

POTTEROTICS: HARRY POTTER FANFICTION ON THE INTERNET

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To my grandparents Edward and June Hard, and Michael and Katherine Tosenberger

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	4
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	8
LIST OF TERMS.....	9
ABSTRACT.....	10
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCING THE MONSTERS AND THE CRITICS: RECURSIVE FICTION, FANDOM STUDIES, AND HARRY POTTER.....	11
The Madness of Crowds: The Pathological Fan.....	12
Academics and Fans: A Brief Overview	15
Fanfiction and Literature	24
Potter Publishing: “Official” History.....	36
Portrait of the Artist as a Young Fan	41
Methodology.....	52
2 SEXUAL PERVERSITY AT HOGWARTS	59
Won’t Someone Think of the Children?.....	66
Shipping, or, H.M.S. What the Hell?.....	72
Responding to Romance	75
The Internet is for (Fandom) Porn	78
3 MUCKING ABOUT WITH MALFOY: THE TRANSFORMATION OF DRACO	86
Autoethnography: or, Virtue Has Nothing to Do With It.....	86
Changing the Leopard’s Spots.....	92
What Is This Fanon Draco, And From Where Did He Beam Down?	94
Rehabilitation and Redemptionistas	101
Poor, Abused Draco, or: Lucius, Instrument of Redemption	103
Fons et Origo: Cassandra Claire’s Draco Trilogy	104
Refinement: Maya’s Draco Malfoy, The Amazing Bouncing... Rat?	108
Harry/Draco: Shipping Angst.....	110
4 SUBTEXT IN HIDING: POTTER SLASH FANFICTION	113
Scholars and Fans	115
Harry Potter Slash: The Beast in the Plumbing	122
Queering the Canon	126

5 KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY: INCEST NARRATIVES IN HARRY POTTER FAN FICTION.....	133
Why the Weasleys and the Malfoys?.....	136
Unstable Bodies in the Chamber of Secrets	141
Incest Narratives in Potterverse Fanfiction: Literary Models.....	148
Malfoycest: Patriarchal Rights	151
Weasleycest: Unnatural Little Beasts	154
EPILOGUE: POTTERDÄMMERUNG OR, THE WANKALYPSE IS NIGH: THE FUTURE OF HARRY POTTER FANDOM	163
LIST OF REFERENCES	167
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	179

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation Website

FF.N Fanfiction.net

FA Fiction Alley

JF Journalfen

LJ Livejournal

RS Restricted Section

SK Skyehawke

AS Author's Personal Site

LIST OF TERMS

Canon	The official source text: the book series, the television series, the film
Fanon	An interpretation or characterization that gains widespread currency within the fandom
Fic	Short for “fanfiction” or “fanfic”
Het, het fic	Fanfiction featuring a heterosexual romance
Fanfiction	Literature about pre-existing characters (from a book, television series, film, etc.) that circulates unofficially
Gen, gen fic	Fanfiction with no romantic pairing
Hurt-comfort	Genre of fanfiction where one character suffers and another character cares for him/her; also abbreviated h/c
Joss, jossed	When fanfiction is negated by new canon; i.e., a story about two characters who marry and live to 100 is “jossed” if one character is killed in the next episode
PWP	“Plot? What Plot?” or “Porn Without Plot”: a story consisting entirely of a sex scene
Ship	A romantic pairing (or threesome) of two or more characters that has attracted a fan following
Shipper	A fan who prefers a particular ship (romantic pairing)
Slash	Fanfiction featuring a same-sex romance
Squick	A feeling of revulsion
TPTB	The Powers That Be; the copyright holders of the source text

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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A number of the most devoted readers of J.K. Rowling's immensely popular Harry Potter series have not been content to wait for the next book, but have gone online in droves to swap gossip and speculation, engage in literary criticism of the series, and, especially, create new stories ("fanfiction") featuring favorite characters. Harry Potter fan stories now number in the hundreds of thousands, and are produced and consumed by fans around the world, ranging in age from schoolchildren to adults. Fanfiction is inextricable from its ethnographic context, and it is also a *literary* production. My project, while partaking of ethnography, also focuses attention upon fanfiction as art in its own right – and, moreover, as an art whose forms and functions are inseparable from its means of distribution: the Internet. I have located fanfiction within existing discourses of intertextuality, including folk retellings, and have discussed literary genres especially relevant to Potter fanfiction, including school stories, the Gothic, fantasy, romance, and pornography. A particular area of interest is the manner in which Potter fans interrogate literary and cultural discourses of adolescent sexuality through their stories. In addition, I have analyzed a number of specific fan stories in depth from a literary-critical perspective. Another key feature of my project is extensive reporting of fans' interpretations of their own material. Underpinning all of these analyses is a consideration of the nature of online communication, and of the production of text in electronic environment.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING THE MONSTERS AND THE CRITICS: RECURSIVE FICTION, FANDOM STUDIES, AND HARRY POTTER

J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series is a worldwide publishing phenomenon. As the release date of the seventh and final book in the series draws near, excited readers prepare to let out the collective breath they've been holding since the series began. However, many of the most devoted aficionados of the series have not been content merely to wait for the next book; they have gone online in droves to swap gossip and speculation, draw pictures, and, most especially, create new Harry Potter stories. At the time of writing there are over 280,000 individual Harry Potter stories written by fans in existence, concerning the continuing adventures of Harry, Ron, Hermione, Snape, and other favorite characters.

While the production of these narratives, variously termed "fanfiction," "fanfics," or simply "fics,"¹ is not a new phenomenon, what is unique is the immense depth and breadth of the Potter fandom's literary activity, inextricably intertwined with the technology of the World Wide Web that fostered and distributed the activities of the fandom. The high speed nature of Internet communication, as well as the comparatively long wait between books, has engendered a body of fan literature that covers every imaginable permutation of genre and romantic pairing, with semi-literate net-speak atrocities tumbled into fic archives next to sophisticated examinations of intertextuality. In addition, Potter fanfiction has made considerable inroads into traditionally taboo areas of discourse, particularly incest, and created thoughtful and intelligent explorations of difficult topics, through the medium of what may be called "recursive" literature. Potter fanfiction constitutes, I will argue, a thriving and legitimate

¹ I have elected to spell "fanfiction" as one word, as this is by far the most common usage within fandom. In general if a there exists both a fannish term and a general or academic term for a concept, I have given preference to fandom terminology.

literary genre that is ripe for scholarly examination, particularly at this time of anticipation and anxiety about the imminent end of the book series.

The Madness of Crowds: The Pathological Fan

In order to understand what is meant by “fanfiction” or the community that produces it, “fandom,” one must first articulate what is meant by “fan.” In popular discourse, the term “fan” carries with it a whole host of pejorative assumptions. “Fan” derives from “fanatic,” which itself derives from the Latin “fanaticus”; the term was probably first used in the late 19th century, usually non-pejoratively, for followers of spectator sports, and was later applied to women who attended plays and films primarily to see particular actors (Jenkins *Poachers* 12). Further, as Jenkins points out,

[i]f the term “fan” was originally evoked in a somewhat playful fashion... it never fully escaped its earlier connotations of religious and political zealotry, false beliefs, orgiastic excess, possession, and madness, connotations that seem to be at the heart of many of the representations of fans in contemporary discourse. (*Poachers* 12)

This is the popular representation of the fan: screaming, crying girls at concerts for the Elvis, the Beatles, and sundry boybands; rock groupies, willing to sleep with anyone for a chance at the band; no-life losers camping out in their parents’ basements far beyond adolescence; bored housewives; murderous obsessives both real (Mark David Chapman, Robert John Bardo) and fictional (the films *The Fan* [1981 and 1996], *Misery* [1990], and *Play Misty for Me* [1971]). From an academic standpoint, fans are, at the very least, uncritical dupes of Adorno’s culture industry: mindless, histrionic sheep who literally buy into the cultural paradigms used to control them – the ultimate “bad” consumers. It is therefore something of an understatement when Joli Jensen notes that “the literature on fandom is haunted by images of deviance” (9).

One crucial point of this “deviance” is what is often seen as the fans’ fixations upon cultural objects deemed “unworthy” of such attention:

Fandom is typically associated with cultural forms that the dominant value system denigrates -- pop music, romance novels, comics, Hollywood mass-appeal stars (sport, probably because of its appeal to masculinity, is an exception). (Fiske 30)

According to Fiske, texts seized upon by fans are “insufficient texts that are inadequate to their cultural function of circulating meanings and pleasure until they are worked upon and activated by their fans, who by such activity produce their own cultural capital” (42). By designating texts that accrue fandoms as being, of necessity, “insufficient,” Fiske drives a wedge between fandom and other “affinity groups,” ones that form around texts with a higher accumulation of Bourdieu’s “cultural capital” – like, for example, literature studied by academics such as Austen and Shakespeare. While Fiske correctly attributes a great deal of the pathologizing of fans as deriving from sexist, racist, classist and ageist assumptions about certain types of texts and the people who respond to them, he is, in my view, too attached to fandoms as being fixated on unworthy objects in the cultural-capital sense – and fans are “by definition excluded from official cultural capital and its convertibility, via education and career opportunity, into economic capital” (42). I believe his insistence that texts which acquire fandoms are *necessarily* inadequate not only serves to render fannish activity surrounding “highbrow” texts invisible, but also downplays the pleasures to be had from that complete inability to translate fan products into material gain – fans are not, for example, obligated to adhere to a publisher’s standards of what will sell.

Jensen, on the other hand, is less sure that such a distinction is useful; she argues, persuasively, that academics, and others with cultural capital, have self-servingly separated their own activities from those of fans:

But what happens if we change the objects of this [pathological] description from fans to, say, professors? What if we describe the loyalties that scholars feel to academic disciplines rather than to team sports, and attendance at scholarly conferences, rather than Who concerts and soccer matches? What if we describe opera buffs and operas?... Do the assumptions about inadequacy, deviance, and danger still apply? Fandom, it seems, is not readily conceptualized as a general or shared trait, as a form of loyalty or attachment, as a mode of “enacted affinity.” Fandom, instead, is what “they” do; “we,” on the other hand, have tastes and preferences, and select worthy people, beliefs, and activities for our admiration and esteem. Furthermore, what “they” do is deviant, and therefore dangerous, and what “we” do is normal, and therefore safe. (19)

Or, as Bourdieu puts it, “the most intolerable thing for those who regard themselves as possessors of legitimate culture is the sacrilegious reuniting of tastes which taste dictates shall be separated” (56-7). This distinction between “us” and “them” has not only to do with the perceived distinctions between the objects of devotion, but with the mode in which this devotion is enacted: “‘good’ affinities are expressed in a subdued, undisruptive manner, while ‘bad’ affinities (fandom) are expressed in dramatic and disruptive ways” (Jensen 21). Jensen’s self-proclaimed “aficionados” respond with bourgeois rationality to “worthy” objects – academics write scholarly papers about great works of literature, opera buffs “appreciate” opera. Fans, on the other hand, get rowdy: they “waste” time interpreting useless texts, they squeal, they cry, they write fanfiction. They don’t respect bourgeois notions of “rational” disengagement or the primacy of the “original” author and text. Jensen doesn’t take the final step and point out that a great deal of literary and artistic response and innovation relies on precisely the same sorts of “rowdiness” towards texts, highbrow or otherwise, but her argument certainly lays the groundwork for it.

The constellation of pejorative concepts of fandom as laid out by Fiske and Jensen can be collectively entitled the “lack theory of fandom”: fans lack maturity, decency, good taste, sanity. However, it isn’t simply hostile critics who contribute to the “lack” theory; I argue that many academic writers, including Fiske, who present positive readings of fandom and critique

the pathological views also play a part in constructing fans as “lacking”: fan objects lack legitimacy as art, fans lack “appropriate” distance from those objects, fans lack critical insight into their own activities (insight which can only be provided by academics).

Academics and Fans: A Brief Overview

Since the late 1980s-early 1990s, there have been a number of academic studies of fandom and fans concerned less with the way fans are perceived by outsiders than with the communities and activities of fans themselves. Therefore, a concept of “fan” other than “crazy deviant obsessive” needed to be formulated. To that end, various taxonomies and definitions of fans and fandom have been proposed (Tulloch and Jenkins, Brooker and Brooker, Abercrombie and Longhurst, Hills), with the majority distinguishing between casual “followers” (in Tulloch and Jenkins’ term) and “fans,” who are far more engaged with both the source material and the social scene surrounding that source material – the fandom. The exception is Abercrombie and Longhurst (somewhat echoed by Sandvoss), who propose an odd differentiation between “fans,” “cultists” and “enthusiasts,” with fans listed as being the least participatory of the bunch; as Hills dryly notes, “It seems faintly unhelpful to produce a taxonomy in which the definition of ‘fan’ is at odds with the use of this term in almost all other literature in the field” (ix).

In “almost all the other literature,” the term “fan” refers to a person who is invested in a particular cultural object – a band, a sports team, a television show, a movie, a book – to the point where their admiration of that object becomes a crucial part of social identity; this investment leads fans to act not simply as consumers of these objects, but as *producers*, creating new works (fiction, songvids, filks) centering upon said objects – these fans can also be referred to as “participatory fans,” and, in practice, the majority of the academic literature has focused upon this group. The social community in which this production takes place is “fandom,” which can refer to the fannish community as a whole or, when marked as such, to the community

centered around a specific object (“*X-Files* fandom”), or even to a subgroup within a particular fandom (“Draco fandom”). Unless otherwise specified, throughout this study, by “fans” I mean these “participatory fans,” and especially those fans whose fandom centers around a *narrative* text, such as a book, film, or television show; these fandoms are, unsurprisingly, the most likely to produce fanfiction.²

There were several notable academic studies of fandom, in the broad sense, done prior to the watershed moment in the early 1990s, including a number of studies of popular television (Ang, Allen, Marc, Kaplan), Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance* (1984), Joanna Russ, Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diane L. Veith’s articles on *Star Trek* slash (homoerotic fanfiction) zines (1985 and 1986), as well as great deal of work on subcultures in general (Hebdige). However, the early 1990s produced several works that were to prove vastly important for the future development of the field. In 1991, Constance Penley’s groundbreaking article “Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics and Technology,”³ which celebrated slash as a radical act involving “hit-and-run acts of cultural seizure,” enacted by women in order to claim a share in a discourse that excludes them (“Brownian” 139). 1992 saw the debut of both Henry Jenkins’s *Textual Poachers* and Camille Bacon-Smith’s *Enterprising Women* – two in-depth ethnographic studies of television fandoms, both with a primary, though not exclusive, focus upon *Star Trek*.

Henry Jenkins, a student of Fiske, certainly did not found the field of fandom studies, but he is probably the most influential figure in the field. In *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins argues, first and foremost, that “speaking as a fan is a defensible position within the debates surrounding

² So-called “Real Person” fandoms, which produce RPF (Real Person Fic), are an interesting exception to this general rule; such stories are not simply individual self-insert fantasies (like those collected in Shar Rednour’s book *Starf*cker*), but can also center around known groups of celebrity associates, such as members of a band (N’Sync), actors in a television series (*Supernatural*) or a film or film series (*Lord of the Rings*). See Busse, “My Life is a WIP on my LJ” for more information.

³ Penley, along with Russ, Lamb and Veith, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

mass culture” (23) – a position taken up by later fan scholars, or “aca-fans” -- and that fannish readings of media texts are both worthwhile in and of themselves and useful to academic critics of those media texts, which has proved a bit less popular. He provided fandom studies with a strong theoretical base, drawing on Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital to articulate the pathologized image of fans (as echoed by Fiske, above). But Jenkins did not limit himself to merely explaining why everyone thinks fans are freaks, but produced a workable descriptive theory of the *process* of fannish activity, drawing upon Michel de Certeau’s concept of popular readers as “poachers,” as elucidated in *The Practice of Everyday Life*:

Far from being writers... readers are travelers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves. (174)

In Jenkins’s application of de Certeau’s theories to fandom scholarship, he argues that “[d]e Certeau gives us terms for discussing ways that the subordinate classes elude or escape institutional control, for analyzing locations where popular meanings are produced outside of official interpretive practice” (*Poachers* 26). Fans are not simply dupes, but are, in fact, savvy, subversive readers operating outside of the cultural industry’s paradigms – especially since they are not simply readers. Jenkins emphasizes fans as active *producers* of new cultural material: fans “poach” their favored texts in order to create a variety of new creative works, especially in the form of fanfiction.

Jenkins, in all his subsequent work, has continued his fierce defense of the legitimacy of fannish practices as both interpretation of the source material and art in its own right; he is the scholar whose work has most influenced my own, and he will be encountered frequently throughout these pages. Of particular interest to me is ‘Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking’ (1993), a study of slash fanfiction co-written with Shoshanna Green and Cynthia

Jenkins; it is, in my view, one of the best articles ever written on the subject of fandom, not only for its thorough critique of academic positions on slash fiction, but on fandom in general:

academic writers often deny their personal stakes in the objects under study, their rarified language does not engage closely with the particularity of popular culture and therefore lacks the rigor of most fan criticism, a false distance may be highly distortive to our understanding of the complexity of popular culture. (13)

Further,

[w]e urge a reconsideration of the concept of popular expertise, a recognition and respect for the sites of amateur cultural production that accords them the same privileges to speak as are accorded to other spheres of the art world. (14)

The rest of the article is taken up with extensive quotations from fans discussing slash in two major media zines, *Strange Bedfellows* and the *Terra Nostra Underground*. This methodology was a very visible means of the authors' refusal to hog all interpretive authority for themselves, but to instead create a space wherein fans could be treated as valuable contributors to the discourse. This article has had immeasurable influence upon my project.

Of a very different stripe is Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women*. Bacon-Smith trained as an ethnographer in the folklore program at the University of Pennsylvania, and she never lets the reader forget it. Unlike Jenkins, Bacon-Smith is concerned with maintaining an appropriate "academic" distance from fans, marking herself in transcribed dialogue as "Ethnographer." Matt Hills irresistibly describes Bacon-Smith's self-presentation as that of a great detective unraveling a mystery (Hills 68-9): she is the only suitable interpreter and indeed, arbiter, of reality, who can cut through the stonewalling, prevarication, and self-delusion of fans to present the *true* story of the fannish community (*Enterprising* 283). She seems to envision herself as Sherlock Holmes, but the effect is, unintentionally, more akin to Edward Woodward's Sergeant Howie in *The Wicker Man* (1973). While Bacon-Smith reads fandom as a site for feminist resistance to patriarchal and heteronormative ideology, she finds herself repeatedly

frustrated when fans don't always concur with her analyses. This is not to say that Bacon-Smith has nothing useful to contribute; she has a keen eye for social structures and interactions within fandom, and her focus upon the day-to-day processes of particular fandoms is exemplary. However, her insistence upon overt academic distance from her informants in the text is counterproductive, making her appear condescending instead of analytical. Given this, Bacon-Smith is the scholar most often negatively received by fans, particularly slash fans (see Chapter 4).

The work of Matt Hills is, in its own way, as maddening as Bacon-Smith's. *Fan Cultures* (2000) is a sound critique of academic attitudes toward fandom, both condescending and "romanticizing"; he correctly cautions against "moral dualisms" that pit academics against fans, with one marked "good" and the other "bad." However, even given his focus upon academic understandings of fandom, Hills undercuts his own warnings against dualism by keeping fan presence within his work to the barest minimum: there is not a single quotation from a fan in the entire book until the conclusion, and even there, the fan voices are but six, and drowned out by the chatter of the academics around them. The overall impression is that fandom studies is a rather clubby affair consisting primarily of academics talking to one another, with fans' input limited to examples of this or that behavior, included only to be explained by the academic. Jenkins criticized Hills' work for rendering fans "invisible" ("Interview" 29), but it's even more accurate to say that fans are, in fact, present, but as a silent, monolithic Other against which academic readers are constructed; Hills is willing to devote a great deal of time exploring the contradictions and complexities of this academic discourse, but is reticent when it comes to representing fans as potentially as contradictory and complex.

Hills, echoed by Cornel Sandvoss, also calls for “a general theory of media fandom,” claiming that

too many previous works have focused on single TV series, singular fan cultures, or singular media.... the focus on singular fan cultures also presents the danger that fans’ readings will be cut off from the wider consumptions that surround, and may help to make some sense of, their fan activities. (Hills 1-2)

I believe there are a number of problems with this program. The first is, I admit, something of a knee-jerk preference for the particular over the general: while I certainly see the value of a general theory that can tie fannish activities into these issues of “wider consumption,” my own scholarly interests tend toward the micro rather than the macro. This is not to say that I think such a theory should not be attempted, but, as it stands, I feel that such a theory will be far more useful if it is able to benefit from a wider range of those “singular” studies that Hills (and Sandvoss) dislike. This impression of too much singularity is perhaps attributable to the fact that Hills and Sandvoss are both in the field of media studies, from whence the vast majority of those “singular” works originate, usually concerning television series, especially *Star Trek*. While Hills and Sandvoss are right to push for a consideration of fandom beyond television shows, both tend to articulate their theories of fannishness strictly from a media studies/popular culture studies model, particularly with regards to which affinity groups they are willing to consider fans.

Like Fiske, both Hills and Sandvoss see fandom as being inherently tied to texts with low cultural capital: television shows, sports, popular music, genre fiction. While, to a certain extent, understandable, given their disciplinary location, this simply reiterates Jensen’s “fan”/“aficianado” dichotomy by cutting off consideration of activities that could be considered “fannish” that center around works of high cultural capital, such as the literature of Shakespeare and Jane Austen.

Moreover, and forgive me if this sounds like grumbling, it's easy to demand that fandom studies move away from particularity when your pet fandoms (Hills: *Dr. Who* and the horror genre; Sandvoss: sports and alternative music) have been studied quite extensively. Fandoms that partake of, but are not identical with, this media studies/popular culture tradition – such as Harry Potter -- are apt to be subsumed under a theory that was constructed in ignorance of their internal functioning, which can seriously undermine the theory's relevance and usefulness.

Another objection to Hills's and Sandvoss's desire for a general theory is that this theory will necessarily relegate all specific fannish activities as secondary to the fact of fandom itself. Almost every study of fandom, general or particular, has approached the subject from a sociological and/or ethnographic standpoint, which is interested in the creative products of fandom primarily for what they have to say about fandom (or society) as a whole, rather than as legitimate artistic productions in their own right. Slash is the form of fannish creativity that has received the most attention, but, as will be detailed in Chapter 4, the bulk of the scholarship is preoccupied with the supposed peculiarity of heterosexual women writing erotica about gay men, rather than serious artistic consideration of the genre. Even Jenkins, who argues that fans should be treated as artists, is more interested in the context in which this art is produced than in the aesthetic qualities of the art itself. Not that Jenkins is wrong in this: fans' creative output is shaped by the specific culture of the fandom in which they operate, and to fully appreciate the art, you have to understand the fandom. But somehow, very few ever seem to get around to considering the art *as* art. There are definite inroads being made for an aesthetic consideration of fan works, as will be discussed below, but so far, the sociological still dominates.

My final, and, indeed, my primary concern about the calls for a general fandom theory is the effect a sole focus upon general theory will have on fan participation within fandom studies.

Hills and Sandvoss both give the appearance of treating fans as if they were irrelevant to the discourse of fandom; it is unsurprising that both advocate the use of psychoanalysis – that most authoritarian of approaches -- to explain fans to academics, and only to academics. A focus upon creating this general theory places the power to interpret fandom squarely in the hands of those with access to the language and literature of media studies – in other words, mostly academics – while simultaneously diminishing the relevance of much fan expertise, which shines especially in the realm of the particular. (Even more problematic is that academics' general theories are often also rooted in the particulars of a specific fandom or discipline, which is then mistakenly treated as paradigmatic for fandom as a whole; for example, many academic theories of slash are really theories of *Star Trek* slash.) A call to the general is, in effect if not in intent, a gatekeeping move that will rarify the discourse out of the reach of all but those fans who happen to possess graduate degrees in cultural theory.

I wish to stress that, despite my misgivings, I do not think that this general theory is an avenue that should not be explored – I am not anti-theory (what is usually meant by theory), and indeed, I believe that further study of specific fandoms will enable a much stronger general theory. I am a pluralist at heart, and fandom is such an enormous field that there is certainly room for multiple avenues of inquiry. However, I would think it a serious shame if the dominant mode of fandom studies became that of creating this general theory. Henry Jenkins has been calling for greater active participation by fans in fandom studies for years, but that isn't going to happen if academics retreat behind ever-more jargon-heavy analyses which completely sideline fans.

Happily, there are a number of fandom scholars who are exploring avenues other than general theory, especially in the realm of bringing previously neglected approaches to bear on

fandom studies. Sheenagh Pugh's *Fan Fiction: The Democratic Genre* (2005) is a breezily engaging literary study, by a published creative writer ("proficcer"), of fanfiction. Pugh states up front that she has no wish to rehash the sociological concerns of previous writers on fandom, and she therefore plunges straight into consideration of individual works of fanfiction in several different fandoms. And what fandoms! Pugh discusses the fanfiction written for not only the grand old media studies warhorse *Blake's 7* and the contemporary British crime drama *The Bill*, but also, importantly, the novels of Jane Austen.⁴ In one fell swoop, Pugh demolishes the notion that texts that accrue fandoms are necessarily inadequate as texts, and likewise complicates the understanding of fannishness being tied to culturally "unworthy" objects in order to count as fannishness. By bringing Jane Austen fanfiction to the forefront, and by drawing analogies with texts produced outside of fandom that also draw heavily upon the work of other "highbrow" texts, Pugh is able to place fanfiction within a broader literary tradition – a tradition I will discuss in further detail below. Another book is Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse's marvelous, and more overtly theoretical, collection, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, which gathers essays from a variety of different disciplines, especially, and crucially, from the realms of literature and history; Hellekson and Busse provide a needed update to the internal processes of various fandoms, almost all of which live primarily on the Internet these days.

One of the finest essays in the Hellekson and Busse collection is Abigail Derecho's "Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction," a thoughtful analysis of fanfiction's position within the literary sphere, with insights gleaned not only from academics, but from fans as well. It is this consideration to which I will next turn.

⁴ For more discussion of fannishness surrounding Austen, see Garber.

Fanfiction and Literature

One of the major pitfalls of the purely media studies/ethnographic approach to fandom is that it can often unintentionally isolate the concept of fandom from discourses outside of that genre, which may contribute to the portrayal of fans as “deviants.” By focusing upon fanfiction as valuable primarily for what it says about the fandom community, many studies of fandom have cut off fanfiction from a broader literary tradition, a tradition that, I believe, it quite clearly belongs to.

In order to effectively discuss fanfiction’s relationship to the category “literature,” it is first necessary to define what is meant by “fanfiction.” First, the term originates within fandom; one rarely finds non-fannish academics using the term to refer to commercially-published material that could, conceivably, be defined as such. Therefore, it is necessary to document the various understandings of what is meant by “fanfiction” within the fan community. Derecho summarizes the three basic fannish understandings of the term “fanfiction”:

1) fan fiction originated several millennia ago, with myth stories, and continues today, encompassing works both by authors who identify themselves as fans and those who do not write from within fandoms...; 2) fan fiction should be understood as a product of fan cultures, which began either in the late 1960s, with *Star Trek* fanzines, or, at the earliest, in the 1920s, with Austen and Holmes societies; 3) The first argument may be too broad, but the second line of thinking may be too narrow; some other identifying traits of fan fiction might be expressed that would more accurately situate the genre within the larger field of literature. (62)

While I agree with Derecho’s third position, that “fanfiction” is best understood as a point between the two more extreme positions, I wish to spend some time discussing her other positions, starting with the first, as this explicitly locates fanfiction within a literary tradition external to fan communities as we understand them.

The tradition of using “other people’s” plots and characters in literary work has, of course, a long history; even putting aside, for the moment, the vast amount of material based upon folk

narratives, there remains a great deal of precedent within the literary tradition for “poaching” characters and plots created by other authors. Chaucer’s rewritings of Boccaccio; Shakespeare’s promiscuous cribbing from any and all sources; Milton’s rewriting of the Biblical fall to suit himself; the innumerable sequels to works like *Gulliver’s Travels*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *Pamela*, and *Tristram Shandy*; “alternative” *Alice in Wonderland*⁵; every Sherlock Holmes pastiche ever produced; Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*; Cesaire’s *Une Tempete*; Coetzee’s *Foe*; Maguire’s *Wicked*; Naslund’s *Ahab’s Wife*; Updike’s *Gertrude and Claudius*; Rawles’s *My Jim*; Randall’s *The Wind Done Gone*; Brooks’s Pulitzer-Prize Winning *March*; and, of course, the perennial favorite of fans, Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*: all make use of characters and plots that did not originate with their authors.

David Brewer, in *The Afterlife of Character: 1726-1825*, refers to this process of poaching characters as “imaginative expansion”: his study of 18th and early 19th century material is especially relevant to an understanding of present-day imaginative expansions, and not simply for furnishing further examples of artistic precedent for poaching characters. The 18th century is the era in which debates about intellectual property and copyright law became a major part of the discourse of literature. Brewer discusses the competing discourses of the “economy of abundance” as distinct from the “economy of scarcity,” as they applied to literary characters, and which uncannily foreshadow current discussions about fanfiction:

If characters were unconstrained by “mortal law,” then they could also be regarded as perpetually available through what Simon Stern has usefully termed an “economy of abundance.” This way of thinking about literary property postulates that “any future use becomes a form of increase,” that value is added merely by additional iteration and circulation. Needless to say, this is just a fantasy, a conjecture concerning the supposed fundamental nature of literary property, not a description of the actual material conditions of the book trade, which, like any other sector of the economy, involved finite resources. But for our purposes, and those of the readers with whom we are concerned, the accuracy

⁵ See Brooker (*Alice*), and Sigler’s anthology.

of this fantasy was irrelevant. The important thing was the way in which it could provide a compelling alternative to the (equally far-fetched, but to us more familiar) “economy of scarcity, driven by the logic of an inelastic marketplace,” which many booksellers promulgated in their attempts to secure perpetual copyright. In an economy of scarcity, literary property was conceived as a zero-sum game: a reader’s gain must mean an author’s loss. In an economy of abundance, on the other hand, no such dispossession could occur, since “with respect to Intellectual Labours, we may improve the Discoveries of others without invading their Property.” By imagining themselves as participants in an economy of abundance populated by inexhaustible “sprites,” readers could feel free to invent whatever additional performances struck their fancy without having to worry that they were being unjust or larcenous. (11)

Brewer’s description of the competing economies of scarcity and abundance could just as easily be applied to the conflicts that arise in the present era between copyright holders and fans. The emergent Enlightenment discourse of individual and “natural” rights, which included rights to property, was thus played out in the realm of literature; indeed, a common analogy invoked by those participating in imaginative expansion was that of the “commons,” where all cottagers had the right to graze their animals; in this reading, all literature was conceived of as, in the words of Sir Joshua Reynolds, “a magazine of common property, always open to the publick, whence every man has a right to take what materials he pleases” (quoted in Brewer 15). In our own era, it is technological advances, particularly the mainstreaming of the Internet, that have forced the issue of intellectual property into the open, as writers working in violation of copyright law now have a means of distributing their work outside of official publication.

This leads into my consideration of Derecho’s second position, which is that fanfiction can only be understood as a product of fandoms, which is almost always considered to begin with *Star Trek*. This argument obviously places a great deal of emphasis on fanfiction’s relationship to modern concepts of fandom, which themselves have a great deal to do with advances in technology, the advent of the mass media, and, crucially, modern copyright law. While these points are well taken, I feel that this argument is far too narrow, and isolates fanfiction from non-fannish texts that are almost identical in terms of artistic process, if not in

terms of the community that produced them. I also feel that this position is simply a reiteration of the overused sociological approach, which reinforces the notion that fanfiction is interesting only as a byproduct of a particular community, and is completely isolated from broader literary traditions.

Like Derecho, I feel a good definition of “fanfiction” will partake of both of these positions: it will establish fanfiction’s relationship to literature as a whole, while at the same time make clear the particular cultural conditions from whence it springs. To that end, I feel that a general term for the type of literature, fannish or otherwise, that “poaches” pre-existing characters, might be useful.

The critical idiom of “intertextuality,” is, at first, appealing; literature that makes use of other literary characters is an extremely overt case of intertextuality. However, the majority of the writers concerned with intertextuality (Barthes, Kristeva, Genette) talk about intertextuality in terms of the totality of literature and language: *all* language is referential, *all* writing is rewriting, “the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text” (Barthes 4). While all of these concepts are crucial for understanding the type of literature to which fanfiction belongs, they are concerned with literature and language in *general*; all literature is intertextual. Therefore, while referring to works that poach extensively from other texts as “intertextual” is absolutely correct, it doesn’t differentiate these texts from the mass of literature in general – and I think such differentiation is necessary. Fanfictional-type literature does not merely reference or allude to other texts: it *lifts* characters and plots, whole cloth, from a pre-existing source (in fandom, this source text is referred to as the “canon”). Fanfictional-type texts are *extensively* intertextual with regard to a *specific* and *identifiable* pre-existing work; they are predicated upon the reader being familiar

with that *particular* pre-existing text, often to the point where lack of familiarity with that pre-existing text will render the current text nearly incomprehensible.

Derecho correctly argues that the terms most often applied to such texts, “derivative” and “appropriative” (one could perhaps, also throw the concept of “poaching” into this mix), contain a negative value judgment on the worth of such texts: “To label the genre of fiction based on antecedent texts “derivative” or “appropriative,” then, throws into question the originality, creativity, and legality of that genre.” Instead, she proposes the term “archontic literature” for fanfictional-type texts, inspired by this passage in Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever*:

By incorporating the knowledge displayed in reference to it, the archive augments itself, engrosses itself, it gains in *auctoritas*. But in the same stroke it loses the absolute and metatextual authority it might claim to have. One will never be able to objectivize it with no remainder. The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future. (quoted in Derecho 64)

Derecho argues that the “archontic principle,” “that tendency toward enlargement and accretion that all archives possess” (64), is an accurate description of the relationship between source texts and the texts that borrow from them. Instead of understanding the fanfictional text as a diminishing of the source text, Derecho argues that instead, such literature expands the “archive” of the source text:

An archontic text allows, or even invites, writers to enter into it, select specific items they find useful, make new artifacts using those found objects, and deposit the newly made work back into the source text’s archive. (65)

This concept, nearly identical to Brewer’s “economy of abundance,” admirably breaks down the problematic hierarchies between source text and fanfictional expansions, and is therefore effectively removes the stigma of “derivative” and “appropriative.”

However, I have two objections to the adaptation of ‘archontic’ to refer to texts of this nature: one theoretical, and one more a matter of personal preference. First, as Derecho herself admits, “archontic” can easily refer to all literature: “Given that what I am calling archontic

texts are always open and have the potential for infinite expansion, one might say that, in a sense, all texts can be called ‘archontic’” (65). As with “intertextual,” I don’t see how this term, while interesting, can usefully be restricted only to those texts that engage in the type of extensive and coherent borrowing that is the key marker of this genre. My second objection ties into my concern, expressed earlier, about rarification of academic discourse on fandom; “archontic,” while providing a fascinating way of understanding this type of literature, is only really transparent to those who are familiar with Derrida, and thus has the potential to function as a gatekeeper.

The term I think might be more useful, in place of “archontic literature,” to describe the entire genre of texts based extensively on specific pre-existing texts, is “recursive literature.” As defined by David Langford in John Clute and John Grant’s *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, “recursive” fantasy is that which “exploits existing fantasy settings or characters” from “a specific former fiction” (805, emphasis his); Langford distinguishes these recursive texts from “twice-told” fantasy, which Clute defines as texts which are clear retellings of a pre-existing folk narrative (968). I have chosen to slightly modify Langford and Clute’s definitions; I think “recursive” may function well as a broad description of *any* text that partakes explicitly and extensively of a specific, identifiable, pre-existing story, and “twice-told” is a useful subcategory, distinguishing those recursive texts which partake of a particular *folk* narrative (I will attend to folk texts in a few moments). I prefer “recursive” to “archontic” for several reasons. First, it strikes me as more specific: objects that are recursive are always recursive *to* another object. In a textual sense, it marks a specific, and *active*, relationship between texts; “recursive” implies interaction between texts in a way that “archontic” does not: while the metaphor of the archive is an excellent description of the *fact* that literature accumulates more

literature and draws it to itself, I believe “recursion” is a better description of that *process* of accumulation. “Archontic” refers to a space, “recursive” refers to an action: given the choice, I prefer the term that contains the greater assumption of agency, of *action*, for the activities of fans. I feel it ties in better with my overall arguments concerning fans as producers, and fandom as a place from which it is possible to operate from a position of strength (as per Jenkins). Second, I feel the term requires rather less unpacking than “archontic” does, not simply for the fact that the word itself is more immediately comprehensible, but also because my usage derives from *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, a text that was published for a mixed academic and popular audience, concerning a genre that has close historical ties with modern fandom.

So, now we have a term that may be useful for describing literature that makes extensive and explicit use of characters and plots from a specific pre-existing text, from “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* to “The Bloody Chamber” to the entire contents of Fanfiction.net. Within this broad category, what, then, are the useful distinctions to be made? First, I have been using “recursive literature” to refer explicitly to narratives that would be classed as “literary,” as opposed to “folk” – that is, the (forgive me) *secondary* text is a literary rather than a folk production. This is because *all* folk narratives are, in some sense, recursive: folk narratives are, by definition, narratives that have been *repeated* by a number of people, to the point where their individual origins are obscured, and they become common property of the culture. Because “repetition” is built into the very concept of the category, folk narratives do not need to be explicitly marked the way that recursive literary texts, which battle with the Romantic conception of “good literature/art” as “something wholly original,” do. Indeed, the Romantic conception of folklore is in direct opposition to the Romantic conception of “art”; folk narratives were constructed as valuable precisely *because* of their “lack of

originality,” that is, their status as “survivals” from an earlier age. These separate hierarchies of value were used to downplay or denigrate recursivity in literature (as “unoriginal”) and innovation in folk narrative (as “inauthentic”).

Of course, folk narratives have furnished inspiration for any number of recursive literary texts: this is Clute’s category “twice-told,” the name of which emphasizes these recursive texts’ explicit connection with oral storytelling traditions; for example, Angela Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber” is a “twice-told” story recursive to the fairy tale “Bluebeard.” It is at this point that I should mark out another subcategory of “recursive” that has a close, but not exclusive, relationship with the category “twice-told”: retellings. Retellings are those recursive texts which, well, *retell* the plot of the source text in a recognizable way; the majority of “twice-told” narratives are retellings, as are texts such as *Cold Mountain* (which narrates the events of the *Odyssey* as taking place in the Civil War South), and, more obliquely, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (which shows us the unfolding of *Hamlet* from the eyes of two minor characters). Retellings are distinct from prequels (like *Wide Sargasso Sea*) and sequels (like all those “further adventures of Macheath and Polly Peachum” that Brewer talks about) in that they incorporate the bulk of the plot of the source text, and often, though not always, begin and end at roughly the same points as the source plot.

However, there are a number of recursive texts that do not seem to have incorporated the plot of the source text in any meaningful way, but are instead focused almost exclusively upon the characters. Such stories may take place before, during, or after the events of the source text, but do not engage with the primary plot as a plot, but merely as background. This may seem like hairsplitting, but I prefer to reserve “prequel” and “sequel” for those texts which narrate events that are directly related to the events of the primary plot; for example, I would probably

not consider a Potter fan story about Lily Evans and Sirius Black having a romantic encounter at Hogwarts a “prequel,” in the way I would a story about James and Lily Potter going into hiding from Voldemort: the former is simply a story that takes place before the events of the main plot of the Potter books, while the latter is clearly a *buildup* to that main plot. This seems to be relatively common usage in fannish contexts; stories explicitly labeled “prequels” or “sequels” are either buildups or continuations of the main plot, while stories that do not engage with that plot are rarely marked as such.

Another example of recursive literature that often makes use of the source characters rather than the source plot is so-called “alternate universe” (often abbreviated to “AU” in fandom) fiction, which places characters in a setting substantially different from their original milieu: Harry Potter as a sheriff in the Wild West or captain of a spaceship, and the like. Of course, AUs can also take plot as well as characters: one can describe, say, Joyce’s *Ulysses* as an AU retelling of the *Odyssey*. (Generally, stories where characters are somehow transported, in the story, from their “original” universe to *an* alternate universe are not called AUs; AUs posit the characters as existing in the alternate universe from the beginning.) And “pastiche” is a form of recursive literature that attempts to mimic the *style* of the source text; pastiches are more likely to crib characters than plots from their source texts – a story that has the same characters, the same style, and the same *plot* as the source text is a rather pointless exercise, since you may as well just read the original. The joy of a pastiche is usually that of seeing the characters, in their accustomed style, participating in a plot that the original author, for whatever reason (including propriety, prudery, or sanity), neglected to write. Many texts recursive to Conan Doyle, Wodehouse, Pratchett, or Tolkien (prior to the Peter Jackson films) are pastiches.

All recursive literature depends, to a great extent, on a reader familiar with the text being referenced; writing about pre-existing characters and plots does not only close down certain avenues of artistic inquiry, but more than compensates by opening up a whole host of other artistic directions not open to “original” fiction. Sheenagh Pugh notes that “shorthand, allusion and irony” (32) are especial hallmarks of recursive texts. Recursive literature especially lends itself to feats of compression that would be impossible in a non-recursive text: for example, a line in a Harry Potter story as seemingly innocuous as “Ginny was keeping a diary again,” is, in fact, deeply ominous for a “clued-in” reader.

Fanfiction cribs plots, characters, styles, or all three; fanfiction can draw from both folk and literary texts; fanfiction can be a prequel, sequel, retelling, pastiche, or none of the above; fanfiction can show characters in their “original” universe, or transport them to another time, place, or dimension. So, how, then, can fanfiction be differentiated within the admittedly broad category of recursive literature? I define fanfiction thus: *fanfiction is recursive literature that, whether out of preference or necessity, circulates outside of the “official” institutional control of commercial publishing*. Fanfiction is most usefully distinguished from other forms of recursive literature by its *means of distribution*, rather than by more arbitrary distinctions – distinctions that almost always contain a value judgment detrimental to fanfiction, such as the perceived cultural capital of the source text or, even worse, the aesthetic quality of the recursive text. Fanfiction often operates in a legal grey area in relation to copyright law – Jenkins’s term “poaching” was not chosen lightly – and often find themselves engaging with “economy of scarcity” discourses promulgated by copyright holders. However fan writers, unlike Brewer’s 18th century sequel writers, operate in a strictly “non-profit” manner, which has so far proven to be not only an effective safety strategy (no copyright infringement case involving amateur

productions has ever made it into court, as copyright holders generally don't think it worth their while⁶), but has also freed fan writers from needing to adhere to the standards set by commercial publishers. While this can, and sometimes does, mean, "freedom from standards of grammar, spelling, and readability," more fruitfully, it means that fan writers are not limited to producing stories that publishers think they can sell. While fans are not able capitalize on their writing in terms of money or official recognition, fan writers are compensated by not being restricted to institutionalized discourses. This freedom, as well as the support of a community of like-minded readers and writers, means that even writers creating texts recursive to out-of-copyright works, such as Shakespeare's plays⁷ or Jane Austen's novels⁸, often prefer to circulate their stories within an unofficial context – a context distinguishable from active-copyright fandoms only by the lack of an admonition to avoid drawing the attention of The Powers That Be.

This artistic freedom covers all aspects of literature from format (100-word "drabbles," short stories, novellas, epic poems – all of which are difficult or impossible to sell) to style (writers can create spot-on pastiches of the source text, or can develop their own styles) to substance: fan writers are free to use characters and plots to explore any discourse under the sun, a freedom especially felt with regard to non-normative and taboo forms and representations of sexuality. If that sounds a little utopian, it's because I believe, in some ways, that it is: while fandom is not all sunshine and bunnies (as any Fandom Wank member can attest), for the most part, fandom is a space where freedom to read and write whatever one wants are felt in a much more concrete way than in more "official" spaces. This is especially true for young readers and writers, whose official spaces are far more heavily policed. Fanfiction is, in many ways, given

⁶ See Jenkins, *Convergence* 185-91, for more information on legal issues and Potter fanfiction.

⁷ The "Shakespeare" section at Fanfiction.net currently (February 13, 2007) boasts 907 stories.

⁸ See Pugh.

life by what other spaces don't allow – it takes for itself spaces within the text, and fills those spaces with stories that canon has no room or desire for.

The implied “clued-in” audience that all recursive texts hope for is gratifyingly visible, in the form of the fandom, and that community is not only familiar with the source text – the “canon” -- but is also familiar with the vast archive (in Derecho’s sense) of material that has built up around the canon, an archive which includes the primary canon (the “official” source texts -- in Potter’s case, Rowling’s books), the secondary canon (material that is not as authoritative as the primary canon, but originates from somewhere near the producers of the primary canon – the Potter films, interviews with Rowling, and so forth), and the mass of fan-produced material, which, in large fandoms, is often, in sheer bulk, far greater than the primary and secondary canons combined. Some fan-produced “archival” material – such as a particular interpretation of canon, or the portrayal of a particular character in an influential piece of fanfiction -- that gains widespread currency in the fandom is referred to as “fanon,” a portmanteau of “fan canon.” For example, in the Potter fandom, the majority of the stories about Draco Malfoy have far more to do with his characterization in a clutch of core fanfics than they do with his portrayal in canon, whether by replicating this characterization or writing against it.

In the Potter fandom, fanon, especially when the fanon is expressly posited as an interpretation of canon, often anticipates or even surpasses academic readings of Rowling’s texts. Fans are not only communicating via a much faster medium than that of scholarly publishing, but also have access to a vast network of fact-checking sites, essays, fanfiction, and theorizing that non-fannish academics do not. Fan theorizing is a parallel tradition to academic examination – and in the case of aca-fans, one that overlaps explicitly – and academics who wish to discuss the Potter books would benefit enormously from familiarizing themselves with

the fandom and its readings of characters and texts. Moreover, Internet fandom provides a visible record of readers' responses to the Potter books, and showcases the enormous range of acceptable discourses within fandom, which anyone interested in the impact the Potter books have had on our culture would do well to investigate.

Seperis, a fan, eloquently sums up the particular pleasures, as both reader and writer, to be gained from fanfiction:

It's always been high praise in fannish circles to be told that you wrote a story so good it should be published, but sometimes, the highest praise is that it can't be. It's very uniqueness, what creates it, makes it impossible to be anything else. Lots of people can write stories that fall into readable (more than you think, actually, but I'm flexible on the idea of readable), and many can write stories I'd pay to read, and even some write stories that could be published and be great. But there's this small, fascinating group that write a story that belongs only to the fandom that created it. It's like having a treasure you never have to share. It wraps itself in the canon and fanon and the author's own mind that created it and takes it as its own so perfectly that you are so damn *glad* you went into that fandom, just *grateful*, just absolutely *thrilled*, because you get to read *this*. And no where else would it have worked, if you'd been in a different fandom when you read it, it wouldn't have, you wouldn't have gotten it, but here, it just blows your mind. There's something magical about a story that has subtext in the subtext.⁹

Now, at last, it is time to finally turn from the general to the particular, and to begin my discussion of Harry Potter. First, I will briefly recount the publication history of the canon, which will set the stage for an overview of the Potter fandom.

Potter Publishing: “Official” History

The first Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone (Sorcerer’s Stone)* in the US) was published in Great Britain in 1997. It garnered rapturous reviews from British reviewers;¹⁰ more importantly, it became a grassroots sensation among schoolchildren in both the UK and the US. The second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (UK: July 1998; US: May 1999) and the third, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (UK: July 1999;

⁹ Seperis. November 23, 2003. Accessed October 1, 2006. LJ.

¹⁰ See Nel for a roundup of reviews of books 1-4.

US: September 1999) upped the ante; the series had, by this time, become a full-blown publishing phenomenon, with an enormous amount of media attention for Rowling, the series, and, more broadly, children's literature. Particularly noteworthy was the fact that the Potter books had captured the attention of adults, and not simply parents or those who deal professionally with children's books, but ordinary adult readers – an interesting reversal of the usual top-down movement associated with children's literature, where adults write, publish, and distribute the books they deem worthy to children. The release of *Azkaban* generated hype that had heretofore never been seen for a children's book, and, predictably, the beginnings of a backlash. As Philip Nel reports:

By the time *Prisoner of Azkaban* was published... most opinions of Harry Potter fell into one of four categories: 1) praise for the books, because they either entice children to read or prove that children's literature is worthy of adult attention; 2) scorn directed at people in the first group and, by extension, at the Harry Potter phenomenon, for a variety of reasons; 3) conservative US Christians suggesting that the books should be removed from school libraries; and 4) the debate over whether the novels deserved to be ranked with classic children's fiction. (Nel 56)

Literary critics were distributed throughout categories 1,2, and 4; category 1 also contained a number of librarians and educators, who were in an ideal position to see the impact of the Potter books on large numbers of children. Their opponents were Nel's category 3, the conservative Christians whose repeated attempts to ban the Potter books earned the series its spot at the top of the American Library Association's Most Challenged Books list in 1999, an "honor" it has retained ever since. Those in category 2 were, outside of conservative Christian circles, the primary agents of the Potter backlash, and their anti-Potter arguments tended to be framed in three ways: a) outrage that *adults* were wasting their time on children's literature, borne out of a general disdain for the category as a whole (Bloom, Safire); b) concern over the enormous hype the books were receiving, whether out of fears of the over-commercialization of children's culture or out of an elitist rejection of anything that was deemed "too popular"

(Bloom, Safire, Zipes); c) critique of the books on aesthetic grounds.¹¹ Of course, two or even three of these objections could be combined, and this was especially common in the response to *Azkaban*'s nomination for the prestigious Whitbread prize, against such works for adults like Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* (the eventual winner). Jack Zipes, who knows far more about children's literature than many anti-Potterites, nonetheless dismissed the books on grounds that have more to do with their popularity than with actual aesthetic judgment: “[T]o be phenomenal means that a person or commodity must conform to the tastes of hegemonic groups that determine what makes up a phenomenon” (Zipes 175). As Nel remarks, “For Zipes, then, the success of the Harry Potter novels can only mean that they are ordinary, and, by implication, unworthy of success” (Nel 60). Which is something of a catch-22, because, presumably, the very act of succeeding renders a text “unworthy,” since it can only appeal to the lowest common denominator.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire was released in July of 2000; the publication gap between the UK and other English-speaking countries had been steadily narrowing, and now became nonexistent, enabling North American fans to receive the book at the same time as their UK counterparts. Midnight release parties were held across the globe, and reviewers – which now included a roster of famous writers such as Stephen King and Penelope Lively – were asked not to reveal key plot details. After *Goblet*, Rowling, who now had the clout to be able to take her time, took a break, saying that she had felt rushed during the writing of *Goblet* and wanted to have more time to work on the later books.

The period between *Goblet* and the release of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, three years later, was perhaps the first time that the full cultural impact of the Potter books could

¹¹ See Nel for a more detailed discussion of these responses.

be assessed, as both child and adult readers came up with strategies for making the wait between books bearable. Rowling's success sparked interest in both old and new fantasy series, with librarians and booksellers setting up displays entitled "What to read while you're waiting for the next *Harry Potter*:" Philip Pullman's lauded *His Dark Materials* trilogy became a bestseller in this manner, as did the works of Diana Wynne Jones, many of which were re-issued after having gone out of print. Likewise, classic fantasy texts such as C.S. Lewis's Narnia series (1950-56) and Elizabeth Goudge's *The Little White Horse* (1946) experienced a revival, with *The Little White Horse*'s 2001 reissue sporting a blurb from Rowling, who names it as one of her favorite books as a child. The release of the enormously successful Warner Brothers' films of *Stone* and *Chamber*, in 2001 and 2002 respectively, also kept interest in the series alive during this time, as did the 2001 publication, by Rowling, of the "schoolbooks" *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *Quidditch Through the Ages*. This is also the period when the online Potter fandom became a force to be reckoned with in the fannish universe, as will be discussed below.

Phoenix was released around the world in June 2003, and garnered even more high-profile attention, most of it positive; while there was some concern that the series' darker turn might be troubling for younger readers, on the whole, reviewers were pleased with the fact that the series appeared to "grow with" Harry, both in thematic maturity and size: *Order* weighed in at a hefty 870 pages. Of course, the backlash continued, with A.S. Byatt taking up Bloom and Safire's snobbish mantle, with a side helping of obvious resentment of Rowling's popular success as compared to her own ("Harry Potter and the Childish Adult").¹² By this point, the popularity of the series had made a great deal of money for all concerned -- Rowling herself was accounted richer than the Queen in 2003 ("J. K. Rowling," BBC News), and by 2004, had become the first

¹² For a roundup of responses to Byatt, see Ben Williams, "The Critics Critiqued."

person ever to become a billionaire, in US dollars, from writing, and only the fifth female self-made billionaire,¹³ but the impact of the series was not solely financial. The Potter books had also dragged the discourse of children's literature, previously confined to educators, librarians, and a relatively small group of scholars, closer to the mainstream of both academic and popular culture. Attempts to reinforce the ghettoization of children's literature, such as the *New York Times'* 2001 creation of a separate bestseller list for children's books (in response to adult authors' complaints that the Potter stranglehold on the top spots made it impossible for their own books to crack the list, and therefore receive the coveted "*New York Times* bestseller" blurb on their book covers), were criticized as disingenuous gatekeeping.

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, the next-to-last book in the series, was released worldwide in July 2005. The initial print run of 10.8 million books (in the US), broke all previous records, including the one set by the *Phoenix* release two years earlier. Speculation on character deaths, always rampant, was especially high for this book, with the vast majority correctly betting on Dumbledore; the *Guardian* even ran a pre-release contest for the best description of Dumbledore's death in the style of a famous writer (the winner was "The Poppyng of the Clogges," in the manner of Chaucer, with runners-up imitating Helen Fielding and Irvine Welsh).¹⁴

On February 1, 2007. Rowling announced that *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* will be released on July 21, 2007; I detail fan response to this announcement in the conclusion.

To date, the Potter books have collectively sold over 300 million copies, and individual books in the series have garnered numerous merit-based awards such as the British Book Award

¹³ Watson and Kellner.

¹⁴ "Great Expectations."

for children's book of the year (*Stone, Chamber, Prince*), the Whitbread award for children's book of the year (*Azkaban*), and the Hugo (*Goblet*).

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Fan

Let us hearken back to the image of the pathological fan for a moment: if one strips away the overt criminality, what one is left with is a portrait of *immaturity*. The teenage girl able to express her sexuality only by screaming and crying for pop stars,¹⁵ or the adult male who lives in his parents' basement and has never kissed a girl¹⁶ are the standard gender stereotypes; the concept of *adolescence*, whether actual or inappropriately retained, is the key component of the pathological fan. Fannishness is no fit activity for a mature adult.

Studies of participatory fans, have, by and large, attempted to demolish this image by focusing on the creative end of fandom – the fanfic writers, the zine editors, the vidders – which is dominated by adult women.¹⁷ These adult women are another point on the pathological fan continuum: the bored housewife, who, like adolescents, is not a participant in the “real world” – if she were, presumably this “real world” would drive all these silly fantasies about silly television shows out of her head, fantasies more appropriate to a teenager than for an adult woman who has achieved the pinnacle of feminine existence, heterosexual marriage. What the work of earlier scholars such as Jenkins, Bacon-Smith, and Penley attempted to do was show fandom as, indeed, a fit activity for adults, and one, moreover that was a potential site of resistance to the dominant ideologies of the marketplace and of patriarchal culture in general.

¹⁵ See Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs.

¹⁶ It comes as no surprise that the titular *40-Year-Old Virgin* of the recent film engaged in stereotypical fannish activities like toy collecting.

¹⁷ For unknown reasons, male fans tend to congregate in the sections of fandom devoted to consumption (toy collecting and so forth), while the active producers of fannish creative material are more likely to be female.

Fandom was a space for savvy, subversive women, engaging in creative – and very adult – ways with media texts.

In the modern era, fanfiction circulated by way of self-published zines. Access to fanfiction, and participatory fandom in general, was restricted to those who knew the right people, in order to be put on mailing lists, and had the financial resources to order zines and attend conventions – in other words, adults. Early studies of participatory fandom helped to defuse some of the adolescent stigma of fannishness simply by documenting the community, which consisted almost entirely of adults, and by presenting these adults in a positive light. Fanfiction zines, which were selected and edited for quality, also contributed to the impression of fandom as an adult space, adhering to adult standards of taste.

However, the mainstreaming of Internet technology in the late 1990s radically altered the fannish landscape, not only in terms of day-to-day functioning of fandom, but in demographics. Media fans tended, as a group, to be “early adopters of digital technologies”¹⁸ and had begun migrating onto the ‘Net in the mid-80s, but while this new medium was faster, the actual fannish community didn’t change much until access to this technology became widespread. (Of course, the Internet was not entirely a free-for-all: access to the technology was, and is, still a privilege of those in the middle and upper socioeconomic tiers.) Now, anyone with access to the Internet could not only find fanfiction, but could publish their own – and this included children and teenagers, who were likely to be far more ‘Net-savvy than their parents.

The advent of Harry Potter coincided with this mainstreaming of the Internet, a fortuitous combination of the runaway success of a text published for children and teenagers with widespread access of children and teenagers to cutting-edge communications technology. The

¹⁸ Jenkins, “Interactive.”

Internet, especially in the Potter fandom, enables communication not only between young readers, but young writers as well, who have access to a wider audience than ever before. As Ernest Bond and Nancy Michelson observe:

It is not a new phenomenon for young readers to occasionally extend a literary creation by becoming authors of new versions, sequels, or spin-offs of the story. However, the advent of *Harry Potter* has generated an unprecedented number of voluntary literary responses by adolescent readers. (Bond and Michelson 111)

Henry Jenkins has expanded upon this theme, with an in-depth discussion of general pedagogical benefits enjoyed by adolescent participants in the Potter fandom, including increased media literacy, access to a community of peer reviewers, and fostering of intellectual and artistic creativity – all outside the direct control of adults, but with a great deal of egalitarian cross-generational conversation (see Jenkins “Heather” and *Convergence*).

This cross-generational exchange remains one of Potter fandom’s greatest strengths, as well as one of its greatest sources of friction. Harry Potter was one of the first major fandoms whose canon was marketed primarily to children and teenagers, rather than adults; although the series has achieved enormous popular success among adults, who form a major portion of the online fandom, Potter fandom as a whole is perceived as skewing a bit younger than more “traditional” fandoms. And not only younger, but less experienced in “traditional” fandom cultural norms – Harry Potter is, for many participants, their very first foray into fandom.

Potter fandom grew up entirely on the Internet. It has never known a time when access to fanfiction, either to read or to publish, was limited by finite resources and editorial control; its only experience of the fannish landscape has been one of infinite space, where anyone can post anything they wish. Potter fandom never needed to “mentor” in new members, nor did it ever experience the top-down editorial control of zine-based fandoms. This freedom of access, combined with the sheer *size* of the Potter fandom, has resulted in a fandom of subgroups,

specialized fandoms-within-fandom, which is where the bulk of most fans' day-to-day functioning within the fandom occurs – creating what Francesca Coppa calls “an increasingly customizable fannish experience” (54). These subgroups can be based around a website, a mailing list, a journal community; and those spaces can be devoted to an interpretation of canon, a character, a genre of fanfiction, a romantic pairing (“ship,” short for “relationship”), an author.

What this means in terms of Potter fanfiction is that each of these subgroups can churn out its own stories for its own audience with impunity. The enormous number of people participating in the online fandom almost guarantees that however outré your fanfictional desires, somebody will share them – and will have written a story, or be willing to read yours. Writers of unpopular pairings or “squickier” scenarios often had, in the days of zines, a difficult time getting their stories published and therefore finding an audience. The Internet cut out the middlemen: “Arguably, this may be fandom’s postmodern moment, where the rules are ‘there ain’t no rules’ and traditions are made to be broken” (Coppa 57).

The first Potter story posted on the enormous multifandom archive Fanfiction.net appeared on September 4, 1999. Fanfiction.net was the space where much of the Potter fandom’s activity took place in the early days, and it still maintains the largest collection of Potter stories (at last count over 280,000) on the web. Later that month, the mailing list Harry Potter for Grown-Ups (HP4GU),¹⁹ devoted primarily to canon discussion and speculation, but serving as a springboard for many prominent early Potter fanfiction writers, was founded; this list currently includes 21,958 members. This was also the period when I first encountered, and fell in love with, the Potter books; also, I had just discovered this thing called “fanfiction,” and was inhaling *X-Files* and *Homicide: Life on the Street* stories by the truckload. My reading in

¹⁹ Mailing list founded September 17, 1999.; HP4GU moved to its present-day Yahoogroup site (<<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HPforGrownups/>>) on August 25, 2000. Accessed October 2, 2006.

the Potter fandom was, at this time, sporadic; I didn't care for the character of Draco or the pairing of Harry and Hermione, both of which seemed to dominate Potter fanfiction at the time.

2000 saw the worldwide release of *Goblet*, which inaugurated the Potter fandom's Long Wait, when the fandom spread like kudzu across the Web. The three-year period between *Goblet* and *Phoenix* established the prevailing culture of the Potter fandom, a culture that differed in significant ways from traditional fandoms.

First, there is a major difference – possibly *the* most important difference – between a fandom whose primary canon is complete (i.e., a self-contained book or film, a completed book or television series) and a fandom whose primary canon is incomplete. The rhythm of day-to-day fandom functioning, the nature of the fights, the type of fanfiction produced: in these areas, fandoms with completed canons have far more in common with each other than they do with incomplete-canonical fandoms in the same medium or genre. The arrival of secondary canon, like film versions of a completed book series (such as *The Lord of the Rings*), will invigorate the fandom, often dramatically, but this invigoration is of a different sort than that which happens in an incomplete canon when new primary canon comes along.

However, canon medium, especially when considered alongside the primary mode of fandom communication, will have an enormous influence on an incomplete-canonical fandom culture. In the days of printzines, fans of ongoing weekly television series tended to be somewhat sanguine (for a given value of “somewhat”) about canon development that nullified their interpretations, their fanfiction, or both – fannish communication and distribution of production moved far more slowly than the canon itself, which meant that fanfic would often be out-of-date long before distribution. The Internet enabled television fans’ production not just to keep pace with the canon, but *outpace* it, which had not been possible before. The term “joss,”

meaning “to render fan work uncanonical,”²⁰ originated in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fandom (in honor of series creator Joss Whedon, famous for his wild plot twists and willingness to kill off main characters), but quickly achieved pan-fandom usage; the fact that the term was so quickly and widely adopted suggests that it fulfilled a conceptual void within the fandom: before the Internet, “jossed”-ness was the usual state of affairs, taken in stride by readers and writers of fanfiction, so there wasn’t a particular need to mark that state out with a specific term. Present-day fans of ongoing television series have, for the most part, retained this comparatively sanguine attitude to “jossing,” seeing it as inevitable; the arrival of brand-new canon each week means that television fans don’t have quite the same opportunities to get attached to particular readings of canon.

Not so in the Potter fandom. Three years is a *long* time on the Internet. The vast numbers in the Potter fandom, all of whose members had access to the primary means of publication, meant that popular arguments and positions were getting rehashed constantly. Political factions formed around various characters, ships, and genres. This, in itself, was certainly not a new activity for fans, but instead of having to wait for newsletters or conventions, the advent of the Internet meant that loyalties could be cemented and opponents could be confronted on a *daily* basis – and there were always new allies to make and enemies to fight. Potter fans became deeply, and visibly, entrenched in their particular positions, which turns every countdown to the release of new canon into a ticking time bomb. (Fans joke that the release of Book 7 will break the Internet.) This entrenchment, the speed and anonymity of the Web, and the relative youth and/or inexperience of many Potter fans – all have earned Potter fandom a reputation for flamewars notable for their vitriol. Perhaps the most bitter is the Great Shipper War, a battle

²⁰ See Browne.

between the two major “het” (heterosexual) ships, Harry/Hermione and Ron/Hermione; the question of which boy Hermione would or should romance became a major source of conflict in the fandom, to the point where canon confirmation (in *Prince*) of Hermione/Ron merely exacerbated the issue instead of resolving it.

However, the Potter fandom produced a great deal more than simply conflict during the Long Wait. The speed of Internet communication meant that the fannish feedback process, always much faster than that of official publishing, was now instantaneous. This speed also meant that the fandom could become saturated with a particular pairing or kink very quickly, and thus spur fans on to write different, more experimental material, and draw audiences. When I wandered back into the Potter fandom in 2002, the landscape had changed a great deal from my brief foray two years earlier. I had been biding my time in “popslash” fandom, a community devoted to producing homoerotic stories about members of the boybands N’Sync and the Backstreet Boys (yes, really); this fandom, despite – or, actually, *because* of the absurdity of the source material, had attracted a number of experienced and talented fanfic writers interested in exploring issues of modern celebrity, consumerism, and sexual representation, and the fandom was noted for the consistently high artistic caliber of the stories produced. At any rate, in 2002, the boyband phenomenon was winding down, and popslash fans, in a very common fannish move, migrated to other fandoms, with a great many going to Harry Potter. By this point, the fandom had expanded far beyond those early Draco and Harry/Hermione narratives, and I was able to find fanfiction more to my taste, which I enjoyed so much I was inspired to produce some of my own. This injection of popslashers was, while influential, not the first foray of older media fans into the Potter fandom; Snape fans, especially the Snape slashers, were a subgroup visibly distinguished from the rest of fandom, at the time, by the presence of these

old-school fans. According to Fanhistory.com, the Snape faction got a major boost in 2001, with the release of the film version of *Stone*, featuring the attractive (arguably *too* attractive) actor Alan Rickman as Snape.²¹

2002 saw a major rupture in the fandom: the enormous archive Fanfiction.net (hereafter FF.N) banned all NC-17 fic from the site. Despite the existence of Potter-specific general archives such as FictionAlley.org (hereafter FA), as well as numerous character- or ship-specific sites, FF.N was still the primary location for the bulk of Potter fic in the fandom. In response, Potter fans created RestrictedSection.org (hereafter RS), an archive solely for NC-17 fic (for more on RS's trials and tribulations, see Chapter 2). The removal of the porn from FF.N hastened the fragmentation of the Potter fandom into ever-more-specific subgroups; FF.N itself became the domain of the youngest and least experienced members of the fandom. Moreover, online fandom as a whole was gradually shifting from mailing lists to blogs, especially to the free open-source blog-hosting site Livejournal (henceforth abbreviated as LJ). Blogs – online personal journals to which readers can comment – gave fans their own individual, and publicly accessible, soapbox in which to publish fanfiction, essays, and random thoughts about their lives. While mailing lists were still very much in play, LJ blogs and communities – consisting of a central blog to which a number of members could post individual entries – became a force to be reckoned with.

2002 also saw the creation of the satirical community Fandom Wank on LJ. This community, whose motto is “We take ‘fandom is fucking funny’ too far,” is dedicated to the reportage – and, even more importantly, mockery -- of “wank” in any and all fandoms: ‘wank,’ from the British and Australian slang term for “masturbation,” is defined as ”Self-aggrandizing

²¹ <<http://www.fanhistory.com/>> Accessed October 2, 2006. Throughout this section, this site's timeline of the Potter fandom has proven useful.

posturing. Fannish absurdities. Circular ego-stroking. Endless flamewars. Pseudointellectual definitions.”²² Upon observing wank, Fandom Wank denizens (also known as “Wankas,” to distinguish themselves from the “wankers” being mocked) write up a “wank report,” with links to the wank, and post it to the community. Readers trot over to observe the wank, and then – this is crucial – *return* to Fandom Wank to make fun of the wank. (Wankas are strictly prohibited from getting involved in the wankers’ space; “trolling” wanks is a bannable offense.) While this seems a bit mean, and often is, in actual practice Fandom Wank is to flamewars what *Mystery Science Theater 3000* was to bad movies. Wankas treat fandom as a spectacle, and an absurd one at that; it is a key article of Wanka culture that “everybody wanks,” and no one, especially themselves, is immune from mockery. As of today, Fandom Wank, happily ensconced on Journalfen – a blogging service analogous to LJ, henceforth abbreviated as JF -- after being tossed from LJ for reasons never adequately explained, has over 3500 members from a wide variety of fandoms, and is a major fixture in the online fannish landscape.

Fandom Wank is important because, sooner or later, almost every fannish controversy winds up there, and will sometimes be rehashed in the comments to the wank report. Due to its multi-fandom membership base, fans can learn what people in fandoms other than their own are discussing – or, this being Fandom Wank, fighting over. Like the London magazine *Private Eye* (or, indeed, *Lingua Franca*), Fandom Wank reports the news to mock it, but still *reports*. Aside from often being screamingly funny, it remains one of the best sources for straight-up news in the fannish universe. If it’s on Fandom Wank, people are talking about it, and a search through the archives will reveal how often it has been talked about in the past three years, and in what contexts. There is no better record of the cyclical nature of fannish controversies,

²² Fandom Wank profile. Accessed October 2, 2006. JF.

especially where fanfic is concerned: every so often, fans will refight why slash is good/bad, the ethics of writing incest/non-consensual sex/underage sex, and the proper relationship of fandom to The Powers That Be. Potter fandom, due to its size, is such a reliable source of wank on these issues that it has been dubbed “Old Faithful.”

2003 was a busy year for the Potter fandom: *Phoenix* was finally released, and it broke the hearts of Sirius fans, confirmed the suspicions of Snape fans, and irritated the participants in the Great Shipper War for not resolving the conflict – Harry/Snape shippers, on the other hand, were thrilled. New characters such as Luna and Tonks quickly acquired large fan followings. In keeping with the darker tone of the series, much of the fanfiction took a turn for the angst; while angst had always been a popular genre, the events of *Order* made it even more relevant.

In July 2003, the first major Harry Potter conference, Nimbus 2003, was held in Orlando, Florida. This event was designed to be a combination of academic conference and fan convention, and featured academic papers analyzing the Potter books – and my own academic presentations on the Potter fandom -- alongside shipping debates and fanfiction readings; a major event was the panel debate “Resolved: Can Draco Malfoy be Redeemed?” in which I represented the “hell, no!” position.

2004 saw the release of the (excellent) film version of *Azkaban*, and a rather widespread feeling of ennui within the fandom. While still producing material on a volume that dwarfed other fandoms, some older fans felt that the fandom was becoming fat and lazy. In reality, increased fannish fragmentation meant that some of the subgroups that had formed the “mainstream” in the pre-*Phoenix* days were experiencing a tapering off (such as the popular Harry/Draco ship, and Draco fandom in general), while other subgroups were experiencing dramatic growth. J.K. Rowling’s official website debuted, with a section devoted to “Fan Site

of the Month”; the very first fan site she chose was *Immeritus: The Sirius Black Fan Club*²³ – a site which hosts fanfiction and fan art.

The major event of 2005 was, of course, the release of *Prince*, which rejuvenated the fandom, but also caused a major implosion in the Great Shipper War, when it was confirmed that Hermione and Ron were to become a couple. The Draco segment of the fandom found themselves back in play again – after Draco’s near-absence in *Phoenix*, his return, with a key role in the denouement, no less, was welcomed. At present, major questions in the fandom include “Which side is Snape *really* on?” “Is Harry going back to Hogwarts?” “Where (and what) are the remaining horcruxes?” and “Remus/Tonks? The hell?” And let’s not forget the small but devoted clutch of Sirius fans invoking the soap-opera law of “We haven’t seen a body, so he isn’t really dead,” who are also happy with the possible presence among the living of Sirius Black’s mysterious brother Regulus, which has cheered (and created) many a Blackcest writer. All of these issues and more were discussed at The Witching Hour: A Harry Potter Symposium (October 2005), for which I served as chair of academic programming; like Nimbus 2003, TWH was a combination of academic conference and fan convention, this time with an even greater emphasis on the academic, and featured a keynote address by Henry Jenkins.

At present, fans are gearing up for the release of Book 7, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, on July 21, 2007 -- a date which will mark an irrevocable change in Potter fandom, from an incomplete to a complete canon.

As I have shown, Potter fandom is an enormous, sprawling, fragmented space; I wish now to discuss my own methodology, and my reasons for choosing the topics I wished to discuss.

²³ <<http://www.immeritus.org/>> Accessed July 23, 2007.

Methodology

If you've read this far, you have probably picked up on some of my preoccupations, most notably a desire to treat fanfiction as literature in its own right. However, fanfiction is literature produced within a specific community, and a full appreciation of the nuances of the literature requires an understanding of the community from whence it sprang. Therefore, I have combined literary and ethnographic approaches, discussing fanfiction genres and specific stories in terms of both aesthetics and community context, whether that community consists of a tiny group of writers who all know each other (Weasleycest) or forms a dominant discourse across the fandom as a whole (slash). My primary area of folklore research prior to this project was the European fairy tale canon, and that field of study's combination of literary and folkloristic considerations formed the model for my own approach. The World Wide Web, where words exist in a nebulous space between oral and written text, is an ideal location in which to consider these issues.

So, how, in a fandom so large, did I choose which fanfiction, and which subgroups, I wished to discuss? Well, I knew that attempting survey the *entire* fandom would be a task of Sisyphean proportions. So I decided to invoke the discourse of auto-ethnography (see Chapter 3), and let my own fannish experiences be my guide. I've come into contact with a wide cross-section of fans, of all ages and most ships, in my five years in the fandom; while many of my own fannish tastes tend to the distinctly subcultural (Weasleycest!), my love of slash and of several popular het ships, including Ron/Hermione, kept me in contact with more mainstream elements of the fandom, and my work on the conferences Nimbus 2003, The Witching Hour, and Phoenix Rising brought me into contact with many famous early Potter fans, especially those within the Draco sectors. In addition, my longtime membership in Fandom Wank has kept me abreast of developments in the fandom at large, albeit in a somewhat skewed way,

given the nature of the community. I admit up front that I know far more about het and slash fic than I do about “gen” (non-romantic) fic; I’ve read more fic about the Hogwarts students than about their teachers; and I am only somewhat familiar with Snape-fic, James/Lily, fic about Slytherins other than Draco or Marcus Flint, and werewolf porn. I’ve read a few “Mary Sue” stories (authorial self-inserts, of the “beautiful American exchange student comes to Hogwarts and all the author’s favorite characters fall in love with her” variety) in my time, but had no desire to revisit them; besides, a number of scholars have cataloged Mary Sue in her appearances historical (Pfleiger) and contemporary (Jenkins, Bacon-Smith, Willis). Before I began this project, I was a fan, and, like all fans, I “customized” my fannish experience to suit my own tastes and affinities. This is not to say that I have limited my consideration of Potter fanfiction to “stuff I like” -- if I had, there wouldn’t be a Draco chapter. But one must begin somewhere, and the fiction and subgroups I knew the most about seemed as good a starting place as any.

By focusing upon fanfiction as literature, and by letting my own fannish interests guide me, I hope to lay the groundwork for a more emic form of fandom studies. Fans spend a great deal of time reading, writing, editing and discussing their stories within a variety of intra-fandom affinity groups, and I wanted to capture the flavor of that fannish love of the micro. To that end, and following the example of Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins in “Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking,” I have relied extensively upon quotations from fans, in order that my voice not be the only one the reader hears. I also circulated a draft of this dissertation among fans, and have benefited enormously from their feedback, which ranged from fact corrections to reading suggestions to analysis and clarification of the project as a whole.

Before plunging in to the rest of my dissertation, a brief note on ethics and citation issues is called for. There are two schools of thought with regard to the nature of online statements, the “private” and the “public.” Academics of the “private” school feel that online words are the property of their owners, and should not be used by researchers without the informed consent of the speakers; those of the “public” school feel that posting online is the equivalent of making a public statement (Hine *Ethnography* 23-4). At The Witching Hour, the panel “Telling Tales Out of School” addressed this issue from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, with some panelists taking the “private” line and arguing that fandom studies is human subjects research that requires the informed consent of those being studied, and other panelists taking the “public” line, and arguing that publicly accessible online material should be treated as any other form of published text. My own sympathies lie with the “public” school, and not simply because the publishing and journalism industries tend to understand publicly available online material as “published,” even if not-for-profit; I am interested in fanfiction as literature, and the fannish discourse surrounding fanfic as literary review and criticism. I think too strong an insistence on the “private,” human-subjects rubric for all studies of fandom may, by fixing the fan solely as ethnographic subject, diminish or eliminate consideration of the fan as writer and artist.²⁴

However, when dealing with online fandom, one runs into the issue of what counts as “publicly accessible.” It’s easy to see that one should get fan consent to quote from a private forum, mailing list, or archive, and equally easy to argue that one does not need consent to quote material posted on a major public archive like FF.N, but what about LJ, where a great deal of my fannish experience has taken place? Obviously, an entry that is locked only to those users the journal owner has listed as “friends” requires consent, but what about so-called “public”

²⁴ See also Ess.

entries? Yes, such entries are indeed publicly accessible, but in many cases, the journal owner does not think of his/her posts this way, even if s/he knows it intellectually.

To deal with these issues, I have adopted a middle road. While I do believe publicly available material does indeed count as “published” and that it would be perfectly ethical to treat it as such, I am a member of this community, not simply as a researcher, but as a fellow fan, and I don’t believe it is really my duty to demand that all fans I wish to quote agree with my position. I have therefore decided to err on the side of caution, and have requested permission from all fans (who could be identified) whose words I wish to quote. Indeed, if a fan is mentioned by name, I have his/her permission to do so. I have cited fans throughout by their chosen online handles under which they have published their stories and commentary; another reason for requesting permission was to give fans, some of whom fear discovery of some of their more outré material by non-fans, the opportunity to request a pseudonym – that is, one different from their usual online handle; pseudonyms assigned by me at the fan’s request are set off with quotation marks. In some cases, the name a fan commonly writes under is not the same as his/her LJ or JF user name (i.e., the LJ user name for fan “Jane Doe” may be “Dracoluvr69”); I have used the name the fan prefers, as in most cases fans are easily traceable under their pen names to LJ, often via a link on their websites or archive author pages – and vice versa, as most fans’ LJ profile pages contain links to their websites and/or archive author pages.

LJ (and JF) citations themselves proved tricky, for the reasons mentioned above; I have elected to follow the example set by Hellekson and Busse, and have listed the abbreviation of the journal site (such as LJ) rather than posting the URLs to specific blogs or blog entries. I have kept full URLs in my own records, but this method seemed to me the best means of balancing accurate citation with protection of fan privacy. Comments made by one fan on

another fan's journal are cited as "Fan X. Comment on Fan Y's LJ. Date. Date accessed. LJ." In a few cases, fans have given me permission to quote their comments on another fan's LJ, but the LJ owner could not be reached; in those situations, the citation reads "Fan X. Comment on LJ. Date. Date accessed. LJ." Posts to LJ and JF communities, such as Fandom Wank, read as such: "Fan X. Comment on Fandom Wank. Date. Date accessed. JF." Likewise, I have usually linked to the main page of fanfiction archives and fan's personal websites, rather than to specific stories; the main page usually contains all the fandom disclaimers (not my characters, not for profit, I have no money, don't sue) – archives (identified by abbreviations) and author sites (abbreviated AS in footnotes) are listed in the bibliography. From the main pages, specific stories are easy to find, by utilizing the "Search" function on archives, or by clicking on the appropriate link (often labeled "Fiction") on personal websites.

A note on terminology: for the most part, I will explain fandom terms as they arise, but a couple bear explaining at the outset, as they will come up early and often. "Potterverse" refers to the tale world of the *Harry Potter* series – the fictional universe created by J.K. Rowling. ("Potterdom" refers to the Potter fandom.) "Wizarding World," often abbreviated "WW," is the wizard-controlled portion of that universe, as distinguished from the "Muggle World." Therefore, one might see an essay entitled "Overlaps Between the Wizarding World and Muggle World in the Potterverse."

Now, at last, we come to the rest of this dissertation.

Chapter 2, "Sexual Perversity at Hogwarts," discusses romance and pornography in Potter fanfiction, as well as the concept of "shipping" (fans' devotion to particular romantic pairings). This is the chapter in which the notion of the Potter books as being "for and about" children and adolescents becomes paramount: Potter fandom has been the site of pitched battles over the

forms representation of teenage romance and sexuality should take – especially given the number of children and teenagers who participate in the fandom. The gendered nature of participatory fandom is key; fans who wrote graphically sexual stories were usually characterized by opponents as “uncaring” rather than actively pedophiliac.

Chapter 3, “Mucking About With Malfoy: The Transformation of Draco,” is a study of fanfictional role played by Harry’s schoolboy nemesis – his Flashman, as it were -- Draco Malfoy; a character who, according to the numbers on FF.N, is second in popularity only to Harry and Hermione. Many early Potter fan writers were interested in Draco; I will discuss several of these key Draco stories in depth, and discuss their impact not only on the development of “Fanon Draco” (a wildly different creature than his canon incarnation), but on the fandom as a whole. This chapter also engages with the concept of my own so-called “dual consciousness” as both academic and fan: as an academic, I am fascinated by the historical development of Draco narratives, but as a fan, I have an enormous dislike for Draco in all his incarnations. These apparently competing impulses inspired me to take a closer look at the categories “academic” and “fan,” so often posited as binary opposites, and to examine my own negotiations of these categories.

Chapter 4, “Subtext in Hiding: Slash Fanfiction,” is concerned with homoerotic stories in the Potterverse. Slash has garnered a great deal of scholarly attention, much of it problematic or pathologizing; due to this, slash fans are often the quickest to engage with and criticize scholarly accounts of fandom. In contrast to earlier scholarly characterizations of slash as an isolated subgenre, slash is arguably the dominant form of Potter fanfic. I posit that the setting of the Potter series in a British boarding school, a location consistently coded as queer space in folk and literary traditions, has influenced the mainstreaming of slash in this fandom.

Chapter 5, “Keeping It in the Family,” is a case study in the joys of the micro. I examine a form of Potter fanfiction which, with the mainstreaming of slash, has taken over some of its “isolated subgenre” coding, and would be considered too weird for a macro-theorist to bother with, but is yet an important facet of this particular fandom: incest stories. These fics, usually involving the Weasley or Malfoy families, are often self-consciously literary and of a high artistic caliber; accordingly, this is the most “literary-oriented” of my chapters, with an in-depth look at incest narratives in folklore and literature – especially narratives suggested by the Potter books themselves -- and the ways in which fanfiction writers invoke those narratives in their own stories.

Finally, “Epilogue: Potterdammerung, or, the Wankalypse is Nigh,” reflects on the present moment, which hovers on the brink of irrevocable change in the Potter fandom: the imminent release of the seventh and final book in the series. At that point, the fandom will move from an open canon to a closed canon, and will mark the end of an era. I will speculate on what the future holds for the development of Potter fanfiction, with reference to pre-existing Potter fic trends and the examples set by other “closed-canonical” fandoms such as *Lord of the Rings*.

CHAPTER 2

SEXUAL PERVERSITY AT HOGWARTS

People make too much fuss about sex. And this wank isn't even about real sex.

--Darksplash¹

By far, the majority of Potter fanfic concerns romance, whether heterosexual (het) or homosexual (slash). How, then, does the discourse of romance – and its seamy sister, pornography – operate within Potter fanfiction? And how do these discourses operate with regards to the Potter books' status as texts published for young people, and the presence of so many young people within the fandom?

Fanfiction, in Jenkins's estimation, satisfies desires that are not being satisfied by the source text, particularly, and most importantly for my discussion, for sexual representation. The chapter will explore the implications of when those desires, which our culture insists are the sole province of adults, come into contact with a text for children and/or teenagers. When the interpretive community includes children, adolescents, and adults, where are the lines of demarcation drawn between “appropriate” and “inappropriate” discourse? And how do fans of all ages manifest, negotiate, and challenge the cultural assumptions about children’s and Young Adult (YA) literature, and children’s and adolescents’ sexuality?

Jacqueline Rose famously questioned assumptions about childhood and adolescence implied by the treatment of “children’s literature” as a meaningful, definable genre, when children’s and YA lit is controlled, at every stage of the game, by adults (1-12). The very idea of children’s literature is bound up with the concept of this ideal “child” whom the literature is supposedly for; but that “child” is constructed by adults, as a vehicle for adult fantasies and desires about children and childhood – and as such, is also fraught with adult anxieties,

¹ Comment on Fandom Wank. January 9, 2004. Accessed February 28, 2007. JF.

particularly regarding sexuality. So children's literature must satisfy both the perceived desires of this ideal "child" (a category it has constructed in the first place), but also the adult desire to police both child and children's literature. Children's literature is, then, like children themselves – and moreover, like fans -- figured in terms of *lack*: lack of "sophisticated" language, lack of complicated themes, and most especially lack of sexual desire. If a story includes sex, even non-explicit sex, it's not "appropriate" for children, as sex is solely the domain of adults. However, as James Kincaid has noted, this absence of sexuality – "innocence" – is not simple absence, but a complex adult fantasy, and an erotic one: "the idea of innocence and the idea of 'the child' became dominated by sexuality – negative sexuality, of course, but sexuality all the same" (55). If innocence is figured as desirable, then it follows that those who possess it are also desirable, be they blushing virgin brides or children at play.

Adolescence (or "young adulthood," a term that gives with one hand and takes away with the other) and its literature, does, albeit grudgingly, allow a space for sexual consciousness, and the discourse shifts from blanket condemnation to strategies for containment. Our culture's relationship with adolescent sexuality is complex and contradictory: on the one hand, we valorize the youth and beauty, the erotic appeal, of teenagers, and often wink at "horny teenagers'" sexual escapades on television and film; on the other hand, there is a great deal of hand-wringing about containing teenage sexuality within parameters acceptable to adult sensibilities.² The literature aimed at teenage audiences reflects this tension; Roberta Seelinger Trites argues that "adolescent literature is as often an ideological tool used to curb teenagers' libido as it is some sort of depiction of what adolescents' sexuality actually is" (85). While YA

² See Thomas Hine and Neubauer for discussion of these issues.

literature has gradually allowed itself to become more sexually explicit³, there is still a strong imperative towards pedagogy – inculcating “correct” attitudes about sexuality to an audience deemed in need of education. Trites expresses frustration, a frustration I also share, at the overwhelming emphasis in our discourses concerning sexuality in general, but adolescent sexuality in particular, upon “repression” rather than “*jouissance*” (95).

Potter fanfiction is, first, a discourse that operates outside of institutional paradigms that control children’s and YA literature; it is not bound, unlike the Potter books themselves, within publishing conventions that obligate it to contain sexuality within parameters of age (of the characters and readers) or of pedagogy – it is free to focus upon *jouissance*. This has been a source of some friction within and without the Potter fandom; some have wondered if there is something inherently dodgy about writing sexually explicit fanfiction about a children’s series, if it is a children’s series. A common move made by those who defend erotic Potter fanfic is to argue that the series is now firmly in the realm of YA literature, and therefore depictions of sex (even considering institutional paradigms) are not inappropriate; the characters will be 17 or 18 by the end of the series, and over the age of consent in the UK (16). Other fans dismiss such concerns, pointing out that the Potter books have many adult readers; while still others take a reader-response tack and argue that it matters not a whit what the author or publisher intended about the series, because fans of all ages and proclivities have hold of it now. As has been pointed out by a number of fans, graphic depictions of teenage sexuality are hardly unusual in published literature for adults – even graphic depictions of children’s sexuality are not without precedent, as Stephen King’s bestselling novel *It* attests -- and therefore fanfiction is not doing anything intrinsically *outré* in that regard.

³ See Stone for some recent examples and discussion.

An interesting counterpoint to these questions within the Potter fandom can be found in the hoopla surrounding the publication of Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie's *Lost Girls*, a graphic novel recounting the erotic adventures of Alice (from *Alice in Wonderland*), Wendy (from *Peter Pan*), and Dorothy (from *The Wizard of Oz*). The three women meet in a hotel at the Swiss border in 1913, and tell their stories of sexual awakening, stories that bear a striking resemblance to the famous novels featuring their comparably tamer adventures. *Lost Girls* is both a serious examination of desire, fantasy, and, as Moore puts it, "the human sexual imagination," but is also, unabashedly, a work of pornography – stunning, beautifully rendered pornography that draws its inspiration from the written and visual erotic material of the Victorian and Edwardian periods (Beardsley and Schiele are referenced within the illustrations). Moore and Gebbie posit their hotel as a "pornotopia" (a la Stephen Marcus) where any and all sexual desires can be fulfilled, and not simply the socially acceptable ones – incest and sex with children are also described:

if we wanted to talk honestly about pornography, we had to include all of it. We had to be comprehensive. We couldn't brush anything that was currently socially uncomfortable under the carpet, because that would not have been being true to the idea behind the work. The work was an exploration of erotica, of pornography, and more importantly, of the human sexual imagination. That is obviously which wanders all over the place, and which can never be legislated against. (Brady "Part 2")

Moore and Gebbie use Alice, Wendy, and Dorothy, three fantasies who "famously do not exist," to explore the nature of fantasy itself, including the fantasy of childhood, and what it means to grow up. Regarding the "appropriateness" of writing pornography about characters from children's books, Moore states

[w]e wished to simply expand upon them. Any story about a child carries the implication that the child will eventually grow up.... It seemed like fair game to speculate upon the perfectly normal part of every human life, that these characters would have experienced if their narratives had been extended beyond the childhood that was represented in the original books. (Brady "Part 1")

This is a position with obvious relevance to Potter fandom, and a number of fans have anticipated and echoed Moore's arguments, which also emphasize the fictitious nature of literary texts like *Lost Girls* or fanfiction: all characters involved, no matter their age, are fictional, and all acts depicted, no matter how depraved, are also fictional: no real people are being hurt in any way.

The representation of teenage, or underage, sexuality in Potter fanfic varies considerably, depending upon the story, the pairing, the character, and the fan. Certain general patterns seem to hold for the portrayal of underage sexuality in the fandom; in particular, many stories, prior to *Phoenix*, that concerned Harry and his classmates tend to age up the characters to at least sixteen. While this served the purpose of rendering the characters' engagement in sexual activity more palatable or "defensible," it's important to note that this aging up doesn't have to be considered as such, but more as a practical narrative necessity, "picking up where the books left off" for that 3 year period [between the publication of *Goblet* and *Phoenix*.]⁴ As the characters have aged in canon, there has been a dropping off of concern over them being depicted, in fanfic, as sexual beings; however, prior to *Prince*, wank about representation of underage characters engaged in sex bubbled up on a semi-regular basis.

"Potter fans=pedophiles" is something of a running joke in the fandom, particularly the contingent that frequents Fandom Wank; however, the charge has indeed been leveled, with varying degrees of seriousness, at the Potter fandom as a whole, and many fans have thought seriously about the topic. The overwhelming response seems to be "no": while it is acknowledged that pedophiles exist and that some may alight in the Potter fandom, there is nothing intrinsically pedophilic about the fandom itself, even the more sexually explicit bits. As

⁴ Heidi. Comment in Catja Mikhailovic's LJ. November 15, 2003. Accessed February 20, 2007. LJ.

Idlerat says, “I do think there are some psychologically unhealthy people in fandom, but that doesn't make fandom psychologically unhealthy.”⁵

There are a certain number of fanfics that do not follow the “age-up” pattern, and are broken down by a fan thus:

a) [stories] written by people who were themselves teenagers, and therefore not all that concerned about assuring us they weren't pedophiles (see: FF.N, esp. before the NC-17 purge); b) non-kinkfic abuse narratives, like... L/D [Lucius/Draco]... c) Tom/Ginny, which is canonically bound to her first year; and d) chan, which includes kinkfic abuse narratives with an underaged abusee, and is a specific subgenre (as opposed to a generalized fandom phenomenon) which tends to squick lots of people, though not me.⁶

The final category, “chan,” is a genre of stories concerning graphic, but highly stylized, descriptions of underage sexuality, that often appears to owe a great deal of its conventions to those of Japanese anime and manga (Browne notes that “chan” translates roughly to “little and cute” in Japanese). Chan usually means that at least one character is thirteen and under, or prepubescent (fifteen and up is rarely considered chan); the only famous chan story in the Potter fandom is Aspen’s “If That Mockingbird Won’t Sing,”⁷ an AU Snape/Harry in which the figures of “youthful innocence” and “tortured experience” are not only stylized, but so cheerfully, deliberately over-the-top that it functions as a parody of those roles and our expected responses to them. Chan’s overt stylization is not to everyone’s taste, and the genre is a small part of the general Potter fandom discourse of representations of underage sexuality, though one that often crops up in fan discussions about that general topic.

During one such discussion, Delphi, echoing Kincaid, remarked:

[This] view... assumes that any sexualization of children has been completely imposed by adults. I'm not that far-off from being a kiddie, myself. I remember the things that my

⁵ Idlerat. Comment in Catja Mikhailovic’s LJ. November 15, 2003. Accessed February 20, 2007. LJ.

⁶ Catja Mikhailovic. November 15, 2003. Accessed February 20, 2007. LJ.

⁷ Aspen. Before June 2003. Accessed July 22, 2007. AS. (locked)

friends and I got up to.... Just because childrens' literature (and most of society) has chosen to greatly tidy up the view of what really goes on in the mind of a child, doesn't make the reality any different. That said, of course I'm not condoning acts of violence (sexual or otherwise) against any child. But it's a very murky area, and not confronting all sides of it just makes it worse.⁸

Melannen takes on the issue of Potter as children's text, and relates it to fanfictional depictions of underage sexuality:

One of the things that most fascinated me about HP when I first read it (I must have been about 15 or 16 at the... time)- was the realization that this was a children's series where she was actually going to age the characters up a year with every book, and they'd be 17 or 18 by the end.... [T]his 11-year-old boy eating chocolate on the train was going to grow up into a sexual being. He'd be older than me by the time the series ended, and there was no way an author with JKR's apparent ability and bravery was going to be able to avoid dealing with [sex] while writing from the POV of a 17-year-old boy.... That future horny teenage Harry would be the same character Hermione hugs and tells he has heart - that was an incredible turn-on to me.⁹

Cathexys asked, regarding depictions of underage sexuality, "is there a difference between having private fantasies and sharing them? Are there or ought there be limits to what we write about and imagine?"¹⁰ In response, Rat Creature brings up the issue of "thought crime," and the impossibility of punishing someone for it:

[I]s something child pornography because a child molester gets off on it?... I mean, someone could also get off on cute family baby pictures another person posts on the web, and yet nobody would think you posted child pornography because you posted your family photos.... Personally I think the only way "child pornography" makes sense as a (criminal) category (you could obviously discuss at length various cultural/theoretical aspects of sexualization/sexuality of children for the benefit of adults and/or other children) is if it involves and harms real children, because ultimately I'm far more uncomfortable with the "thought crime" approach to child pornography than with chan.¹¹

Kai also points out certain generic conventions that often apply not simply to representations of underage sex, but to pornography in general:

⁸ Delphi. Comment on LJ. December 3, 2003. Accessed February 28, 2007. LJ.

⁹ Melannen. Comment on LJ. December 3, 2003. Accessed February 28, 2007. LJ.

¹⁰ Cathexys. December 3, 2003. Accessed February 26, 2007. LJ. (locked post)

¹¹ Rat Creature. Comment on Cathexys's LJ. December 3, 2003. Accessed February 26, 2007. LJ. (locked post)

There are also significant subgenres of original amateur fiction that feature fictional "children" who are actually stand-ins for the adult readers (thinking specifically of a lot of spanking fic, not to mention infantilization, age-regression, and sissification stories). A person who is not versed in the various genres would likely come along and be horrified! Many might think that the stories "glorify" or "promote" rape, incest, child molestation, torture, etc. People who understand the genre would not be so fooled.¹²

Won't Someone Think of the Children?

Before we go much further, I feel I should clarify my position with regards to these issues.

As might be obvious by this point, I value fandom for the freedom it affords from institutionalized discourses of sexuality. I believe in art in general as a safe space for the expression of any fantasy one wishes; as long as no live human beings are being made to suffer against their will in the creation of art, anything goes. I believe sexual desire and fantasy – the “human sexual imagination” -- is not something that can or should be policed. I think fandom provides a good space for the working out of fantasy in a safe, supportive, essentially tolerant atmosphere; I believe this is especially beneficial for women, queer folk, and young people, whose desires have traditionally been the most subject to cultural attempts at containment. I believe that intellectual and artistic freedom – freedom to read, freedom to write – should not be the sole reserve of those over the age of majority, and that decisions about what is “appropriate” should be made by individuals – parents and children – for themselves and those in their care, rather than leaving it to lawmakers. I arrive at these from a variety of perspectives: as a feminist, as a humanist, as a queer person, as a writer, as an educator, as a consumer (and sometime producer) of pornography, as a child who grew up in a house full of bodice-rippers that I was never forbidden to read, as a fan.

“Won’t someone think of the children!” is a rallying cry heard all across the Internet; in the Potter fandom, the issue of minors’ *access* to pornographic fan material is as reliable a source of

¹² kai. Comment on Cathexys’s LJ. December 3, 2003. Accessed February 26, 2007. LJ. (locked post)

argument as the representation of minors in pornographic material. Even in arguments about chan, fans rarely accuse one another of actively being pedophiles; the primarily female membership of fandom does not fit with general cultural conceptions of pedophilia. Rather, the rhetoric in this female-dominated space tends to hinge upon issues of *caring*, as in, “Don’t you *care* if some innocent child comes along and is exposed to your filthy smut?” Controversies of this sort appear regularly within many fandoms, but the issue of children’s access to naughty fanfiction is heightened by Potter’s status as a text marketed to children; there is a genuine concern on the part of some fans that children searching the Internet for general Potter information not unexpectedly encounter something raunchy.

However, the vast majority of fanfiction displays warnings for graphic sex, underage sex, incest, non-consensual sex, and anything else likely to be considered objectionable, thus making it easy for readers to avoid (or find) fics that do not (or do) suit their tastes; this warning system is an ingrained element of fannish codes of courtesy. In addition, a system based upon the MPAA movie ratings is almost universally employed – or was, until the MPAA decided that fanficciers’ use of this rating system was in violation of its trademark, and sent a Cease and Desist letter to a Potter fanfiction site¹³ -- nowadays, alternate but equivalent ratings systems are used. In essence, this means that, while finding the filthy smut is not especially difficult, *accessing* the filthy smut requires proactivity on the part of the reader, who will invariably be asked to click “yes” on at least one, and often several, statements that one is old enough to read such material. There is no way to prove one’s age on the Internet, particularly on not-for-profit sites that do not ask for a credit card, such as fanfiction archives; even friends-locking a LJ post

¹³ See “MPAA Gives FanFic Site a Bad Review.” Chilling Effects. March 17, 2005. Accessed February 21, 2007. <<http://www.chillingeffects.org/trademark/notice.cgi?NoticeID=1782>>

or password-protecting a site is no guarantee that minors will not be able to access adult material.

As WishWords noted,

every author I've seen who has ever decided to password protect their site has done so, not to keep underage readers from access, but to protect their own hides from lawsuits and angry parents. Password protection is not a preventative, it's a CYA [cover your ass] move.¹⁴

The most famous “CYA move” in Potter fandom was made by RestrictedSection.org, an archive devoted to NC-17 (excuse me, “Mature” or “Adult”) stories. RS received a cease-and-desist letter from Warner Brothers (which owns the rights to the Potter novels), claiming that Rowling herself was disturbed by sexually explicit fanfiction, and demanding that RS “remove all such material and cease making it available on the internet [sic] or by any other means.”¹⁵ The letter was initially suspected of not being genuine; it was sent on behalf of “J.K. Rowlings,” and though sent in 2003, it is dated January 13, 2002 – an error, as RS did not exist at that time. However, it did turn out to be real, and claimed:

There is plainly a very real risk that impressionable children, who of course comprise the principal readership of the Harry Potter books, will be directed (e.g. by a search engine result) to your sexually explicit web site, which you will appreciate most right-minded people would consider wholly inappropriate for minors. Plainly the warnings to the effect that children under 18 should not access your website do not in fact prevent minors from doing so. Indeed, such warnings may well serve simply to entice teenagers to your site.

After a certain amount of wrangling, RS agreed to place the site under password protection. While this certainly will not prevent minors from lying about their ages, it does place the onus for underage viewing of the site solely upon the minors themselves. Rowling, if she was indeed behind the Cease and Desist, appears to have made her peace with the existence of explicit stories; as mentioned in the previous chapter, one year later she named *Immeritus*, a site which hosts some adult fanfiction (among other things) as the first recipient of her “Fan Site” award.

¹⁴ WishWords. Comment in Aja’s LJ. January 14, 2004. Accessed February 19, 2007. LJ.

¹⁵ Chilling Effects. Accessed February 10, 2007. <<http://www.chillingeffects.org/fanfic/notice.cgi?NoticeID=522>>

While there are more than enough fans who object to the writing of various forms of fanfic (underage, non-consensual, and incest are the most common targets) to keep Fandom Wank fat and happy, on the whole, fans tend to be tolerant when it comes to production of sexually explicit material, and usually argue that the responsibility for “protecting innocent children” lies with those children’s parents, as opposed to random strangers on the Internet. Panthea’s comments sum up this attitude:

IT IS NOT MY JOB TO KEEP YOUR CHILD SAFE. Make that "SAFE". Because if some Poor!Impressionable!Child! is browsing the internet unchaperoned and finds some not-so-nice fic I've written, that's his or her parents' fault.... [M]ost badnastywrong fic is disclaimed as such, and I've yet to meet someone who lives their life according to the morals of *smut fanfic they read on the internet*.... It all comes down to: If a child needs protecting from the Big Bad World, IT IS NOT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ANYONE EXCEPT THAT CHILD'S PARENTS. Believe it or not, making life harder for those of us who *aren't* young and impressionable is not going to make the world a better place.¹⁶

This fannish response stems from long exposure to popular rhetoric concerning the vulnerability of children -- especially girls -- to pornography, especially pornography on the Internet. Juffer points out that most government attempts to regulate porn regularly invoke the image of a vulnerable little girl traumatized by an invasion of porn, which should be limited to circulation in the public (male) sphere, into the feminine sanctuary of the home – which thus requires mothers (not fathers) to be ever-vigilant, to protect the sanctity of not just the home/private sphere, but also of women’s place within it (Juffer 34-7).¹⁷ Of course, the fact that the Internet allows easy access to pornography from the privacy of one’s own home makes it all the more insidious, and ever-more-elaborate schemes – from Net Nannies to the various iterations of the Children’s Online Protection Act -- are devised to protect innocent children from

¹⁶ Panthea. Comment on Fandom Wank. January 13, 2004. Accessed February 11, 2007. JF.

¹⁷ Also see Driscoll 81.

filthy smut. Some fans have little patience with such measures, and credit children's own quite adequate self-censoring capabilities:

I just recently released my 8 year old daughter upon the internet. And I'm not even worried. Why? Because she self-censors better than anyone I know.... [I]f she DID stumble across one of these chan-noncon-bestiality-incest extravaganzas, she'd read a paragraph, scream EWWW and click the Back button as quick as she could.¹⁸

However, there is another wrinkle to the question of minors' access to dirty fanfic: as Ataniell put it, "Are you aware that there are people [writing pornography] who are under 17 themselves? How do you propose to protect them from themselves?"¹⁹ A number of talented writers in the Potter fandom, including V (whose "True but Not Nice" will be discussed below), began writing fanfiction, sometimes pornographic fanfiction, well before the age of 18. While an honest minor may be barred from accessing sites like RS, or the 17-and-older stories on FA, there is nothing preventing her from creating an LJ (which requires users to be 13 and older), and uploading adult fanfiction there. The entire debate of protecting minors from dirty fanfic is complicated by the presence of said minors, who are often producing the very material that others wish to protect them from – and are not shy about speaking up in defense of their artistic and intellectual freedoms. There is also a tacit understanding that if a minor cannot figure out that a) sites that host porn disallow minors for the sites' own protection, and b) no one can ascertain her age on the Internet, she doesn't deserve to access the porn. This fits in with the general fannish preference for taking responsibility for one's own desires and kinks.

The existence of controversies along the axis of children and exposure to dirty fanfic taps into our culture's general willingness to construct children (and to a lesser extent, teens) as a uniquely vulnerable audience; the Internet, which has enabled young people to access

¹⁸ Ailei. Comment in Aja's LJ. January 14, 2004. Accessed February 11, 2007. LJ.

¹⁹ Ataniell. January 14, 2004. Accessed February 11, 2007. LJ. (locked)

information and communicate with other young people and adults at an unprecedented level, has sharpened those anxieties. Valerie Walkerdine's examination of children and cyberspace is especially relevant here:

The importance of the twin issues of the mass medium and the vulnerable and suggestible mind cohere to produce a social psychology and a psychopathology of groups in which mass irrationality and suggestibility have a central place. (235)

"Irrationality and suggestibility" – these are qualities assigned not just to children, but to fans as well. It is interesting that fannish anxieties about the representation of sexually explicit material is not confined to fandoms like Harry Potter, which has a visible demographic of "vulnerable" young people, but also to fandoms whose demographics skew older. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, debates about the "morality" of representing certain sex acts, or sex with any degree of explicitness, in fanfiction springs up regularly, as Fandom Wank teaches us. In fandoms whose source texts are aimed at adults, these debates, lacking the visible presence of children as a constructed vulnerable audience, often fall back on vague notions of "responsibility" in fanfictional representations of things like incest or nonconsensual sex. These debates can get especially heated, as many adult fans who read and write such stories resent being constructed as "irrational and suggestible," and often point out that the depiction of such sex acts is hardly unusual in published fiction for adults, as bodice-ripping romances, V.C. Andrews's romantic incest stories, and a decent chunk of the contents of the erotica section at Borders will attest. I believe the high incidence of these debates has to do with anxiety about the extreme accessibility, to read and write, offered by the Internet; commercial publication is controlled by the cultural elite, which lends published texts a comforting veneer of "respectability," no matter how seamy the subject matter, or how joyfully, erotically, or sympathetically illegal sex acts are portrayed – people whose class and educational privilege

enable them to safely read “questionable” material have deemed it fit for the rest of us. But fanfiction published on the Internet has no such top-down vetting process.

Shipping, or, H.M.S. What the Hell?

Fannish desires and kinks are expressed most visibly and vociferously through the process of asserting one’s preference for particular romantic pairings over other romantic pairings; in the Potter fandom, the enormous number of possible pairings, and the various artistic and ideological tropes that develop around particular pairings, makes these discussions especially heated.

I’ve been using the term “shipping” throughout the previous chapter; now is a good time to expand upon the topic. “Shipping,” is, as noted earlier, short for “relationshipping”; the term originates in *X-Files* fandom, where a “shipper” was a fan who desired Mulder/Scully romance (see Browne). “Shipping” a pairing indicates that you have a strong preference for that pairing as opposed to other pairings; however, that preference can take on a variety of nuances, including “I enjoy reading/writing this pairing in fanfic,” “I want this pairing to happen in canon,” “I believe this pairing will happen in canon, and I want it to,” or “If this pairing does *not* happen in canon, I’ll take a hit out on the creators.” “Shipping” is understood as a rather strong response; casual readers of the Potter texts who believe that, say, Ron and Hermione will get together, and that’s cute, would not usually be called “shippers.”

Ships are often designated simply by listing the characters’ names together, separated by a slash mark: Hermione/Ron, Lucius/Draco, Snape/Giant Squid. Unlike anime/manga fandoms, where name order in a same-sex pairing can indicate which character is the “top” and which the “bottom,” there is no consistent rule for name order in most Western ship names. “Name-smooches” are also fairly common, if the names can take it – “Snarry” (Snape/Harry) is the most widely used. Potter fandom, specifically Fiction Alley, is unique in the conceit of naming ships as if they were “actual” ships, as in boats – H.M.S. Cutesy Ship Name. Some ship names are

descriptive (H.M.S. Puppylove – Remus/Sirius, H.M.S. Fire and Ice – Ginny/Draco), some refer to popular fanfics (H.M.S. Pumpkin Pie – Harry/Hermione), and some are hilarious (H.M.S. The Government Stole My Toad – Neville/Luna).²⁰

Shipping that is centered around fanfictional preferences tends not to cause too much friction, unless the ship taps into cultural taboos (such as incest). However, shipping tied to hopes for validation in the canon is quite possibly the single most reliable source of wank in fandom as a whole: when it comes to canon, there is the potential for shippers to be right (their ship is validated by canon) or wrong (their ship does not happen). When two or more ships are in competition for canonical validation, shipping wars result – usually, in most mainstream media, among rival het ships.²¹ Potter fandom is noted for one of the most ferocious canon shipping wars in fandom history: Ron/Hermione (and Harry/Ginny²²) vs. Harry/Hermione.²³ At stake were two competing narratives of romance; the Harry/Hermione shippers preferred a story of platonic friendship that gradually grows into love, while Ron/Hermione shippers favored the “bickering lovers” model. (What tended to get lost in the shuffle was that Harry and Hermione also bicker, especially in *Phoenix*, and Ron and Hermione are also friends.) Each side accused the other of being clichéd. Ron/Hermione canon shippers questioned the reading skills of the Harry/Hermione faction; the Harry/Hermione canon shippers insisted that what *appeared* to be Ron/Hermione moments in the text were merely red herrings intended to lead astray naïve and ignorant readers (i.e., Ron/Hermione shippers). As noted in Chapter 1, the debate among the

²⁰ My personal favorite is H.M.S. Beelzeblubber (Voldemort/Mr. Dursley). As a ship name, not an actual pairing.

²¹ Occasionally, a slash ship will make its way into a major canon shipping war: in the fandom for the television series *House M.D.*, the major rivalry is between House/Wilson (a slash ship) and House/Cameron (a het ship).

²² Those two ships combined are often referred to as “OBHWF”: One Big Happy Weasley Family.

²³ The usual proposed solution to the ship war was H.M.S. Menage a Trio: Harry/Ron/Hermione.

canon shippers had become so bitter that not even canon resolution, and confirmation from Rowling herself, ended it – indeed, *Prince*, and an interview Rowling gave afterwards, only made it worse. In this interview – with two fans, Melissa Anelli, who runs *The Leaky Cauldron*²⁴ and Emerson Spartz, who runs *Mugglenet*²⁵ -- Rowling confirmed that not only were the romantic pairings Ron/Hermione and Harry/Ginny, but that they had always been so:

ES: We thought it was clearer than ever that Harry and Ginny are an item and Ron and Hermione — although we think you made it painfully obvious in the first five books —

JKR: [points to herself and whispers] So do I!

ES: What was that?

JKR: [More loudly] Well so do I! So do I!

ES: Harry/Hermione shippers - delusional!

JKR: Well no, I'm not going to - Emerson, I am not going to say they're delusional! They are still valued members of my readership! I am not going to use the word delusional. I am however, going to say... I will say, that yes, I personally feel - well it's going to be clear once people have read book six. I mean, that's it. It's done, isn't it? We know. Yes, we do now know that it's Ron and Hermione. I do feel that I have dropped heavy... hints. ANVIL-sized, actually, hints, prior to this point. (Anelli and Spartz "Part 2")

While most Harry/Hermione shippers took the canon sinking of H.M.S. Pumpkin Pie in stride – many pointing out that non-canonicity certainly hasn't stopped other ships from thriving in fanfic – a few, already disappointed by the events of *Prince*, were incensed at what they perceived as Rowling making fun of them, and proceeded to say so; this faction became known as the "Harmonians" (or, less charitably, "Harmoanians"). Add to this that some Ron/Hermione shippers were gloating in an unseemly fashion, and one has a recipe for a fandom explosion.

²⁴ <<http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org/>> Accessed July 23, 2007.

²⁵ <<http://www.mugglenet.com/>> Accessed July 23, 2007.

The true victors in the shipping war turned out to be the battlefield scavengers of Fandom Wank, who derived countless hours of entertainment from the entire situation.²⁶

Given this intense focus on romantic pairings in fandom, how do the genres of romance and pornography play out in fanfiction?

Responding to Romance

While fandom in the broad sense contains both male and female members, the majority of participatory fans -- writers and readers of fanfiction -- are women. Internet fandoms, including Harry Potter, are primarily female spaces. Much fandom scholarship discusses fandom as, therefore, a liberatory space for women, where they can engage with discourses of romance and pornography; as Catherine Driscoll notes, this has led to a perhaps disproportionate focus, by academics, upon that fanfiction deemed the most “subversive” – slash and pornography – while ignoring the elements of conventional generic heterosexual romance, as that is “the traditional terrain on which women write” (Driscoll 82), and likewise ignores scholarship of genre romance, which focuses upon readers’ agency and responses (such as Radway and Modleski).²⁷ Unsurprisingly in fiction that overwhelmingly deals with romantic themes, tropes from genre romance abound in fanfic. Driscoll argues that “the most consistent conventions of fan fiction remain that of formulaic romance,” which are as follows:

The conventions of romance encourage stories in which heroines are insufficiently aware of the world around them to negotiate it effectively, so that the story might trace their

²⁶ The post-*Prince* shipping wank, which continues to this day, turned out to be so enormous that Fandom Wank, in fear of drowning, created an offshoot community devoted solely to Harmonian wank: HP Cornfield. The community name refers to the classic *Twilight Zone* episode “It’s a Good Life,” expressing the desire of weary Wankas to wish all the competing factions “to the goddamn cornfield.” (HP Cornfield. Created March 18, 2006. Accessed March 3, 2007. JF.)

²⁷ Juffer likewise critiques the academic focus upon pornography that appears the most “transgressive”: “celebrating pornography’s transgressiveness may lead to a certain dictation of appropriate desires....valorizing the act of reading certain (transgressive) texts potentially hierarchizes desire in a manner that might actually inhibit its expression and could play into a conservative politics of correct and incorrect sexual expression.” (20)

education. Heroes are obviously flawed, although those flaws conceal more valuable virtues; and the romance narrative culminates in heterosexual fulfillment. (84)

While her point is well-taken,²⁸ I question the application of this formula to fanfic as a whole. A great many fics do follow this plot to the letter, but in my experience, the incidence of the application of the formula in fanfic varies a great deal according to pairing. For example, Driscoll's formula is extremely common in Snape/Hermione, Draco/Hermione, and pre-*Phoenix* Harry/Ginny fanfic; however, while still common, it's not *quite* as consistently found in the most popular Potter het ships of Harry/Hermione, Ron/Hermione and post-*Phoenix* Harry/Ginny – especially since, up until *Prince*, Hermione was, and Ginny still is, canonically more romantically experienced than either of the boys. One finds a similar situation when one considers what scholar and romance novelist Jennifer Crusie Smith names as the overriding theme of genre romance -- belief in “an emotionally just universe” (56), where good people are rewarded with love – to be common, but not universal, in romantic fanfic, both het and slash. The presence or absence of this theme as an organizing principle depends on the characters, the pairing, the author, and the story. For example, post-*Phoenix* Remus/Sirius fanfiction can never fit unproblematically within the discourse of the genre romance, since their relationship ends on a tragic note with Sirius’s needless and preventable death – in the face of that, it is difficult to construct a believable narrative of an “emotionally just universe.”

A number of the better-known Potter fanfics invoke well-known genre romance tropes in order to complicate or subvert them. Lori Summers’ *Paradigm of Uncertainty*²⁹ is probably the most famous Harry/Hermione story; while it is, unabashedly, an adventure-romance of the type common in contemporary genre romance, there are some significant differences. The most

²⁸ See Kaler and Johnson-Kurek for more in-depth discussion of genre romance conventions.

²⁹ Lori Summers. July 14, 2001 (in circulation before this). Accessed March 3, 2007. FA.

important element of *PoU* that distinguishes it from a great deal of genre romance is that Harry and Hermione's romantic relationship develops *very* gradually – the story takes place long after their graduation from Hogwarts, and they spend years as happily platonic friends before falling in love. *PoU*, as fanfiction, has access to the backstory of Harry and Hermione's relationship from canon, and is able to build a romantic narrative upon a different foundation than that of genre romance, which must spend time constructing the hero, heroine, and their romantic relationship from scratch.

Maya's "Flame and Shadow"³⁰ plays more explicitly, and ironically, with romance tropes – not simply those of genre romance, but of societal expectations about the proper way a romance should happen, and, moreover, expectations about to *whom* those romantic stories should happen. Ron, having been dumped by Hermione, has a drunken one-night stand with Pansy Parkinson, Draco's ex-girlfriend. In the morning, Ron is horrified at his own behavior, and he lashes out at Pansy:

"What kind of girl drinks and takes drugs and–"

"Oh no you don't, Weasley. You absolutely do not get to have a one-night stand with me and then lecture me on my morals."

"I DON'T have one-night stands!" Ron yelled indignantly.

Pansy gave him a long look, and then rolled her eyes.

Ron clutched his bedsheet to him as if it was his maiden virtue.

Ron decides that if they go out on a date, he will be absolved of having a one-night stand. Pansy is bemused, but she agrees to go out with him. Despite finding each other supremely irritating, they eventually fall in love, much to the consternation of their respective exes, who thoroughly disapprove. Pansy is promiscuous and unashamed of it, and her sexual confidence both shocks

³⁰ Maya. Before June 2003. Accessed March 1, 2007. AS.

and attracts the less-experienced Ron, whose relationship with Hermione was quite sexually repressed; this is a direct contradiction of the genre romance formula identified by Driscoll. Their relationship is one initially borne out of convenience; while a number of genre romances start out this way, Maya dwells on Ron and Pansy's frustration and loneliness -- both feel inadequate and desperately ordinary in comparison to their friends, and especially to the partners who have left them:

"Potter got what he wanted, did he?" Pansy asked. "And I'm sure he trampled on people to get it. These, these spectacular people with their bravery or their brains, they get their shining reward, and some of us don't seem to be born for it and there's nothing we can do and they - they just turn away."

Neither of them feel like the special people, the people who always seem to have love just fall into their laps – for example, the heroes and heroines of romance novels, who, as denizens of an emotionally just universe, are described as extraordinary in some way that seems to make them more deserving of love – extraordinary love -- than ordinary schlubs. Throughout the story, Ron keeps evaluating his ideas about how romance is supposed to go, and how girlfriends are supposed to behave; in the end, he tosses all of those expectations out the window to be with Pansy, who is the right person for him:

The house was never going to be clean and he hated all her friends and he understood her, he got it, and people like Hermione or Malfoy had been smart and had left people they loved and had gone searching and were still searching and he'd just stumbled on it and he was incredibly, incredibly lucky.

The Internet is for (Fandom) Porn

Romance is inextricably bound up with sexuality, and while romance and pornography (the explicit representation of sexuality) have traditionally been posited as oppositional – romance as a “female” discourse, and pornography as a “male” discourse,³¹ with “erotica” as the socially-

³¹ Driscoll 83.

acceptable term for “artistic,” or “female-oriented” porn -- the two genres are not separable.

Driscoll rightly points out that the two genres often work in conjunction, particularly within the realm of fanfiction; fanfiction is not bound by publishers’ marketing of genre, and thus fan writers are free to blend the discourses in any way they see fit.

Fans have largely bypassed use of the term “erotica” and have cheerfully claimed “porn” (sometimes jokingly spelled “pr0n”) as a descriptor for their sexually explicit writing. Despite the arguments of second-wave anti-porn feminists, women have a long history of involvement with porn, and not only as objects of the male gaze, but as producers, consumers, and distributors of pornographic material (see Peakman 35-9, Hunt, and Juffer). Women’s consumption of and contributions to pornography have primarily been in the realm of written, rather than visual, porn; Jane Juffer convincingly argues that “[w]omen don’t have a greater biological attraction to print than visual materials... but rather a greater access to the means of production and consumption” (5). Fanfiction neutralizes some of the battle lines in the feminist debate about pornography: it is primarily produced by women, for women³², and in the case of Potter fanfiction, centers around characters created by a female author. Much of the scholarship concerning pornography has, with notable exceptions, tended to focus upon material aimed at heterosexual males (Kipnis, Williams, Hunt, Kendrick); fanfiction provides an excellent space to “map the remarkable decentering effects of proliferating sexual representation” (Williams “Second Thoughts” 56).

While not all fanfiction is pornographic, fanfiction as a category shares with pornography as a category a potential for seditious critique of existing power structures. Julie Peakman, Lynn

³² Witness Russ’s statement that slash is “pornography by women, for women, with love”; while it is usually slash that is articulated as such, I believe that the statement holds true for romantic fanfiction as a whole. See Chapter 4 for more details of the scholarship surrounding slash.

Hunt's collection, Laura Kipnis (especially in "Reading *Hustler*"), Walter Kendrick, Linda Williams, and Constance Penley ("Crackers") have all discussed the history of pornographic discourse as sometimes serving as a form of political challenge and mockery, of targets both specific (prominent politicians, aristocrats, clergymen) and general (bourgeois mores, and class structure in general). Penley, citing Cindy Patton, also articulates porn's mockery of mainstream film and television through the production of parodic knockoffs (*Edward Penishands, The Sperminator, The Da Vinci Load*) – these knockoffs represent the explicit sexuality that "Hollywood or television is unwilling to show" ("Crackers" 328); these porn parodies, with their insistent filling of spaces within the texts, are not unrelated to fanfiction in that regard. Fanfiction doesn't have as consistent a discourse of explicit politics or parody, but the collective impact of fanfiction does, as was discussed in Chapter 1, pose a challenge to bourgeois cultural notions of the primacy of the original author, and "rational" disengagement with "worthy" texts.

With regard to the "worthiness" of texts (fanfictional and otherwise), and with Juffer's cautions against essentializing in mind, it is worth noting that fanfictional pornography differs from non-fannish pornography – especially male-oriented pornography -- in one crucial respect: its focus upon character, which is, to put it mildly, not a concern of non-fannish porn (Driscoll 91). Even the most shameless Tab-A-into-Slot-B PWP ("Plot? What Plot?") fanfic is dealing in specific, named characters with histories and personalities. Fanfiction's primary appeal is that of a further experience with a favorite text, including specific characters – this is true whether the fanfic is pornographic, romantic, or contains no romance whatsoever. As Driscoll puts it, "That fan fiction includes the only form of pornography mainly produced and consumed by women is important more for what it says about the gendering of pornography than for any question of motivation or effect" (91). This concern for the aesthetic issue of characterization, absent from

so much of what is usually considered “pornography,” would seem to pull fanfiction – like *Lost Girls* -- into the realm of what Lynda Nead calls erotic art “above the pulp-line” (146): that is, sexual representation that is contained by aesthetic claims, which thus invokes a discourse of “disinterested” (147) contemplation to counteract the potentially arousing acts being described. However, Moore and Gebbie are deliberately trying to collapse the usual boundaries between Nead’s articulation of erotic art and “pornography”; both author and artist are insistent that their work is intended to fulfill the pornographic function of sexual arousal -- and moreover, the potential sexual arousal of the reader is not in opposition to intellectual and aesthetic enjoyment, but is a central part of the reader’s experience with the text. While individual fanfic writers may or may not conceive of or articulate their work in the same way Moore and Gebbie do, it is worth noting that the pleasures of pornographic fanfic extend beyond simple sexual arousal, as they provide readers with further experience of the source text’s characters and world.

Fanfictional narratives often combine elements of romance and pornography, with graphic sex scenes anchoring an extended romance plot, or with romance giving a pornographic scene narrative momentum (Driscoll 91). While it is worth noting that none of these combinations are exclusive to fanfiction – genre romance, especially more overtly “erotic” texts such as Harlequin’s “Blaze” line, certainly does so – fanfiction, due to its unofficial status, is free to mix, match, expand upon, elide, or subvert generic conventions in whatever manner authors may wish, without being constrained by the conventions of the publishing industry. Often, the author’s categorization of the “mood” of the story – such as “fluff,” “humor,” “angst,” or “darkfic” – carries as much weight in its classification as the presence or absence of graphic sex. Witness, for example, Fiction Alley’s division of its archive into sections devoted to humorous fic (“Riddikulus”) and angst/darkfic (“The Dark Arts”); while “The Astronomy Tower” is

specifically marked as a site for romance fics,³³ romantic and sexually explicit narratives can be found in all categories.

A terrific example of the ways in which fan writers play with not only the categories of romance and pornography, but also fannish categories such as fluff and angst, can be found in V's "True But Not Nice."³⁴ The story features Marcus Flint and Oliver Wood,³⁵ and Marcus wants to make very clear that, whatever gossip has been floating around, he definitely does *not* like Oliver. So, after threatening violence upon those responsible for the gossip, he hunts down Oliver to tell him so. This, of course, ends in sex in an abandoned classroom, Marcus insisting all the while that he hates Oliver, really he does:

It turned out that Oliver didn't get the point anyway, because when Marcus pulled his mouth away, his breathing was quietly erratic, and he hissed in Oliver's ear, "It's not fucking true, I hate you." And Oliver didn't get it when Marcus pressed the heel of his hand hard against Oliver's waist and pushed, pushed so Oliver had to reach for a table behind him before he lost his balance, and still didn't get it when Marcus kissed him again, hard enough to bruise, because mixed signals *what?*

The story is a romance but a cockeyed, anti-romantic one – Marcus and Oliver's desire, and, at the end, their budding regard for one another, is, as the title says, "true but not nice." V, who was 16 when she began writing Potter fic, has a terrific ear for hilariously profane teenage dialogue, especially when it comes to the vague rumor-mongering that kicks off the story. Marcus and Oliver are incoherent, rather stupid adolescent boys, and while their inability to

³³ A reference to the popularity of the Astronomy Tower as *the* location at Hogwarts for romantic encounters in fanfic.

³⁴ "True But Not Nice." November 18, 2002. Accessed March 3, 2007. AS.

³⁵ Marcus/Oliver, which pairs the Slytherin and Gryffindor Quidditch captains, became a popular ship after the release of the film version of *Stone*. The pairing has been characterized as Harry/Draco light: it contains some of the same tensions as Harry/Draco, but without all the canon and fanon baggage to contend with. Another appealing element of the pairing is its potential for goofiness, as neither Oliver nor Marcus are, in fanon, overly bright; also, while movie-Oliver (Sean Biggerstaff in *Stone* and *Chamber*) is exceptionally handsome, Marcus is described as trollish (*Stone* 185), and movie-Marcus (Jamie Yeates) was fitted with hideous teeth for the role. Many stories treat the pairing as a skewed Beauty and the Beast.

express themselves provides much of the humor of the story, it also causes them genuine frustration and anxiety, and V never condescends to them. She reverses the usual momentum of both romance and pornography, placing the longest and most explicit sex scene first; the other two scenes are shorter and less elaborate, but incrementally more tender. While she invokes a number of pornographic tropes (two teenage boys manage to have earth-shattering, lube-free anal sex their first time with one another), V, like other gifted fan writers of erotic material such as Calico and Aspen, uses her characters' experiences of the sex act as a way of articulating their personalities and relationship to each other. “True But Not Nice” doesn’t fit easily into the common fannish categories of fluff, angst, humor, or darkfic, though it partakes of all of them. The story is charming and hopeful, but not at all sweet or fluffy; it’s very funny, but there’s too much of an undercurrent of rage (on Marcus’s part) and anxiety (on Oliver’s) for it to fit unequivocally into that category.

Another category of fannish classification of stories are so-called “kinks”: while “kink-fic” refers to a story that contains “extreme or unusual sexual acts” (Browne), such as incest, non-consensual sex, bestiality, and so forth³⁶ -- reflecting pornography’s tendency toward specialization -- “kink” is often used more generally to refer to an especial preference for a specific motif or narrative (i.e., sibling incest, Draco in leather pants, marriage and babies); a “bulletproof kink” is a preference so strong that you will put up with terrible writing if the story is satisfying your kink. The opposite of a “kink” is a “squick,” which can be defined as “a reaction of active repulsion,”³⁷ and, more cheekily, “somebody else’s kink.”³⁸ As Executrix

³⁶ Browne remarks that Potter “is a notoriously kink-friendly fandom, both in the attitudes of the fans and, not coincidentally, in the ease with which the canon accommodates kink: there is virtually no fetish, however strange, that cannot be made to fit naturally into the Potterverse.”

³⁷ Idlerat. November 15, 2003. Accessed February 20, 2007. LJ.

³⁸ Ellen Fremedon. Comment on Idlerat’s LJ. November 15, 2003. Accessed February 20, 2007. LJ.

remarked, “I like the concept of ‘squick’ very much because it requires us to distinguish between ‘this bothers me’ and ‘you shouldn’t have written this, only a terrible person would write/enjoy this.’”³⁹ This language of “kinks” and “squicks,” as Executrix says, enables fans to discuss fanfictional preferences, including erotic turn-ons and turn-offs, in a non-judgmental manner.

Elaborating upon the concepts of kinks and squicks, and the way kink functions from the perspectives of readers who may or may not share a particular writer’s kinks, Idlerat asked,

I wonder how our perception of other people's reactions influences our own. For instance, is it squickier to know that something upsetting... turns someone (you like) on? Does it matter if you feel like the fic is trying hard to turn *you* on?⁴⁰

Ellen Fremedon responds with a thoughtful distinction:

Frequently, stories that play to a particular kink are really only intended for an audience that shares that kink.... Basically, I have different standards for kinkfic and for fic containing kink. It really boils down to where the arousal is located in the story-- in other words, is the situation getting the characters hot, or getting the author hot?... I've found things extremely arousing that would squick me horribly in [real life] or in less skillful fic, just because the characterization was good enough for the characters' arousal to bleed through vicariously.⁴¹

Ellen Fremedon’s allowance for a porny fanfic’s aesthetic qualities to override its functions as a sexual turn-on is not at all uncommon; Weasleycest narratives initially became popular outside of those with an incest kink for this very reason (see Chapter 5) – readers are swept along by the momentum of the stories.

On the topic of being swept along by the momentum of a piece, despite a lack of kink or even the presence of a squick for the issue being explored, in the next chapter, I shall move from the broader generic discourses of romance and pornography to a consideration of one of the most polarizing characters in the Potter fandom: Draco Malfoy. Draco is the locus of an enormous

³⁹ Executrix. Comment on Idlerat’s LJ. November 15, 2003. Accessed February 20, 2007. LJ.

⁴⁰ Idlerat. Ibid.

⁴¹ Ellen Fremedon. Ibid.

amount of fannish desire, and he is commonly portrayed in fanfiction as the Slytherin Sex God. This erotically-charged image of Draco helped, in large part, to drive the development of the “mainstream” segments of the Potter fandom in the years between the release of *Goblet* and *Phoenix*. However, I, as a fan, am completely turned off by Draco, and will use my fannish dislike as an entry into a discussion of the negotiation of canon, fanon, and character love and hate in the Potter fandom.

CHAPTER 3

MUCKING ABOUT WITH MALFOY: THE TRANSFORMATION OF DRACO

"I'm sure Draco wouldn't hurt a dumb animal," Ginny said at last, after a whispered conference on whether Neville Longbottom counted.

-- Maya, *Draco Malfoy, The Amazing Bouncing... Rat?*¹

FF.N lists 284,339 Harry Potter stories in its archive², of which 51,090 feature Draco Malfoy as the chief character – only Harry and Hermione feature in more stories, and all the other characters lag far behind. According to FF.N's search engine, Draco is most often paired with Hermione (17,595), Harry (16,482), and Ginny (8730). In comparison, the most popular non-Draco ships are Harry/Hermione (11,114), Hermione/Ron (9613), Harry/Ginny (9418), Remus/Sirius (6332) and Harry/Snape (5428).

Draco is simultaneously the most swooned over and most fought-about character in the fandom; the sheer number of stories written about him attest to his enormous popularity. For a character that, up until *Prince*, was little more than a cardboard bully in canon, this would seem to be quite an achievement. And there, with that statement, I'm revealing my own bias: as a fan, I cannot *stand* Draco. So, why am I devoting an entire chapter to him?

Autoethnography: or, Virtue Has Nothing to Do With It

My initial rationale for this chapter was that it was my academic duty to report on Draco stories, as they are so historically important to the development of the fandom. I was just going to have to suppress my fannish side: that is, I would hold my nose, and attempt to present an “objective” documentation and analysis of these stories. What a good little scholar I am! So noble, so self-sacrificing... so self-serving. I was drawing a distinction between my fannish and my academic selves, and privileging the perceived “needs” of the academic world over my

¹ Chapter 11. Prior to 2003. Accessed July 30, 2007. AS.

² As of February 11, 2007.

“desires” as a fan: a triumph of rationality. Matt Hills argues, eloquently, that academics have set up a false dichotomy between “academics” and “fans,” and often privilege one (usually the academic) over the other (usually the fan). As frustrating as I find Hills’ book, for reasons detailed in the introduction, he has a point, and he calls for a more honest form of aca-fan autoethnography, that avoids the pitfalls of both the “pathologizing” and “romanticizing” positions.

Hills argues that “good autoethnography should attempt to be multivocal; it should not operate as a legitimization of the investments of the academic-fan self which are dressed up as theoretical ‘critique’” (80). Hellekson and Busse take Hills’ argument in a somewhat different direction:

[W]hereas Hills regards [autoethnography] as a “voluntary self-estrangement” (72) we think of it as more, rather than less, of an investment and as an awareness of our subject positions that creates a stronger, rather than weaker affect.... By remaining fan-scholars at the same time that we become scholar-fans, we hope to shift the concerns from dichotomy of academic and fannish identity to subject positions that are multiple and permit us to treat the academic and fannish parts as equally important. Our identities are neither separate nor separable. (“Introduction” 24)

Hellekson and Busse have “gather[ed] together fans who are already academics and academics who are already fans” (“Introduction” 24); while this approach makes sense in a volume of essays by multiple authors, which is multivocal by nature, I don’t believe that my subject position as both fan and academic is enough to sustain the arguments I wish to make about multivocality for the course of an entire dissertation, which is why I have chosen to follow the example of Jenkins, Jenkins and Green (“Normal Female Interest”) in incorporating extensive analyses and commentary from fans. However, I do wish to further explain that subject position, in terms of my own fannish and academic experience, as a way of shedding some light on my analyses of the Potter fandom. I touched upon my fannish interests as a means for shaping this dissertation as a whole in the introduction; here, I wish to go a bit deeper into those

interests, and how they have shaped my responses to specific fannish issues. In conjunction with Jensen's article on academics' self-serving distinction between themselves and fans, I realized that, because of my intense emotional response to Draco as a character and fannish icon, this chapter was an ideal space to really examine my own understanding of myself in the categories of "academic" and "fan."

The marker of a professional academic is the same as that of a participatory fan: sharing one's insights with an audience. In academia, the modes of transmission are quite formalized: publication of articles, teaching classes, presenting at professional conferences. Fandom can, and often does, incorporate these modes of transmission, particularly in the context of conventions or conferences, but fannish interactions are not limited to these formal spaces and discourses; fandom also embraces a wide variety of creative and informal discourses ranging from artistic creation to vicious flamewars to delighted squeezing to lustful ogling. The same fan (myself, for instance) can post an academic analysis of the Weasley twins' role in *Chamber* (and stick a variation of it into my dissertation), write a snippet of a George/Hermione fic, sigh over the growing attractiveness of the actors playing the twins in the films, and get into a near-flamewar over the relative Evil Bully-ness of the twins in comparison to Draco: all of these are part of the fannish purview, and fans happily accept discourses ranging from the most formal of academic tones to the most informal exclamations ("OMG DRACO IS SO HAWT"); there are a number of discrete spaces set aside for particular forms of fannish discourse (essay sites, shipping threads, fic communities), but they are all considered part of the general space of fandom. The movement within academia towards personal narrative – and autoethnography – has been a step from the other side towards broadening the parameters for acceptable academic discourse; while academia, as a professionalized space, will never have access to the sheer

breadth of discourses open within the anarchic spaces of fandom, treating “academia” and “fandom” as wholly separate spheres is a mistake, as there are far too many fans, including myself, who have experienced these categories as mutable and amorphously overlapping.

My occupation of the categories of “academic” and “fan” springs from the same impetus: an obsessive nature. I’m driven by a desire to not only learn as much as I can about a given subject, but also to participate, in any way, in the discourse of that subject. I didn’t want to be simply a passive consumer of my favorite books, so I discuss them, write about them, argue over them. I have passionate emotional responses to stories, and especially characters, and those responses drive both my fannish and my academic interests; if a text does not spark that passionate response, I will not pursue it either academically or fannishly. This need for a further experience drove me to seek out scholarship on my favorite texts, and while I found it deeply satisfying, I still hungered for even *more* ways to engage. Folklore, with its constant reiteration and revision of stories, was immensely appealing to me; my initial plan for my dissertation was a study of fairy tale retellings in young adult novels. The more fanfiction I read, the more I realized that fanfiction bore a striking resemblance, in terms of the artistic maneuvers being made, to those retold fairy tales I so enjoyed. Both tapped into my desire to see a known story or character from a multiplicity of angles, and to play with what readers, and characters, think they know when going into a story. Recursive fiction depends upon our familiarity with a text in order to create something new and strange, and it is this sense of the *uncanny* that I found deeply appealing, as a reader, writer, and scholar – one of the reasons I went into children’s literature was to look at the stories I had loved as a child with new eyes, and I was delighted with the strangeness I found.

This is why I find incest narratives, especially those about the Weasley twins, so fascinating -- the layers and layers that have to be peeled away to get at something true about a posited incestuous relationship: of folk and literary metanarratives about incest, about twins, about tricksters; of the literal *familiarity* of the beloved -- not just family, but one who looks *exactly* like you, down to your DNA strands, and the erotic charge that comes from being with someone who could be, and maybe should be, known territory, but who turns out to have twists of their very own. I also have, to put it in fannish terms, a major “best friends kink,” which to my mind is a game similar to incest stories, but played for lower stakes; my craving is for stories that hang in the balance between familiarity and newness, with sexuality being the final frontier. (This is why I’ve never been fond of ex-lovers-reuniting stories.) There is, most assuredly, an erotic charge to my enjoyment of fanfiction – I don’t like to read about characters that I don’t find sexually appealing. But this sense of eroticism is not isolated from my academic concerns, as is evidenced by my interest in the genres of pornography and romance, as well as gender and sexuality studies – fandom is simply a space where I can happily and easily meld erotic and intellectual enjoyment in a manner that appeals to my erotic and intellectual tastes.

So, this is what I love. Draco is another matter entirely. There is absolutely nothing I find appealing about the character, in canon or fanon. While I find Draco’s racism and snobbery disgusting and indefensible, I can’t pretend to have an overarching objection to reading about racist snobs, as I actively seek out stories about Tom Riddle, and have been known to enjoy stories about Draco’s father, Lucius.³ I cannot decide whether I find Draco irritatingly boring, or boringly irritating: if he were funny or clever, I’d be more inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt, as I do Snape (who is both intelligent and mordantly funny). I also have a major

³ After the release of promotional pictures of the film version of *Chamber*, featuring Jason Isaacs as Lucius, the incidence of fans mistyping “Lucius” as “Luscious” skyrocketed.

competence kink: that is, I find people who are very good at what they do, whatever that is, to be very appealing. In Draco's case, he isn't very good at being evil -- unlike Tom and Lucius who have a genuine talent for wreaking havoc and striking fear into hearts. Up until *Prince*, Draco is simply an arrogant, petty, spoiled little entitlement whore who failed pathetically in all his attempts to get one up on Harry and company. Some find that endearing; I do not. Plus, I don't much like blonds. Too, Draco isn't textually situated in a way that lends itself to the stories I like; I prefer sibling incest narratives to parent/child ones, and Draco's only close friends are Crabbe and Goyle, and those are love stories the gory details of which I'd prefer to remain unaware. (While I enjoy the battling-lovers scenario, I'd rather read Ron/Hermione – which also satisfies my best friend kink – than Draco/good guy any day.) Another element of my dislike has less to do with Draco himself than with my encounters with some of his defenders; not only do I have residual resentment from my first foray into Potter fandom ("Why are people wasting their time with this Draco crap? They *should* be writing stories that cater to *my* tastes!"), but I've weathered too many rounds of "the Weasley Twins are Evil Bullying Potential Death Eaters, but Draco is a Poor Misunderstood Suffering Angel," to have enormous reserves of patience when it comes to him, and the stories that adore him.

So, given my dislike, why is Draco occupying a space in this dissertation? Well, love him or loathe him, Draco is inescapable in the Potter fandom. He is a polarizing figure, and very few Potter fans are completely indifferent to him; frustration, annoyance, and character-bashing are as much a part of fandom as squeals of delight. Fans spend as much time dissecting things they dislike, about the canon, the fanon, and the fandom, as they spend celebrating the things they love: if this weren't so, Fandom Wank would not exist. While I do feel that I have a certain academic responsibility to discuss such a major fandom presence, I also feel that my dislike of

him is just as valid a fannish response as the adoration of his fans, and should be discussed as such.

Changing the Leopard's Spots

Fan culture has a long history of challenging and subverting the paradigms of the source text; Henry Jenkins names the two fannish moves that operate in stories that center around Draco:

Refocalization: While much of fan fiction still focuses on the series protagonists, some writers shift attention away from the programs' central figures and figures and onto secondary characters, often women and minorities, who receive limited screen time....

Moral Realignment: Perhaps the most extreme form of focalization, some fan stories invert or question the moral universe of the primary text, taking the villains and transforming them into the heroes of their own narratives. (*Poachers* 165-9)

Jenkins, discussing wider trends in general fanfiction, paints in broad strokes; a closer examination of the way Draco narratives function within the fandom reveal a far more complex system of interpretive and artistic strategies at work. Draco's power and influence as a character within fandom was wildly disproportionate to his pre-*Prince* importance in the books, for a variety of reasons. Of course, there are literary precedents for villain-rehabilitation: as Flashman, the bully from *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, is an obvious antecedent for Canon Draco, George Macdonald Fraser's *Flashman* series is an obvious forerunner of Fanon Draco, even if this character is rarely invoked explicitly in fanfiction.

Rowling herself seems bemused by Draco's popularity, and frequently mocks or dismisses sympathetic readings of the character during her interviews. When asked, in 2004, if Draco was only child, she replied, "Yes. You wouldn't want more Dracos, would you?!" ("World Book Day Chat"). And then, in the response that sent a good portion of the fandom into either screaming rages or raptures of delight, she informed us that

this is a really good place to answer a question about Draco and Hermione, which a certain Ms. Radcliffe is desperate to have answered. Will they end up together in book six/seven? NO! The trouble is, of course, that girls fancy Tom Felton [the actor playing Draco in the films], but Draco is NOT Tom Felton! (Ibid.)

After the release of *Prince*, Rowling elaborated further on her concerns about the fannish embrace of Draco:

People have been waxing lyrical [in letters] about Draco Malfoy, and I think that's the only time when it stopped amusing me and started almost worrying me. I'm trying to clearly distinguish between Tom Felton, who is a good looking young boy, and Draco, who, whatever he looks like, is not a nice man. It's a romantic, but unhealthy, and unfortunately all too common delusion of... girls, that they are going to change someone. And that persists through many women's lives, till their death bed, and it is uncomfortable and unhealthy and it actually worried me a little bit, to see young girls swearing undying devotion to this really imperfect character, because there must be an element in there, that "I'd be the one who [changes him]." I mean, I understand the psychology of it, but it is pretty unhealthy. So, a couple of times I have written back, possibly quite sharply, saying, "You want to rethink your priorities here." (Anelli and Spartz, "Part 2")

This being the Potter fandom, Rowling's comments, in both cases, unleashed a steady torrent of wank,⁴ with Draco-lovers and Draco-haters either sharpening knives or gloating. Many fans rightly pointed out that Draco was a popular character long before Tom Felton gave him an arguably cute face:

The fanon characterisation of Draco as misunderstood, secretly good, sexy etc. was alive and kicking long before [*Stone*] was released in cinemas. That fangirls find Tom Felton good-looking has contributed, but it's hardly a sufficient condition. I think it's a combination of the Bad Boy effect, old archetypes, the bias against him in the story, some shallowness and fandom interaction. Though we've drowned in fanfiction now, this wasn't always the case. There were a few fics that got the status of "almost canon," where Draco got the role of Sarcastic Anti-Hero, and it's an idea that has been bounced around a lot and there's been a lot of imitation.⁵

⁴ In the case of the second interview, however, Rowling's comments about the pairings of Harry/Hermione and Ron/Hermione received far more attention from fans; see Chapter 3 for details.

⁵ Alshain. "W.Y.S.I.W.Y.G., AKA Can't Stand Fanon!Draco Malfoy." Fiction Alley Park Thread. September 29, 2004. Accessed February 14, 2007. FA.

This assertion is borne out by the existence of a number of pre-*Goblet* Draco stories, as well as the fact that early chapters of the influential multi-chapter Draco epics, including Cassandra Claire's *Draco Trilogy* (*Draco Dormiens*, *Draco Sinister*, *Draco Veritas*), Aja's *Love Under Will* and Rhysenn's *Irresistible Poison* were floating around before the release of the film version of *Stone* in November 2001. Several fans were offended at Rowling's apparently cavalier treatment of their favorite character, her perceived amusement/exasperation at their expense, and her speculation upon the source of their Draco-affection. Others take the offended Draco-lovers to task, pointing out that "Her purpose of being a writer is to write what she wants, not what we want."⁶

Fandom Wank has the last word, as usual:

Isntitironic: If I ever have a fandom that writes the kind of crap I see infesting [Potter fandom], I'll be a bitch to my fans, too.

Cleolinda: Seriously. And I don't even care who ships what. I dream of a future where I will pop up randomly on message boards and terrify netspeaking teenies like the Voice of God: "NOW SPELL YOUR FICS CORRECTLY OR YOUR FAVORITE CHARACTER DIES!"⁷

What Is This Fanon Draco, And From Where Did He Beam Down?

Draco Malfoy is the most controversial character in the Harry Potter canon. The questions underlying not only J.K. Rowling's treatment of him in the books, but our reception of him, have been the subject of constant disagreement throughout the fandom for the past five years. Is he a sympathetic character? Is he Hitler youth? Is he meant to provide a very crucial lesson to Harry about tolerance, prejudice, and inter-house unity? Is he filler, a comical stock bully? Is he nuanced or cardboard, or both at once? What the heck is up with his status as widespread fandom idol, a reading of his character which Rowling herself has openly and frequently rejected?⁸

⁶ Author By Night. . "W.Y.S.I.W.Y.G." Fiction Alley Park Thread. March 5, 2004. Accessed February 14, 2007. FA.

⁷ Comments on Fandom Wank. March 7, 2004. Accessed February 13, 2007. JF.

⁸ Aja. "Defining Draco Malfoy." November 28, 2004. Accessed July 23, 2007. AS.

In canon, Draco Malfoy is an unprepossessing character who is revealed to be even more unpleasant than he initially seemed: he is a coward, a racist, a horrible snob, a bully; he toadies, he tattles, he threatens everyone with the wrath of his father. He whines, he gloats at the prospect of torture being inflicted upon others, he taunts those with less money or material possessions than himself. In the first books, he is a major irritant to Harry and his friends, but by *Phoenix*, he had faded into the background and barely registered on Harry's radar, having been trumped by the far greater threat of a newly corporeal Voldemort, though his function as a connection to his powerful and sinister family -- especially his father, Lucius Malfoy, Voldemort's right-hand man -- ensured his continued presence in the books. However, *Prince* gave Draco fans just about everything they were hoping for: a complex, desperate, openly vulnerable Draco, motivated by the need to protect his family, who is shown weeping in the bathroom (521-2), and, in the climactic scene, to be incapable of directly committing murder (592-6). Moreover, Harry/Draco shippers – a ship to which many, if not all, Draco fans profess allegiance – were ecstatic at Harry's requital of Draco's previously one-sided obsession. Fans are still absorbing the impact of this sea-change in Draco's importance, and a number of the old Draco-fan/non-Draco-fan lines in the sand are being reassessed. One of the chief points of contention – Draco's overall importance in the series – has been answered by Rowling, and this has robbed Draco discussions of much of their previous heat, but that history of disagreement is important; I have therefore chosen to concentrate more on pre-*Prince* discussions of Draco, as it's difficult to unravel the post-*Prince* discourse without the historical background of Draco arguments within the fandom.

Like Voldemort, Draco combines, in Vladimir Propp's terminology, the roles of villain and donor⁹: Voldemort has unwittingly passed some of his powers along to Harry – how much, and of what nature these power are, is a major source of angst for Harry -- but Draco's villainy, and accidental giving, is usually just annoying and ridiculous. In *Stone*, Draco goads Harry into displaying his skills on a broomstick, thus leading to Harry's installation on the Gryffindor Quidditch team. During *Chamber*, he unwittingly imparts valuable information about the beast stalking the school to a disguised Harry and Ron. In *Azkaban*, Draco, attempting to get a hippogriff executed, inadvertently provides the means for Sirius Black's escape. In *Phoenix*, he writes the mocking lyrics to "Weasley is our King," intended to rattle Ron on the Quidditch field; the song ends up as the Gryffindor victory cheer when Ron overcomes his stage fright. He earns Hermione the admiration of Harry and Ron when she slaps him (*Azkaban*); he is caught out talking to Rita Skeeter, thus enabling Hermione to discern Rita's Animagus form (a beetle) and neutralize her (*Goblet*); he is beaten to a pulp by George and Harry, transfigured into a ferret and then bounced across a stone floor, stupefied, turned into a giant slug, and mauled by a hippogriff. All in all, he cuts a rather pathetic figure. Draco's actions drive the plot of *Prince*, but all his attempts to murder Dumbledore go awry, and Harry, the only person convinced of Draco's responsibility, is unable to convince anyone else of it. As Aja, one of the most dedicated and eloquent Draco-defenders in the fandom, puts it:

Unlike Harry, Draco's biggest moments in the books are all defined by a lack of action; in fact, his entire modus operandi throughout the books can be summed up as a series of passive-aggressive actions against Harry and Harry's friends. All of these attempts fail miserably and often work for Harry rather than against him. When he does try to stand on

⁹ A not uncommon combination, such as the witch in a fairy tale from whom the hero steals a magical agent (Propp 81).

his own, he fails horribly and embarrassingly.... Indeed, the moral surrounding all of Draco's actions thus far seems to be that karma is a bitch, and bullies will be punished.¹⁰

Given all this – which is, indeed, the source of much of my dislike for the character -- why Draco's intense pre-*Prince* popularity? Elkins, in a famous and extremely influential essay, argues not only that “Draco Malfoy is Ever So Lame,” but that his “lameness” is the reason for his devoted fan following.

I do feel that Draco has been written in such a way as to encourage a good amount of reader sympathy, something that cannot be said for any of the series' other villain characters.... For one thing, she never lets Draco win. Never. Not ever.... [W]hat few successes he has are both short-lived and do no permanent harm, while his failures are often overwhelming.... Of course, Draco Malfoy is not designated "Underdog" by the text itself. The text itself defines him as a mass of privilege. But the *meta-text* -- the unspoken body of genre convention and literary trope that readers cannot help but hold in mind while they read a work of fiction -- designates him quite clearly as the Underdog of the piece. As readers, we know perfectly well that Draco cannot win.... And yet, even though he's utterly trounced at the end of each book, there he is at the start of the next one, still plugging away at trying to make life difficult for Harry, even though he's not really very good at it and never manages to get away with it, in the end.... And you know, it's really hard not to sympathize with that.¹¹

This sympathy, in some quarters, led to Fanon Draco, a monstrous amalgamation of Oscar Wilde, Dread Pirate Westley, and Spike from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: beautiful, witty, tormented, louche, sarcastic, charming, aristocratic, secretly goodhearted, and above all, *sexy*. His arrogance and snobbery is recast as endearing charm, his bigotry is written off as naivete, and his canonical pale, ferret-like pointiness is reimagined as blond-bombshell sensuality – he is sometimes asserted to have Veela blood. Also, he weeps. A lot.

So how did Fanon Draco develop? First, it is necessary to lay out what is meant by fanon in more detail. Driscoll characterizes fanon as showing up in “naïve,” “unsophisticated,” and “immature” writing (88-90); however, she is invoking a narrow definition of fanon that is

¹⁰ Aja. “Defining Draco Malfoy.” November 28, 2004. Accessed July 23, 2007. AS.

¹¹ Elkins, “Draco Malfoy is Ever So Lame.”

somewhat at odds with the way the term is used in fandom in general. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, fanon is a portmanteau of “fan canon,” and Mafalda Stasi notes that “[f]anon is developed by the fan community as an integral part of the process of interpretation of original texts” (121). Especially in a fandom the size of Harry Potter, subgroups develop their own fanon, and a piece of fanon can be confined to a particular LJ community, a particular ship, the fanbase of a specific character, or extend fandom-wide.

Flourish, in Fiction Alley’s glossary of fannish terms, defines fanon thus:

Concepts, ideas or beliefs about the series that have never been explicitly told to us by Rowling, but have become so commonly used in the fandom that they are taken as fact. For instance, before J.K. Rowling stated in a chat that Lily was in Gryffindor, fanon often placed her into Slytherin.¹²

Notice that this definition refers to relatively simple factual gap-filling. This is one form of fanon, and while fans may disagree on the accuracy of a particular piece of fanon, most don’t see this as, as Browne puts it, “pernicious” – probably because this fanon is intended to function as a plausible reading of canon. Browne gives an excellent example of this type of fanon: “until [Phoenix] confirmed it, Snape’s being sent back to spy on the Death Eaters was a widely-accepted piece of fanon.” Contradictory readings can become fanon in different quarters; for example, at the present moment, there are at least two fanon answers to the question, “Is Harry a Horcrux?”

But what about that more “pernicious” form of fanon, such as what many fans claim is exemplified by Fanon Draco? This is what Driscoll is referring to when she calls fanon “a false image of canon, a wish-fulfillment fantasy” (88), and points out that a great deal of the fanon considered controversial within the fandom is based upon the stereotyped figures and plots of

¹² Flourish. “Fiction Alley: Dictionary of Terms.” 2001. June 27, 2007. <<http://www.lumosdissendium.org/dictionary.html>>

genre romance. She claims that this sort of fanon is “a fantasy based on the needs of individual writers” (88). However, this somewhat misses the point of fanon, as for something to become fanonical it has to be picked up by a number of fans, to the point where its origins may be obscured (Browne) – fanon is folk interpretation as practiced within the fandom. Fanon becomes controversial when it is perceived to stray too far from the realm of canonical interpretation, but is still being posited as such. It becomes especially controversial when a piece of “strays-too-far” fanon becomes popular enough to pose a challenge to more “closely-canonical” fanonical interpretation. For example, the trope of Abused Draco (see below) is usually held to be reasonably canon-supported fanon, but an Abused Draco with a heart of gold who secretly longs to join the side of Right and Good is often considered beyond the pale.

As might be clear by now, the “pernicious” form of fanon is often centered around the nuances of character interpretation; since responses to particular characters are individual and subjective, fanon characterization, more so than plot predictions or factual gap-filling, is an extremely reliable source of wank. This is especially true when the fanon is believed to originate within influential fanfiction, as opposed to, say, a theory about the canon itself¹³; it is one thing when the creative license taken by a fanfic writer is confined to her story, but another thing entirely when her creative innovations become so widespread as to drown out (or appear to drown out) more canon-supported fanon. (And of course, what counts as “canon-supported” is hardly a cut-and-dried issue – see Stasi, and Chapter 4, for details.) Dark, unpleasant, or villainous characters are very prone to garnering controversial fanon, if the literary process of rehabilitation – especially extreme rehabilitation -- is believed to be common enough to override, in the fandom, their canonical unpleasantness or villainy; this process is sometimes called

¹³ Of course, fanfiction often explores theories about the canon; the issue is when a fanfic author’s artistic innovation becomes popularized as a comment on canon, rather than a fun detail.

“woobification” (as in “Aw, I just want to cuddle the poor widdle woobie!” – see Browne).

Famous woobies include not just Draco, but Snape, Lex Luthor (especially in his *Smallville* incarnation), and Gregory House (*House M.D.*).¹⁴ (For some reason, Lucius and Tom are less prone to being woobified, perhaps because there is almost nothing potentially sympathetic about them for fans to grab on to, and the pleasure of villainy thus overrides the woobification impulse.) Woobification extends beyond sympathy into what can be considered a problematic smoothing away of rough edges, and a proclivity for placing them in schmoopy, happy-ending narratives in possible defiance of their trajectory in canon. Again, woobification, and characterization that strays beyond a certain point (whatever that is) of canon plausibility in general, doesn’t tend to become a point of contention until it reaches a degree of critical mass -- when the woobie version of a character starts to challenge the popularity of the canonically villainous form.

While I’ve been focusing on fanon that is intended, or looks as if it is intended, to serve as a reading of canon, it’s important to note that not all fanon functions this way; there are a number of fanonical tropes that began as jokes, or are cheerfully and deliberately uncanonical, such as the fanon that develops in ships that have little to no chance of becoming canon. In fact, many of the individual elements that make up Fanon Draco started out as jokes, especially in the Harry/Draco segment of fandom. In general, fanon that is not pretending to canonical accuracy doesn’t tend to become controversial, unless the group that produced it feels it becomes clichéd, or, as with Draco’s love of leather pants, becomes picked up by enough people to risk becoming a fandom-wide trope.

¹⁴ “Good” characters are also prone to woobification, if they are presented in canon as sympathetically angst-ridden and tormented: this class of woobie includes Remus, Sirius, Fox Mulder (*X-Files*) and Dean Winchester (*Supernatural*).

Rehabilitation and Redemptionistas

In a broad sense, there are two basic categories of Draco-narratives: stories where Draco is “redeemed,” and stories where he is not. By “redeemed,” I mean any story in which Draco, overtly or covertly, rejects whole or in part the agenda of Voldemort, the Death Eaters, and/or his father in favor of the anti-Voldemort position espoused by Harry, Dumbledore, and the other “good” characters; this redemption is a crucial feature of Fanon Draco. These Redeemed Draco stories can be further subdivided into rehabilitation narratives, where Draco starts out badly, but is cured of his wicked (or at least rude and/or bigoted) ways – usually through the love of Harry, Hermione, Ginny, or occasionally Ron -- and rescue narratives, where Draco is already in possession of a heart of gold and longs to escape the horrors of being a junior Death Eater -- most Abused Draco stories fall into this category, and will be discussed in Chapter 5. Of course, many stories contain both tropes – in the *Draco Trilogy*, Draco hates his father and all that he stands for, but must still reevaluate his class biases. Though there are a decent number of stories that portray Draco as unequivocally “evil” – many written as a result of overexposure to Redeemed Draco stories -- they are far outnumbered by fics that render the character sympathetic. Most of these narratives reaffirm the moral lines drawn in canon – Voldemort and company are Evil, and something that Draco must escape or be rescued from. And many of these stories, particularly those written pre-*Phoenix*, present the Good side as unquestionably the better option. Even those stories, like Kay Taylor’s “Surfacing,”¹⁵ that are suspicious of the rhetoric of the good guys still choose to align Draco with them, as it’s difficult to render characters that advocate racism and genocide wholly sympathetic. In addition, many narratives, especially humor and PWPs, present the Death Eaters as simply ridiculous or irrelevant and

¹⁵Kay Taylor. July 16, 2004. Accessed February 13, 2007. SK.

therefore Draco falls in with the good guys by default – Maya’s *Draco Malfoy, The Amazing Bouncing.. Rat?*, discussed below, is an extremely influential example.

However, Draco, much like Flashman, can be used as a medium for questioning those very moral lines; many argue that Rowling’s continued portrayal of him, and by extension, Slytherin House as a whole, as irredeemably bad in canon is itself morally suspect:

Look, none of the pro-Dumbledore, Side-Of-Good-And-Beauty types are suggesting for a moment that wizarding society and muggle society ought to be integrated. Death Eaters may regard Muggles as utterly inferior, but how is that considerably worse than the sort of patronising condescension we see from the rest of the wizarding world? Arthur Weasley thinks Muggles are amusing in the same way that many people find chimps' tea parties entertaining: a bit like us, but not really as good. Muggles are under-developed, not quite up to standard. It's perfectly acceptable for wizards to routinely Obliviate Muggles to avoid inconvenience or embarrassment: in what way does any of this demonstrate some kind of equality between wizard and Muggle?¹⁶

The Slytherins are evil. The Slytherins are the Junior Death Eaters. There are bullies in the other houses, but it's the Slytherin bullies who lack redeeming characteristics. The purpose of the Slytherins is to be cardboard cutout villains that the reader "should" hate without reservation. It's predictable and one-dimensional.

In the real world, lines between good and evil are never this cleanly cut. And it doesn't work in canon either - if Voldemort's army was comprised of naught save Slytherins, it would have to have been a pretty small army. Of course, people from other houses may have become Death Eaters, but the catch is, we don't hear about them.

And still, even if the majority of Death Eaters were Slytherins/the majority of Slytherins became Death Eaters, one would think that 'brilliant' and 'wise' wizards like Dumbledore would have spotted this trend and maybe, you know, done something to address why it was occurring in the first place.¹⁷

Fans espousing these positions were ecstatic when *Prince* confirmed many of their arguments, and have good reason to hope that *Hallows* will continue to give Draco, and Slytherins as a whole, more depth and complexity.

¹⁶ Ephemera. “What’s Wrong With a Non-Redeemed Draco?” Fiction Alley Park Thread. July 12, 2003. Accessed July 25, 2007. FA.

¹⁷ Htrismegistus. Comment on Fandom Wank. March 3, 2004. Accessed February 22, 2007. JF.

Poor, Abused Draco, or: Lucius, Instrument of Redemption

As mentioned earlier, one of the primary tropes of numerous Draco narratives is Draco's perceived abuse at the hands of his parents, almost always his father. Lucius Malfoy's first appearance in canon, arguing with Draco in Borgin and Burkes (*Chamber* 50-3), is the Scene That Launched a Thousand Beatings. One of the most common way of interpreting that scene, especially for lovers of Fanon Draco, is to read the scene as indicative of Lucius' coldness toward his son, which can be translated into emotional (or more likely in fic) physical abuse.

The actor Jason Isaacs, who plays Lucius in the Potter films, concurs:

"Lucius is a very dark character and a thoroughly unpleasant man," Isaacs notes. "He's the most confident person I've ever stepped inside and completely supreme in his arrogance and ruthlessness. He is pure evil." Lucius' relationship with his son Draco... is vital to the story, as well as the key to understanding why Draco is such an antagonistic bully. "Draco has a monstrous home life," says Isaacs. "Lucius bullies him, which makes Draco bully others. He's a chip off the old block."¹⁸

Given the close involvement Rowling has had with the films, it can be inferred that Isaacs's portrayal of Lucius as not simply a monster in general, but a monster to his son as well, is not out of the ballpark of possibility, as far as canon is concerned. And that is more than enough justification for fanfic writers, who can spin vast theories out of far more subtle hints. Tom Felton's comment, from the same piece, encapsulates both this reading and the other major reading of the Malfoys' relationship:

I always thought that theirs would be quite a loving relationship, since Lucius and Draco are both really mean people, but I think there's actually something quite scary going on between them... Draco always gets the rough end of the stick and is quite afraid of his father. (*Ibid.*)

Sister Magpie's nuanced reading of that scene concludes that Draco comes across as quite emotionally stunted, as a clear result of his treatment by his parents:

¹⁸ "Final Production Notes."

A lot of Draco's talk about his parents centers around their affection for him. In his first scene he's bragging he can bully his parents into buying him a broom, later we hear his mum sends him sweets and doesn't want him as far away as Durmstrang (stuff that again most kids would die before letting anyone know). His taunts to Harry center on the lack of such affection, not having a proper family, having to stay at school for Christmas. So I can't help but notice that whenever we see these people in canon they hardly mesh with the picture Draco's painted.... Lucius seems at best bored by and at worst disgusted by his son in that scene.... I honestly don't recall one positive thing Lucius says to Draco throughout. Draco himself, of course, is whining about Harry and spinelessly trying to place responsibility for his own failures on others, but that, to me, doesn't seem strange given the way Lucius seems to view him. I doubt there's any good way for Draco to admit to failure and do better--yet it also seems like a family rule that Lucius must be seen as perfect. With Lucius as his model of perfection how could one really expect him to make sense on this issue? ... By announcing Draco's incompetence to the shopkeeper, Lucius enlists his help in shaming his son.... That's certainly the way he treats him in the scene. Any openings for encouragement Draco gives him ("What good will it do if I don't make the team..?") are dismissed... and this is the guy who supposedly thinks it's a crime Draco isn't allowed to play first year? I don't think so.¹⁹

A great number of Draco stories take the coldness and tension Sister Magpie notes and spin it into a full-blown abuse narrative. Nearly always, the abuse functions as a spur to Draco's rejection of the dark side – rejection of Voldemort also is a rejection of his cruel father. The *Draco Trilogy* is the best-known Abused Draco fic, and as every aspect of that story inspired legions of imitators, it's unsurprising that a canonically plausible motivation for an eventual redemption of Draco, with built-in melodrama, sympathy and vast potential for hurt-comfort scenes, should be seized upon by writers. There is, in fact, a specific subgenre of Lucius/Draco stories in which Lucius' sexual abuse of his son is what pushes Draco into Harry's/Hermione's/Ginny's arms (see Chapter 5).

Fons et Origo: Cassandra Claire's Draco Trilogy

"Well," said Harry, "you know, we're kept pretty busy having Young Death Eater meetings, and then we spend a lot of time making loads of other students feel bad about their lack of money and social standing. Sometimes we stay up all night and try to raise

¹⁹ Sister Magpie. November 16, 2003. Accessed February 27, 2007. LJ.

demons to do our loathsome bidding, but most evenings we just order pizza and pull the wings off a few flies."²⁰

Cassandra Claire's *Draco Trilogy* (2000-2006) – consisting of *Draco Dormiens*, *Draco Sinister*, and *Draco Veritas* -- are easily the best-known and most influential stories in the Potter fandom. Her conception of Draco as a witty, languid, effete snarkmaster with a heart of gold and a wardrobe of leather pants became, for better or for worse, the chief representative of Fanon Draco.

The plot is immensely complicated, with a constant stream of characters coming together and breaking up, and rearranging themselves into couples and alliances. The story begins with a magical accident: Harry and Draco are partnered for a class experiment in Polyjuice Potion, a substance that transforms one's outward appearance into that of another. Harry and Draco, paired against their will, take on each other's appearances: "I was just thinking that I really am astonishingly handsome," said Draco in Harry's voice. "I could kiss myself. I mean, seriously, in this particular situation, I could kiss myself."²¹ But while all the other student pairs return to their proper forms at the end of class, Harry and Draco inexplicably remain trapped in each other's bodies. Draco-as-Harry provokes a fistfight, in which Harry-as-Draco is knocked cold and sent to the infirmary; when questioned, Draco-as-Harry decides to play along and pretend to be Harry. For a time, Draco has enormous fun reaping the benefits of Harry's fame, especially that of female attention:

"It's not a quiet life, being Harry Potter," Draco went on, warming to his subject. "I've got classes, plus Quidditch, plus interviews with the Daily Prophet, loads of good to do and

²⁰ Cassandra Claire. *Draco Dormiens*. Chapter 3. Available for download as of February 14, 2007. AS.

²¹ *Draco Dormiens*, Chapter 1.

evil to vanquish, plus I'm being hunted down by the remorseless killer who murdered my parents. I haven't got time to go barging around after girls."²²

Hermione, who has been carrying a torch for Harry, soon apprehends the situation, and sets out on a rescue mission, Draco-as-Harry in tow, to Malfoy Manor, where Harry-as-Draco has been taken following his Potions class injury. In the meantime, Harry-as-Draco is struggling to keep up the charade for Lucius and Narcissa, Draco's parents, and not entirely succeeding:

She [Narcissa] rushed out of the room and almost immediately rushed right back in again, bearing what looked like a length of green velvet. She handed it to him, and he saw that there were words picked out across the front in gold lettering:

PUNISHMENT LEADS TO FEAR. FEAR LEADS TO OBEDIENCE. OBEDIENCE LEADS TO FREEDOM. THEREFORE PUNISHMENT IS FREEDOM.

"Wow," said Harry in a lifeless voice. "It's lovely, Mum. I bet all the other kids will wish they had a blanket with a really horrible motto on it just like this one."²³

Hermione and Draco-as-Harry's rescue attempt coincides with Lucius Malfoy's plan to lure Harry to Malfoy Manor using Sirius Black as bait; complications ensue, not the least of which is Draco's growing attraction to Hermione, confused by the fact that he currently occupies Harry's body and has access to some of Harry's thoughts. With the help of Narcissa, who has been an unwilling pawn in her husband's political power games, and a last-minute appearance by Ron and the twins, Harry (now returned to his own body, as is Draco), Hermione, and Sirius are rescued from Malfoy Manor, along with Draco, who has been disinherited by his father for refusing to betray Harry and Hermione. Harry and Draco are then united as family with the marriage of Narcissa and Sirius, forcing them to remain in each other's constant company for the remainder of the series. The love triangle consisting of Harry, Hermione and Draco continues

²² *Draco Dormiens*, Chapter 2.

²³ *Draco Dormiens*, Chapter 3.

apace, with the additions of Ginny as another love-interest for Draco and a will-they-or-won't-they sexual tension between Draco and Harry, culminating in a kiss in *Draco Veritas*.

It's somewhat difficult to evaluate the *Trilogy* aesthetically, as so much of the plot and characterization have been absorbed into the fandom at large: the magical accident that forces Harry and Draco to spend time in each other's company and shoes (literally), Draco's abuse at the hands of his father as the spur to his rejection of Voldemort, Harry and Draco's discovery of their status as some form of super-wizards (here, called "magids"), and Draco as a paragon of wit and style (if not self-awareness) were not fandom clichés when the *Trilogy* was begun, but have been so widely imitated since that Cassandra Claire has been credited/blamed with the creation of Fanon Draco out of whole cloth – and that cloth is leather. Black leather. Draco dons a pair of black leather pants in *Draco Sinister*, and that detail, more than any other, has been seized upon by the fandom as a point of contention, as a symbol of all that is wrong or right with Fanon Draco.

Of those people who wrote that kind of Draco before or around the same time Cassandra Claire did, the most significant is Rhysenn, whose *Irresistible Poison* also had a wide impact upon the fandom. Here, Harry and Draco accidentally ingest a love potion and spend fifteen chapters sorting out their feelings for each other. Rhysenn is credited with creating one of the first seriously angsty Dracos, and *Irresistible Poison* remains an enjoyable read; in the wake of *Prince, Poison* looks positively prescient. While never quite as influential as the *Trilogy*, it nonetheless occupies an important spot in fandom history, not least because it established Harry/Draco as one of the premier Potter fandom ships.

Refinement: Maya's Draco Malfoy, The Amazing Bouncing... Rat?

"He who fights dirty survives, and gets to lie about the battles afterwards." It was a Malfoy motto, right after "Loot, Pillage, Burn!" and "In the Name of the Dark Lord Insert-Name-Here!"²⁴

Almost as influential as the *Draco Trilogy* is Maya's *Draco Malfoy, The Amazing Bouncing... Rat?*, which also features a magical accident (Draco is transformed into a rat) and eventual redemptive romance with one of the good guys (in this case, Hermione), but is far more of a pure romantic comedy – "a comedy of manners," as Aja calls it – than the dramatic adventures of the *Draco Trilogy*. This fic established Fanon Draco as a paragon of wit; Maya is one of the funniest writers in Potter fandom, and she milks an enormous amount of comedy out of Draco's situation. Draco is the victim of a villainous plot that results in his transformation into a fluffy white rat; no one witnesses this, and it is assumed that Draco has gone missing. However, he is scooped up and adopted by none other than Ron Weasley, who coos over him in a revolting manner and brings him back to live with the Gryffindors, where he quickly becomes the house pet, much to his chagrin. As a rat, he is unable to make himself heard or understood, no matter how loudly he shouts; however, his words are heard subconsciously by the humans around him, who mistake them for their own thoughts – some of the most hilarious scenes in the story come when Draco discovers this and exploits it for his own amusement ("Let me ravish you on the bed, my gorgeous redhaired raunch puppet"), and later, to help the Gryffindors sort out their tangled love lives, eventually settling Ron with Cho and Ginny with Harry (it's a running joke that "vixen" Ginny anticipates Draco's own innuendo-filled comments). Draco, living in close proximity with his hated enemies, grows to tolerate and then like them, while still retaining a healthy respect for Slytherin virtues of cunning. Eventually, Draco regains his human

²⁴ Maya, *Draco Malfoy, the Amazing Bouncing... Rat?* Chapter 2.

shape, unmasks the villain, retains his uneasy friendship with the Gryffindors, and declares his love for Hermione.

The beauty of *Rat* lies not so much in its innovation, but in its refinement of pre-existing tropes: Maya wasn't the first to write witty Draco, sexy Draco, a magical accident throwing Draco into the arms of his enemies, or Snape teaching sex ed, but her renditions of these motifs are among the best in the fandom; I believe, however, that she was among the earlier writers to posit Draco has Veela ancestry – a piece of fanon that became a joke when less accomplished writers got hold of it. Another influential feature of *Rat* is its conception of a gentle moral universe: Maya's Draco doesn't need redemption so much as a scenery change, and the Slytherins are far too busy with their entertaining sexual escapades to cook up evil schemes – indeed, the villain turns out to be Gryffindor Colin Creevey, and his unmasking is farcical rather than fearsome. The Death Eaters, mentioned only in passing, are silly and pathetic, and Draco's transformation is more of an inconvenience than a serious threat to his well-being.

Although all the pairings explicitly described within this story are heterosexual, Maya's engagement with slash themes – another famous story of hers is *Underwater Light*, a foundational Harry/Draco epic – have, as with the *Draco Trilogy*, contributed to its continuing popularity in the slash-heavy Draco fandom. In *Rat*, the slashy vibes are played more for comedy than romantic angst: Draco's return to human form is achieved, in true fairy tale fashion, via a kiss Ron places on top of rat-Draco's fuzzy head, which causes human-Draco to appear in Ron's bed, completely naked – to Seamus's everlasting trauma. Fanon Draco has always contained a heavy dose of camp, and Maya's is arguably the campiest of all, despite this story's heterosexual romance. This campy, ambiguously-oriented but universally-appealing

Draco is, even more so than the *Draco Trilogy*'s Draco, the gold standard of the fanon conception of the character.

Harry/Draco: Shipping Angst

I don't understand why the fact that Malfoy is staying consistently cardboard and consistently git-like should be suddenly some earth-shattering thing that has arrived to crush the hopes of H/D shippers everywhere. Because Malfoy hasn't changed. He's still the Malfoy all of you fell in love with. He is still the Draco who all of YOU transformed into some larger-than-life fandom badass with leather pants and a sexy-but-sweet interior. He is still the Draco all of us believed in and the Draco that we all hoped would be expanded and changed and brought forth into growth and maturity. So he hasn't been. So the fuck what?²⁵

Harry/Draco, as borne out by the statistics of FF.N, is one of the most popular ships in the fandom. Most of the best-known fics are Harry/Draco, especially among the novel-length stories that abound in the Potter fandom: Rhysenn's *Irresistible Poison*, Aja's *Love Under Will*, Maya's *Underwater Light*, not to mention the *Draco Trilogy*'s slashy subtext. Of course, enemies who become lovers is one of the time-honored romance tropes, and the delight is in watching antagonists overcoming their differences, or at least overcoming their differences long enough to have sex. Harry/Draco can even be approached in a semi-canonical way: Draco has a demonstrable obsession with Harry, and his enmity is predicated upon Harry's initial rejection of his friendship. Of course, even with this running start, the hurdle remains: why would Harry be romantically interested in someone who stands for everything he hates? *Prince* helped a great deal, by showing a Harry canonically obsessed with Draco. Prior to *Prince*, magical accidents, ala the *Draco Trilogy* abound: Harry and Draco have been Polyjuiced, love potioned, magnetized, and roped together as a means to facilitate romance. More mundane situations have also been pressed into play: school/army morale building, Harry having a psychological

²⁵ Aja. "OOTP, Harry/Draco, the Damnation of Slytherin, and the Right of Fans to Be Upset." June 25, 2003. Accessed March 4, 2007. AS.

breakdown, even hostage situations. Harry/Draco stories also sometimes come with a side of Ron-bashing: Ron, as Harry's best friend and Draco's most vocal critic, potentially poses a threat to Harry/Draco love. However, Harry/Draco could also coexist comfortably with the major het ship of Ron/Hermione, and a number of the more romantic Harry/Draco narratives ended with those happy couples.

Harry/Draco exploded in popularity in the three-year wait between *Goblet* and *Phoenix*, when the most popular Draco narratives were either overtly or covertly Harry/Draco, and the character of Fanon Draco truly solidified through constant reiteration. However, *Phoenix* was a major disappointment to Draco fans in general, and Harry/Draco fans in particular, and prompted a number of essays asserting the death (or continued life) of the ship. Aja summarizes the problems for shippers:

Frankly, OotP left us in a real bind--not an insurmountable bind, but a real, immediate hindrance to the ship.... In my mind OOTP left the H/D shipper with two primary questions: *how can Harry want Draco right now?* and *how can Draco forgive Harry for what he did to his father?*²⁶

Aja was frustrated with what she saw as Harry/Draco shippers' refusal to engage with these questions, either by leaping forward in time to a post-Hogwarts, post-war setting, or by ignoring the events of *Phoenix* altogether and writing from the "previously existing H/D dynamic--the one that was there before OOTP, where you had Harry and Draco playing out their lust/rivalry in a number of different ways" (*ibid.*). A number of Draco stories took, in keeping with the general trend of the rest of the fandom, a turn for the extremely dark; see Chapter 4 for details.

However, *Prince* breathed new life into the flagging ship, and Harry/Draco ship has regained its

²⁶ Aja. "H/D Fic, Post-OOTP, and How We Aren't Writing Any." October 4, 2004. Accessed March 4, 2007. AS.

position at the forefront of the fandom, although it now has to compete with the ever-more-popular Snape ships.

This consideration of Harry/Draco is a good place to begin discussion of the broader issue of homoerotic narratives in fandom, as Harry/Draco is arguably a major reason for slash fiction's popularity in the Potter fandom; while a number of experienced slash fans had migrated into Potter fandom, they tended to cluster in the Snape sections, and it was left to the Draco fans to ensure that slash would become the dominant narrative mode of Potter fanfic. In the next chapter, I will discuss the development of slash fiction in Potter fandom, with special attention paid to the role played by the Harry/Draco ship.

CHAPTER 4

SUBTEXT IN HIDING: POTTER SLASH FANFICTION

In a fannish landscape where one can, with minimal effort, find giant squid porn, house elf BDSM, and Weasley incest orgies, mere slash fanfiction starts to look positively *tame*. The bulk of the scholarship on slash has tended to treat the genre as if it were a bizarre, isolated subgenre; however, in the Potter fandom, slash is widely perceived as the dominant form of fanfiction: a panel at The Witching Hour was entitled “Heterosexuality and Feminism in a Male/Male Slashcentric Fandom” (Holmes *et al.*). In the next chapter, I will discuss incest stories, a genre which has taken over a great deal of the subcultural coding previously assigned to slash; in this chapter, I will treat the emergence of slash as the major genre player within the Potter fandom.

The definition of what constitutes “slash” is contested. The broadest definition, and the one I favor for reasons explained below, is any fanfiction that features a romantic and/or sexual relationship between characters of the same gender. The term arose in *Star Trek* fandom in the 1970’s, referring to the punctuation mark separating the characters’ names (Kirk/Spock). The “X/Y” model indicated that the major romantic pairing was homosexual; stories of heterosexual romance were labeled “ST” or “adult ST” (Penley *NASA* 102). Although later fandoms adopted the slash punctuation mark for all romantic pairings (i.e., Hermione/Ron), the term “slash” stuck, retaining its original meaning of homoerotic romance. The majority of slash is male/male, and most of the scholarship focuses upon this, but female/female slash certainly exists and is worthy of study, and is sometimes marked as “femslash,” “femmeslash,” or even “saffic.” Like other forms of fanfiction, it is primarily, though not exclusively, written by women; a great deal of non-fan writing about slash focuses upon the supposed oddness of (mostly) heterosexual women writing erotica about (possibly) gay men.

Some fans and academics (especially those keen on slash’s transgressive and subversive potential) wish to narrow the definition, and claim that the same-gender relationship must be noncanonical. However, this qualification poses several problems. First, it does not reflect the way the term gets used within the fandom. The term “slash” functions in fandom as the binary opposite of “het” fic, which features romantic and sexual relationships between characters of different genders; as no one places a similar limitation on het fics – fan stories that concern canonical heterosexual pairings, such as Molly/Arthur, are still labeled “het” – most fans reason that it doesn’t make sense to apply the restriction to slash. Second, no one has ever come up with a satisfactory term for fanfic that concerns *canonical* same-sex relationships; in the fandom for the television program *Queer as Folk*, fan stories about the canonical Brian/Justin relationship are still called “slash.” Third, and perhaps most importantly, is that what constitutes “canon” is never an unproblematic issue: “beyond the bare factual minimum, canon constitution and interpretation are a highly debated and controversial critical activity in the fannish milieu” (Stasi 120). Many slash stories and pairings are predicated on a reading of subtext that fans claim is present in the canon: Remus Lupin/Sirius Black is defended, passionately, as canon by many fans, a reading which many other fans just as passionately oppose.

The insistence that slash must transgress the existing canon rather troublingly assigns, to the canon, a heteronormativity it may not necessarily possess, not to mention reinforcing the pernicious assumption that queer readings are always readings “imposed” from the outside.¹ This is not to say that slash is not transgressive or subversive; in a homophobic culture that attempts to police or censor expressions of non-heteronormativity, any depiction of queerness, especially a positive, sympathetic depiction, qualifies as such. However, for the reasons outlined

¹ Stasi, Willis and Jones discuss this issue extensively.

above, I believe it is a mistake to claim that slash is intrinsically *more* transgressive/subversive of a given text than other forms of fanfiction.

Scholars and Fans

Slash has proven to be of enormous interest to academics, fannish and otherwise, and journalists. Slash, even more so than other fannish activities, has suffered at the hands of disapproving, sensationalistic journalism. “Potter Porn,” by Christopher Noxon, conflates slash with pornography, thus allowing Noxon to combine outrage over the production of homoerotic stories about Harry and company with outrage over perceived “child pornography” – as many fans sourly noted as par for the course in such diatribes, there was no mention of, and thus no concomitant outrage over, porny *het* fics. Noxon then goes on to round up the most self-critical fan expressions of “why I write slash” he can find, and crows over the self-confessed “inadequacy” of those he has marked as neurotic deviants. However, other journalists have written more laudatory – and more responsible – articles on slash: Noy Thrupkaew’s article “It’s a Fan’s World,” in *Bitch Magazine*, was both sympathetic and very well-researched.

Fans tend to evaluate journalistic treatments of slash more passively, judging the stories on the basis of how positively or negatively they portray the community – if the journalist belittles the fandom, the story is dismissed with expressions of irritation; if praised, fans cheer the author. But academic treatments of fandom, and slash in particular, are actively engaged with by fans, who read and debate the arguments presented, apply academic theory to their own practices, and create their own theories in response. Henry Jenkins is a fan favorite, not only for his honesty and openness about his own fannish activities, but also because his work is often seen as the most flexible and nuanced, and the least prone to making monolithic statements about why slash exists. The article (co-written with Cynthia Jenkins and Shoshanna Green), “Normal Female

Interest in Men Bonking,”² critiques the totalizing tendency of much scholarship of slash fandom, including the preoccupation with straight females writing erotica about gay males, the treatment of slash as somehow isolated from other forms of fan discourse, and the search for “a theory that can account for the phenomenon as a whole” in defiance of fans’ own multivocal understandings of their own activities (Green et al. 11).

For the reasons articulated in “Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking,” many fans have a somewhat conflicted relationship with academic studies of slash. While most are pleased to see their interests and passions being treated as worthy of study, and appreciate the fact that most academics avoid the “look at the freaks!” approach that characterizes many journalistic accounts, fans often express mixed feelings about the results of academic inquiry. Camille Bacon-Smith’s *Enterprising Women* is the most soundly critiqued academic study of slash. While she is generally laudatory of the subversive potential of slash, and of the communities of women dedicated to writing it, Bacon-Smith’s “vulgar Freudianism”³ leads her to treat fans as patients to be diagnosed, and downplays their ability to “correctly” interpret either the source text or their own material. Bacon-Smith characterizes slash fans as somehow having failed to live up to society’s expectations of heterosexual women, smugly reporting that a number of slash fans of her acquaintance were celibate, inexperienced in long-term heterosexual relationships, or morbidly obese (Bacon-Smith 248). (Even more overtly pathologizing is the recent work by Catherine Salmon and Donald Symons, which shoehorns slash readers and writers into an extremely essentialist model of evolutionary psychology, arguing that slash fans are example of “abnormal” female sexuality.)

² In Harris, *Theorizing Fandom*. 9-38.

³ Anne Kustritz. September 14, 2004. Accessed August 30, 2006. LJ.

The existence of slash complicated conventional notions about women's interest in erotica in general, and the types of erotic material women were "supposed" to be interested in (i.e., heterosexual romance novels). It is unsurprising that in most slash scholarship, slash is presented as a potential site of resistance to the dominant ideologies of patriarchal, heteronormative culture. Anne Kustritz sums up the argument thus:

slash offers its own particular challenge to normative constructions of gender and romance, as it allows women to construct narratives that subvert patriarchy by re-appropriating those prototypical hero characters who usually reproduce women's position of social disempowerment. (371)

Constance Penley, who draws upon the work of Joanna Russ and Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith, famously presents slash as a subversive space, where women can articulate a fantasy of equality between romantic partners that is impossible in heterosexual relationships ("Brownian," "Feminism," NASA). While a number of fans do agree with the assessment that slash "is about equality," many fans point out that the "equality" trope is far from the only narrative explored in slash fiction.

The "nature of slash" is a perennial topic of conversation within fandom; academic theories of slash, particularly Penley's "equality" theory, are referenced and critiqued within these discussions. Some fans claim that the concept of an equal partnership was what drew them into slash:

It seems to me that the playing field starts out more equal, and so you have more room to play... for explaining why slash is intellectually or creatively interesting, not just this sort of visceral *ooh, I love* response, the equality theory works well.⁴

The idea that gender equality throws other forms of inequality into sharper relief is one often referenced by fans. However, just as many fans are prepared to critique the "equality" model:

⁴ Go Seaward. Comment on LJ. January 6, 2004. Accessed August 30, 2006. LJ.

I'd think that theory holds more weight if people *wrote* the relationships as equal rather than talking about them/idealizing homosexual relationships as equal. Because most slash fics of this variety read *exactly* as heterosexual fics would, except for the bit about masculine names. Occasionally, the sex even reads as heterosexual despite different bits.⁵

Another female fan links up her interest in power imbalances with the impossibility of experiencing male/male sexuality for herself in real life:

I write/read slash 'cause I like the idea of two guys together. Period. Who gives a flying fig about equality?.... [M]y preferred reading material is about power *imbalances*.... I'll never be a guy and therefore it's the brand of sexuality I find the most mysterious and intriguing. I enjoy thinking about it.⁶

Dira Sudis offers a historical perspective on the equality theory; she points out that the majority of slash scholarship, focusing as it does on *Star Trek*, *The Professionals*, and *Starsky and Hutch*, have limited their theories of slash to the stories about the best-friend male pairs (“buddyslash”) that were featured on those programs. But she argues that buddyslash is only one of three major forms of slash, the other two being “enemyslash” (slash about characters that are rivals or enemies) and “powerslash,” which slashes characters in unequal relationships (such as teacher/student), or explores the inequalities within a slash relationship:

I think the three [buddyslash, enemyslash, powerslash] deserve to be recognized at least as distinct subgenres within slash, if not wholly different animals. I think that if you vastly prefer one of these, you're likely to be a slasher for different reasons than people who vastly prefer a different one. And I think that for purposes of explaining it to people who don't slash at all, academics tend to be looking at buddyslash unless they say otherwise.⁷

A number of fans expressed frustration with the “univocality” (Green *et al.* 11) of the scholarship:

I dislike not only the single motive and cause for all slash writers, but the urge to find a motive at all, to pathologize slash writing as if it must have a diagnosable cause. That's not,

⁵ Verstehen. Comment on LJ. January 6, 2004. Accessed August 30, 2006. LJ.

⁶ GMTH. Comment on LJ. January 6, 2004. Accessed August 30, 2006. LJ.

⁷ Dira Sudis. Comment on LJ. January 6, 2004. Accessed August 30, 2006. LJ.

for example, how people approach fiction writing in general. Most academic writing on slash messes it up for that reason.⁸

And:

It never fails to amaze me the way people over-analyze women when it comes to sex. If we were men writing femmeslash no one would bat an eye.⁹

As noted above, slash is an activity engaged in primarily by women. Fans both embrace and question the argument put forth by Russ, and echoed by just about every other scholar on the topic, that slash is “pornography by women, for women, with love.” Fans acknowledge and celebrate the concept of slash writers as a community of women, though are divided upon how much slash has to do with feminism, how much it has to do with subversion, and how much it has to do with queerness; as many fans point out, these issues vary enormously from writer to writer, from pairing to pairing, and even from story to story. A number of fans resist the concept of “subversion” as a primary motive for writing slash at all; as Bartle_by jokes, “And all this time I was writing slash because it was hawt, who knew I was damning the man at the same time?”¹⁰ And Kanna Ophelia mocks “those self-satisfied Penley-quoting slash writers who author little ‘Why I Write Badly-Written Male-Male Porn and Why That Makes Me A Radical Subversive’ essays.”¹¹

Therealjae, however offers a nuanced reading of the feminist potential of slash, which gives weight to academic univocality while not negating fannish multivocality:

I think when it comes to this hobby of ours, it's so important to differentiate between the intents of the individual and the impact of the collective. On the level of an individual writer, the intent (and indeed, even the impact) of that writer's work can have more or less

⁸ Cursive. Comment on LJ. January 6, 2004. Accessed August 30, 2006. LJ.

⁹ GMTH. Comment on LJ. January 6, 2004. Accessed August 30, 2006.

¹⁰ Bartle_by. Comment on Fandom Wank. April 26, 2005. Accessed August 30, 2006. JF.

¹¹ Kanna Ophelia. Comment on Fandom Wank. April 26, 2005. Accessed August 30, 2006. JF.

to do with queerness than with feminism, more or less to do with sex than with subversive politics (or more or less to do with either of those than with story), more or less to do with women than with men. But when we're talking about the level of the fannish community, it's hard to argue that we're not all participating in something larger than ourselves that looks an awful lot like a feminist political act.¹²

As an extension of the concept of slash as pornography by and for women, the question of what, if anything, male/male slash has to do with gay men, real or fictional, often arises. While many fans are in agreement that slash is far more about women's desires rather than real-world gay men, the issue of real-world gay rights is often not perceived as entirely separate. As Valartd comments, "Writing slash is not activism. Getting out and working with your local Gay and Lesbian Center is. But slash can be a gateway to that level of activism."¹³ Some fans, like Cathexys, worry about objectification:

I am concerned with the fetishization of the gay male body, but I think the fact that we again and again address this issue indicates that there is a concern and not just mindless objectification.¹⁴

Every so often, a fan will pop up who likes slash, but objects to real-world homosexuality. Such announcements invariably end up on Fandom Wank. The vast majority of slash fans tend to be socially liberal or progressive, especially where homosexuality is concerned; while individual fans may see their involvement in slash as being more connected or less connected to their support for social justice, fans who receive gratification from fictional depictions of homosexuality but don't want to extend civil rights to real-world gays and lesbians are often greeted with derision. The Brat Queen, while acknowledging that people fantasize about all sorts of things they would not condone in real life, serves up an oft-quoted summation of this fannish attitude:

¹² Therealjae. Comment in Aerye's LJ. April 3, 2003. Accessed August 30, 2006. LJ.

¹³ Valartd. Comment on Fanthropology. May 10, 2005. Accessed August 30, 2006. LJ.

¹⁴ Cathexys. Comment on Fanthropology. May 10, 2005. Accessed August 30, 2006. LJ.

the question has arisen of whether or not being a slash fan yet being firmly against the rights of gays to marry makes one a hypocrite.... I don't know if it makes you a hypocrite, but it sure as hell makes you an asshole.¹⁵

A discussion in Aerye's LJ touched upon all these issues and more, and reaffirmed the multivocality of slash fandom. Aerye describes her attempt to navigate between the discourses of slash, both academic and fannish:

I've often felt stranded between two camps in slash -- the slash is about gayness camp and the slash is about women camp. Because for me, slash is about queerness and women; I am as reluctant to try to disentangle these notions in slash as I am to disentangle them in my life.... I've always been uncomfortable with the notion that queerness had nothing to do with slash... As a friend of mine has said, slash can sometimes feel like a minstrel show if you're queer - a parody that appropriates the markers of queerness without assimilating the experience. [Another fan's] comment seems to create a connection between female sexuality and queerness that makes sense to me, that resonates. It seems to leave room for the notion that queerness (not queer identity, but queerness as strange and unusual sexuality) as an aspect of character is part of slash - a blurring of sexual lines, something "strange and unusual". Queer acts, not queer identity. And I'm drawn to that notion....the collective act, the collective phenomenon, can be feminist without all of the individual women participating self-identifying as such.¹⁶

Julad, in response, proposes an excellent, workable theory of slash. Articulating slash as a *space*, she moves slash theorizing, both fannish and academic, away from its previous focus upon the actors, sidestepping the univocal/multivocal conflict; in addition, she brings into focus the concept of slash as *potential*:

[S]lash is not so much queer in the act as it is queer in the space.... Slash is a sandbox where women come to be strange and unusual, or to do strange and unusual things, or to play with strange and unusual sand. The women may be queer or not, strange or not, unusual or not. The many different acts and behaviours of slash may be queer or not, strange or not, unusual or not. The queerness may be sexualised or it may not, and what is sexual for one woman may not be for another. The space is simply that: a space, where women can be strange and unusual and/or do strange and unusual things.¹⁷

¹⁵ The Brat Queen. February 19, 2004. Accessed August 30, 2006. LJ.

¹⁶ Aerye. April 3, 2003. Accessed August 30, 2006. LJ.

¹⁷ Julad. Comment in Aerye's LJ. April 3, 2003. Accessed August 30, 2006. LJ.

Harry Potter Slash: The Beast in the Plumbing

Because of its uncertain legal status in relation to copyright laws, Potter fanfiction is, of necessity, “unofficial” -- it must operate beyond the pale of institutionalized literature in order to avoid retribution from copyright holders – in this case, Warner Brothers. While fans are not able to capitalize on their writing in terms of money or official recognition, fan writers who wish to tell controversial stories are compensated by not being restricted to institutionalized discourses. Julad’s concept of slash as queer space can be extended outward to include fanfiction as a whole – a place for women (and some men) to be strange and unusual and do strange and unusual things. Slash is that portion of the space devoted specifically to *queer* discourses; like other forms of fanfiction, the unofficial nature of the space means that fan writers are under no obligation to accept the dominant, heteronormative discourses of queer sexuality.

Slash, like other forms of fanfiction, initially circulated by way of self-published zines. Because of the controversial nature of the material, slash, even more so than het or gen fic, was restricted to those who knew the right people, in order to be put on mailing lists, and had the financial resources to order zines and attend conventions. All the issues of the move from printzines to the Internet, as discussed in Chapter 1, affected slash even more than other genres of fanfic.

The vast majority of the influential academic studies of slash date from the pre-Internet period, and the theories put forth by academics reflect this. In a landscape dominated by Kirk/Spock romance the equality theory makes a great deal of sense. Market forces and the limitations of technology meant that those fans who preferred, say, Chekov/tribble bondage¹⁸

¹⁸ To invoke a fannish truism, somebody, somewhere, has written that.

had far fewer chances to publish their stories. The fans critiquing the equality theory have access to a much wider range of stories than did pre-Internet fans and fan researchers.

Potter fandom particularly resists univocal theories of slash. Since the Potter fandom was born and bred on the Internet, Potter fans never experienced the top-down editorial control of zine-based fandoms. Fan communities develop their own cultural norms for what is or is not acceptable in fanfiction; in small fandoms where everyone knows each other, those rules can extend over the fandom as a whole. As discussed in Chapter 1, the sheer size of the Potter fandom makes this impossible; the result is very much a fandom of subgroups, and each subgroup can churn out its own stories for its own audience with impunity. The enormous number of people participating in the online fandom almost guarantees that however outré your fanfictional desires, somebody will share them – and will have written a story, or be willing to read yours. Moreover, while slash has always been far less isolated from the general fannish landscape than many academic accounts would have readers believe¹⁹ – just as fanfiction in general has been treated as if isolated from literary discourse as a whole²⁰ -- it is perceived as a dominant mode of fanfiction within the Potter fandom.

The fragmentation of the fannish landscape means that Potter slash is not dominated by a fandom-wide One True Pairing (OTP), the way *Star Trek* was by Kirk/Spock. The most popular slash pairing is Harry/Draco, followed by Sirius/Remus. Some of the early stories in the Potter fandom were Harry/Draco; the popularity of these stories inspired other fans to try their hands at the pairing. After the release of *Goblet*, the fandom grew to gargantuan proportions, and Harry/Draco grew accordingly, helped along by the “Big Name Fan” (BNF) status of the early

¹⁹ As noted by Green et al. 11

²⁰ As discussed by Derecho, Stasi, and Woledge.

writers, including Aja, Rhysenn, and Maya. Eventually, there appeared such a glut of Harry/Draco stories that older fans who felt the possibilities of the pairing had been exhausted, and newer fans who had no interest in the pairing at all, began producing reams of stories about other characters. The nature of Internet technology meant that the popularity of Harry/Draco did not limit the existence of other pairings, but rather, enabled other slash pairings to flourish – writers were not being pressured by market forces to keep churning out Harry/Draco, and fans who didn't like the pairing had equal access to the means of publication. Perhaps most importantly, the sheer number of Harry/Draco stories meant that fan readers who had never heard the term “slash” were certain to be exposed to it, and thus more likely to become slash writers themselves.

Slash about Harry and Draco, who are enemies in canon, complicates academic theories of slash that are predicated upon the Kirk/Spock “buddyslash” model. Jenkins, referencing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s articulation of “homosocial desire” (1985), argues that

[s]lash throws conventional notions of masculinity into crisis by removing the barriers blocking the realization of homosocial desire. Slash unmasks the erotics of male friendship, confronting the fears keeping men from achieving intimacy. (*Poachers* 205)

While this is an excellent model for talking about Kirk/Spock, Starsky/Hutch, or in the Potter fandom, Harry/Ron, it clearly cannot function as a global assessment of slash in this day and age, if indeed, it ever could. Jenkins, always nuanced, does mention other, non-buddy forms of slash, but other writers have tended to treat “slash” as if it were identical with “buddyslash.” Harry/Draco, as an “enemyslash” pairing, must negotiate a somewhat different “semiotics of masculinity”²¹ than Harry/Ron, and Harry/Snape, as both “enemyslash” and “powerslash,” is a different beast altogether. Even though these broad narrative patterns can be discerned in Potter

²¹ Modleski, quoted in Jenkins *Poachers* 207.

slash, it's important to note that there really is no such thing as a "typical" Potter slash story: with such a variety of characters available, the tropes in Potter slash tend to be highly dependent upon the characters being paired. There is no such thing as a "typical" Potter slash story, but there are "typical" Harry/Draco or Fred/George or Remus/Sirius stories.

Fear of a homophobic response, or a struggle with internalized homophobia is, as Jenkins notes (*Poachers* 205), an effective way of creating tension in a buddyslash story. However, Harry and Draco are mortal enemies, which creates an enormous amount of tension on its own; while a number of Harry/Draco stories deal with homophobia, it can have the effect of gilding the lily. Fred/George, a buddyslash pairing (complete with mind-melding) if ever there was one, faces a similar problem – the fact that the characters are *brothers* is liable to cause them more anxiety than the fact that they're both male -- if it causes them any anxiety at all, as Fred and George are the Potter books' resident tricksters (see Chapter 5).

Indeed, many Potter slash stories completely ignore the issue of homophobia, or articulate it in different ways. One factor is the more widespread (Muggle-world) societal acceptance of gays and lesbians, so both authors and characters may feel less of a need to have characters confront homophobia in themselves and others than in earlier fanfiction. The "we're not gay, we just love each other" trope that featured in so much pre-Internet slash is rare in Potter slash. Again, the more widespread acceptance of gays and lesbians, and thus no corresponding need to distance characters from the term, has had an effect. The sometime corollary, "I've never been with another man before," tends not to be loaded with the homophobic overtones of earlier slash -- where the implication was often that there's no possible way tomcat Kirk could ever have been attracted to another man, but his connection with Spock is simply that transcendent. In Potter slash, given the ages of many of the characters, it's quite likely that "first time with a man" is

going to be “first time,” period. And the fact that so many of the characters are teenagers, and teenagers in a British boarding school, no less, carries its own powerful discourse – this will be discussed in more detail later, but for now, that the characters are “horny teenagers” is often treated as good enough justification for *any* variety of sexual activity, hetero, homo, incestuous, intergenerational, or interspecies,

Another key feature of the Kirk/Spock model is that the characters will embark upon a committed, monogamous relationship – buddyslash as a genre tends to argue that characters are soulmates, and understand each other better than anyone else ever could.²² It’s the model of the heterosexual genre romance novel, and it furnishes enemyslash, also, with narrative momentum. While a great many Potter slash stories do, in fact, move toward this end, “romance ending in committed relationship” is far from the only story told by slash writers. PWPs (“Plot? What Plot?” or “Porn Without Plot”) stories abound, as they always have. But the size and diversity of the Potter fandom means that fans can, and do, experiment with narratives outside these models, and those experimental works can gain currency in the fandom.

Queering the Canon

I’ve been narrowing my focus throughout this chapter, from slash in general, to slash in the context of academic thought, to Potter slash in relation to slash as a whole. Now, I wish to discuss some of the specifics of Potter slash fandom, and how the fanfiction is shaped by the canon. There are a number of cultural and literary narratives invoked within the Potter books, and gleefully seized upon by fans, that leave the text open to a slash reading.

Whether slash fans view their pairings as “supported” or “unsupported” by canon, and how important that is, varies from pairing to pairing, and from fan to fan. Some fans argue

²² Woledge calls this soulmate-space “initimatopia.”

unapologetically that their favored pairing is canon, and, in the case of Sirius/Remus, a decent chunk of the fandom will agree. At Nimbus 2003, which took place shortly after the release of *Phoenix*, a speaker shouted, “JOINT CHRISTMAS PRESENTS!” – a reference to the set of books given, by Sirius and Remus together, to Harry²³ -- which earned a resounding cheer from the audience. In addition to the characters’ obvious affection for one another, fans cite the coding of Remus’s werewolfism as a terminal illness correlated to AIDS -- victims, while posing a genuine danger to others, are subject to fear and discrimination far out of proportion to their likelihood of infecting others.²⁴ One of the most interesting Remus/Sirius stories, “The Most Ridiculous First Name I Ever Heard,” by Mousapelli, takes this argument to a terrifying conclusion, and argues that the lycanthropy “virus” becomes, when transmitted to Muggles, HIV – and Gaetan Dugas, AIDS’ “Patient Zero,” was the name Remus had chosen for himself on his travels.²⁵ Fans also point out that of all the animagi (wizards who can change into animals) depicted in the series, Remus and Sirius are the only two characters who are physically compatible in both human and animal forms. And last but not least, Sirius’s death in *Order of the Phoenix* does follow the established trope in early gay-themed YA literature that homosexual characters must be lonely, tormented, and then die²⁶ – though he is dispatched by a fall through a veil rather than a car crash.

Remus/Sirius slash stories explore all these themes and more, especially concentrating upon the characters’ school days in the 1970s – perhaps unsurprisingly, there are a certain

²³ *Phoenix* 501.

²⁴ Philip Nel reports that Rowling specifically designed the response to Lupin’s werewolfism to be “a metaphor for people’s reactions to illness and disability” (Nel 15-16); as fans realized, the discourse of AIDS seems to be a primary influence.

²⁵ Mousapelli. Accessed August 30, 2006. AS.

²⁶ Cart 225-6, and Cart and Jenkins

number of “Glam Rock Sirius” stories. Alfonso Cuaron’s film of *Prisoner of Azkaban* strengthened the argument even further. The film contains a number of lines – not found in the book – which seem to justify a homoerotic reading: Snape accuses Sirius and Remus of arguing like an “old married couple”; when Remus begins his (in the book, involuntary) change to wolf form, Sirius makes a non-book-supported appeal to Remus’s humanity, embracing him and shouting “this is not the man you are inside!”; and finally, Remus explains his resignation by saying that “parents will not want a, um,... *someone like me* teaching their children.” (In the book, he simply says “werewolf.”²⁷) All of these were happily taken as support for the Remus/Sirius reading of the text.

Other fans couldn’t care less about the canonicity, or lack thereof, of their favorite pairing, but will still argue for subtext, and scour the text for details that can be spun into a story. And the nature of “support” is taken with varying degrees of seriousness: when Ron declared that going out with Lavender Brown was “like going out with the giant squid” (*Prince* 450) fans jokingly declared Ron/squid canon – how would he know what dating the giant squid was like unless...? Also, as one fan put it, “The British Wizarding World is its own made-up society, and we don’t know all that much about its sexual mores.”²⁸ In other words, fans have a great deal of freedom to imagine the discourse of homosexuality in the wizarding world, and many actively construct or passively assume a more tolerant culture than that of the Muggle world.

New canon invariably produces loads of fanfiction and not only about whatever new characters are introduced. Canon is able to dramatically invigorate little-known or stagnating slash ships. *Phoenix* featured Harry and Snape forced to become uncomfortably intimate with

²⁷ *Azkaban* 423.

²⁸ Anonymous. Comment on Fandom Wank. September 26, 2005. August 30, 2006. JF.

each other – Snape is teaching Harry how to prevent Voldemort from reading his thoughts by... reading Harry's thoughts; Harry, angry and frustrated, does the wizarding equivalent of reading Snape's diary, and peeks at Snape's most secret, humiliating memory. Snape/Harry (Snarry) fans rejoiced, and many fans who had never been interested in the pairing before were inspired to write it. And *Prince*, as was seen in Chapter 3, gave Harry/Draco fans their previously elusive holy grail – a Harry fixated upon Draco. Before this book, the problem faced by Harry/Draco writers was that, while Draco is canonically obsessed with Harry, Harry has never seen Draco as anything more than a passing nuisance. (To overcome this, fans devised a number of ingenious schemes, often involving magical accidents, to force the two together; for example, Rhysenn's *Irresistible Poison* had Harry and Draco accidentally ingest a love potion.) In *Phoenix*, Draco barely registered in the book at all, which had the effect of slowing down production in the already saturated Harry/Draco portion of the fandom. Snape/Draco writers, though fewer in number and a bit drowned out by the cheers of the Harry/Draco crowd, were also immensely pleased with *Prince*, and immediately started work on a plethora of stories that can be summed up as: Snape and Draco, on the run from Death Eaters and the Ministry alike, comfort each other sexually or have angry resentful sex. Harry slashers squealed over the number of times Harry described a male character (usually Tom Riddle) as “handsome.” Little things, perhaps, especially when compared with the overt Harry/Ginny romance plot, but more than enough to construct a story around – and in fandom, that’s all one needs.

The construction of the Potterverse itself, as well as its characters, invokes an enormous variety of literary and cultural narratives, some of which lend themselves to slashy readings. Fans long anticipated the argument put forth by Pugh and Wallace (264-5) that Harry's discovery of his wizard nature is akin to a coming-out narrative – he is rescued from a literal closet, and his

relatives' horrified reactions bear a striking resemblance to the language of homophobia, especially in the way they fling about words like "abnormality" (*Chamber 2*) as weapons. Thus, the entire wizarding world can, from the perspective of the Muggle realm, be read as "queer space." Even more telling is Harry's destination: Hogwarts is a British boarding school, an institution that is so consistently coded as queer space that it's practically shorthand for homosexuality, British-style²⁹; the "English vice" is defined as a taste for either flogging or buggery, the origin of both being traced to the boarding school environment. The "school story" has a long pedigree in children's literature, starting with *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, by Thomas Hughes, published in 1857. Hughes's novel was the template for all other school stories that came after it; while the bulk of the text exalts the boarding school as the ideal place to form manly Christian servants of the empire, a curious passage, emphasized by a footnote, troubles the complacent uprightness of the text:

He was one of the miserable little pretty white-handed curly-headed boys, petted and pampered by some of the big fellows, who wrote their verses for them, taught them to drink and use bad language, and did all they could to spoil them for everything in this world and the next. (Hughes 233)

The footnote coyly claims "there were many noble friendships between big and little boys, but I can't strike out the passage; many boys will know why it was left in." The adult version of the genre dispenses with the coyness; Stephen Fry's *The Liar*, and pornographic novels like the works of Chris Kent – including, appropriately enough, *The Real Tom Brown's Schooldays* -- among many others, depict boarding school as a locus for homoerotic encounters.

Although Hogwarts is a coed school, which neutralizes some of the queer encoding, students are still somewhat isolated from the opposite gender, and live without privacy among students of the same gender, which affords ample temptation and opportunity for homosexual

²⁹ For a thorough discussion of the history of homosexuality in the British boarding school, see Hickson.

acts. Stories in which the characters are in the same dormitory -- Harry and Ron, Percy and Oliver, Crabbe and Goyle – frequently use this lack of privacy as the catalyst for slash; there are dozens of stories in which one character walks in on or overhears another character masturbating, or calling out in his sleep. Percy/Oliver has the particular advantage of being the only two named Gryffindor boys of their year, so fans have written them as having the dormitory all to themselves. Quidditch players have post-game showers, prefects have a special bathroom, and of course all students have access to the Astronomy Tower, sundry abandoned classrooms and broom closets, dark corners of the library, the Room of Requirement (which features in enough stories to qualify as a character in its own right), and Snape’s desk. Fetishized accoutrements of boarding school life, especially emblems of power such as prefect badges and canes, have all been featured in stories, especially BDSM-inflected narratives.

While other highly structured sex-segregated communities, such as the military, are coded as homoerotic, the cocktail of teenage hormones lends boarding school narratives a special potency. Teenage characters’ newfound overwhelming desires are, to a certain extent, coded as a get-out-of-jail-free card for all manner of sexual behavior; homosexual activity among teenagers can be winked at as “experimentation.” Not that fan writers dismiss the plight of gay teenagers or construct homosexuality as something that characters will grow out of, but the narrative of horny teenagers experimenting means that slashers do not have to depict characters going through a lot of soul-searching about their attraction to the same gender, unless the author wants that to be a major issue of the story. It also frees up writers to concentrate on eroticism, rather than social issues. Published YA novels, a category to which the Potter books belong, do not have this luxury. Roberta Seelinger Trites observes that the majority of YA novels about gay and lesbian teens

are very Foucaultian in their tendency to privilege the discourse of homosexuality over the physical sexual acts of gay men, defining homosexuality more rhetorically than physically. (102-3)

She later states that “[d]enying the corporeality of homosexuality too easily divorces it from pleasure, which potentially disempowers gay sexuality” (114). Published YA novels, hemmed in as they are by institutional discourses of teenage and queer sexuality, not to mention that of bibliotherapy, have, until fairly recently, shied away from graphic depictions of gay sex, and even non-explicit gay and lesbian novels for teens are singled out for localized repression in the form of censorship and book-burnings. But slash, like all fanfiction, is subject to no such constraints; while it’s important to note that not all slash is pornographic, the point is that it *can* be. Slash fans can be as graphic or as circumspect as they wish, but on the whole, the balance tips decisively toward the frankly physical.

This is perhaps especially important for teenage slash fans, of which the Potter fandom contains a great many. Potter slash not only exposes teenagers to discourses of homosexuality outside of the culturally “official” stances marketed to them, but also enables young writers to explore those alternative discourses for themselves, with the support of a community of like-minded readers and writers. Fanfiction in general is often articulated as a refusal to simply be a passive consumer of media, but to actively engage with texts; slash fiction expands this textual engagement to issues of queer representation. For Potter fans, teenagers or adults, slash is an opportunity to explore relationships between characters in a manner beyond culturally demanded heteronormativity.

CHAPTER 5

KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY: INCEST NARRATIVES IN HARRY POTTER FAN FICTION

As we have seen, the vast and fragmented spaces of Harry Potter online fandom have enabled readers and writers to make inroads into a number of traditionally taboo areas, including underage sexuality, non-consensual sex, and the topic under consideration here: incest. Incest is one of the most thriving subgenres within the Potter fandom, and writers draw upon a wide range of literary, social, and psychological narratives about incest to create their stories; with the mainstreaming of slash within the Potter fandom, incest has taken over some of that genre's subcultural coding. A number of exceptionally talented writers have tackled the theme of incest, usually locating their stories within the Weasley or Malfoy families; the specific situations Rowling has created for each of these families invoke a number of tropes that fans have taken as suggestive of incest narratives. The complexity of the theme is explored by these writers in several configurations, from consensual sibling love to cruel parental abuse: stories illuminate not simply the dynamics of incest itself, but act as windows into the characters of the transgressive lovers. Readers and writers of fanfiction *know* the characters they are writing about, and thus, fan stories are never simply rote inscriptions of our cultural narratives of the Depraved/Oppressed Siblings, or the Cruel Father, or the Betrayed Child: rather, incest fics are often multilayered examinations of literary and cultural narratives of incest as experienced through the eyes of Fred and George, or Draco and Lucius, or Ron and Ginny.

Incest, in its multiple and contradictory forms, has long been a concern of literature: Sophocles, Ovid, Chaucer, John Ford, Byron, Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley, Poe, Melville, Faulkner and Angela Carter have all treated the incest theme in their works, with varying degrees of horror, outrage, disgust, sympathy, and compassion; a parallel tradition in pornography emphasizes mere prurience. In this chapter, I discuss Gothic and Romantic depictions of incest,

as the narratives of transgressive familial desire exhibited in the literature of that period appear to have had the greatest impact upon the Potter fandom's discourse of incest. I am not arguing that specific Gothic and Romantic texts are absorbed into the fandom by direct transmission – though the Potter fandom is, after all, a *literary* one, and contains a number of widely-read authors who cite any number of literary sources as inspiration for their stories. Instead, I am considering “Gothic” and “Romantic” as modes of narrating incest, that, while inspired by the texts of that period, are not solely bound either to the specific literary works or to that historical time frame. The second book in the Potter series, *Chamber of Secrets*, is very much a Gothic text – and the primary source book for writers of incest fic.

Psychoanalysis, that most Gothic of methodologies, is another way to tell the incest story. While acts of incest are generally constructed as marginal, committed by those upon the extremes of culture or of established notions of mental health, Freud placed Oedipal incestuous desire at the very center of his configuration of the psyche. Otto Rank, a contemporary of Freud and author of the most thorough and comprehensive orthodox psychoanalytic study of the incest theme, claims that incest is “from a purely psychological point of view the most natural form of sexual intercourse” (Rank 30). I am primarily interested in psychoanalysis, particularly popular understandings of its methods and subjects, as a storytelling mode, rather than a therapeutic or analytical tool; the critical tradition that links the Gothic with psychoanalysis also features in my analysis of the incest theme in Potterverse fan fiction. Fans are as well-versed in pop-Freudianism as anyone else in our culture, and are not averse to invoking the leitmotifs of psychoanalytic constructs of desire. However, I have abstained from utilizing psychoanalysis to speculate upon the appeal of incest fiction within the fandom, as such attempts often appear facile and intrusive. In keeping with the rest of my dissertation, I have therefore chosen to frame

my discussion of the appeal of incest fic in terms of literary precedent and cultural narratives -- following the example of scholars of the incest theme such as Twitchell, Ford, and Richardson.

Incest narratives in the Potter fandom are numerous and visible, with Weasley incest stories (“Weasleycest”) leading the pack. Debates spring up occasionally about the morality (or irrelevance of morality) in writing such stories. A search through the archives of Fandom Wank reveals that such debates are cyclical; every generation of fans seems to need to refight questions concerning not just incest, but any depiction of non-mainstream or non-normative sexuality or sex acts (see Chapter 2). Potter fandom’s first large-scale incest debate occurred in January 2004, and spiraled into a larger debate about minors’ access to sexually explicit fan fiction.¹ Given the current prevalence of incest fic, it may seem surprising that it took that long for the issue to become a controversy. However, the pre-*Goblet* incest writers tended to lie somewhat low, and the incest writers of 2002, including Marvolo, Rhoddlet, and Kay Taylor, were producing sophisticated literary work for a smallish group of fans who appreciated such things and were not fazed by the subject matter. The high quality of the stories of this latter group of fans drew in more readers, a number of whom eventually tried their hands at the genre, and by the release of *Phoenix* in 2003, incest fic was a thriving genre, and thus more visible to censorious eyes.

For the most part, fans tend toward a live-and-let-live attitude. “Don’t like, don’t read” is a common refrain, especially when concerning issues such as incest, underage sexuality, and non-consensual sex, which fan writers traditionally “warn” for in the headings of their stories; warnings not only allow readers to avoid stories containing material they don’t wish to read, but also for those who do wish to *find* such stories – as a number of fans point out, this is a greater

¹ See Fandom Wank for details. JF.

courtesy than one will find in the case of commercially-published works. Warnings, therefore, also function as a means of classification. Incest, in fan classification, seems to function as a “dominant” category: no matter what other categories a story may belong to (slash, het, underage, non-consensual, BDSM, and so on), the story will almost always be classed as incest first. For example, stories that are both incest and slash – which most are, as the majority of possible incest pairings in the Potterverse are homosexual – tend to be more about incest than they are about homosexual desire. The concerns about attraction to/involvement with a *relative* usually overrides characters’ concerns about attraction to/involvement with a member of the same sex. Likewise, the issues of underage sexuality and consent are overshadowed by the incest. Many Malfoy incest narratives (“Malfoycest”) feature an underage Draco, but the fact that his partner is his *father* is, in the story, more important than the fact that his partner is an adult or a male. Unlike, say, Harry/Snape, stories, there is no way of neutralizing the problems of consent by aging up the characters; no matter the age of the participants, the parent/child power differential will always exist, and issues of consent will always be dubious.

Why the Weasleys and the Malfoys?

The majority of incest narratives within the Potter fandom are about the Malfoys, or, far more commonly, the Weasleys. While incest fic about other families (the Patils, the Creeveys, and, especially after *Prince*, the Blacks and the Gaunts) exists, the numbers are dwarfed by the enormous presence of Malfoycest and Weasleycest. There are a number of reasons for this, including the fact that the Weasleys and the Malfoys, as families, are major characters with a good deal of stage time, and have dedicated fan followings. However, the background and circumstances of both families supply crucial tropes invoked within both popular and literary discourses of incest, particularly with regard to class and wealth, which makes the characters in many ways ideal participants in incest dramas.

Incest in popular narrative is often associated with the highest and lowest strata of society.

Many mythologies, including Greek, Roman, Egyptian, and Indian contain examples of sanctioned divine incest: “The view of incest as an act denied to men but permitted to the gods is a staple of ancient mythology where the heavens are populated by precisely the kind of breeding forbidden to men” (Twitchell 43). By extension, the highest echelons of human society, royal dynasties, have traditionally married relatives of varying closeness in order that their blood and property not be sullied by admixture with those of less exalted rank: “Incest eliminates the admission of a stranger into an established bloodline – a crucial point when that bloodline is already deemed optimal” (Ford 7). At the same time, incest is also popularly figured to be a problem of the poorest of the poor, whether rural hillbillies or urban slum dwellers. The linking of incest with the lowest rung on the social ladder is often contradictory: hillbilly narratives point to rural isolation as the culprit, while overcrowded conditions are blamed for incestuous acts among the city poor.²

In the Potterverse, the “pureblood” wizarding families – those families that can trace their wizarding ancestry back many generations – are considered by some to be superior to those wizards who come from Muggle or mixed families. Within canon, the wizarding world’s distinction between purebloods, Muggleborns, and Muggles themselves is expressed entirely in terms of blood: one is born either with or without the ability to do magic. Wizards on Rowling’s side of good leave it at that: entry to and status within wizarding culture is based solely upon one’s possession of that inborn ability. However, evil wizards, like Voldemort and his followers, place a premium upon one’s immediate origins – whether one comes from a wizarding or Muggle family. Interestingly, this bigotry is never, in canon, expressed in the rhetoric of culture

² Twitchell 138.

(“they just don’t understand our ways”), but exclusively in terms of blood, as the term “pureblood” indicates; “mudblood,” a derogatory term for a Muggle-born wizard, likewise emphasizes blood, not upbringing – this distinction corresponds in many ways to real-world extra-fictional racism. However, this rhetoric of blood, that defines the categories of pureblood and mudblood, is articulated by the good characters as fallacious. Ron, defining “mudblood” for Hermione and Harry, explains: “Dirty blood, see. Common blood. It’s ridiculous. Most wizards these days are half-blood anyway. If we hadn’t married Muggles we’d’ve died out” (*Chamber* 116). While racial issues in the Potterverse do not correspond exactly to real-word racial issues,³ it’s worth noting that Rowling was inspired by Nazi rhetoric in creating the mindset of her villains⁴; indeed, it’s a key plot point that Voldemort, like Hitler, shares ancestry with those he considers undesirable.

Rowling’s pureblood-Muggleborn rivalry, while utilizing the rhetoric of racism, owes as much to constructions of class, especially the traditional British and European class system. In *Phoenix*, Harry comes upon an impressive tapestry delineating the “Noble and Most Ancient House of Black,” whose motto is “*Toujours Pur*.” To his surprise, Harry discovers that his godfather, Sirius Black, is closely related to both the Malfoys and Lestranges. Sirius explains: “‘The pureblood families are all interrelated,’ said Sirius. ‘If you’re only going to let your sons

³ Blake: “The concepts “pure blood” and “mudblood” have nothing to do with skin color, or nation or culture of origin.” (107) He goes on to note that characters of color, such as Parvati and Padma Patil, Dean Thomas, Cho Chang and Lee Jordan, are ordinary supporting characters, not racial stereotypes. In addition, what in our world would be termed “interracial” romantic relationships are not remarked upon as such – Harry has a crush on Cho and a date with Parvati, and Ginny is dating Dean Thomas in *Phoenix* and *Prince*. Far more attention is paid, at least in the form of taunts from Draco, to Harry’s and especially Ron’s association with the Muggle-born Hermione. However, it is worth clarifying that Blake is referring to *real-world* cultures of origin as irrelevant within the text – although the Muggle/wizard division is figured as one of blood, it is certainly one of culture, as well, not least the cultural articulation of what is meant by “blood.”

⁴ Rowling, J.K. “FAQ: Why are some people in the Wizarding World (e.g., Harry) called ‘half-blood’ even though both their parents were magical?” *J.K. Rowling.com*. Accessed February 27, 2007.
<http://www.jkrowling.com/textonly/faq_view.cfm?id=58>

and daughters marry purebloods, your choice is very limited, there are hardly any of us left” (113). The analogy to the proverbially inbred European royal houses – haunted by inherited diseases of the blood -- is clear.

However, one pureblood family is prominently excluded from the Black family tapestry: the Weasleys. According to Sirius,

Molly and I are cousins by marriage and Arthur’s something like my second cousin once removed. But there’s no point in looking for them on here – if ever a family was a bunch of blood traitors it’s the Weasleys. (113)

This confirms Ron’s earlier assertion of the fictitious nature of pureblood claims: the pureblood families erase Muggles, Squibs, and those with whom they disagree politically from their family trees. It simultaneously highlights the attempts to keep the bloodlines pure through selective inbreeding.

While inbreeding is not quite the same thing as incest, and it is important not to conflate the two, there is a great deal of overlap in the cultural discourse. Since the Weasley and Malfoy families are composed mostly of males, actual “inbreeding” is rarely depicted in fan stories.⁵ However, as seen above, both the Weasleys and Malfoys are the *products* of inbreeding, which provides some of the impetus for the incest fic, especially with regard to Malfoycest. The Malfoys, as a powerful old-money family, are immediately recognizable aristocrats, by the terms of both their world and ours. In addition, they are, as might be expected, the loudest voices denouncing those of Muggle birth, and Muggles themselves, as inferior. The Weasley family has, by the standards of the wizarding world, a background as exalted as the Malfoys, and

⁵ Even stories that feature Ginny or Narcissa rarely depict actual pregnancy. Narcissa/Draco stories are thin on the ground, and, while this is the most logical place to explore actual *inbreeding*, pregnancy in these stories almost never happens. There were a couple stories, pre-*Phoenix*, that depicted Lucius and Narcissa as brother and sister, though. And stories do exist where Ginny becomes pregnant by a brother (usually Ron – see Kay Taylor’s “Weasleys at War,” SK), but the Weasleys’ anti-pureblood privilege stance means that Ginny’s pregnancy is never contextualized as a pureblood breeding project.

indeed, the families are related. But the Weasleys are vocal supporters of equality for Muggle-borns and Muggles; the Weasleys' shabby-genteel poverty is, according to Molly, at least in part due to their political beliefs, as pureblood-supporters like Fudge have routinely blocked Arthur's promotion. The bitter contempt the Malfoys exhibit toward the Weasleys is attributable to the fact that the Weasleys are "blood traitors," who, despite their exalted blood, choose to throw their lot in with Muggles and Muggle-borns. They are betrayers of their heritage, and a threat to the pureblood hegemony the Malfoys hope for. Lucius tells Arthur that he is a "disgrace to the name of wizard," and, upon noticing Hermione's Muggle parents, whom Arthur has taken under his wing, sneers "The company you keep, Weasley...and I thought your family could sink no lower" (*Chamber* 62).

The categories inhabited by both the Weasleys and the Malfoys are categories strongly associated with incest narratives. Both families are aristocrats, members of a class that is slowly dying out, and which, if it hopes to survive, must stop its incessant inbreeding and find more suitable partners. Just about every Malfoycest fic invokes this discourse of aristocracy, to such an extent that it constitutes the single most important trope for Malfoy incest narratives. From the Malfoys' canonical setup as manor-dwelling, luxury-loving, servant-abusing feudal anachronisms, it is not difficult for a fanfic writer to infer the rest of the trappings of decadence and degeneration, complete with all manner of sexual perversion. However, the discourse of Weasleycest, like the discourse of the Weasleys themselves, is far less coherent. The Weasleys bear a much more conflicted relationship to the category "aristocrat," as they actively fight against aristocratic privilege. Consequently, Weasleycest almost never invokes the "inbred/depraved aristocrat" trope that is such a necessary component of Malfoycest. However, the Weasleys *are* aristocrats, and they are also the rural poor – a double dose of incest

associations. Add to the fact that the Weasleys have been for their sins stricken out of the pureblood family Bible, so to speak, and isolation, political and personal, becomes a factor. The Gaunts, Tom Riddle/Voldemort's maternal family introduced in *Prince*, split the difference between the two discourses; they are impoverished aristocrats living in close quarters, like the Weasleys (although the Gaunts live in utter squalor, thus resembling the hillbilly stereotype far more closely); unlike the Weasleys, and like the Malfoys, the Gaunts (at least the males) are obsessed with their own pure blood, and cast out the daughter, Merope, when she becomes pregnant by the Muggle Thomas Riddle – a Muggle aristocrat who sneers at the Gaunts' poverty. There are incest narratives written about the Gaunts, but not as many as for the Weasleys and Malfoys; the Gaunts have only been onstage since *Prince*, and so have not had the time to build up a dedicated fan base yet. Also, the Gaunts are described as physically unappealing; while that hasn't stopped Snape fans – who have Alan Rickman as a visual representation in the films – the Gaunts are presented as actively repulsive.

Unstable Bodies in the Chamber of Secrets

Until the release of *Phoenix* – which sparked a small explosion of Blackcest, which was boosted even further by *Prince* -- the chief source text for most incest writers was *Chamber*. *Phoenix* confirmed many of the suppositions that had been percolating in the fandom for years, such as the inbred nature of the pureblood families, suppositions that were based primarily upon the events of *Chamber*. The release in 2002 of the film version of *Chamber*, and the months-long publicity buildup that came before, inspired a major wave of incest narratives.⁶ Of paramount importance are the glimpses we get of the home lives of both the Weasleys and the

⁶ The release of publicity shots of actors Jason Isaacs and Christian Coulson (Tom Riddle) in costume, posed seductively, certainly didn't hurt, either. Though Potter is, essentially, a text-based fandom, the films have definitely had an impact on fan conceptions and representations of characters.

Malfoys. Harry spends extended periods of time with the Weasleys in other books, but *Chamber* gave readers their first and most detailed look at life at the Burrow, the Weasley family compound. And *Chamber*, as of yet, contains the only private scene between Draco Malfoy and his father, Lucius; every interpretation of Malfoy family dynamics begins with the scene Harry witnesses between father and son in Borgin and Burkes (see Chapter 2).

However, *Chamber*'s relevance for incest writers goes beyond the depictions of specific familial situations. The pureblood-Muggleborn conflict is introduced here, and located within a larger narrative obsessed with bloodlines, heredity and, especially, *origins*. A key issue is the origin story of Hogwarts itself: there was a rift between co-founders Salazar Slytherin, who believed that only pureblood students should be admitted, and Godric Gryffindor, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Helga Hufflepuff, who wished Hogwarts to be open to all students with demonstrable magical ability. The majority prevailed, but legend has it that Slytherin, without the knowledge of the other founders, created a magical room within the castle, the Chamber of Secrets. He sealed the Chamber so that none but his true heir could open it and release the “horror within,” and purge all Muggle-borns from the school (*Chamber* 151). The “horror within” turns out to be a basilisk, a giant snake with a deadly gaze, which manages to Petrify, but not kill, a number of students, including Hermione. After the first attack, a message written in blood appears on the walls, threatening “Enemies of the Heir Beware.”

But *Chamber*'s delineation of the complex issues of blood and heredity is not the only reason for its centrality for incest writers. *Chamber* is also, crucially, the point where sexuality is introduced into the series, and the co-mingling of concerns about bloodline with concerns about sexuality is what makes it such a rich mine for writers. While *Harry*'s sexuality is not overtly on display until *Azkaban*, when he develops a crush on Cho Chang, other characters are

shown experiencing, and suffering, sexual desire. The women of the wizarding world, including Hermione and Mrs. Weasley, are thrown into a tizzy by handsome Gilderoy Lockhart; prissy Percy has been sneaking around to see his girlfriend; and most importantly, Ginny develops an enormous crush on Harry. Going hand-in-hand with this awareness of sexuality is the fact that the main characters are at the age of puberty, and *Chamber* is rife with chaotic, unstable bodies that are not always under the control of their owners. The most obvious metaphor for bodily instability is Polyjuice Potion, which transforms the drinker's appearance into that of another person. Hermione makes a batch in order to spy on Draco Malfoy; by disguising themselves as Draco's Slytherin cronies Crabbe, Goyle, and Millicent Bulstrode, they hope to find out if Draco is, or knows the identity of, the Heir of Slytherin. Upon taking the potion, Harry experiences uncomfortable physical sensations:

[B]before his eyes, his hands began to grow, the fingers thickened, the nails broadened, the knuckles were bulging like bolts – his shoulders stretched painfully and a prickling on his forehead told him his hair was creeping down toward his eyebrows – his robes ripped as his chest expanded like a barrel bursting its hoops – his feet were in agony in shoes four sizes too small. (216-17)

The process of Harry's transformation into the lumpen thug Goyle reads like sped-up puberty. The moment when Harry and Ron gaze in mingled horror and fascination at their newly huge, hairy, grunting bodies is comic, but also evokes adolescents' responses to their own unfamiliar bodies. But Hermione, in what may be a wry comment on the female experience of adolescence, has accidentally added cat hair to her potion, and has partially transformed into a cat, complete with tail.

Ginny, however, does not merely lose control over her body, but is actively *violated*: she is seduced, then possessed, by Tom Riddle. The implication of a metaphoric rape is inescapable; Ginny's bodily integrity has been trespassed upon by an older (much older) male who first charmed her, and then proceeded to use her body for his own ends. While canon only hints at

Ginny's suffering, a number of fan writers have speculated upon Ginny's experiences with Tom, and the possible effects that such a violation would have upon a girl just entering puberty.

Throughout *Chamber*, Ginny's interactions with Harry, and therefore all her appearances in the text, are defined by sexual desire: she has a debilitating crush on Harry, which renders her incapable of speech in his presence. However, she *is* able to speak, via the diary, to Harry's doppelganger Tom, to whom she pours out her distress and longing. The information she provides him about her object of desire enables Tom to lure Harry into the Chamber of Secrets.

Given this fixation upon the family and upon sexuality, it is perhaps no surprise that the climactic sequence in the Chamber of Secrets reads like an extended parody of pop-culture Freudian interpretation. Harry confronts Tom, the slayer of his father, deep in the bowels of Hogwarts, within the Chamber of Secrets. He reaches the Chamber by sliding down a long, slimy tube hidden in the girls' bathroom. He must then fight Tom's enormous snake, the beast in the plumbing that has been whispering to Harry throughout the book. The weapon bestowed upon Harry is the jewel-encrusted sword of Godric Gryffindor, Harry's spiritual (and perhaps physical) ancestor; with the help of Fawkes the phoenix, Harry first *blinds* and then slays the snake, and then plunges the snake's poisonous fang into the diary, destroying Tom himself. This battle of phallic symbols takes place over and around Ginny's prone body – Ginny, who resembles Lily Potter in looks and temperament -- where Harry, her object of desire, defeats Tom, her wicked seducer, and order is restored. Ron, Ginny's brother, is not allowed into the Chamber of Secrets, through lucky chance. Earlier in the book he had broken his wand, and the resulting unpredictable emissions were a source of great embarrassment to him. However, when Lockhart attempts to wipe Ron and Harry's memories, the wand backfires and Lockhart loses his

entire memory; the backfire also triggers a small avalanche that cuts Ron and Lockhart off from Ginny.

While neither Ron nor Percy are allowed to be effective protectors or rescuers, as that role rightfully belongs to her future lover Harry, it's significant for Weasleycest narratives that both brothers have quasi-sexual encounters with her. Ron, of course, accompanies Harry down that long damp tube, though he, like Lockhart (a villainous too-old seducer like Tom), is not allowed to enter the Chamber – for once his wand malfunctions prove useful. Percy's midnight rambling, secretiveness, and ambition – he reads a book entitled *Prefects Who Gained Power* -- makes him a red herring in the central mystery, but a *red* herring that foreshadows the real culprit. And it is Ginny who reveals that Percy has a girlfriend; she knows this because she walked in on them kissing. Percy's preoccupation, as well as his general obtuseness, makes him incapable of protecting Ginny – though he is the only character at Hogwarts who even notices that something is wrong and attempts to ameliorate his sister's distress, even if his methods (Pepper-up Potion, hounding his brothers to refrain from upsetting her) do not work.⁷

Equally important to incest writers is *Chamber*'s establishment of Lucius Malfoy, beater of Draco, as not simply a villain, but a *predator*. Lucius is the prime mover of the events of *Chamber*. Intending to discredit Arthur Weasley, who has been pushing legislation through to prevent attacks on Muggles, Lucius slips Ginny the interactive diary containing Tom's spirit: “The Weasleys are one of our most prominent pureblood families. Imagine the effect on Arthur Weasley and his Muggle Protection Act, if his own daughter was discovered attacking and killing Muggle-borns” (*Chamber* 336). Lucius makes it possible for Tom to violate and possess

⁷ Fred and George's method of cheering her up is even less helpful; “covering themselves with fur or boils and jumping out at her from behind statues” (*Chamber* 185) – an aggressive display of the physical markers of puberty (excessive body hair, acne) – proves to be not especially calming for a girl in the throes of her own pubertal crisis.

Ginny -- a metaphoric pimp⁸ for a metaphoric rapist. Fanfiction writers have not found it difficult to make the conceptual leap from indirect sexual abuse of a child to direct sexual abuse of a child, and from thence to creating Lucius as the Master of All Depravities. Lucius features as the sexual menace in fan stories far more often than his master Voldemort; in an essay discussing Lucius's role in fan fiction, one fan notes "Perhaps every fandom needs an evil, terribly attractive villain. And Voldemort, with the physical limitations described at the end of [Goblet], has a hard time filling that role (except for Riddle incarnation)."⁹

With his ancient lineage, vast wealth, gloomy castle, terrified servants, unauthorized and unclean sources of power, unshakeable belief in his own superiority, and evil designs upon all that is just and good, Lucius is indeed a "terribly attractive villain," and what's more, a villain from a specific literary tradition: the Gothic. His appearance on film reinforces this impression visually – Lucius is highwayman-handsome, his long pale hair tied in a silken ribbon like an eighteenth-century fop. And it's not simply Lucius who has ties to the Gothic; Ginny's story arc could have been written by Anne Radcliffe or Horace Walpole. An innocent young woman of limited means, but noble birth, is threatened by not one, but two patriarchs with wicked designs upon her, both for what she is – a naïve girl, who can be lured into giving up her body to male appropriation -- and for what she represents, as a member of a family that has the effrontery to thwart the villains in their schemes. She is then rescued by the young man she actually desires, who is a kinder, gentler (and arguably more boring) version of the villain who has seduced her.

⁸ In the film, Lucius carries an ebony cane topped with a silver serpent's head; fans immediately dubbed it the "pimp cane." It featured in a number of stories as Lucius's weapon of choice for inflicting pleasure or torment on his sexual partners/victims.

⁹ Regan. February 4, 2005. Accessed May 10, 2005. LJ. In the same article, she draws attention to the similarities between "Lucius" and "Lucifer," and references Lucifer's incestuous coupling with his daughter, Sin, in *Paradise Lost*. Milton's Lucifer, of course, is a major influence upon later Gothic and Romantic villains.

The staples of Gothic narrative, as established by writers such as Radcliffe, Walpole and Matthew Lewis – a mysterious castle, terrifying monsters (human and otherwise), secret passageways, ghosts, evil yet seductive men, maidens in peril – are all present and accounted for in *Chamber*. But the Gothic is not simply a collection of set pieces, but a mode of storytelling. It is a critical commonplace that the tortured spaces of the Gothic landscape, haunted as they are by the violence and tragedy of the past bleeding into the present, map the internal spaces of the psyche. The discourse of the Gothic is, in our time, intimately bound up with the discourse of psychoanalysis, to the point that Anne Williams claims “the true heir of Walpole and Radcliffe, the most profoundly Gothic creator of narrative in our century, is Sigmund Freud” (240). *Chamber* ingeniously makes use of both Gothic and psychoanalytic tropes to explicate the shared obsession with origins and narrative of the present haunted by the past. The classic Gothic motif of the old diary that explains all contains, in *Chamber*, not simply a narration of the past, but the past itself: Voldemort has preserved within its pages not just the words of his youth, but his young *self*. His previous attempt to manifest in his present form having been thwarted, in *Stone*, Voldemort “regresses” to the more comfortable space of the past – a past where few know his true identity. In the present, where most have forgotten his old name, Voldemort-as-Tom poses as a friend to Ginny, encouraging her to spill her secret desires via the therapeutic process of journaling. But these sessions are not for Ginny’s benefit, but for Tom’s – through her revelations, Tom is able to feed off her power to enhance his own. The repressed returns with a vengeance, and, in shades of Dora, Ginny’s “therapist,” with the help of the insensitive, uncomprehending males around her sucks his “patient” nearly dry. Though Ginny’s experience is somewhat glossed over in the books, fan writers have explored her story.

Chamber invokes the twinned discourses of the Gothic and psychoanalysis, but does not overtly address a key element of both: the incest taboo. But fanfiction writers, inspired by these narratives, have not hesitated to explore the incestuous possibilities contained within the Potterverse.

Incest Narratives in Potterverse Fanfiction: Literary Models

Potterverse fan fiction concerns itself with two basic forms of incest: parent/child and sibling/sibling. In all cases, the incest is entered into knowingly, with full awareness of the familial relationship. Malfoycest is, of necessity, dominated by parent/child; while there is some parent/child Weasleycest, the vast majority is sibling/sibling. A great deal of the disparity in tone between Weasleycest and Malfoycest is attributable to these differing configurations.

Parent/child incest is, in both literary and popular discourse, nearly always portrayed as a monstrous, horrifying transgression. The extreme imbalance of power between parents and children means that any incestuous activity automatically carries with it abuse of authority and betrayal of trust. While the Oedipus complex is the centerpiece of Freudian psychoanalysis, it is a truism, marking the key difference between fantasy and reality, that mother/child incest is the least common form of incest in both life and art.¹⁰ In the majority of folk and literary depictions of parent/child incest, the parent is the father, and he is nearly always portrayed as a predatory villain, with illicit designs upon his daughters, or, more usually, daughter-surrogates. The archetypal Gothic villains to whom Lucius Malfoy owes so much – Walpole’s Manfred, Radcliffe’s Schedoni and the Marquis of Maontault, Stoker’s Dracula, among others -- are threatening father figures who menace their daughter-surrogates not simply for sexual

¹⁰ Though, as Twitchell notes, if one goes by linguistics, the idea of mother/child incest carries an enormous amount of power: “motherfucker” is one of the worst insults in any number of languages (54). With regards to the Potter stories, one could also point out Harry and Ron’s attraction to women who strongly resemble the boys’ mothers.

gratification, but for the consummation of power – an ultimate expression of the patriarch’s rights over those within his family group, especially women. Lucius’s interactions with Ginny (who, it is worth remembering, is indeed a relative, albeit a distant one) follow this model. James Kincaid, making note of this literary heritage, names our collective discourse of child molestation “Gothic” (10).

The discourse of sibling incest, on the other hand, is not so coherent, nor so universally condemned. Sibling incest, in which the power differential is less pronounced and thus lacks the automatic stigma of betrayal of trust, does not conform as easily into the villain/victim morality play. Both folklore and literature are less inclined to heap approbation upon incestuous siblings than on incestuous parents; folk ballads that deal with incest are nearly always about sibling couples, and are notable for their lack of condemnation of the incestuous desire itself. Some of these ballads – such as “Sheath and Knife,” “Lizzie Wan,” and “The King’s Dochter Lady Jane,” from the Child collection -- recount unwitting incest, the least blameworthy form of the act, but even those siblings who have knowingly entered into an incestuous relationship are tragic rather than monstrous. The tragic outcome of these ballads is perhaps due to the need to contain the threat to social and familial roles; the siblings themselves often generate sympathy for their plight.¹¹ Gothic tales, too, will flirt with sibling incest, usually in an “are they or aren’t they related” way, but a potential erotic relationship between siblings is often seen by the characters as a tragedy, or a forgivable mistake, and almost never as the threat that the erotic designs of the patriarch on the heroine are.

However, it was the Romantic poets – working at around the same time that scholars began taking an interest in folk material (indeed, Romantic nationalism is a decisive factor in the

¹¹ See Twitchell 63-4, and Syndergaard.

development of the study of folklore) -- who mounted, in word and deed, an apologia of sorts for sibling incest. According to Alan Richardson, sibling incest is “the quintessential form of Romantic incest” (552). Byron’s *Manfred* and Shelley’s *Laon and Cythna* are key texts; these writers in turn, especially Byron, influenced Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*. The degree to which art may have imitated life for Romantic writers is a topic of endless speculation; Byron was exiled for his indiscretion with his half-sister Augusta, and the relationships of both William and Dorothy Wordsworth and Percy and Elizabeth Shelley have come under scrutiny.¹² Like the Gothic, Romanticism was a revolt against the rationality of the Enlightenment; unlike the Gothic, which flirted with transgression only to have order triumph at the end, Romanticism celebrated the transgression and apotheosized the transgressors, and the villain became the Byronic antihero whose sufferings generate compassion. Given this, it follows that Romantic, as opposed to Gothic, depictions of sibling incest often portray lovers who are fully aware of their familial relationship, and enter into a romantic relationship anyway. Richardson elaborates:

Romantic sibling incest is presented not as a perversion or accidental inversion of the normal sibling relation, but as an extension and intensification of it. As opposed to the unwittingly incestuous siblings of most earlier traditions who have grown up apart and do not meet until they are sexually mature, Romantic incestuous couples tend instead to have a history together going back to infancy. (553)

This Romantic model of consensual sibling desire has filtered down to the novels of V.C. Andrews, who is the most-often cited conduit among Potter fan writers for the sympathetic incest model. In addition, Andrews locates her sympathetic incestuous siblings within overtly Gothic settings and plots. In these texts, sexual overtures made by older men towards the heroine are grotesque and frightening; the adult world is so corrupt and abusive that the only possible solace is incest with one’s trusted brother or sister. Narratives which center around Ginny sometimes

¹² Mary Shelley’s relationship with her father, William Godwin, is also noteworthy -- especially as she gave him a copy of her novel *Mathilde*, which concerns father-daughter incest. See Harpold.

make use of this particular trope – a number of stories portray her as having been so traumatized by Tom that the only safe place to exercise her sexuality is with her brothers. In Catja Mikhailovic’s “And in Arcadia I,”¹³ Ginny is the only one who can comprehend George’s mingled fear and anguish over Fred’s death, and they turn to each other for what little safety and comfort they can achieve.

The discourse of villainy, while an important component of Ginny-centric Weasleycest, is a chief concern of Malfoycest; the moral universe of Malfoycest stories hinges upon the presentation of Lucius’s designs upon his son. If Lucius plays out his canonical role as Gothic villain, the incest is simply evidence of his depravity. But if Lucius’s role is allowed to expand, even if in directions previously mapped out by Gothic hero-villains in the Byronic mold, the depiction of incest becomes more complex and nuanced, and more firmly located in the relationship of Lucius and Draco as specific individuals in a specific situation, rather than as “villain” and “victim.”

Malfoycest: Patriarchal Rights

It’s somewhat difficult to trace the history of Malfoycest, as some important early writers have removed their stories from the Internet, and a major early archive for the genre has also been closed down. Unlike Weasleycest, which has spread across the fandom like kudzu, Malfoycest has always been more difficult to find, and its writers a bit more secretive. Even without issues of secrecy, Malfoycest is less common than Weasleycest, despite the popularity of Draco and Lucius as individual characters. This is probably due to the fact that the potential for incest within the Malfoy family falls along parent/child lines, which a number of fans find off-

¹³ Catja Mikhailovic. January 24, 2003. Accessed March 1, 2007. AS.

putting; Malfoycest not only requires that readers and writers negotiate incest, but also a great difference in age between sexual partners, and the issue of dubious or non-existent consent.

The majority of fan fictional depictions of Malfoy incest utilize the expected narrative of torment and abuse. However, Lucius's abuse of Draco is, even in the most simplistic Fiendish Abuser/Innocent Victim narratives, rarely portrayed as unmotivated evil. Just about every single story of Malfoy family incest locates the incest within a broader narrative of *what it means to be a Malfoy*. Malfoys are, above all things, aristocrats: the head of such a noble family has the right of absolute control over and access to the bodies of those in his power; the scion of such a noble family must learn those lessons of power in order to make him a worthy heir of the dynasty. Sometimes the incest is expressly part of a political agenda: Lucius is preparing Draco for service to Voldemort by first establishing his own absolute authority as paterfamilias: "Mongoose's" haunting "Verbs and Vertebrae" opens, "When Lucius is exercising his Malfoy patriarchal rights upon Draco's body..."¹⁴ But even if Voldemort's political agenda is never explicitly invoked, incest is always contextualized as a specifically "Malfoy" act, an expression of something intrinsic to the family and to the bloodline.

The Malfoys, in canon, are presented as corrupt aristocrats, with ties to a corrupt political regime that is doomed to failure. In the majority of Malfoycest narratives, incest is a symbol of the inherent depravity of both the family and the political system they support. Sometimes this depravity is something that is celebrated and reveled in by the characters, but often, incest is a destructive force that contributes to the disintegration of the family unit. Lucius's abuse often serves as the impetus for Draco to rebel against his family and join the side of good. A number of Malfoy incest narratives eventually resolve into Draco/Good Character, usually Harry. These

¹⁴ "Mongoose," December 10, 2002. Accessed May 19, 2005. LJ.

stories rely heavily upon the Gothic villain/innocent polarity, with Draco replacing Ginny as the suffering victim. The incest, in most of these narratives, is not the story itself, but a device to garner sympathy for Draco. Kincaid notes that this Gothic narrative forces the child into the one-dimensional role of Victim, and not only robs the child of agency, but also absolves the child of any responsibility, ever (12); as a narrative device, Evil Daddy/Tortured Innocent places the onus for Draco's canonically unpleasant behavior directly at Lucius's door. Rhysenn's "Patris est Filius,"¹⁵ which turns into Harry/Draco, is one of the finest examples of this popular story line.

Stories in which Draco is abused, but do not end with Draco being driven into the arms of the good guys, tend to be character studies that explore Draco's response to his father's evil, or Lucius's self-justifications for his cruel behavior. "Verbs and Vertebrae," quoted above, is a short, stark scene of rape; while Lucius violates Draco, both father and son fantasize about doing the same to Harry. A number of stories focus upon Draco's attempts to rationalize the abuse. In other stories, incest is an expression of Lucius's rage and disappointment in his son; rape is used as a punishment, in order to toughen Draco up.

While all Malfoycest narratives depict the incest as a factor of the Malfoys' fetishization of their pure blood and their family position, some stories specifically depict Lucius using incest as a means of *training* – not so much in order to exercise control over Draco, but rather to teach Draco to use sexual pain and pleasure as a means of controlling others. In these stories, Lucius is seductive rather than abusive, and Draco does not tend to conceive of himself as abused, and is, in fact, likely to participate with relative eagerness. In "Eff Yu Cee Kay Eye En Gee," by Sine Que Non 767, Lucius explains:

These are crucial lessons for a Malfoy. It is part of the growing up process in our family. We teach the seeking after the sweet taste of fear, of power.... Once he is addicted...then it

¹⁵ Rhysenn. Accessed February 28, 2007. AS.

can be refined, as the Dark Lord would expect. As the noble House of Malfoy would expect.¹⁶

Rushlight's "A Passage to Eden"¹⁷ features what amounts to a Malfoy initiation ritual, with Lucius first instructing his son to have sex with the prostitutes he brings home, both male and female, while he watches. During the next encounter, Lucius joins in, and eventually moves to sex with Draco alone. Draco begins the story admiring and respecting his father, and is grateful for the attention; by the end, Draco's admiration has turned to adoration and desire, and Lucius reciprocates the affection. In her author's note, Rushlight characterizes the story as "Either a twisted love story or the ultimate mindfuck -- you be the judge." Rushlight so skillfully draws readers into the characters' minds that their rationalizations of the abuse make a horrible sort of sense: *of course* this Lucius and this Draco would understand their actions this way. It's a tour de force of characterization, and effectively disturbing because of it.

More overtly consensual Malfoycest, though a minority subgenre, does exist. The few Narcissa/Draco stories tend to be consensual, and are based upon the Freudian model of the (male, heterosexual) child's sexual desire for the mother – most Narcissa/Draco stories overtly or covertly reference Oedipus. Consensual Lucius/Draco tends to write Draco as the seducer. Some of these Draco-as-Seducer stories are chan, and owe something to the stylized children of that genre; however, it is also possible that such stories are commenting upon the fanon construction of Draco as Slytherin Sex God, and giving him an early start to his career.

Weasleycest: Unnatural Little Beasts

Weasleycest is more popular than Malfoycest, if simply for the greater potential for variety inherent in a family with seven children. The majority of these pairings are sibling/sibling; the

¹⁶ Sine Que Non 767. August 27, 2003. Accessed February 28, 2007. SK.

¹⁷ Rushlight. Accessed May 10, 2005. AS.

lesser stigma of sibling incest inspires less squeamishness, and therefore more writers are willing to attempt stories. Moreover, canon approves of their politics and the family as a whole, and therefore, it is not necessary to rupture the family unit to garner sympathy for the characters. As the Weasleys fight against pureblood hegemony, their incest narratives can operate without engaging the political issues that characterizes Malfoycest; if Weasleys are sexually involved with each other, it is usually about the personal desires of those specific characters, rather than a manifestation of a sociopolitical agenda. That is not to say that politics has no impact whatsoever on Weasleycest, but it is indirect. The Weasleys are political outcasts, “blood traitors,” and this has contributed to their poverty and isolation, and heightened their emotional attachments to each other. Dale Edmonds, in an interesting post on the appeal of incest fic, remarks, “There's just something about the Weasleys -- maybe it's that they're so loving and sweet to each other in the books, a real Weasleys vs. the world feel, and the sense of them all crowded into that little house and a tiny world of their own.”¹⁸

In general, if incest is occurring among the Weasleys, it is far less likely than Malfoycest to be presented as destructive, and is usually presented as consensual, sympathetic, loving, and even downright fluffy. If Malfoycest is overrun with melodrama, Weasleycest is overrun with “taboo? What is this taboo you speak of?” stories; indeed, if a reader is unaware that the characters are related, it can sometimes be difficult to discern that any transgression is occurring at all. One fan comments, “there's a number of stories that treat [Weasleycest] as just another pairing, but with... better access to the object of desire.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Dale Edmonds. February 19, 2003. Accessed February 28, 2007. LJ.

¹⁹ Catja Mikhailovic. July 7, 2003. Accessed February 28, 2007. LJ.

Weasleycest, as a whole, has a rather different approach to the concept of incest as a social transgression than Malfoycest does. The most common, and the most influential, Weasleycest pairing is Fred/George, or, as it is commonly known, twincest. The twins often serve as a gateway pairing for readers who haven't read incest stories before. In fact, twincest has become somewhat "naturalized" within the fandom at large; like Ron/Hermione, Fred/George appears as a background pairing in a number of stories that focus upon other characters. The reasons for the popularity and (fairly) wide acceptance of twincest are manifold, but certainly due in part to the fact that the power differential, which gives parent/child incest so much of its power to disgust, is non-existent: the twins, as portrayed by Rowling, are absolute equals. Indeed, they barely seem to differentiate between one another, at one point proclaiming themselves "Gred and Forge" (*Stone* 202), and effectively function as a single character. Both canon and fanon portrayals of the twins owe much to a popular mythos of twinship – twins, especially identical twins, are perceived as somewhat uncanny. They have a special, secret bond, perhaps a psychic connection; "one in the womb" and "one soul, two bodies," are the most common twincest tropes. One of the earliest Weasleycest fics, Ailei's "Supposedly," asks, "Don't you think... sometimes... we ...were supposed... to be...One person."²⁰ "Let's Get Metaphysical," by Mathilda, a meditation upon the nature of twinship, comments "People always say to us, 'So which one are you then?' And we always reply, 'Never mind that, which one are *you*?'"²¹ The prevalence of this trope has led to fans wondering, with tongue somewhat in cheek, whether Fred/George is incest or masturbation.

²⁰ Ailei. 2000-2001. Accessed February 4, 2007. RS.

²¹ Mathilda. Accessed February 28, 2007. AS.

A further spur to the naturalizing of twincest lies in the twins' canonical function as tricksters.²² As Hogwarts' resident pranksters, Fred and George's chief purpose in life is to disrupt any and all semblance of order or stability. It's especially noteworthy that their chief tricks – Canary Creams, Ton-Tongue Toffees, Skiving Snackboxes – all destabilize the body. Like the Malfoys, the twins do not operate within the rule of law, but their characters are *outside*, rather than *above*, the law, anarchists rather than fascists. Boundaries, whether social, moral, or physical, simply do not *exist* for the twins – even the boundary between themselves as separate human beings. So, reason, fan writers, what care they for mere sexual proprieties? A number of twincest stories are gleefully pornographic, and the twins will often team up to seduce a third person – Harry, Lee, Oliver Wood. The summary for “Double or Nothing” by Calico, one of the finest writers of erotica in fandom, reads “Exploration of social boundaries. Through porn”;²³ here, Fred and George break out of the Potterverse and are seduced by singer Lance Bass, of the boyband N’Sync. This story, while a bit of a sport among other twincest narratives, is nonetheless one of the most consistently recommended incest fics, for its exquisite writing and so-bizarre-it-works premise; Fred and George, boundary-crossers extraordinaire, are not even confined to their own fictional universe, but can easily swan about Muggle London with real-world celebrities.

This happy, porny, we-are-soulmates tone is widely pervasive within twincest, and since twincest is the most popular pairing, this tone tends to bleed over into Weasleycest as a whole –

²² Unsurprisingly in the Classics-haunted Potterverse, Fred and George appear to owe most of their characterization to the god Hermes: guide of souls, messenger of the gods, and patron of merchants and thieves, father of Hermaphroditus. The twins inherit and master the Marauder’s Map, which contains a “recording” of James Potter, and pass it along to Harry; they also, with Harry’s financial help, open a joke shop. And like Hermes, the twins are firmly arrayed on the side of the “Good,” although the alliance has more to do with personal loyalty (to Zeus, to Dumbledore) than with moral commitment, as all Tricksters are essentially amoral. *Trickster Makes This World*, by Lewis Hyde, contains a fascinating discussion of Hermes, as does William G. Doty’s “A Lifetime of Trouble-Making: Hermes as Trickster.”

²³ Calico. May 16, 2003. Accessed February 18, 2007. AS.

to the point where the prevalence of romantic Weasley fluff can be labeled the Twincest Effect. However, an important strain of twincest fic treats the “one in the womb” trope ironically, in order to trouble the pervasive narratives. “Gemini,” by Penelope-Z, opens with the twins’ birth, their hands bruised from clinging so tightly to each other: “each twin subconsciously came to understand the reality of the other through pain.”²⁴ The splendidly-titled “Crushed Beneath the Delicate Weight of a Piano That Falls From Heaven (Alternately Titled: The Tragicomedy of Weasley Blood),” by Marvolo,²⁵ features, as an epigraph, a passage from a biology text about the formation of identical twins. The story describes the gradual disintegration of Fred and George’s relationship, sparked by both twins’ separate encounters with a manipulative Hermione. Hermione’s favorite game is “anagrams,” wherein the magical words of spells are broken down into the mundane words of everyday reality (“Transfiguration.” “Fountain, rigs, art. Um. Frustration, gain.”); her semiotic destruction of felicitous speech mirrors her destruction of the twins’ felicitous bond, and turns both into something dull and ordinary.

After twincest, Percy/Ginny is probably the most popular Weasleycest pairing. As discussed earlier, the film of *Chamber* inspired a major wave of Weasleycest writing, and much of that was Percy/Ginny. While many Ginny stories have Tom Riddle lurking somewhere in the background, Percy/Ginny is often predicated upon a triangle with Tom, making it the most consistently melancholy of the Weasleycest pairings. As mentioned earlier, a number of stories posit that Ginny, deeply traumatized by Tom, turns to her brothers as a sexual safe haven,²⁶ and Percy is the brother most consistently chosen. In Rhoddlet and Marvolo’s “Heir,” Ginny’s trust

²⁴ Penelope Z. April 6, 2002. Accessed February 28, 2007. FF.N.

²⁵ Marvolo. May 1, 2003. Accessed February 4, 2007. LJ.

²⁶ Angela Griffen’s “Nightmare” (Accessed February 28, 2007. AS) and Catja Mikhailovic’s “Spasm” (January 17, 2003. Accessed February 28, 2007. AS) are illustrative.

is misplaced; Percy, seduced by Tom’s promises of power, not only hands Ginny over to Tom, but violates her himself.²⁷ Of all the Weasley siblings, ambitious Percy is most likely to be lured to the dark side, and is therefore the most likely to be presented as abusive.

After Percy, Ron is the brother most often paired with Ginny. Ron/Ginny stories are often light and cheerful. Ron is only one year older than Ginny (the smallest Weasley age gap besides that of the twins), and unlike Percy, his canonical allegiance to the good guys is absolute, making him a much less ambiguous character, and a more reliable post-Tom haven. Aspen is the writer most associated with Ron/Ginny, and many of her stories, such as “Strings of Pearls and Copper Curls” and “Hidden, Sweet and Wet” are sweet-natured erotic romances.²⁸ Ron/Ginny is not without its darkness, however. Rhoddlet often writes Ron as a traitor, placing him in narratives that are usually associated with Percy – “The Atheist Geometer” is a stark, brutal Ron/Ginny/Tom triangle, and neatly inverts Ron’s canonical goodness to produce a narrative even more wrenching than a Percy story would have been.²⁹ Cassandra Claire’s “Mortal Instruments” recasts the fandom’s most argued over het ship quadrangle; when Harry and Hermione become romantically involved, Ron and Ginny, jealous and hurt, turn to each other over the summer break. Ron falls in love, and he thinks Ginny does, as well, but she breaks it off, claiming fear of discovery. At the beginning of the school year, Ron sees Ginny and Harry together, and he realizes that she has “used him for practice. Like she always had.”³⁰

Bill and Charlie feature sporadically in Weasleycest narratives, usually paired with each other. Neither brother has had much stage time in canon, but their few appearances are

²⁷ Rhoddlet. November 22, 2002. February 28, 2007. AS.

²⁸ Aspen. Accessed February 4, 2007. AS.

²⁹ Rhoddlet. October 30, 2002. February 28, 2007. AS.

³⁰ Cassandra Claire. April 26, 2004. May 20, 2005. LJ. (Now offline.)

appealingly glamorous. Bill is a treasure hunter, with long hair, a ponytail, and a dragon fang earring; an impressed Harry proclaims him “cool” (*Goblet* 52). Charlie, a legendary Quidditch player, works with dragons in Romania. Given so little information, fanon has had to fill in a number of gaps, and one of the chief elements of Bill and Charlie’s fan characterizations is their perceived ages. According to canon, Gryffindor hasn’t won the House Cup in six years, not since Charlie left school (*Stone* 114); based upon this, fans calculated that Charlie is about eight years older than Percy, and Bill perhaps two years older than Charlie. In Weasleycest narratives, this significant age gap means that when paired with a younger sibling, Bill or Charlie has nearly as much power as a parent. When paired with each other, as in Kay Taylor’s lovely and influential “Every You and Every Me” and “Summer’s Day,”³¹ Bill and Charlie’s relative isolation from the rest of the family becomes a key part of the pairing dynamic. However, after the release of *Phoenix*, Rowling threw a monkey wrench into the fan calculations, by proclaiming that Charlie was only three years older than Percy.³² This has caused much grumbling within the fandom; not only do the numbers not make sense, but fans have had to rethink the fanon. While Bill and Charlie are still old enough to be abusive, especially if paired with Ginny – which, in such narratives, they usually are – they lose the independence that characterizes their own pairing.

Weasleycest abuse stories are uncommon, on the whole, as sibling incest, even without the Twincest Effect, lacks a built-in abuse narrative. If abuse occurs among the siblings, Percy, and sometimes Bill or Charlie, will be the perpetrator, and the victim will usually be Ginny. Parent/child Weasleycest is even rarer, and almost always features Arthur as the incestuous

³¹ Kay Taylor. Both posted 2002. Accessed February 28, 2007. SK.

³² J.K. Rowling. “FAQ: You said recently that Charlie was only two years older than Percy.” *J.K. Rowling.com*. Accessed February 28, 2007. <http://www.jkrowling.com/textonly/faq_view.cfm?id=63>

parent. Ravenchel's "Repetition" series,³³ the most famous Weasleycest abuse fic, utilizes the Gothic Evil Father paradigm usually found in Malfoycest. She explores how this paternal sadism functions among the Weasleys, who don't even have the dubious justification of a political agenda. And as the title indicates, the abuse doesn't stop with Arthur. Ginny is damaged first by her brothers, who enact the abuse they suffered, and then she encounters Tom. By the time her father reaches her, "it could never shock her again." Last of all, she returns to Percy, who kills her – in part due to his own conflicted relationship with Tom.

I have focused upon pre-existing narratives of incestuous desire in literature and popular culture, and have argued that fanfiction writers both import and critique these narratives in their own writing. However, the most striking thing about so many incest fics is how *specific* they are. Though fan writers may grab shiny narratives from any number of sources, they never lose sight that they are not simply writing about "the Abused Child" or the "Fiendish Father" or the "Passionate Brother": they are writing about *Draco* and *Lucius* and *Ron*, each of whom has his own individual history, and fits into his family and his world in a specific way. The very nature of fanfiction ensures that no matter how poor the setting or the characterization, none of these stories exist in a vacuum. Kincaid points out that the narrative of child molestation is reductive and only allows for flat, two-dimensional roles of Villain and Victim. But even the most simplistic importing of this narrative into a fan story deepens the pre-assigned roles – the Villain may be a snarling caricature, but he has a face and a history, and he attends the Quidditch World Cup and hides contraband under his parlor floor. And when a writer the caliber of Rushlight or Marvolo or Cassandra Claire tells an incest story, the story becomes not simply about the incest

³³ Ravenchel. June 13, 2002 and following. Accessed February 4, 2007. LJ.

itself, but about Draco or Percy or Ginny negotiating their shameful or traumatic or exciting desires and fears through a tangled web of political, social, and familial concerns.

EPILOGUE: POTTERDÄMMERUNG OR, THE WANKALYPSE IS NIGH: THE FUTURE OF HARRY POTTER FANDOM

On February 1, 2007, J.K. Rowling announced that Book 7, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, would be released on July 21, 2007. Fans cheered, wibbled, and worked themselves up into a frenzy of anticipation. One fan, foreseeing the inevitable explosion, composed an epitaph:

July 24

INTERNET WWW. GORE

BELOVED FREAKSHOW, DIED IN A

TRAGIC BUT INEVITABLE EXPLOSION

1987-2007

REST IN PEACE¹

Some fans mourned the passing of an era, and wished for more *time* with the series as we know it: “I wanted one more year of fandom waiting and speculating and discussing and theorizing.”² Other fans took heart from the example of other fandoms: “It is not like Tolkien fans have run out of things to talk about, and the good ladies over at [pemberley.com](#) are still posting 24/7 about Jane Austen’s books.”³ The most common response was either glee or consternation at the coming fandom storm; good Wankas have been stockpiling (virtual) popcorn and beer for *years* in anticipation. Hence the term “Potterdämmerung”⁴: the end will be long, loud, melodramatic, and the fannish universe will never be the same again.

At the time of this writing, I have just finished reading *Hallows*, and I am due to graduate in two weeks; the past eight years of my life are officially coming to a close. I fell in love with

¹ Alex Greenshields. February 1, 2007. Accessed March 4, 2007. LJ.

² Heidi Tandy. February 1, 2007. Accessed March 4, 2007. LJ.

³ Peg Kerr. February 1, 2007. Accessed March 4, 2007. LJ.

⁴ Now in common usage, most sources credit Dragonscholar with coining the term.

the Potter books in the fall of 1999, when I desperately needed an escape from the new rigors of graduate school; it seems appropriate that I complete my graduate work in the year the series ends. I am reluctant to venture out onto the Internet just yet; I want to mourn privately, for the time being.

I mentioned, in Chapter 1, that completion or incompleteness of the canon is one of the chief elements affecting the flavor of a fandom. A completed canon means answered questions, and a shutting down of certain avenues of inquiry; overall production of fan material tends to plateau, as the frenzy of anticipation of new canon has ended – Potter fandom is too large to die, but stories will likely not be produced in the same numbers as before. This is the general pattern for completed-canon fandoms. I predict though, that fannish activity will not drop off significantly until after the release of the seventh film; though the books will be finished, the movies will keep Potter in public consciousness, and the fandom will function much as before; since the films are being released nearly concurrently with the books, Potter fandom will not experience the vast culture clash of, say, *Lord of the Rings* fandom, in which old-school Tolkein fans and new fans drawn in by the Peter Jackson films coexisted somewhat uneasily.

Completed canon also means that fans have as much information as the creator is willing to give them, and thus have the full parameter of the world set out, as a spur to invention. *Hallows* is still fresh and raw in fandom memory, and I don't wish to speculate too fervently about directions the fanfiction will take, at this early stage. However, without giving too much away, I can say that Harry/Draco will continue to thrive, Weasleycest will take a tragic turn, the characterization of Lucius in fanon will shift dramatically, fic about Dumbledore as a young man will explode, and fans will be especially eager to tackle questions about the political arrangements of the wizarding world in the aftermath of Voldemort's defeat. While many

narrative strands were tied up, Rowling has left an enormous amount of room for speculation, as the famous epilogue only discusses certain aspects of the fates of a few major characters, nineteen years after the events of the main narrative. While Rowling has promised an eventual encyclopedia which will answer some of these lingering questions, it will likely be years until this appears, and fans may or may not accept it as canon on a par with the series itself – particularly if there are contradictions between the encyclopedia and the series. Controversies over interpretation of characters and events will continue, but possibly with less heat than before; as long as the canon was incomplete, one's pet theories could still be proven right or wrong. Now that so many questions have been answered, there will be a period of pure reaction to the text – laudatory or critical – and then more creative responses will begin in earnest.

I mentioned earlier that the success of the Potter books has brought discussion of children's and YA literature into the mainstream; I think, also, that Potter, along with the *Lord of the Rings* films by Peter Jackson, has made the fantasy genre more visible than ever before. Fantasy publishing and filmmaking, for children and adults, is experiencing a renaissance, but young fans of the genre are especially benefiting; a recent visit to Borders confirmed the dominance of fantasy literature in the children's and YA sections, and a look at upcoming film releases shows adaptations of acclaimed children's/YA fantasies such as Neil Gaiman's *Stardust*, Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass*, Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising*, and the second installment of the Chronicles of Narnia, *Prince Caspian*. All of these films have substantial fandoms of their own, and Potter fans, eager for new material, will gleefully seize upon these films, and the texts they are based upon, as a further spur to creativity. Those fans who gained their first experience of fandom through Potter are colonizing other fandoms, especially those in related genres such as horror and science fiction, and bringing with them some of Potter's fannish norms; *Supernatural*,

a horror television series where the most obvious of possible romantic pairings is between two brothers, has proven appealing to notoriously unshockable Potter fans. Potter fans have also infiltrated *Stargate: Atlantis*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *Heroes* fandoms.

Potter fans now know for certain where the gaps in their favorite text lie, and will devise ingenious schemes for filling them, whatever Rowling may say afterwards. Potter fandom was a perfect storm, a global phenomenon fostered by the Internet, and the effects will be felt in children's literature, in fantasy literature, and, especially, in the fannish landscape, for years to come. Now, at the closing of the canon, we will finally be able to begin the work of assessing Potter's ultimate impact upon fandom as a whole.

But not right now. The Potterdämmerung has begun, and the Wankas have saved me a ringside seat and a tub of popcorn.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Catherine Tosenberger was born in Chillicothe, Ohio, and grew up in the Akron area. She graduated from Cuyahoga Falls High School in 1994, initially intending to major in theatre and become a professional actor; she turned out to be a terrible waitress, and decided to study religion and literature instead, first at the College of Charleston, and then Kent State University, from which she graduated with a Bachelor of General Studies. She then attended Ohio State University, where she received her MA in English with a specialization in folklore. Having fallen in love with Harry Potter and Internet fandom, she came to the University of Florida to study children's literature and folklore. In March 2007, she married Tim Smith, a fellow alumnus of Cuyahoga Falls High School. Upon receiving her Ph.D., Catherine intends to take a well-earned nap.