary. I had to read it. This is what it said: The other day I was sailing and we lost the wind. The horrible Gam came and said he wanted my firstborn in exchange for our safe journey to land”*



**Bettina Blokker**

**Forleden gik jeg forbi dronningens gemakker der så jeg en dagbog så fin. Jeg måtte læse i den. Her er hvad der stod:**

**Forleden da jeg var ude og sejle, vi vinden vi mistede. Der kom gam den grumme og sagde at han ville have min førstefødte og til bytte ville vi komme i land.**

Synes godt om · Tilføj kommentar · Del · 3. marts kl. 13:24 · 🌐



Skriv en kommentar...

Tryk på Enter for at slå kommentaren op.

Matteo Stocchetti - 9783631675441

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via free access

And what is a Gam, indeed? There was a lively exchange about mythical creatures and artefacts (the bird costume, the maiden's bower). Sometimes, the negotiation about meaning leads to humorous interpretations. For example, in the case of the maiden's bower (*jomfrubur* in Danish), the students play with the double meaning of *bur*, which can mean both a room (archaic use) or a cage (modern use)

Fig 6. "We have been informed by a reliable source that the so-called *jomfrubur* is actually a brothel. Shame on you, Germand Gladensvend"



Synes godt om · Tilføj kommentar · Del

Other examples of fleshing the world out include offering hypotheses as to the different occurrences in the story. The students try to explain how things fit together, not only internally in the story but also, remarkably, in relation to our own world, such as here:

Fig 7. “I think that Ragnhild Mathilde (the Queen) is not at sea. I think this is all about the oppression of women, since men are only interested in ‘boobs and noobs’. Here is a quote from the song that proves this ‘everything under your belt, is what I am interested in’. This means that the only thing people pay attention to in a woman is her looks, and not what she says #FEMINISM”



**Sølverlad Rex**

Jeg tror at Ragnhild Mathilde, ikke er på havet. Jeg tror at det handler om kvindeundertrykkelse, siden de kun ser på boobs – i noobs.

Her er et citat fra sangen der beviser det: det er alt under din Linde,  
der jeg monne efter traæ. Det betyder altså at det eneste folk ligger mærke til er hvordan kvinden ser ud, og ikke hvad de siger!!! #FEMINISM

Synes godt om · Tilføj kommentar · Del · 3. marts kl. 13:23 · 🌐

Maybe the members of this group are not completely right in their interpretation, but they are nonetheless questioning the female roles in the old story, in which a woman is often defined by her sexual or reproductive status, and her actions are reactive and not proactive, except for Sølverlad's final revenge on the birds. The old world collides with our contemporary world in a way that provokes the students to start a discussion.

Apart from all this interpretive work, the students also engaged in world-building by incorporating images and music, and some even by using archaic language or rhyming their contributions, a creative impulse that is related to the next section.

### Engagement in expressive and poetic activities

Two of the five literary analysis functions behind our Facebook prompts were intended to make the students express themselves (create something new, deepen personal relations), extending the transmedial world of the *Folkeviser* in new ways. Our prompts specifically wanted the students to work with the inner life of the characters, something that is not explicit in the text of the *Folkeviser*, and many posted status updates about how they felt about the different events of the story: “I can't take this anymore”, “so sad”, “don't let your son fly over the sea, I don't know how you can call yourself a mother and my soon mother in-law”. Such utterances took place both on Facebook and in the classroom as the groups kept talking to each other throughout. The expressions of sentiment were somewhat exaggerated (often peppered with profanity), but the students made an effort to adapt them to the situation in the *Folkeviser*.

Another way to get other people to talk about their inner life in our contemporary media is to interview them, like here:

Fig 8. “IT’S INTERVIEW TIME BITCH! How come you were baptised so quickly? SP33DY! Do you believe in jebus? Who is the guy in the boat? Aren’t you a bit ugly? Who christened you? SwegPriest? Please answer”



**Meta Fugl** ▶ **Germand Gladensvend**

**IT'S INTERVIEW TIME BITCH!**

**Hvordan kan det lige være at du blev døbt så hurtigt? SP33DY!**

**Tror du på jebus?**

**Hvem er ham i badet?**

**Er du ikke lidt grim?**

**Hvem døbte dig? SwegPræst?**

**Svar plz**

The group performing Germand Gladensvend efficiently answers all the questions with humour and poise. They are at all times conscious of being “the hero” of the story and often remind the others of their status. At one point, the hero expresses defeat, and the group playing the character of the blogger (Bettina) cheer him up with a homemade verse:

*Gladensvend lev op til dit navn  
selv om din kone ikke er sikkert i havn  
Selv om der er moder savn  
så kommer din kamp til gavn  
Vær du en glad svend og lev i nuet min kære ven*

“Gladensvend live up to your name [‘happy boy’] / even though your wife is not safe at sea / even though you miss your mother / your fight won’t be in vain / be a happy boy and live in the present, my friend”. This is by no means the only instance of students writing in verse, a remarkable feat if we remember that they are allotted only eight minutes per sequence.

The students also find alternative ways of expression tied to the affordances of Facebook. For example, after the Gam has drunk the prince’s blood, he adds a life event to his timeline about “becoming a vampire”:

Fig 9. Gam's life event



The same kind of humorous exploitation of Facebook features can be found in the following example. After having created a group called “the big thinkers”, the journalist Meta creates a poll where all the characters have to answer whether they think that German should marry Sølverlad. The result is *javist din kvist*, a humorous way of saying yes.

Fig 10. The poll



The expressive activity of the participants occurs both at the level of text and that of visual imagery, and on several occasions, the students employ multimodal expression to reinforce a particular message. In the following screenshot, German Gladensvend expresses his loss in the following way:

Fig 11. "I lost my eye today. I lost my beloved today. I said farewell to life today"



Germand Gladensvend tilføjede et nyt billede.



**Jeg i dag mit øje tabte. Jeg i dag min elskede tabte. Jeg i dag væk fra livet sagte.**

Synes godt om · Tilføj kommentar · Del · for 18 timer siden via Bitstrips ·

In all, the students act creatively in the form as well as the content of their participation on Facebook. Many of their contributions have sexual undertones, but it is also arguable that sexuality is one of the main topics of the *Folkeviser* itself: there is a love story between Germand and Sølverlad, oedipal undercurrents in his relationship with the possessive mother, and a very strong Gam, who intrudes violently into the lives of mortals and takes what he wants (the students often sexualise him as having a big penis).

One group ask themselves as they work: "Is this something we know for sure or something we think?" This is a good question that reflects on the students' own learning process. How much of the way they interpret the old texts is plausible deduction and how much is fabulation? *Folkeviser* are often about transgression and the dangers of changing life state or messing with the unknown. In the classroom we visited, transgression is certainly less dangerous as it is limited to sexually explicit language on Facebook.

### Debrief session

The final part of the intervention was the debrief session that we held with the class on the day after the students had worked with Germand Gladensvend. The teacher asked them to summarise the plot of the *Folkeviser* in groups and to work with the characters. While one group presented, another group had to ask them a question that made them go deeper into one of their arguments. The discussion was very good, with students engaging in complex hypothesis-making and argumentation. The teacher told us that they are otherwise never so engaged with this kind of activity and that they worked at a higher level than usual.

The groups were confronted with their exaggerated erotic interpretations and had to defend their own playful content production by finding good arguments. For example, a group was accused of over-interpretation after having insinuated on Facebook that Germand and his mother had an incestuous relationship. They defended themselves by going back to the text and finding the passages which demonstrate that Germand has an unhealthy maternal bond and that she is over-protective and does not want him to be free from her influence. All groups displayed a heightened sense of ownership (and pride) over their own productions.

Finally, students and teacher evaluated the whole activity together and were very positive about both the format and the learning that had occurred.

## Discussion: Content Versus Process

At the beginning of this paper, we asked how stories are appropriated and re-enacted by students in social storytelling of this kind. We hope that the previous section has clearly shown that students are able to put the *Folkeviser* into perspective from their standpoint as 21<sup>st</sup> century teenagers in a creative way.

We have to note, though, that the content produced on Facebook cannot alone stand as proof of learning and needs to be put in context. Firstly, the process by which the groups agree and produce the content has a learning value in itself, as meanings are decoded, appropriated and acted upon. Secondly, the debrief session on the following day is as important for learning and reflection as the Facebook session itself. The teacher pointed to the Facebook activities that were more productive in relation to the *Folkeviser* and gave the groups a way to reflect upon their content production. The common discussion made learning visible by providing a safe space for reflection.

The dichotomy content vs. process also has two dimensions that were more important than we had anticipated. The first was a time dimension, because it took a couple of rounds to create a meaningful world (enough content) on Facebook so that the actions of the characters had weight and motivated further

interaction. It is difficult to start on an empty social network, especially because the transmedial world of the *Folkeviser* is also unknown at the beginning and only takes shape slowly.

The second is the social dimension, as the students were very attentive to each other's production and opinion, both on Facebook and in the classroom. The social community of the class is a motivating factor, but it can also disturb the process as the personal relationships between the students (and their roles, such as that of the class clown) are carried onto the digital platform. Content was evaluated against a backdrop of existing relationships, which can be expressed more freely than in traditional teaching activities.

## Conclusion: Opportunities and Challenges

We dare to conclude that social media storytelling can facilitate the kind of learning advocated by Freire, but that the creative digital productions need to be contextualised before and after the interactive sessions. It is extremely important to evaluate the productions in a debrief session in order to reflect on the learning process.

From a transmedial perspective and in relation to teaching literature, we can say that social media are a good vehicle for:

- expressing the inner life of characters, even if it is done parodically
- filling in details about the fictional world
- relating fiction to the everyday media practices of the students
- acting upon content (both literary and peer produced); not being just a passive receiver

Of course, experimenting with a new form poses some challenges, as Teske and Horstman report in relation to their implementation of transmedia storytelling in an English literature class school setting. The students can resist, putting the learning experience at risk, or get confused by the new genre affordances and their own role, since it goes beyond that of a traditional passive audience (Teske and Horstman, 2012: 7). We believe that this risk can be mitigated by producing comprehensive guidelines and a well-planned process description, so that both teachers and students have the necessary contextual information. The second risk is that of trivialisation, as shown by some of the examples above, where the advantages of social media (the quick response, the "likes" and short abrupt declarations) sometimes produce utterances that twist the original characters into vulgar caricatures. We must admit that the student-produced Facebook texts cannot stand alone, and that the learning process is not completed until the teacher picks up those texts and engages students in a conversation in order to qualify

them academically, as was done in the debriefing session after our intervention. It was interesting that subversion happened mostly at the language level (swear words) and that the students did what was asked of them and showed both great understanding of the meaning of the work and ability to synthesise. The teacher's guidance is key to validate the literary value of the controversial utterances, so that a dialogue about "why did you write this in this way?" motivates the students to concentrate on the topic and be more talkative and show more literary involvement than they usually do in a classic text analysis session, according to our teacher.

The biggest challenge to our format are the restrictions imposed by Facebook's terms of service, as we do not wish to encourage illegal use. Facebook does not allow fictional accounts, and this of course includes accounts that, as here, are "played" by a group of people. We argue that the collective roleplaying of one character is important to make students reflect together on their interpretation and synthesis processes. We have considered creating our own platform to support social media storytelling, but then the students would not be able to transfer their use experience in the same productive way we have experienced. This might however be the only way forward, since Facebook does not seem to be keen on opening the door to fictional uses of their platform.

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