Amateur Authors Venture Down Diagon Alley: Authorship within the Fan Writing
Potterverse

By

Jennifer E. Golabek

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Shannon McRae, Ph.D.

Thesis Advisor
Department of English

Adrienne McCormick, Ph.D.

Discipline Chairperson
Department of English

Kevin P. Kearns, Ph.D.
Associate Vice President for Graduate Studies & Research

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Receiving My Hogwarts Letter: The Way Into Fan Writing and Authorship

Have you ever wondered how the story would have ended up if the Sorting Hat had placed Harry Potter in Slytherin House rather than with the Gryffindors? Or what the final battle for Hogwarts would have been like if Sirius Black had never fallen through the veil in the Ministry of Magic? Or even had the notion that with more details and a bit more exploration, we could find out more about Katie Bell and the rest of the Hogwarts students and staff.

So did I.

I was that kid, the one who didn't want a good story to end just because the last line was read or the credits had started to roll. I saw all the fictional worlds—the halls of Hogwarts, a freezing loft apartment in 1989 New York City, and the vampire-infested Sunnydale High School—as places filled with opportunity. Despite the fact that the characters and world belonged to the author, I still wanted to play with them—shiny new toys full of potential.

I was a fan of those fictional worlds; I appreciated the craft that went into the writing and fell in love with the characters and the magic held within the pages of the story. However, it was more than that. I wanted to be part of the action—to take a stand with Neville to help save Hogwarts, to dance and sing on tabletops with the rest of the Alphabet City Avant-Garde. And even more than *that* desire, to be part of the story, I realized that what I wanted was to create the stories and contribute to someone's adventures.

I figured that there were other fans who shared my curiosity, my craving to create. I began the hunt to find fellow fans and creators, and the first place I ventured was online. The easiest and most populated virtual spaces were the chat-rooms and message boards that were

geared towards my chosen stories; I wanted a community that played with the existing canon of the stories and then branched off and built up the fanon—fan-based writing and events that happen outside of original author canon.

The trick to virtual spaces, I quickly discovered, came in understanding the lingo. I found out that the Harry Potter communities rarely cited full titles of the original stories and that when a story had to deal with a romantic relationship, the central characters' names were always separated by a slash. Instead of a piece of fan writing being set within the story of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, with a romantic focus between Harry Potter and Hermione Granger, fan fiction lingo had the story set in OotP and is a Harry/Hermione fic. My head spun for the first few forays into the communities as I adapted to the slang and unfamiliar jargon, but after a while the language used became familiar and the way people were talking about the stories and their writing came to the forefront.

Truthfully, this discovery process was a bit daunting and time-consuming, so as I familiarized myself with the nuances of the communities I wrote privately, creating within the framework of my beloved worlds as a way to participate in grand adventures. As I wrote, and created a place at Hogwarts for just one more misfit to learn magic, I noticed that my writing was starting to shift. Stories were still based in J.K. Rowling's world, but somewhere along the way I had stopped adhering so rigidly to her trajectory and began to think about where *I* thought the stories should have gone. What began as silly drabbles—those short preliminary writings of beginning fan writers—had moved towards manipulation of the text. Reading Rowling's work had left me with questions—about characters and events outside of the scope of her writing—and my writing began to shift to accommodate those lines of inquiry.

Because of this shift, the fan fiction communities I joined were full of fan writers who were also figuring out the answers to their own questions. To be fair, not all the writing was good, or sought to dig into the original stories in new and inventive ways. I talked with other people outside of the virtual communities, mainly teachers and adults, about the writing that was going on in those communities and from those peoples I learned that a lot of fan fiction was not what they considered to be good writing. It was, as they put it, writing full of grammatical errors and outlandish plots, and worse still it was writing that was produced using another person's created world—theft. As I began to work in these communities, I found that the impressions of my teachers were not, in most cases, unfounded; a lot of the fan writing was fluff, fan service, and something very close to identity play. Despite the prevalence of that sort of writing, however, there were some instances that stood out as different. Some of the writers were not focused on the gushing of fans, praising the original and sticking solely to what could be considered canon within the text; instead, they were working out problems they had discovered in the text and making stories that were informed by the original but not controlled by the original stories.

No one was claiming to be the creators of their selected worlds; everyone borrowed from authors and gave credit as they went. It became clear that the communities I had stumbled on and joined were not concerned with the ability to claim financial and creative ownership over the original material, but that instead the goal was to create something new out of the bones of the original. Here, I began to find writers who used their favorite stories as a way to breath life and passion into secondary characters, who turned minor events into central plot points. As I read *those* pieces of fan fiction, I realized the potential that was in the fan writers who could step back

from their writing, those who chose to see the stories as something they created without having to be a character within it.

It became clear that fan fiction was more than just identity play to those writers, that these fan-created pieces of writing were doing something spectacular. While fan fiction has been defined as a form of theft or copyright infringement (even with the use of the 'disclaimer' at the start of fan fiction pieces), as identity play (especially in younger writers), and as an escape from reality, I believe that fan fiction is a form of experimentation and authorship. Writers challenge facets of the original story and adapt the characters and settings to deal with situations that were not found in the canon of the story as a form of interpretation. This interpretive process provides writers with a space to practice writing techniques, explore new genres, and interact with others who are just as invested in making-meaning for the existing story. As fan fiction is written by, and for, and maintained by community members, writers are able to move beyond genre expectations and catering to a specific genre-related reader base. In short, fan fiction is a place to get messy with another author's world where writers are using the characters and settings of more experienced or well-known writers as a way to figure out their own niche as writers. In this same vein, the writing experience also serves as a proving ground for skills, a field rich with scholarly analysis and interpretation, and a space to navigate the very concept of the author-figure and authorship as a whole. Through fan writing, it also becomes apparent that there is a collective voice that community members contribute to in order to create a fanon (fan-created and accepted plot and character interactions) dialogue.

In this fashion, Roland Barthes' analytical eye towards the relationship and assumed roles of reader and writer and Michel Foucault's questioning of the very concept of an author figure

prove to be useful tools for untangling myths, truths, and benefits of fan fiction writing, as well as begin to answer the larger question of what's at stake through fan writing practices. From the more foundational realm of theory, Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the multi-voicedness of the author-figure is especially useful when dealing with the community aspect of fan fiction writing. Through the lens of Bakhtin's writing, the author-figure is no longer a jumble of voices within a single person; instead, it is a jumble of individuals, all with their own unique voices, working within a shared concept.

I propose that fan fiction is a form of authorship—fan fiction writers are responsible for the text they create, and they are responsible for themselves as authors. Fan writers are able to experiment with their own writing process privately, and then expand out into an active community of peers who care about the same things they do. Fan fiction provides a virtual space to engage with writers and discuss literature and the craft of writing in a way that is inviting to *any* who want to participate. It encourages writers to produce the silly stories right alongside the serious ones, and to value their own interpretive abilities.

I desire to show that fan fiction is a valid form of authorship because of the implications it has for literary analysis and the process of writing. Fan writers are tackling literary concepts in ways that test the boundaries of analysis; the writing produced is analytical and reflective, but presented through creativity and tongue-in-cheek meta-conversations. As a person surrounded by the academic side of things—jargon, referential conversations, and the fun, messy parts of literature, I look at fan fiction communities and I see the development of a writer and the ways writers can talk about their craft with others who understand and appreciate what it takes to write. Through fan fiction writing, with a careful look at the authors, the work produced, and the

communities that foster fan writing, writers are able to find their own voices and writing skills while exploring and expanding fictional worlds they admire and appreciate.

This exploration and development of an authorial self is significant not only because it provides a practical writing space open for experimentation with genre and writing process, but also because of the lines of inquiry that can begin to develop through fan fiction. One of the most informative theoretical puzzle pieces for delving into fan writing and authorship comes from Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author" and *The Pleasures of the Text*. As fan fiction communities rely not on authorial identity (and credibility), but instead on work and ideas produced, "Death of the Author" becomes a critical piece in my analysis. As fans take on the challenges of playing within a source text, they are no longer relying on the author's guidance to make meaning from the literary work. In a very concrete fashion, fan fiction is the exploration of the multiple layers of text, context, and subtexts without the singular guidance of the author figure.

Barthes' theoretical approach to texts, "texte lisible" (reading) and "texte scriptible" (writing), create a foundational way to look into fan writing practices. Fan fiction allows the readers of a fandom to move beyond the pleasure inherent in the reader's place as a subject to a place where readers shift into writers. This shift of reader-turned writer removes the subject status from the individual and provides them with the opportunity to move beyond an assigned subject position. It is in the exploration and position shift of what lies beyond the safe and passive role of the reader that makes fan fiction a valid, and valuable method of authorship. This foundational work provides a foothold necessary for wrestling conceptions of authorship as well as the relationship between fan writers and the primary author. As I further explored fan writing

and the communities that support fan practices, Foucault's writing on "What is an Author?"

became valuable. Foucault's analysis of the author, as well as what counts as a viable product of

an author, became crucial in puzzling out the different functions and domains of the author in

terms of the fan writing community. Between Barthes and Foucault, the overall framework

focused on the author—what constitutes author and author-figure, what falls into the realm of

ownership, how we balance the relationship between reader (now writer) and the primary author,

and what happens beyond fan writing practices.

The first way to explore fan fiction as a valid form of authorship is in looking at the

individual author, the communities that house the writers, and the relationship between fan

writers and the original author. My first chapter is entitled "Authorship meets the Sorting Hat:

Discovering the place for writer identity and community structures" and I use it to present a

broad picture of the world of fan writing. In order to really look into and understand fan writing

as authorship, I used my own experiences and adventures in fan writing to organize this chapter.

This exploration is informed, in large part, by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault as their

writings on authors, reader-to-author relationships, and the relationship readers have to the text

helped shape my theoretical approach to the concept of authorship. This approach sets the stage

and proves the necessary background to understanding the later explorations and explanations

about the goals of fan fiction and the ways in which is can, and should be, seen as authors

exploring and analyzing texts through the production of their own creative stories.

From this broad overview of fan fiction—both of the writer and the communities—I

move into looking specifically at a few of the different types of fan fiction that is produced by

fan writers. The second chapter, "Authorship and the Chamber of Writing Experiences" follows

a similar trajectory as the first chapter, in that the first section covers the idea of fan fiction as identity play and then moves into the more generalized fan fiction. Where chapter one talks about fan fiction from the perspective of the author and the community, this continuation into fan fiction explores the different writings that are produced by fan authors. The bulk of legwork in this chapter is done by Henry Jenkins' extensive work on fan communities—looking not only at fan fiction communities, but fan culture as a whole—as well as Rebecca Black's work on fan fiction and adolescent writers. While Black's analysis is focused specifically on a more pedagogical avenue, her process and data regarding fan writing practices, community, and content are beneficial when focusing on the fan fiction process as a journey through levels of authorship. This is crucial because it sets up the work fan authors are doing with the original text in terms of analysis, topics discussed, and creative responses.

The types of fan fiction discussed in chapter two are broad in order to encompass as much of the fan writing experience as possible. What all three types—Mary-Sue fiction, general fiction, and slash fiction—have in common is that they are set within *one* fictional world and rely on the original story of one author. In this fashion, authorship is explored through what writers are doing with the characters, setting, and scenarios of the original author while still maintaining a close relationship to the original world. Through the course of this chapter, I begin to move from the work of beginner writers to the bulk of writing that fills fan fiction communities; in those types of writing, fan writers are starting to demonstrate not only a firm grasp on writing technique and the editing process, but also an understanding of literary tropes and the different ways available for analyzing a text. The last section of chapter two, which focuses on slash fiction, delves into an aspect of fan fiction writing that holds a lot of opportunity for authorship. Through this exploration, I present this type of writing as a way to push the original stories into

new directions that were almost entirely unexplored by the original author. What this means, then, is that this type of fan fiction allows writers to have more control and input on the stories they are producing; they are taking control of the stories and characters and moving them in directions that were not accessible to the original creator for a number of different reasons. Slash fiction is primarily analyzed as a form of identity play and a way to play with gender stereotyping and gender identity. Often, is it read and studied as a way for minority writers (usually presents as young woman and individuals within sexual minorities) to express themselves through preexisting characters. While I acknowledge that a lot of slash can, and does, fall into those camps, I argue that slash writing is primarily about confronting social norms and analyzing the source text through a lens that is not predominantly used within *that* genre or *that* specific text.

The exploration of different fan fiction types that occurs in chapter two lends itself well to the transition into the third chapter. Chapter three, which is entitled "Beyond Hogwarts: Where do we go from here?" looks at fan writing and authorship as it exists beyond the world of one set author. Just as the concluding section of chapter two presents slash fiction as a form of fan fiction that stretches the original story and moves it beyond the original author's range, chapter three explores the idea of crossover fan fiction. Through crossover fan fiction, fan writers are able to navigate between multiple source texts in order to push the boundaries of character, settings, and plot points while establishing personal and communal boundaries as legitimate authors. Writers are producing what Mary Louise Pratt refers to as a contact zone, wherein multiple ideas, voices, and viewpoints come together in order to form a cohesive working dialogue between source texts and fan writers' analyses, which in turn leads to further

development of the identity of the writers as well as their ability to make meaning through fan fiction.

What this means in terms of fan fiction as authorship is that fan writers are moving beyond just one set author-created world and manipulating multiple texts. This shows maturation of the fan writer, as they begin to be able to control not just their interpretations of one world, but several, as well as an understanding of how pieces of literature can inform other writing. This type of fan fiction is presented specifically because it shows fan writers stepping outside of one author's world, manipulating the characters and settings in ways that the original author could never have intended. At this stage, fan writers are owning their interpretations and are pushing beyond the reach of the original authors; they are creating amalgamations of favorite worlds and through those amalgamations, they are creating new analytical perspectives of the specific literary works, genres, and characters.

Chapter three also looks at the potential for fan writers to move beyond the virtual communities of authorship and into a more traditional form of publication. Within this section, I cite a specific example of "fan writer makes good"—a fan fiction writer who took the skills learned within her fan fiction communities and turned those experiences towards the crafting of her own literary works. While this is not the trajectory of every fan writer, I felt the need to include this experience because it demonstrates the benefits of fan writing and shows exactly how fan fiction and the communities that produce it can move beyond fans playing in another writer's text. In a way, this section explores the best possible example of fan writing as a valid method of authorship because of the journey from fan writer to traditional author.

Through these chapters, I will show that fan fiction communities, and the process of fan fiction writing, exist as a form of early training ground for writing and literary analysis. Fan writing exists as more than just a great pastime or as identity play—despite the fact that it surely is a pleasurable experience for those participating—and it's more than fans producing bad writing or gushing about their beloved fictional addictions. Fan fiction writers are invested in the stories they, and other within the community, produce both as a network of fan support and as a network of interpretive acts and outlets. Fan writers journey into the craft of writing and explore their own relationships with the original text as well as their interpretations of the stories presented, and through that adventure they grow as authors and come to their own sense of authorial investment.

Chapter 1: Authorship meets the Sorting Hat: Discovering the place for writer identity and community structures

Section 1: You're a Writer, Harry! The Development of the Writer-Self

Writing fan fiction typically begins as a private experience—a writing space to develop personal interpretations of existing stories. I focused on the world J.K. Rowling created in writing the *Harry Potter* series, latching onto the inviting genre of children's fantasy because of the freedom and detail given in the original writing. Rowling's world was full of secondary characters—minor footnotes in the grand scheme of the wizarding world—that carried potential for development and a way for readers to work out a niche for themselves within the story. As a fan, each book left me with questions created through the context clues left by Rowling. I wondered why there was such animosity between the Gryffindor and Slytherin students—character interactions revealed individual tensions, but each set of students seemed to blindly dislike one another without provocation. The presence of characters such as Remus Lupin and Sirius Black led me to ponder the presence of adult relationships within the framework of Rowling's world—the perfect way to look at mature themes within the scope of children's literature.

The questions that I had floating in my mind led me to develop the desire to create within Rowling's world—if the answers were not in the original text, it was my responsibility to figure them out. I wanted to answer the questions left open by Rowling's text, and I craved a community to help tease out all the possible answers to the questions raised within the *Potter*verse. My first *Potter* community was not a virtual space where people wrote fan fiction pseudonymously; instead, it was in high school classrooms and the school cafeteria where friends would gather and talk about *Harry Potter* in more than a "this is great stuff!" kind of capacity. We were fans, contributing to each other's answers through discussion and speculative conversations—we were not, as of that moment, writers.

Within this section, I will outline the process of how fans become writers in the sense of fan fiction communities, as well as what is gained through the development of the writer-identity. Authorship and the writer-identity are the key features of this section and will be framed through the theorist Michel Foucault's essay, "What is an Author?" as he calls into question not only the relationship between author and text, but also what the very definition of the author function. As fan fiction writers fit themselves between text and primary author, they are challenging the established meaning put forth by the author. Foucault's writing helps to demonstrate this shift that occurs in fan fiction, wherein the primary author is no longer the lone power-figure, instead taking a backseat to the creative interpretation that occurs through the collaborative virtual communities. This section will take Foucault's theories and use them to explore the general steps towards becoming a writer as well as the benefits inherent with not only being a writer but also the process of writing. This initial set-up looks at the individual writer within the framework of theory and personal experiences in the fan fiction community, and from the set-up of the individual we will later continue onto the larger picture of the community of fan writers as set by theorists like Henry Jenkins, Rebecca Black, and Catherine Tosenberger

In looking at the development of a writer-self, it is important to realize the behind-the-scenes moments that influence a fan and push them into developing their writing. As a fan left with questions, I relied on my real-world friends to provide a space to discuss the series and to approach it with the same sort of enthusiasm I did. I wanted to analyze the story, not just gush about the characters and setting; I craved a space for my own meaning and interpretation of the story and characters to be acknowledged and accepted. The lunchtime conversations were fun, but did not fulfill the need to create based on the inspirations of Rowling's world. I would

participate in our conversations but never share my own ideas and interpretations about potential answers to our large questions about character relationships or plot holes left by Rowling.

I, like other fans who wanted to create, was looking for an outlet—a space for like-minded people to gather and interact with one another and the source text while working to create something new out of existing stories. It was suggested by my lunchroom peers that I investigate online fan communities and that I try to write out my interpretations through fan fiction. This new space would be different from the noisy lunchroom I was used to—the lunchroom has an undeniable level of safety where I trusted everyone who was contributing to the conversations and speculations about the source text. Because of this trust, this familiarity, there was often very little resistance to ideas and interpretations. The real world friends did not question how I used characters in my preliminary writing, or dig into my methods of analysis and interpretation. Conversations were too clean and agreeable to help shape my writing on the *Potter*verse and I was looking for a place to do more than talk about the text. It became a desire to create, to write out the answers to my what-if questions and have others respond to them.

As we view fan fiction writers as creators, it becomes imperative to focus on the steps that many community members follow in order to gain entry to the community. Through these steps it becomes possible to understand how the community fosters a sense of the author-identity among members. The presentation of each phase of entry, beginning with the introduction of the concept of lurking, helps to provide a framework to use in order to analyze the development of a fan writer's sense of ownership over their own authorial presence. This authorial presence represents a sense of communal authorship rather than Foucault's singular sense of the author.

In order to develop as a writer, I needed to find a place to write and respond to other writers' ideas and texts. Often, the first step in becoming a member of the community, and thus a writer within the community, is to 'lurk'. It must be said, at this point, that not all individuals who lurk on sites become community members, but that most community members can trace their foundations back to their lurking days. The ever-popular TV Tropes website, a site maintained by a community of internet users who not only keep themselves aware of cultural shifts and nuances but also understand and engage with academic terms and literary methods of analysis, has this to say on the idea of lurking:

> Sometimes lurking is a prelude to becoming a regular poster on the forum. Either the lurker likes what they see and decides to become an active part of the community, or they were intending to join all along and merely lurked to get a handle on the unspoken rules and *zeitgeist* of the forum. Thus, a period of lurking can help one bypass the noob stage of the forum poster life cycle. (TV tropes)

I existed first as an outsider, the quiet kid who listens in class, but never says a word to peer or teacher. Lurking offered the same sort of safety as the lunchroom—without sharing my own opinions, I was able to get a basic feel for the community as a whole. The silent, fully anonymous position allows potential contributors a chance to analyze the ebb and flow of conversations. This way, when a lurker joins the community and first posts, their entry into the community dialogue will be informed by peers and fellow contributors. The lurking phase is, in this case, a precursor to public writing—fan writers may be crafting stories and dabbling with characters and settings privately, but it is in this stage that writers are learning about the community with which they want to engage. For some writers, this sense privacy, of aloneness, is important for the early drafting stages when ideas are still fluid and meanings are still being

crafted and refined. After a while, however, privacy becomes isolation and a piece of writing can stagnate without a place to share it. Rebecca Black, again with her focus on fan fiction and English language learners (shortened, in her writing, to ELLs), provides an overview of Fanfiction.net in "Access and Affiliation: The Literacy and Composition Practices of English-language Learners in an Online Fanfiction Community", presenting it as an extensively structured and networked community wherein members are able to scaffold their level of participation. Throughout the process of outlining the steps of the fan writer, her insight, though specific to adolescent writers, will be beneficial in understanding the emotions behind the steps.

From this isolated position of lurking, wherein a fan is learning about the community as a whole as well as potentially beginning to experiment with their own writing and creation of meaning, fans can begin to shift into an active member role. After a potential member begins to understand and acknowledge the structure of the selected community, it becomes possible to show the next step in the journey towards the development of the writer. This next step, the initial forum or website posting comes after a potential member has developed a certain level of comfort with the structure of the community as well as with what the existing members are saying about the source material. We can think of this initial post as the introduction to a writer—the first piece of a member's identity as a writer. This initial welcome is *crucial* for contributors—it is the traditional first impression, and it dictates how members think about, and interact with, the community. It is in the first few postings to the site, usually the obligatory "Hi, I'm new here. My user name is _____ and I really like this fandom because _____!" and the first few comments a new contributor makes to someone else's story, that help a new member understand the flow of the community, and the rules and regulations for being an active member. Rebecca Black's work on ELLs is useful in looking at the early posts of novice

members and their early signed (wherein they are logged into the community) comments and reviews to other members' stories. She suggests that "by submitting signed reviews, members such as ELLs who may not yet feel comfortable enough to author their own fictions are still able to establish a social base within the community" (Black 122).

New members take their cues from existing members' posts—which details of the source text are common knowledge, which opinions about characters and plots are in vogue, and where does this particular community stand on deeper issues found within the source material. My own initial explorations were made, hesitantly, on the site, Fanfiction.net, which many fan writers seek out as an early proving ground for their writing. This site, which is one of the most populated fan fiction archives in existence, holds thousands of pieces of fan writing from just about any fandom imaginable, and as such many novice writers find their first virtual community within those forums. Again, Black's work makes it possible to see that, in terms of Fanfiction.net, the structure of the site allows novice writers, and in Black's case ELLs, to "construct themselves as legitimate fans as they participate in the review process, interact with other members, and create a social base to support them when they do begin to author and post fictions" (Black 122). In that fashion, my own posts were not, by any stretch of the imagination, thrilling or full of profound moments; they did, however, attract the attention—or as Black calls it, social base—of some of the site's veteran *Potter* writers who offered their assistance in teaching me the ins and outs of the community. This first post—the introduction of self into the collaborative community—is ritualistic in a way.

In some communities, this first posting occurs in forums rather than as attached to fan fiction stories. One such community, HarryPotterFanFiction.com, separates the establishment of community hierarchy from the writing produced and allows contributors to interact without

relying solely on the fiction produced. In the forthcoming example, wherein the language used is primarily internet-speak and improper grammar, the poster Josephine (pseudonym "Hagridismyman") introduces herself and outlines her favorite fandoms—*Dr. Who*, *Sherlock Holmes*, and *Harry Potter* to name a few. The post continues, stating "im [sic] thinking of uploading my first story, but im [sic] so frightened of what other people will think about it. but i guess that's [sic] half the fun right?" (Hagridismyman). This user's post demonstrates trepidation in joining the community of fan writers, as well as a desire to participate in writing. The user puts themselves out there, both with an introduction and a presentation of what they initially desire from their participation in the community, and then they hope to engage with others through forums and through fan writing activities.

As of this writing, this introductory post has received eleven responses, all welcoming Josephine to the community. In order to understand some of the commentary that goes back and forth between users, it is imperative to look at a response to the initial post. The response, posted by user "Magicmuggle01", is welcoming and supportive—encouraging the participation of the new member Josephine.

> Nice to meet you. As the previous two people have said, this forum site and HPFF site are a good bunch and are very supportive. I felt the same way about my first story which I posted about 18 months ago. I thought to myself, will people like it? What if it's rubbish? But So I took the bit between the teeth and posted it. I had a very good, positive and encouraging reviews and feedback. Now I have 24 completed and work in progress stories. So I say go for it where your first story is concerned. Good luck and enjoy the stories that people have posted, and also good luck with your stories and also your time here. (Magicmuggle01).

While not all of the responses are this in-depth, most share a sense of encouragement and welcome. "The Empty Frame", another forum and writing contributor, offers a much shorter welcome message, stating, "Don't be afraid to post your story, everyone here is really supportive. And even if it's not bestseller material, you can get really awesome feedback and tips!" (The Empty Frame).They share their own novice experiences as a way to encourage new members to not only become active on the forums, but also to take the leap into publishing their own fan fiction stories. Such responses remind new members that the community thrives not only through forums, but through writing and the feedback others provide to members. These simple introduction posts and the veteran members' responses show fan writers' first step towards claiming a place within the source text and fandom. This establishes them as members, albeit novices, within a larger interactive community.

This interaction—the journey of a fan into a writer—continues as the member begins to develop a pseudonym identity within the community through the posting of their own stories or comments on other members' stories. It is in this step, where the majority of the community interactions occur, that Foucault becomes especially useful. Foucault's focus on "the singular relationship that holds between an author and a text, the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and preceded it" (Foucault 1623) is useful in this regard because of the implications raised between fan writer and the text. As a writer begins to post their own interpretations, they are moving beyond the original author-figure's creation and relationship with the text and instead are beginning to develop their own dialogue with the source material. The focus at this step is no longer on who is saying things within the collective dialogue, but on what is being said and entertained within the collective dialogue.

Fan writers at this step are talking not anonymously, but instead they are engaging in craft talks regarding writing and literary analysis through pseudonyms. These self-created identities allow fan writers to create meaning and interpretation of the original source material without their readers having a clearly defined sense of who is producing the texts. This pseudo-anonymous reading and writing practice allows for the audience to get to know the writer through their presented ideas and interpretations rather than through their real-world identities. Writers have been initiated into the community through their initial introductory posts, and are now beginning to create a niche within the community to test their own boundaries as writers.

Through the lens of pseudonyms, works of fan writing are able to stand on their own without a larger context of who an author is, or why they choose to write in a particular style or fandom. I was writing fan fiction, playing with theory, with the critiques and established interpretations of my peers (the accepted term within fan communities for these established interpretations is 'fanon'), and my reactions were based on what was written, rather than who was doing the writing—their work became the way to measure credibility. This step is crucial to the idea of the author and fan fiction because it holds with it the strongest development of the writer's identity. Without a socially defined and set identity, fan writers are able to adopt multiple viewpoints and analytical stances. The writers' perspectives become fluid and fan writers adopt different personas in order to respond creatively within the critical collective. This is, in a sense, the center of authorship; fans are playing with the text and gaining a position of power inherent in the creation of text.

Writers are allowed to try new ideas as members within fan communities, manipulating new plots, methods and styles of writing, and play with a variety of characters without needed to validate their work through other sources. Their writing, a creative piece that often leads to more

analytical responses or quandaries, becomes something stand-alone, the initial piece of research that has the potential to start other writer-members into a new way of thinking. In the general fan fiction writing posts, fan writers became pioneers within their source material, digging in and getting personal with how to share their findings.

The general posting activity is when writers begin to collaborate through comments, taking in the critiques of other writers in order to better their own craft while still working within the bounds of the fan community. In this moment, a writer is made not only to post their stories—their interpretations of the source text—but also to engage with their fellow writers on a level deeper than exploring a fandom. Through this step, it becomes possible to see writers contributing to an ongoing dialogue and participating in craft talk that digs into stylistic questions, techniques, and how well the writer had achieved their set-upon goals.

These steps towards the development of a writer's identity are important to understand as they help frame the overarching idea of fan fiction as a form of authorship. We have looked specifically at the three general stages of the fan member's journey towards the development of the writer: lurking, introductory posting, and general posting of stories and comments. It now becomes essential to look at the individual benefits that come with the discovery of a fan writer's identity.

One benefit is the ability to use the process of writing as a tool for analysis as well as an opportunity to create. In my own case, I both play *and* analyze in worlds that I love and adore, worlds that I myself find value in. This analysis happens not only in the private endeavors of writing fan fiction, but also through the back and forth comments and dialogue that exists when fan writers respond to one another, which will be further discussed in the writing that deals

specifically with the fan fiction community. Through the development of the writer-identity, and the development of a sense of comfort with the analytical and creative abilities of a writer, writers and readers read the original source material right alongside the latest fan fiction as a way of reading for new meaning. From these readings, fan writers are ability to create new interpretations of the original source material's world while still paying attention to their own intuition and power as a writer.

The fan writer is playing in, continuing the story, and creating new character evolutions in worlds that she or he did not originally create. As fan writers, we are playing in someone else's sandbox—telling stories and recreating characters that we love because the original material held something special, something inviting, for us. It is a way to pay homage for some, for others it is a way to 'fix' issues they had in the original source material—often the case in *Potter*verse stories that have Sirius Black alive and well years after Voldemort's defeat—and for still others, it is a way to ask questions to a larger audience that came up during the initial exposure to the world.

Through placing value in these worlds I have given myself license to approach the text in a number of fashions—I am not limited to operating just as a fan, or as a critic. I can, instead, take my personal ideas and opinions and merge them with the critical commentary that I read as a scholar. In a very real way, fan writing has offered me the ability to take ownership of the literature I study and write about, as well as ownership of my own identity as a creator. My opinions are valued as a scholar and encouraged as a creative writer, so bridging these two methods of writing and approaching the source material has allowed me the chance to operate in all capacities, fan, critic, and writer, without limitations.

However beneficial the process of fan fiction writing is to the individual, it is within the communities that fan fiction can truly exist as a form of authorship. The few personal benefits that have been discussed above—discussion of craft, unique interpretive opportunities, and the ability to analyze texts through original creations—will be expanded on when looked at in terms of the community of writers, rather than just the individual writer. It is in the context of fan communities that we will now focus on to continue developing our understanding of fan fiction as a form of authorship.

Section 2: Welcome Harry, to Fiction Alley! Authorship and the Community

Our initial look at authorship focused primarily on the individual as a writer and member into a fan fiction community. The steps for a fan writer's entry into a specific community have been outlined, and from that point it becomes possible to shift our attention to fan fiction communities as a whole. Our study of the community—the proverbial setting for the writer to exist in—will be informed by scholar Henry Jenkins, whose writing has focused on fan communities and fan interactions, and Deborah Kaplan's essay "Construction of Fan Fiction Character Through Narrative". Through these two perspectives, we will focus on the development of communal authorship through fan fiction.

Fan writing communities require a certain type of investment, both in time and in devotion to the original source material. Initially, this translates into re-reads, or re-watches, of the selected fandom, engaging peers on public forums in regards to the latest trends, spoilers, and scandals that have rocked the virtual world since your last log-in, and preparing to devote yourself to ideas and opinions about the universe you want to write and read in. Much in the same fashion as one preparing for his or her studies, writers spend hours of time devoted to

reading and writing, editing and commenting, on pieces of fan writing. From this, we are able to look broadly at the general purpose of fan community.

Henry Jenkins speaks on organized fandoms and states that "organized fandom is, perhaps first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semi-structured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of the mass media and their own relationship to it" (Jenkins 86). As a scholar, his research does not go into the creative expression found within fan fiction or the benefits an author might get through their creative endeavors. Instead, the focus is on the critical aspect of writing and the sense of speculation and observation that comes with the territory of fan writing.

Deborah Kaplan presents a succinct look at fan fiction communities as a whole, noting their similarities to communities of literary critics and scholars, and her statements have informed my own thinking about fan communities and how they support, and present, the writers and readers. She states that "in reality, fans are members of an active interpretation community. A large part of the fannish experience lies in analyzing the source texts of fandom. Fans interpret these texts through discussion and formal analysis, but also through the creative act of writing fan fiction" (Kaplan 135). It is crucial to understand the interpretive writing acts that occur without the participants being told what to do, or how to write. This exercise in craft is, for most, a labor of love and a journey of the writer that is expressed through creative writing, analytical discourse, and a community of critical thinkers. The virtual space is an organic community where members freely contribute based on their interests and interpretations of the source text. It is important to note that while these communities are organic in nature, they are still structured and maintained by fellow collaborators.

We will look first at the known general demographics of fan writers, as it is helpful to understand the individuals who are contributing to the collaborative sense of authorship. Many of the writers fall into the demographic of young adults—student—as Black, Mahar, Chandler-Olcott, Webber, and Burns have shown in their research involving fan writing and fan communities. The other group that is well-documented from a demographic standpoint are female writers as discussed by MacDonald. In terms of historical significance, the women discussed in MacDonald's work are primarily slash writers—a topic we will address in the next chapter—and many of these writers have been around since at least the 1980s with the *Star Trek* fandom. This particular information lends itself to Abigail Derecho's research which delves deeper into demographic information as she states that "fan fiction is a genre that has a long history of appealing to women and minorities, individuals on the cultural margins" (Derecho 76). She claims that those set fan writers participate in writing in order to express themselves creatively as well as shine light on inequalities faced by minorities as a whole.

In discussing the present of minority-writers, it is important to note that the presence of racial minorities within fan communities, is not well documented or theorized, so the primary research lends itself to specifically analyze sexual minorities. There are others who write fan fiction, writers who identify as homosexual, bisexual, or transgendered, and who write stories that explore problems that they, themselves, have faced. This is one of the biggest parts of fan fiction. Henry Jenkins continues with the idea of authorship stating that "just as anyone who wants to can probably get published within fandom, anyone with the ambition can probably establish their own zines to print the kind of stories they want to read and write" (Jenkins 159). *Anyone* is able, and encouraged, to create their own take on favorite stories and moments, regardless of the demographic from which you hail.

Because of this wide-spread acceptance of members, fan communities must be regulated so that order is maintained and the goals of the communities are continually met through user interactions and engagement. The virtual communities of *Harry Potter* fan fiction, along with fan fiction of all fandoms, are self-policing. Each site has specific rules and requirements for the members to adhere to; these requirements are, most often, agreed upon by a new member when she or he signs up to be a member of the site. The guidelines, or terms of service (frequently referred to as the ToS), are usually posted in an easily accessed forum on the site, available for review at any point from any community member. The ToS are adhered to, or moderators—in this case, fellow fans of the *Potter* series who are just as invested as the next fan fiction writer— begin a process of discipline, which can include suspension, or banishment from the site, limited commenting rights, or an inability to publish stories to the public.

In order to get a true handle on the ToS and general guidelines, I wanted to look at one of the most popular, and first accessed, sites devoted to the *Potter*verse—www.Mugglenet.com. This site has an entire section devoted to submission rules, beginning with the statement "You want to submit a fan fic – that's great! But (there are always buts) because we don't post every fic we receive, it is imperative that you read the short list of rules below before actually submitting. **Fics are only posted after they are manually approved by a moderator**" (Mugglenet). This particular site, one of the more rigorous of the general *Potter* fan fiction communities, controls what fan pieces are published based on the adherence to the guidelines of the site. Granted, publication rights are granted by moderators who, like other fan writers, have particular ideas and facets of fan fiction that appeal to them, so the process is not without bias, but it is guided more by the fans themselves.

This system of self-policing is crucial to the community—the agenda is set by those who have invested time into reading and producing fan fiction, and the tides of interest shift dependent on what theories or observations are in vogue. With fan communities, there is no larger, or more receptive, audience than your fellow writers. The reliance on others is essential—writing, regardless of fan-based or purely scholarly, is a communal experience. The writing communities that exist for fan fiction authors rely on the source material to provide the initial playground, readers to provide initial feedback, and fellow writers to push them to challenge their opinions and expand fandom knowledge and interpretations.

There is a reliance on the feedback of anonymous peer-reviewers—a sense of trust that occurs when both parties are working towards a common goal and each are as invested in the process as the other. Peer-reviewers, or as they're called in fandom, beta readers, are community members who offer editing and revision assistance to fellow writers. The beta process, outlined by Angelina Karpovich, provides another level of engagement within the writing community, and as such we must take a moment to outline the functions of betaing. A beta reader is a well-established member—a writer who posts frequently and constructively within the community and has built up a reputation, someone who has run the gauntlet established by the members of the community. These beta readers are veterans and often must meet certain criteria, such as membership, published stories, forum posts, and even in some cases a mini-application, before they become eligible for beta reading duties. Karpovich states that "the beta reader will read the story as a draft and will offer feedback and suggestions for improvement on all aspects of the story, from narrative structure and characterization to grammar and spelling. It is not unusual for an author to use more than one beta reader, perhaps with different betas specializing in different aspects of writing" (Karpovich 174). She continues in saying that "the practice of beta reading

fan fiction represents a unique form of audience engagement with the text, enabled by but more conceptually complex than fan fiction itself, because it allows some members of an audience to significantly affect a text addressed directly to them in ways that greatly exceed the possibilities offered to the audiences of any commercially produced text" (Karpovich 177). It is a one-on-one relationship that writers and beta-readers develop, much like peer editors in an academic setting, where honest opinions and inquiries always guides the discussion, and comments are made not to be cutting, but to help a fellow writer's work become even more sound. In this fashion, the community begins to focus on fan fiction as authorship. This exchange becomes a conversation not about the source material, but about the craft of writing. Authors are contributing to an ongoing dialogue—a craft talk that digs into stylistic questions, techniques, and how well the author had achieved their set goals.

Through discussion of the general practices of the fan fiction writing communities, as well as the hierarchical fan-organized structure of the communities, we can begin to understand how fan fiction and authorship operate in the framework of community. The early focus on the foundations of the communities in tandem with the general process of becoming a writer in the sense of the community makes it possible to look at the purpose of fan communities from the perspective of writing and the development of the writer.

The most obvious benefit of fan communities is found in the membership; each community member begins on equal footing as part of the community as a whole wherein everyone cares about the overall success of the fandom. New members are given the opportunity to make themselves an active community member through forum posts, reviews, and eventually through publication of fan fiction. It, again, must be stated that fan fiction communities are not regulated in such a way that limits involvement from novice members—novice and veterans

alike are able to post in the same places, talk with the same people, and gain the same sort of feedback, regardless of levels of previous engagement. From this equality, it also becomes relevant that there is usually a lack of real-world personal attachments between writers and editors—there is friendship and loyalties to each other, but the primary focus is on the writing created within these friendships. The communal aspect of fan writing means that each party can set to work improving the writing produced in the fandom, making the communities not only a place to discuss and manipulate text, but also a place to engage in craft-talks about writing. Jenkins chimes into this discussion with the idea that "readers and writers depend upon each other for the perpetuation of the fandom" (Jenkins 160). One part of the fandom cannot exist without the other portion being *just* as active, and just as devoted to the overall goals and ambitions of the community. Members are able to play and create within their favorite worlds, and have an audience who not only knows the source material very well, giving writers the opportunity for contextual writing, but also who are genuinely interested in what their fellow members are saying.

"Fan fiction is about the whole community of fans, not just the stories, and not even just the writers who are a big deal" (Schaffner 613). The entire group, readers, writers, artists, and lurkers, is the focus. Yes, there are writers and stories, that gain community- or site-wide attention, filling up forums with comments and petitions for continuing the fan fiction, but they do not make the community as a whole. Like Schaffner, I come to the ideas and research regarding fan fiction as a contributor. She, and I, are both small writers, not widely known on particular fandom sites, but we, and other small-time fan fiction writers, are able to find a welcoming home to express our ideas and experiences within our preferred fandoms. In fact, other scholars have offered evidence that fan fiction communities are more than just fans, but

instead they are scholars and participants that want to engage the source material in a critical capacity. Deborah Kaplan sketches out the community of fans as

> a dynamic critical space where multiple interpretive activities can take place. The same fans who analyze character in the source test so closely will be writing fan fiction that plays into that interpretive and critical activity. Character analyses, rather than being constructed in a nonfiction essay are constructed in a fictional environment in which one interpretation of character can be maintained. In a community populated by competing and often contradictory understandings of character can only carry substantial weight if the characters are well-rounded and carefully drawn. (Kaplan 151)

This definition of fan communities as a critical, *dynamic* space seems perfect to me. The situation I found myself in, as a fan writer and as an analytical writer, fits into Kaplan's description. The communal space is a place to develop ideas as a writer and have the ideas maintained through my own writing to add to the fanon meaning. However, the interpretative acts cannot be unfounded—to persist within the community, the writing must be well-rounded and developed, with a focus on characters and adherence to the original canon as a starting point.

In looking at the development of the writer and then structure of the community, we have seen some of the cursory benefits and purposes of regarding fan fiction as a valid form of authorship. However, we have yet to examine the relationship between the fan writer and the original author and original source material. Our continued study will shift in focus to the relationship between fan writing and text as we push deeper into what it means to be an author and how fan fiction assists in crafting and maintaining that definition.

Section 3: The other side can do magic too! Fan Writers Meet the Author-Figure

Up to this point we have discussed the development of the writer identity and the structure of fan communities as it relates to fan fiction as a form of authorship. We have not, as of yet, looked at the existence of the original author in relation to fan writers and their communities. In this section, we will delve into the relationship of readers and fan writers to the text, and the relationship the readers have with the original source author. To accomplish this task, I will frame this conversation through Roland Barthes' essays "Death of the Author" and *The Pleasures of the Text*. Press releases of J.K. Rowling's stance on fan fiction will also help to inform this writing as well as blog entries from George R.R. Martin, an author who staunchly opposes fan fiction writing practices.

First, we will look at the function of the original Author—the Author-figure in Barthes' writing. In terms of purpose, it is the original author of the source material—J.K. Rowling in this case—who creates the original framework of the fictional world. The author creates the characters and settings that fill the fictional world, thus providing the material for fan writers to begin explorations into the craft of writing. They are the original gods within the fictional universe, and through their writing and publication they shape the canon for fans.

The most publicly stated role of the Author-figure is not, however, in just the creation aspect of the source material. Instead, we must look at the idea of financial ownership and intellectual property as it relates to the Author-figure. This is one of the strongest stances against fan fiction as a valid form of writing because it has writers using someone else's intellectual property, and that the writing produced is an appropriation of the original author's work that works against copyright and financial ownership of the text. One of the biggest critics of fan

fiction is George R.R. Martin—a fantasy, horror, and science fiction author who has a solid and positive relationship with his fan base despite his own ban on fan fiction. His website has a section of frequently asked questions, with the first question being "I want to be a writer. Can you give me any advice?" His response does not directly call out fan fiction, but through the word choice it is possible to assume his meaning. The advice he gives is to always write, and he continues it by saying that

> the more you write, the better you'll get. But don't write in my universe, or Tolkien's, or the Marvel universe, or the Star Trek universe, or any other borrowed background. Every writer needs to learn to create his own characters, worlds, and settings. Using someone else's world is the lazy way out. If you don't exercise those "literary muscles," you'll never develop them. (Martin)

His view states that the use of another writer's universe is lazy and real writers can use only their own creations rather than borrow from authors with more experience. His focus is on the process of creating characters and settings as a writer—the technical and creative aspect of writing that involves time, an understanding of how characters could, potentially, interact, and trust in self as the author-creator. His May 7th, 2010 blog entry is passionate about the fan fiction, laying out the idea that an author's livelihood is reliant on the worlds and characters created, and that they should be treated carefully and used only by the original creators. The idea of theft is a large part of this argument—authors are hesitant to allow fan writers into their worlds because they have worked to make the worlds and characters special, and unmistakably their own.

Obviously, published authors land on each side of the fan fiction writing fence. Some authors, like Martin, view fan fiction as a copyright infringement, laying sole claim to their created work; others acknowledge the potential for a multiplicity of interpretations and because

of that potential, they allow fans to engage directly with their material—they do not stop fan creations and sites from continuing critical conversations about the author's original world.

For the purposes of this writing, it is the opinion of J.K. Rowling that most concerns me as a fan writer. In 2004, Rowling tackled the issue of fan fiction head on and issued a statement through her spokespeople and then presented in an article published by the BBC. Darren Waters' article, "Rowling backs Potter fan fiction", presents an overview on not only the *Potter*verse as it existed several years ago, but also presents Rowling's stance on writers playing in her world. Waters states that "a spokesman for Rowling's literary agent said she was "flattered people wanted to write their own stories" based on her characters" (Waters). The article continues on to say

> The spokesman for the Christopher Little literary agency said: "JK Rowling's reaction is that she is very flattered by the fact there is such great interest in her Harry Potter series and that people take the time to write their own stories. "Her concern would be to make sure that it remains a non-commercial activity to ensure fans are not exploited and it is not being published in the strict sense of traditional print publishing." He said writers had to ensure that the stories were not obscene and were credited to the author and not to JK Rowling. (Waters)

The sentiment of financial ownership is something that fan writers are very sensitive about—fan writing isn't about theft of intellectual property and good fan writers cite their sources in a disclaimer that occurs before the fan fiction. Author Lev Grossman chimes into the authorship conversation by stating that

Nobody makes money from fan fiction, but whether anybody loses money on fan fiction is a separate question. The people who create the works that fan fiction borrows from are sharply divided on it. Rowling and Stephenie Meyer have given *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* fan fiction their blessing; if anything, fan fiction has acted as a viral marketing agent for their work. Other writers consider it a violation of their copyrights, and more, of their emotional claim to their own creations. They feel as if their characters had been kidnapped by strangers. (Grossman).

Fan writers take liberties with published author's creations—manipulating the characters and settings to tell new, or modified stories regarding the original source material. What seems to be at stake, here, is not so much the idea of copyright, but rather the creative and emotional claim to the source material. Fan writers connect with the published literature and through that connection—that emotional bond—a sense of ownership begins to arise. Fan writers come to know and appreciate the source text, and through that appreciation and knowledge, they adopt the world and favorite characters not as their own creations, but instead as tools to be used in carving out a place of their own within the critical, and creative, collective conversation.

The primary fact that comes out of Rowling's statement is that she *allows* and even *encourages* fan writers to play in her world. In a way, the fan fiction communities that exist around the *Harry* Potter fandom provide a fan-driven, grassroots style promote of her writing; fans tell friends and get them thinking about the potential of the stories, and suddenly more people are interacting and discussing the meat of the source texts. She is, in effect, sharing a piece of her authorial power to control the story. This particular freedom for fans means that we write without the overwhelming control of the source material's original creator looming over us,

correcting our opinions. We are allowed to express our enjoyment, our disdain, for the original

work and characters and allowed to confront the original author in this way, rather than

presenting our arguments or expressing our pleasure through anonymous encounters between

reader and author.

The Rowling press statement also lays out the experiences of Fanfiction.net, which again

is a site that fan writers often find first, with other authors not as allowing as Rowling. "Xing Li,

editor of FanFiction.net, said the website had received a number of requests from authors to

remove work. He said: "It is our long standing policy of fanfiction.net to respect the wishes of

original writers and will remove or ban fan fiction categories at their request." Authors to have

contacted the website include Anne Rice, Anne McCaffrey and Raymond Feist" (Waters). Fan

writing, like academic writing, honors the sources and uses them to create opinions and stances

on larger topics, not as a method of theft. Each type of writing does, in its own way, cite the

source material the author is working from—each use a different format but the sentiment is the

same: the original ideas and views presented are not mine, but this is my *interpretation* of what

I've read and seen.

From looking at the position of the Author-figure and some preliminary responses by the

fan community, we can look at the position of the fan writer and community in relation to the

Author-figure. In looking at Barthes, we must remember that all fan writers began as fan readers,

and that in a sense fan writing illustrates the shift from Author-figure to fan writers. Roland

Barthes outlines the primary function of a reader in the reader to author relationship. He says that

> the reader is the space on which all quotations that make up a writing are
>
> inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin, but in

its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is

without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds

together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted.

Which is why it is derisory to condemn the new writing in the name of a

humanism hypocritically turned champion of the reader's writers. Classic

criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only

person in literature. (Barthes 1469)

His focus on Author intent and meaning, specifically the removal of those rights from an author

is a crucial piece for understanding fan fiction as what it is—a communal author experience that

helps fan writers create a sense of their identity as a writer, regardless of the intentions and

wishes of the original author. The readers, as Barthes uses the term, become the writers of fan

fiction and with his interpretation, meaning making belongs in the hands of the readers who

devote their own time and experiences to the fandom. The background of the reader does not

matter, much in the same way that the identity of the fan writer is inconsequential, what matters

is their existence, their willingness to explore and experience a text in its entirety.

While part of my argument is that fan writing offers a way into critical thought and

analysis, we must also explore the idea that scholarship forms a bridge back into communal

writing. Arguably, fan writing should be considered to be a pleasurable, and rewarding,

experience; thousands contribute within fan communities by crafting stories, offering feedback,

and engaging with one another through forum posts and discussions. The key component here is

the idea that this form of scholarship helps to demonstrate the pleasure found in communal

writing. Fans write for themselves, and for one another, sharing plotlines and character

development over fan forums and mass communication to make the experience community-wide, rather than just personal.

In this manner, readers of a text are no longer meeting their favorite authors in a proverbial dark alleyway, as Barthes presents. Instead, reading and writing shift from a sense of anonymity, where fan and writer do not exist within the same framework, to a place where the interactions between author and reader are fluid. These interactions, though anonymous through the virtual communities become pleasurable because each conversation informs the next. Writing and reading no longer occur within a vacuum, and the fan writers—who also exist as readers of the text—no longer have to silently draw pleasure from the text. Through fan fiction and this pleasurable, pseudo-anonymous interaction, fans further develop a sense of ownership over part of the source material. The pleasurable experience becomes communal rather than individual, thus contributing further to the communal creation of the author and the fanon that is created by active writers.

Fans are able to move beyond the boundaries that exist for the Author-figure—fan writing is freedom from genre constraints and societal propriety. Fan writers take the framework of the *Potter*verse and use it as a jumping point for their own creations; the key is that through fan fiction communities fan writers are producing something new out of the existing source material. This freedom means that fan writers can take the source material and stretch it to fit their own lives and interpretations without fear of destroying the canon or losing a reader base.

The communal authorship inherent in fan writing communities opens the gateway of interpretation—meaning is no longer one set idea dictated by one Author-voice. In terms of Barthes, whom we must return to for ideas regarding author authority, we understand that "we

know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and dash" (Barthes 1468). Fan writing invites writers to come together and join the voice of the fan—that child-like voice that focuses on the 'this is great stuff!' mentality—with a thriving community of authors—relying on one another to help make new meaning from each other's writing—to finally the existing voice of the Author-figure as the original creator of the fictional world. Through the devotion and patience of fans, through craft and experimentation, the production of text moves from solely the Author-figure, settling itself on the Author-figure and the fan writers all as valid authors, albeit of different genres and professional levels.

Chapter 2—Authorship and the Chamber of Writing Experiences

The previous chapter offers an outline of the basic steps that fans take to move beyonf passive spectators and into the role of active community contributors. Through this outline we are able to analyze the steps the writers take to hone their craft, as well as understand the structure of the contributor-created communities. However, we have yet to begin studying the work of fan writers—the fan fiction produced and published within these communities. As we focus on the primary claim that fan writing is a method of authorial development and presence— and therefore a sort of ownership—within the fanon of the source text, it is essential that we take the time to broadly address the writing alongside its' creators.

This close focus makes it possible to interpret fan relationships to the source text and the interpretive actions of other fan writers. It also provides a method of analyzing the level of participation that fans feel comfortable within their selected communities through frequency of posting, both writing and commentary. Fans who are comfortable speaking, reading, and thinking within the bounds of their selected virtual communities will be able to not only take on a strong, active role, but they will also become known through the community and in this reputation will gain different senses of ownership over the source text. In this fashion, we can understand the last broad benefit in looking at the writing produces alongside the writers; as scholars, we can track how writers develop their own quandaries in regards to the source text, as well as watch the answers be teased out through creative writing.

As we have previously discussed, a fan's first tentative steps as a contributor are often filled with anxiety—the introduction to a virtual community is, after all, based solely on the textual data presented in the first posting. With that in mind, we can begin to analyze not only the steps from fan to writer, but also the different levels of fan writing that exist. The experiences and writing of fan writers are not, by any stretch of the imagination, always a journey into

meaning-making and ownership—not every pieces of fan fiction is a claim of ownership, or even a step towards analysis. Instead, some fan writing can be categorized as a reader's initial, emotional response (Mary Sue) to the work of the Author-god—fans praising the original source material without delving deeper into textual analysis. Such writing is often categorized as fluff fiction, or drabbles—meaning that the final writing is short and usually without a substantial plot. Other writing that falls outside of the framework of ownership includes the fan fiction sub-genres of crack fiction or squick fiction, two terms are well-known and used by fan fiction communities across fandoms. Fan fiction that carries the moniker 'crack fiction' is usually a piece of writing that has outlandish pairing and impossibly unusual scenarios—writing that amuses the audience and is written for shock value or pure entertainment—within the *Potter*verse, fan fiction written about the Hogwarts castle and the giant squid would be regarded as a piece of crack fiction.

Squick fiction is something a bit more unsettling within the community, and also a sub-genre that carries with it a substantial amount of gray area. Squick is identified as potentially being a "contraction of "squeamish" and "Ick!" A negative emotional response, more specifically a disturbed or disgusted one" (TV Tropes) and in terms of fan fiction, it represents a piece of fan writing that contains elements that unsettle or disturb readers. Often in the *Potter*verse, squick fan fiction involves Hogwarts students in relationships with Hogwarts professors—or pairings that are volatile in their coupling. It must be stated that some pairings and fan writing that is identified as slash fiction can also fall into the realm of squick fiction, depending on the audience reading the piece.

Rather than attempt to analyze all sections and subsections of fan fiction, this chapter will focus on analyzing three umbrella sections that nearly all fan fiction can be divided into: Mary

Sue, General, and Slash. In looking at these three sections, it will become evident that fan writing relies on a form of scaffolding, both in writing abilities and content of the fan fiction, that all lends itself well to the continuing development of the author-self. The fan fiction sections that will be addressed below work well to offer a new level of understanding of the journey of the writer, from gushing fan to hardcore contributor and beyond. To assist in digging into the idea of the development of the author-self, this chapter will be informed largely by T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent". This theoretical approach, which culminates in the idea of author impersonality—a distancing between the author-figure and their creation—presents a unique way of looking at the practices of fan writers at various stages of development.

Regardless of the varying types of fan fiction, the argument here is that the entire *practice* of fan writing, and all the steps and skills it entails, is a valid method of writing and of communal authorship and interpretation of the source text. It is not the individual pieces of writing that craft a fan writer's niche within fandom, nor it is a single experience in the virtual community that dictates their place among fellow fan contributors. In order to truly understand the benefits inherent in fan writing, we must look at the scaffolding of writings, rather than just dig into the more analytical or interpretive veins of fan fiction. These early pieces of writing can be used as signposts, a guide to use in order to follow the progression from devoted fan to analytical author. We begin with our novice writers and the texts produced *before* author impersonality has been truly formed.

Section One: First Years, This Way! A Fan's Early Fan Fiction Writing Experience

Through their writing, fans take the time to explore their own connections to the source material—the phrase 'labor of love' applies to fan fiction because the earliest writing is a fan's

initial reactions to the selected fandom. Often, this takes the form of praise—fans gushing over the ability to play in someone else's world. Far from being a process that takes away from the analytical aspect of fan writing, this initial gush of excitement fuels the process of exploration and analysis that produces later fan-written texts. In a way, these labor of love writings can be placed in the category of inspiration based on the original world—fans were unable to walk away from the characters and settings when the text's action closed, so they began to write their own interpretations and adventures for the characters.

In looking specifically at the Potterverse, again the demographic of the writers becomes important. Since the publication of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, in 1997, the earliest fans have easily been children—school-aged readers who felt the kinship of age with Harry, Ron, and Hermione—and the parents who read or provided the books to these youngsters. These young fans took the source material and made their own niche in the wizarding world, helping to create websites and forums that established an original virtual space for *Potter* fans. It was these fans that took to playing within the source material when the first book concluded with Harry back to the muggles for the summer, imagining the next installment of Harry's adventure, and in some cases making a place for themselves.

As such, a lot of a writer's early endeavors reflect this desire to join into the fun and games—that desire to receive their very own Hogwarts letter that plenty of kids (and plenty of adults too!) have expressed. Early fan fiction often takes on the form of identity play—fans willing themselves into a story that they love. It is, after all, a form of praise for a fan to crave becoming part of a writer's world; so often early fan writing will offer homage to the author, to the characters of the source text. A fan begins writing, in a lot of cases, not only because they want to tackle their own "what if" questions, but because they want to be part of the characters'

story. Such identity play is a fixture of fan writing, though not always the most respected practice.

The act of a writer placing themselves into the fan fiction as part of the larger framework of the text is typically referred to as "Mary Sue" for female writers or "Gary Stu" for male writers. This terminology is used to indicate a fan writer's analogue within their crafted fan fiction. Traditionally, this terminology is derisive within fan communities, and in most virtual spaces such a style of writing is considered unacceptable. The Mary Sue writers are novices, writers in the infancy of their craft and their fandom; their presence within the communities is understandable as a stepping stone into something more than just identity play. Burns and Webber outline this phenomenon nicely in their discussion on *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* fan fiction. They state that "it's not uncommon for inexperienced fanfiction writers to insert a new character into an original work—one that's usually a smarter, more tragic, prettier version of themselves. When these characters are female, they're called "Mary Sues"; their male counterparts are known as "Gary Stus"" (Burns and Webber 29). The Mary Sue/Gary Stu characters are written to be the most popular of the characters in the fan work; they are the author-created characters that, despite their lack of place within the fandom, always seem to end up getting the girl (or guy) and winning the day. They are, in short, a writer's way to recreate themselves as a deus ex machina within the text. In terms of T.S. Eliot's "Traditions and the Individual Talent", these authors do not play with the established characters of the fandom to tell the story because it would distance them from the telling. They crave that personal relationship and have yet to see themselves as distant arbiters of their creations.

Inevitably, most authors initial stories do, at minimum, flirt with the notion of the Mary Sue, and nearly all of them have a Mary Sue/Gary Stu story hidden away in their virtual closet.

After all, fan writers are willing their opinions and ideas about a source text into existence through fan fiction, so it is logical for hints of personal involvement to peek into the writing. This author-analogue character is, in a sense, the first form of ownership a fan writer claims in regards to their fandom. Rather than dissuade from the Mary Sue step, however, I propose that the Mary Sue author figure is, at its most rudimentary, the way a writer makes their first tentative claim to some piece of the fandom. Mary Sue writing can be thought of through the notion that a fan author can claim ownership of the text because they, themselves, are actively *in* the text. Rebecca Black's extensive work on fan fiction helps to illuminate the notion of the Mary Sue in an even more substantial way—it is a form of identity creation. She says that

> fan authors often construct hybridized identities that are enacted through their texts. It is not uncommon for authors to insert themselves into their fictions as characters that possess a mixture of idealized and authentic personality traits. For example, within the fanfiction community, the term *Mary Sue* describes a particular type of hybridized character. According to the dictionary of fanfiction terms at Writer's University (an online site designed specifically for aiding fanfiction authors in their composition), a Mary Sue is "A character that may be loosely based on the author. The character often is perfect and has a tendency to save the day. The story may focus [on] canon characters and their relationship to the character." Thus, Mary Sues are recognized as one way that many female adolescents fuse their own identities with those of the characters and write themselves into a position of power in the fiction. (Black *Access* 124).

While Black's focus is on adolescent writers, primarily female writers, this is a trend that is seen at all levels of fan writing. These hybrid characters are, in a sense, manipulating the world and recreating the text's original meaning.

However, despite the prevalence of this practice, and the idea that as a fan writer it is a normal first step and style of writing, Mary Sueism is frowned upon by the virtual communities as a whole. This is not the sort of meaning-making that is appropriate or desired by veteran fan writers. Often, there are moderators and site members who hunt for the Mary Sue stories in order to try to prevent authors from pushing themselves into the story because it warps the canon. Again, this shows a sense of communal editing and communal expectations for writing.

The goal of fan writing is not, in essence, to insert a new author-voice into the source text; fan writers use the existing material to tell the story in a new manner, digging at new materials that might have been missed with initial read-throughs. The Mary Sue characters, rather than create meaning from the original source text through the interactions of canon characters and settings, take authorial opinions and weave them directly into the canon—no speculation, instead they just make the story fit their meaning. Again, a process that is needed for all fan writers—the earliest method of claiming a fandom is to become a part of it—to directly influence the story, and how better to achieve that goal than through an author analogue. The problem that exists in honoring Mary Sue tendencies within fandom authors falls in the idea that authors are not relying on the source text to tell a story—they are relying solely on their love of the material to be enough to make their meaning clear to their fellow fans.

From this novice style of writing, fan writers begin to branch out and explore different avenues of fan writing—song fiction, drabbles, site challenges, and most visibly slash fiction— as a way to identify where their voice can be the strongest without forcing an analogue into the

story. With the shift from author-centric writing to a "what if" focus, fan writers are moving from admiration of the source text to something more—to a sense of analysis and exploration unavailable to casual fans. Often, these steps are still early in fan exploration—a writer may experiment with different genres, different pairings—that is, the character relationships that are the focus of a piece of writing—and even different communities.

Section Two: Hybrid Character and the Order of the Source Text: General Fan Fiction Writing

Black's *Access and Affiliation* article continues the Mary Sue discussion and branches into a larger idea about the benefits of hybrid characters. For clarity, a hybrid character in *this* case is a character that normally exists within the canon of the original text who is put in unusual situations that may closely reflect the life of the fan writer. As writers, the pieces of our craft often have small elements of our own style, our own ideas and opinions, no matter how diligent we are in removing subjectivity. Even in the fan communities, craft is respected more than a fan's gushing devotional to the source material—readers are interesting in what is said and how it's said. A fan writer presenting their speculations through the voice of source characters will likely get a better response that a writer who continually and forcefully inserts themselves into the story's action because the method of delivery is more readily accepted.

Black rightly looks at the idea of fan fiction as an exploration of deeper issues for readers and writers, and she uses the concept of the hybrid character to navigate through this point. While she does not look specifically at the *Potter*verse, and my focus is not solely on adolescent writers, her theories about hybrid characters are crucial to the idea of ownership of the source text. She states that

there are also many fictions in which the author essentially hybridizes his or her

identity with that of a preexisting media character to express interests, issues, or

tensions from his or her own life. For example, many of the texts on fanfiction.net

depict the characters from the Card Captor series dealing with issues that are

never raised in the anime or manga, such as teen pregnancy, school violence, and

suicide. Through these hybrid characters, fanfiction authors are able to use

literacy skills to articulate and to publicly enact concerns from their daily lives.

(Black *Access* 124).

These hybrid characters offer writers a way to bridge their own lives, and all the turmoil and joy

that that might entail, with a fictional world that has provided them safety and support. Fan

writers often place the source material's characters into fantastical situations—or, at least,

situations that have never occurred within the canon of the original work. In a way, this is a

method of meaning-making just as essential as some of the later aspects we will explore. Within

the *Potter*verse, for example, writers may use Harry's home life as a jumping point to explore

depression, or any symptoms and situations that may accompany an abused child, or they could

use the textual evidence regarding Remus Lupin's lycanthropy as a jumping point to discuss

further issues of racism and acceptable social norm. Rowling laid out hundreds of characters,

offering a lot of backstory—creating an entire functioning fictional world—and fan writers take

what the provided information and begin to tackle difficult or intriguing questions through

hybrid characters.

These difficult questions are often echoed throughout the community of fan writers—if

an issue exists, often someone has done some exploratory fan writing on the subject. Jenkins'

research and publication regarding fan communities and interactions helps to outline the social

interactions of writers and the attitude of writers, especially novice fan writers, in regards to the writing that is produced. He states that

> if any fan writer has the potential to make a major contribution to the development of fan literature (introducing new genres or conceptions of the characters), most choose to build upon rather than reject or ignore fan traditions. Most new fan writers create stories that fit comfortably within the range of precirculating materials. New writers look towards already established writers both for personal guidance and generic models. (Jenkins 160).

We have already looked at the idea of the novice fan writer as they relate to the virtual community as a whole—the feelings of welcome, of guidance that come with the anonymous virtual space—so this comes as no surprise.

This point, wherein the fans understand the source text and the context of the original author, provides a place for the fan writer to begin to work within the text while distancing themselves from emotional involvement with the text. In a way, this is a form of T.S. Eliot's writing on impersonality. With the focus no longer on writing through an author analogue, the fan writers are beginning to understand their relationship to the source text, and then to the fan fiction that they are creating. They begin to see themselves as creators, taking up the mantle of an author and making decisions regarding the text, not their own involvement. This does not mean that fan fiction ceases to be a labor of love devoid of emotion; rather, fan fiction carries with it the emotion of the source text's interpretation rather than the emotions of the author. Eliot speaks on this emotional bond by stating that "very few know when there is expression of *significant* emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet. The

emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done" (Eliot 1098). While Eliot's focus in poetry, this knowledge can be applied to fan writing practices and the communities that support fan fiction. The focus should not be on the writer, or the writer's history; instead, fan fiction should be about the stories created and the acts of interpretation that occur in the practice.

As we have seen, fan writers use their craft and community to truly immerse themselves in the source text. They must find a way to distance themselves from their original worshipful writing in order to truly understand and develop a significant relationship with the source material. Once the writer moves beyond the realm of the Mary Sue and takes on hybrid characters as their tools for storytelling, they have gained the ability to funnel the passion and dedication they feel for the source text into more interpretive and impersonal writing styles.

It is important to outline the idea that most writers do not blatantly disregard the work previously done by other fan writers—traditions established by fans within the community are upheld, although often played with in new writings. This practice, much like scholars building on the research of predecessors, shows the sense of community. The writing that occurs within this space begins to, in this capacity, serve as a critical conversation. Multiple voices join together to present new speculations that delve deeper into established fan observations while still honoring the work that had been done before their contributions. This shows that fan writers are taking the time to explore their communities, to develop their own place within the community, as well as within the conversations about the fandom as a whole. Again, it is in this process that fan writers are able to move out of the Mary Sue-style writing constraints of their early postings and delve into deeper issues through the vehicle of hybrid characters and the characters found within the original source text.

In thinking about the community aspect of fan fiction, it is important to note that members often participate in a multitude of virtual spaces that may or may not relate back to one set fandom. For the sake of cohesiveness, we will look into the idea of multiple communities of the *Potter*verse. As a contributor to the *Potter*verse, it was difficult finding just one niche that I fit into—the world was so large and multi-faceted that it seemed counterintuitive to pidgeon-hole myself into just one, set community. When I began as a *Potter* fan fiction writer, I limited myself to acting as a general *Potter* contributor and the stories I created followed the canon and explored well-known characters and relationships without going too far off of Rowling's established canon. I got my feet wet and learned the canon, learned, as Jenkins outlines, the traditions inherent in the community I had joined.

The preliminary writing I participated in, Mary Sue-esque as it may have been, helped me to learn the canon as it existed within the *Potter*verse—what the established rules and ideas were and where there was room for change or manipulation. From there, I branched out and found out what other communities were available under the *Potter*verse umbrella. In terms of *Potter* fan sites for fan contributors, the best—and most visible—site to visit is Fiction Alley. Fiction Alley is the central hub of a ring of fan fiction sites that house different styles of *Potter* fan fiction. The site also has a number of forums available to meet fellow writers, talk about fan fiction and the *Potter*verse, and discuss elements of the craft of writing. The breakdown for sister-sites, as well as a brief description from www.fictionalley.blogspot.com is as follows:

Schnoogle: Novel-length fics

Astronomy Tower: Romance fics

Riddikulus: Humorous fics

The Dark Arts: Dramatic, angsty, horror and other fics

Now, even these categories are fairly broad, but they provide an outline of the different avenues fan writers may travel in after their initial set of postings. This breakdown is essential to understand—fan writing occurs not just as one set style, but as many genres with many individual goals that meet the needs of the writers.

Section Three: When Harry Met Draco! Slashing the Fandom

In looking further at the idea of fans as partial owners of the text—that is to say, part of a community of authors of the source text—it is important to gauge fan reactions to information provided by the original author-figure. In terms of the *Potter*verse, there is no better situation that Rowling's outing of Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore as a homosexual character. With the publication of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, fans read the relationship between Dumbledore and Grindelwald as more than friendship—drawing out homosexual overtones and using them as the basis for supporting a romantic pairing between the two male characters. In fan writing, this type of relationship fan fiction is referred to as slash fiction, and we will discuss it at length.

Without the great reveal that Dumbledore was indeed, at least in Rowling's eyes, gay, fans had already surmised as much and were playing in the textual evidence left in Book Seven. Fans supporting a Dumbledore/Grindelwald pairing had, without permission from Rowling, claimed ownership over the sexuality of the headmaster. At Rowling's Carnegie Hall reveal, slash writers and fans of the Dumbledore/Grindelwald pairing were unsurprised—they had made this meaning without the authorial voice directing them to do so simply through textual analysis. During the 2007 questions and answer session, Rowling was asked "**Did Dumbledore, who**

believed in the prevailing power of love, ever fall in love himself?" and her response set fans into initial excitement, and then into annoyance. She said that,

> my truthful answer to you... I always thought of Dumbledore as gay. Dumbledore fell in love with Grindelwald, and that that added to his horror when Grindelwald showed himself to be what he was. To an extent, do we say it excused Dumbledore a little more because falling in love can blind us to an extent? But, he met someone as brilliant as he was, and rather like Bellatrix he was very drawn to this brilliant person, and horribly, terribly let down by him. Yeah, that's how I always saw Dumbledore. In fact, recently I was in a script read through for the sixth film, and they had Dumbledore saying a line to Harry early in the script saying I knew a girl once, whose hair... I had to write a little note in the margin and slide it along to the scriptwriter, "Dumbledore's gay!" If I'd known it would make you so happy, I would have announced it years ago! (Rowling)

The fans were unsurprised, but many were also upset at Rowling's assertion that Dumbledore was gay because it limited their own ownership over the text. Catherine Tosenberger writers specifically on this moment in *Potter*verse, and through her writing we are able to explore the deeper pull of fan ownership through a focused lens. Her reveal was met with ovations— headline news. Fans were delighted to have a homosexual character at Hogwarts, but the issue fell in the idea that they were *told* Dumbledore was gay, rather than allowed to come to the realization through textual evidence. Tosenberger outlines the reason for the outrage nicely saying that

fans have always disregarded aspects of the books that are unequivocally

canonical if they interfere with the stories fans want to create, so Rowling's

extratextual pronouncements pose few impediments to fans' imagination. But the

question of how much influence an author has, or should have, over the

interpretation of her is of obvious relevance to fandom, and fans were divided in

their perceptions of Rowling's motived; some saw her as benignly supplying

more information upon direct fan request, while others saw a more sinister desire

to control the interpretation of her books. (Tosenberger 201).

Fans want the authority to make decisions about the meaning of the text, and come to this reveal

with the idea that if it was not originally published in the books, it is not canon. Reporter Jeffrey

Weiss, whom Tosenberger cites within her writing, chimes in with the fannish opinion regarding

the reveal. He published a brief article that acts as a letter to Rowling, talking about the details

within her stories—what was present and what she left out—and ideas of backstory and

interpretation. Regarding details and interpretations of source text he says that "as a reader, I get

to decide, because the author left those details untold in the books. Which is one reason that a

book is almost always better than the movie based on it. More explicit backstory is not always

better" (Weiss). He continues in saying that Rowling's revelation limits fan interpretations—a

point I will argue against—and that the characters and interpretive practices no longer belong to

her. His article concludes with a sentiment that echoes fans across the Potterverse:

You lived with Harry, his friends and his foes for so many years. You birthed

them, shaped them, honed the fine details of their existence. And you thought

long and hard about exactly which of those details were so important to the story

that you would include them in the books. For all of those years, until those books

were published, the characters and settings were yours to command and control.

But then you let them go. And speaking for all of your happy readers I need to tell

you: Now they are ours. (Weiss).

His concluding remarks are valid—once the stories were published, they began a life of their

own with the devoted fans that took the characters in and made a niche for themselves in the

world. This again reflects the Barthes' notion of the author-figure, where he states that "the birth

of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 1470). In a way, the fan

writers are addressing the potential story strands that exist, however minutely, within the original

text. Fans are able to read into the source text and draw from it the points they find valuable;

however, in order to accomplish this goal, readers must move past the constraints placed on the

text by the original author. This movement away from the original author is, in the sense of

Barthes, a metaphorical death in that the author-figure no longer plays a prominent role in

deciding the course of the fiction once it is released to the public and has thus been replaced.

I argue against Weiss' point that Rowling's revelation placed limitations on the fandom,

however. Despite Dumbledore's sexuality becoming, or not becoming, part of the canon, fans

still write on the subject through their own lens. Canon is used as the jumping point for fan

writing—we start here with our hybrid characters and Mary Sue-like writing as a way to

familiarize ourselves with the community and the fandom. From there, fan writers move into

their sub-communities and take textual evidence through rigorous interpretive practices—playing

with the source material until it yields something new. Though Rowling's revelation placed more

canonical knowledge on the shoulders of fan writers, the writers themselves choose whether to

ignore or embrace the authorial opinion within their fan writing. Fans have always ignored what parts of the story they didn't agree with in order to write their fan fiction. This is not a way to avoid the actual text and to ignore the original author's intentions; instead, it is a way to see the multiple avenues available to fans within the framework of the source material. The outpour of responses to Dumbledore's outing revealed that fans were delighted that homosexuality was alive and well in the wizarding world but that it didn't matter to them *who* was identified as homosexual because their writing was based on *their* interpretations.

Continuing in this same vein of thinking, we can now delve into one of the most fruitful areas of discussion regarding fan fiction—slash fiction. It is essential to develop a working definition of what slash fiction is. Here, I rely on the definitions provided in the research and writings of Jenkins, Tosenberger, and MacDonald. In *Textual Poachers,* Henry Jenkins states that "the colorful term "slash" refers to the convention of employing a stroke or a "slash" to signify a same-sex relationship between two characters (Kirk/Spock or K/S) and specifies a genre of fan stories positing homoerotic affairs between series protagonists" (Jenkins 186). Tosenberger outlines slash fiction as "fan fiction that concerns a romantic and/or sexual relationship of characters of the same gender" (Tosenberger 200). MacDonald moves the definition into a stronger focus, outlining slash fiction as "fan fiction with a gay theme, ranging from tender romance with mildly erotic scenes to extreme and sometimes violent pornography" (MacDonald 28). Both sources present the idea that slash fiction is one of the most, if not *the* most, prolific sources of *Harry Potter* fan fiction, based on pieces written and activity within the community.

However, before we can further explore slash communities we must take a moment to look at the history of slash fiction. Like general fan fiction, slash is not a new phenomenon

brought about by the internet and social changes. Delving into the historical aspect of slash, Tosenberger states that

> the term 'slash' arose in Star Trek fandoms in the 1970s, referring to the punctuation mark separating the characters' names (Kirk/Spock). The "X/Y" model indicated that the major romantic pairing was homosexual…Although later fandom adopted the slash punctuation mark for all romantic pairings (i.e. Hermione/Ron), the term "slash" stuck, retaining its original meaning of homoerotic romance. (Tosenberger 195)

Kirk/Spock pairings, and speculations about the nature of their relationship—close friendship or legitimate sexual attraction—became the central topic in many of the 1970s fanzines (collections of stories written, printed, and distributed by fans for fans). While this pairing was a fan favorite, it was never something acknowledged within the canon, and thus was formed through contextual clues and fan interpretations.

Henry Jenkins views slash as having "many progressive elements: its development of more egalitarian forms of romantic and erotic relationships, its transcendence of rigidly defined categories of gender and sexual identity, its critique of the more repressive aspects of traditionally masculinity" (Jenkins 219). He continues, stating that "slash, like most of fan culture, represents a negotiation rather than a radical break with the ideological construction of mass culture; slash, like other forms of fan writing, strives for balance between reworking the series material and remaining true to the original characterizations" (Jenkins 220). He sees this style of writing as a balancing act, wherein the fan readings must balance with societal structure. This reading of slash fiction lends itself well to understanding how fan writers negotiate their

societal understandings and bias with the existing source material. While Jenkins, and Tosenberger, look at slash fiction through the lens of a balancing act, there are other scholars who look at slash as something more subversive.

MacDonald asserts that " slash fiction is more radical and more "anarchistic" in its appropriation of Rowling's universe" (MacDonald 28). In reflecting on her definition of slash fiction, this again is a logical statement as Rowling offers no eroticism in her writing. The presentation of relationships within Rowling's world remains generic, hinting at the stronger undercurrents of sexuality that could be found through subtext. The heteronormative structure presents within Rowling's work does not allow for the referencing of sex or controversial pairings. The characters, most notably Harry, Ron, and Hermione, are shown growing into adolescence and coming into an awareness about human sexuality, but the relationships are only briefly touched upon. The notion that the *Potter* series is, first and foremost, children's literature makes the idea of eroticism between *Potter*verse characters something subversive. Authorial intention was *never* to place the characters in an erotic situation, as stated by Rowling's approval of fan fiction. As earlier discussed, Rowling backs fan fiction as long as the subject matter is *not* obscene. As such, *Harry Potter* slash fiction becomes something purely fan based in nature because the writing produced quite literally falls outside of Rowling's vision for the *Potter*verse.

However, as fans work outside of Rowling's framework when they craft slash fiction, they are experimenting with an area of the original source text that was closed off to Rowling herself because of the constraints of genre and reader-base. Fan writers have, in this sense, more freedom within the source text than the original author. Through slash fiction and erotic writing based within the framework of the *Potter*verse, fan writers are able to negotiate the boundaries of the source text and stretch the existing world to fit new interpretations. This is a luxury that is not

afforded to the original author, and as such it places the fan writers in a position of power over the text. Through analyzing key moments within the source texts, slash writers are able to take the original story and turn it on its head, opening up opportunities for further analysis.

Slash writing is one of the key places, but not only of the only places, in fan writing practices that allows for fans to analyze the source material through a lens focused mainly on sexuality. Jenkins is again useful as he outlines slash as "one of the few places in popular culture where questions of sexual identity can be explored outside of the polarization that increasingly surrounds this debate" (Jenkins 221) The debate that is being referenced is how slash is situated—it is largely feminist, highly political, or progressive or is it just middle-class women working through their own issues. Of the *Potter*verse and slash, Tosenberger comes into the discussion, heavily influenced by Henry Jenkins' *Convergence Culture*. In this instance, she is using slash, and general, fan fiction as a practice of adolescent writers to explore topics otherwise closed off to them. She states that the *Potter*verse fan fiction is

> a form of literacy that is not subject to the usual constraints on young people's reading and writing—offers a safe space for them not only to improve their writing skills, but also to explore discourses of sexuality, especially queerness, outside of the various culturally official stances marketed to them, and with the support of a community of like-minded readers and writers. In an era when representations of adolescent sexuality are both exploited and policed, Potter fandom is an arena in which fans of all ages, genders, and sexual orientations can tell stories to satisfy their own desires; this freedom is especially valuable for younger fans, whose self-expressions are heavily monitored in institutional settings. Fans are able to tell narratives of sexuality in a space not directly

controlled by adults, and do not have to shape their stories to adult sensibilities and comfort levels. Potter fandom is a lively, intellectually stimulating, and tolerant interpretive community, and fans reap great rewards not only in the form of increased literacy, but also by exposure to discourses outside of culturally mandated heteronomativity. (Tosenberger *Hogwarts* 206)

While this focus is primarily on adolescent fans, Tosenberger nicely lays out the bare-bones benefits to writing slash fiction. Fan writers use the familiarity of Rowling's world to navigate through their own ideas and opinions on socially-sensitive topics such as homosexuality, and even in some cases the sexuality of adolescents. The virtual space provides a place to experiment without adult constraints, or real-world implications—like-minded readers provide a supportive environment in which fan writers are able to shape their views and present them as their own stances on topics that interest them.

Through the queering of the text, fan writers sensed tensions and homosexual undertones throughout the *Potter* books. When MacDonald looked into the slash communities in order to discover what motivates fan writers, she discovered that most of the slash writers she studied felt as though

the Potter series encourages a gay reading. As one of the responders put it, 'there is a certain gay feel about the HP books.' Harry discovers that he's different from his non-wizard foster family at the beginning of puberty, when he is eleven. His foster family is deeply ashamed of his magical abilities and terrified that the neighbors will find out. Harry's foster family even refuses to discuss his tendencies in *Sorcerer's Stone*: '*I will not tolerate mention of your abnormality*

under this roof!' Furthermore, the wizards keep to themselves, have a secret

world about which non-wizards know nothing, have their own language and

social codes, and tend to recognize others in crowds of non-wizards. (MacDonald

29)

Through some of her studied readers and writers' queering of *Harry Potter*, contributors can find

evidence to support their claims of homosexual relationships and characters within the wizarding

world. The participants of MacDonald's study cite the differences between Rowling's wizard

characters and her muggle characters as proof that the text can be labeled as homosexual.

Through this specific lens, *Harry Potter* becomes a coming-of-age story featuring a young man

coming into his alternate lifestyle.

Through MacDonald's presentation of slash, homosexuality is a negative identity. She

cites another character example that the participants of her study brought up—the werewolf

Remus Lupin. While Harry is mistreated because of his differences, Lupin is treated with

contempt within the society he supposedly belongs to because of his differences and a 'disease'

that separates him further. MacDonald's responders claim a queering of Lupin because "he has

to keep quiet about being a werewolf, he can't get a job because of prejudice, poor dear, and he

is frequently suspected of being a collaborator with Dark Wizards" (MacDonald 29). In each

example it becomes apparent that such a strict and extreme queering of the text leads to

homosexuality emerges as negative aspects of individuals.

MacDonald's study shows one avenue slash fiction can take—an extreme view that not

all slash writers and readers adhere to. However, the process of analysis and the reading of

context clues is a feature of slash fiction that is valuable to look at in terms of the overall

argument of authorial ownership. Not all slash writers are going to accept a queering of the text; some writers enjoy pairing characters together in relationships and experimenting with character interactions and the overall plot of the source text. The key component here is that fan writers are moving out of the protective framework of the author-accepted canon and are instead experimenting with their own shifts in the source material. It is in these shifts that fans are beginning to claim ownership of the text in more ways that rudimentary identity play, or stories created through hybrid characters. The fiction that delves into personal matters and forces readers and writers to think about the implications of the text are where ownership and authorial intention become apparent.

Chapter 3—Beyond Hogwarts: Where do go from here?

Fan writers explore and experiment in their preferred fandoms through general fan fiction and slash fiction; writers engage in identity play, literary analysis, and meaning making through creative endeavors and interpretations of the source material. The writers produce texts for their specified communities, catering to the tastes of fellow fans while exploring their own notions about the craft of writing and the idea of meaning-making and ownership. The previous chapters have provided a general breakdown of fan fiction communities as well as the initial postings and explorations completed by fan contributors. The question that arises, however, after prolonged participation within fan communities often ends up being something akin to 'well, what next?'.

Fan writers craft their stories for a number of reasons. Some writers cling to the Mary-Sue approach, relying on the most preliminary of identity play to fulfill notions brought about by the original source text while still others rely on the characters and settings provided by the original author to lay the groundwork for new interpretive acts. It can be used as an escape—fans playing in fantasies as a coping mechanism or a brief stint away from the trials of their own lives—while still others use it as a method of exploration—discovery and analysis of hot topics that pester the writer and push them toward understanding. Fan writers engage in fan writing practices for all of these reasons and more, and we understand that no one author ever writes for a single purpose.

What is created through the fan writing process is something more than just identity play, and more than just an act of interpretation. The preliminary fan fiction writing can give way to new forms of meaning-making as well as new levels of ownership for the fan to claim. In these cases, fan writers who are devoted to the craft of writing and the fandom they participate in are doing more than simply playing within the canon. As discussed in the previous chapter, fan writing becomes a form of fan ownership—the original author no longer has a sole claim on his

or her creative work because of the fan-base that has risen around the fandom. With that form of ownership in mind, it becomes possible to investigate the next steps a fan writer might take in order to further claim ownership of a piece of the fandom.

Section One: Combining our Proverbial Sandboxes: Crossover Fan Fiction

The steps that may occur— and it must be stated that this does not *always* occur with fan writers, but that it is a viable step in the process—after a fan writer gains a sense of comfort, control, and familiarity within the community is that they branch out and find new venues to play with their characters and craft. One of the simplest ways of moving outside of the parameters established by fan communities exists when a fan writer starts to craft crossover fan fiction. In order to understand and analyze this next step towards fan ownership it is imperative to establish a firm definition on what *exactly* is meant by the term crossover fiction.

Within fan writing communities, one of the most basic definitions of crossover fiction has fan writers taking preexisting characters from their intended setting and placing them in a foreign world. According to Julie Flynn, who writes as a fan and a scholar,

> the crossover is a type of fan fiction that involves combining one or more elements from two of more sources of text into one narrative. These stories come from the natural questions that fans often find themselves asking: 'Who would win in a fight, Superman or Batman?' We wonder what beloved characters would do if faced with the situation other characters must go through in their narratives (Flynn 132).

Writers who engage in crossover fiction are engaging with multiple fandoms in the space of a single story—completely removing the characters from their author-established elements and

placing them in a new environment. Such crossover writing allows fan writers a unique opportunity; writers can play with the characters without constraint of the *entire* author-created and maintained world. This control allows fan writers a deeper level of ownership because it alters the original author's intent and places the responsibility of bridging the gap between fandoms in the hands of fan writers.

Crossover fan fiction provides a place to not only continue exploration of one set fandom, but also to begin to develop a relationship between components of separate fandoms. A fan writer manipulates their specified fandom through the original author's boundaries—the writing produced through more general fan writing practices (general content and slash fiction) still maintains set boundaries established by the original author. The world is understood, both by the writer and by those reading the fan work, and because it is a familiar world the characters involved in the fiction respond to the stimuli in a certain prescribed fashion.

Crossover provides writers with a literary space that allows for, and encourages, meta-discussion. Often, crossover fan writers will use their writing as a way of telling in-jokes to other fans, as well as a way to poke fun at the very nature of fan writing and all that it entails. Fan writers, through crossover fiction, speak across multiple fandoms, addressing issues and situations that persist in different source texts. Writers can use crossovers as a way to nod to other genres, series, and even tropes that are manipulated through fan writing—poking fun or shedding light on particular fan writing trends and behaviors. This writing creates a bridge for fans to engage with one another as well as with a multitude of texts without straying outside of the perimeters of fan fiction.

In order to look more closely at crossover fan fiction, it seems imperative to present a hypothetical fandom crossover to analyze. Given the popularity of our main source fandom, *Harry Potter*, it seems fitting that another adolescence-focused series be brought up alongside Rowling's work. The pairing of *Harry Potter* and the *Twilight* series has some popularity in fan communities, due in large part to the similarity in supposed ages of the protagonists in each set of novels, as well as the obvious supernatural ties. For sake of example, we will use the main characters of *Twilight* and plug them into the existing world, and characters, of *Harry Potter*.

In this hypothetical, the fan writer would use the canon characters, with their own modifications and interpretations, of Meyers' *Twilight* novels and rather than simply be vampires and a small-town girl from Forks, the characters of Bella and Edward would become Hogwarts students, staff, or faculty and would thus need to adhere to the rules and systems present in the world created by Rowling. This would mean that, while fan writers could keep the idea of Edward as a vampire, the *Twilight* characters would have to be written to mesh with the world of magic as created and maintained by Rowling and her fan communities.

An even more specific example is established in an article by Kerri L. Mathew and Devon Christopher Adams. They outline crossover fiction and then set up the example they looked at for purposes of their writing. They state that

> readers of various genres and works of literature synthesize their reading and the
> effect characters have on them. This juxtaposition becomes evident in crossover
> stories that combine characters and settings from two more sources into one fanfic
> [sic]. These complex pieces explore what the implications might be if characters
> from different works were to meet in the same text, or the effect of a character

from one work having to deal with the circumstances of another work. In "Abandon All Hope You Who Enter Here," the fanfic [sic] writer explores just what might happen if the soul of Meyer's beloved protagonist, Edward Cullen, were, in fact, damned as he fears and he were sent to Dante's Inferno. (Mathew and Adams).

Adams and Mathew go on to explain the complexities of this example, citing the author's knowledge and analysis not only of the original source material—in this case the *Twilight* series—but also the source material that is being used alongside the primary character of Edward. The pairings that occur in fan crossovers can, as this example demonstrates, bridge the gap between popular literature and works thought of as classics, making classic literature more visible to a wider range of readers.

The moment where multiple fandoms are in conversation with one another does not always mean that the source texts balance with one another. As the multiple fandoms intersect through crossover fan fiction, they begin to create what Mary Louise Pratt refers to as the contact zone. Pratt defines the contact zone as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt 33), and for the purposes of this analysis, the "cultures" she speaks of can be shifted to the fandoms in conversation with one another. Crossover fan fiction, with conflicted characters and at-odds settings, makes fan writers act as mediators who work through genre constraints and preconceptions of the texts in order to find hooks and similarities that bring the two stories together.

At the most basic, crossover fan fiction allows fan writers the opportunity to play and create in one world, but in multiple worlds—thus using a variety of source materials to create their own critical and creative piece. In this style of writing, however, it must be noted that no longer is just *one* author's ownership being called into question. Again, I look to Barthes in order to inform my theoretical approach. He states that

> we know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. … the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. (Barthes 1468)

No longer are writers relying solely on the voice and creative power of one primary author to fulfill their needs as fan writers—instead they are drawing from their body of knowledge to satisfy their needs and tackle their own literary quandaries. Fan writers are traversing the space between fandoms and through that exploration they are coming up with combinations and situations that were never intended by the 'Author-God' figure. Through these mixtures, fan writers are places fandoms at odds with one another, forcing open the lines of communication in such a way that community members are drawn into discussions and debates about the mingling of fandoms, the use of the characters and settings, and the larger picture that has been established through this crossover.

In this fashion, it becomes useful to look to a theorist who provides a deeper level of understanding in regards to the voice of the author. Russian philosopher and scholar of literary theory Mikhail Bakhtin offers a lens which with to analyze the voices present in a text. Simply put, it is referenced as multi-voicedness—the term Bakhtin uses within his essays is polyphony and it can best be outlined as the multiple voices of a single author that blend together to form a text rich with diverse characters and situations. Bahktin deals specifically with the function of the author, and the voice of the author as it is presented through their works.

The notion that there is not one definitive author-voice present in writing becomes crucial in looking at fan fiction. Bahktin is looking specifically at the genre of the novel as he discusses the notion that the text is shaped by the multi-voiced author. What this seems to mean is that while the author provides all the characters and words that create the world, each character and different opinion that is presented in the writer's world can be seen as a separate voice. Of the novel, and the presence of the author within the novel, Bakhtin says that

> The novelist is drawn towards everything that is not yet completed. He may turn up on the field of representation in any authorial pose, he may depict real moments in his own life or make allusions to them, he may interfere in the conversations of his heroes, he may openly polemicize with his literary enemies and so forth. This is not merely a matter of the author's image appearing within his own field of representation-important here is the fact that the underlying, = original formal author (the author of the authorial image) appears in a new relationship with the represented world. Both find themselves now subject to the same temporally valorized measurements, for the "depicting" language of the

> hero, and may enter into dialogic relations and hybrid combinations with it
>
> (indeed, it cannot help but enter into such relations). (Bahktin 611-17)

The author of the original source text is not a single-voiced entity; rather, the voices of the characters and situations within the text weave together to show a unified conversation wherein each voice and entity informs the other. Bahktin then becomes useful in looking at fan fiction as an exploration of the multiple voices present in the original text.

Through crossover fan fiction in particular, fan writers are exploring avenues that may only been barely hinted at by the original author-figure. While polyphony in Bahktin's sense is used to explain the multi-voicedness of the novel, it becomes possible to use the terminology to understand the multi-voicedness present in fan communities. Fan fiction writing communities take the representation of the author-figure in its many forms and they shape it into something new—a hybridization of the original story, a bridging of two (or more) different canons, or even the simple identity play of the novice writer. The key, here, is that this process is done with the author-voice in mind, and that it is through that sense of collaborative writing that we are able to witness the strands of the fan fiction community weave together to form a dialogue within itself.

What this style of writing does, then, is motivates a collaborative writing effort even more easily than general fan writing practices. Crossover writers are taking multiple worlds and forcing the characters, settings, and plots to collaborate together in order to create something new out of the existing work. Fan writers are not content to allow the worlds they explore to rest for a moment, and use crossover fan fiction as a way to continue testing boundaries and establishing new borders to examine. In meshing two, or more, fictional worlds, fan writers are combining the literary problems of each of those worlds—they are, either by choice or chance, delicately

pulling apart the rhetoric situation each text finds itself in and from that precise dissection they are recreating hybrid worlds.

Much in the same way that slash and some of the more intense forms of general fiction push past simple identity play and into something more meaningful to the community rather than just the fan writer, crossover fiction provides a space to create hybrid worlds. It is the unique situation of allowing multiple fictional worlds to collide, and from the wreckage of that collision the fan writer creates something new and adaptive. The writers take characters and push them past breaking points—placing the characters in situations unheard of, or impossible, in their home fandoms and forcing them to adapt and to thrive in a world unlike their own. Of course, these pieces of fan fiction writing fall under even stricter guidelines among fan communities because they must appeal to fans of each separate fandom. Each canon that is experimented with through crossover fan fiction has its own set of guidelines—acceptable character pairings, acknowledged events and pieces of writing that help shape portions of the fanon, and even specific tropes that are repeated throughout the main body of fan fiction for each canon—that must be adhered to, or at least acknowledged by the crossover writer. In this manner, while the fan writers are given license to play and create within multiple worlds, they are restricted within the boundaries established and adhered to by the different fan communities at work within the virtual world.

The communities that support crossovers are spawned from the same place as general fan communities—often it is the bridge fans create between two fandoms in which they participate. A fan may be part of the *Potter*verse and part of the *Buffy*verse (as I am), and from the interest in both fandoms separately, it then becomes possible to find ways and places to merge the worlds together. This mixing, which Barthes outlines as an author's true, and only, power, again shows

possession of the source material—characters, plot, setting—in the hands of the fans because they are the creators who are continuing to manipulate the material, continuing to push past acceptable boundaries in order to ensure that the source text does not stagnate.

Section Two: From First Years to Headmaster: Fan Writer to Traditional Author

From discussions on crossover fan fiction, it becomes possible to look at what happens when a fan writers has explored a multitude of outlets available to them. As stated in previous chapters, writing without that sense of community causes the writing to stagnant without a community to support it. However, it becomes possible for fan fiction writers to become complacent in their existing fandom—and the other fandoms they may branch out to and intertwine. Engagement within the community helps to create critical conversations that perpetuate the community, but with a limited scope to work with, fandoms may eventually lose momentum.

With popular fiction, it is important to understand the trends of the audience; popular culture plays a huge role in determining what is considered "in" for each new season. The flow of fan culture is often dictated by cultural shifts as well as a fandom's ability to adapt to audience needs and desires. In this fashion it becomes essential to acknowledge, and briefly explain, two of the most rudimentary differences that may be seen in two different fandoms. In fan fiction terms, two distinctions that help to regulate fan fiction are the ideas of an open canon and a closed canon. An open canon is a fandom that still has source material from the original creators still being produced—current television shows are a prime example of an open canon. A closed canon is a fandom that no longer has author-written source material being produced for fan consumption—our primary example of Rowling's *Harry Potter* series can function as our closed

canon because the series has been completed. In an open canon, the original author is able to continue to manipulate the source material—settings and characters and plot are still fluid and subject to alteration. Within a closed canon, the original author has completed their intended work with the source material—characters and the world they exist in are completely established without possibility of alteration. In reflecting back towards Rowling's outing of Dumbledore, it becomes a question of authorial interpretation of a closed canon, and the validity of such interpretation.

From working within the fandom, honing the craft of writing and practicing beta-reading processes, it seems logical that fan writers might try to move beyond the parameters of their selected fandoms. Writing in another author's world, using their boundaries and characters can be both a liberating task and an arduous one; fan writers are not concerned with the process of world building. Instead, the fan writer focus is on the believability and manipulation of existing characters and settings. Fan writers operate through the communities that bind them, drawing strength and collaborative opportunities from the critical conversations produced in the online forums. Writing, as a craft, is discussed and refined through the fan fiction process; keen attention is paid to editing techniques and experimentation while the community continues to produce new critical conversations and creative endeavors.

Through this fertile environment, fan writers are able to move through the steps of authorship, first through Mary Sue-like minor identity play, and then to hybrid identities established through general fiction, and finally to in-depth research and critical thought as shown through specialized forms of fan fiction. The journey of a fan writer provides the space to begin to question the literature that is produced by the original author as well as the writing produced within fan communities. At this point, fan writers have grown within their specified communities

through the average fan writing steps and procedures. Such writing sharpens individual fan strengths as readers and writers, participated in peer review, and worked critically with a multitude of texts. After exploration in standard fan writing practices, writers may look for a new avenue to continue practicing their craft. For some, this means playing in a new fandom, and in a sense restarting their journey as a fan writer. In that situation, fans will take what experiences they have gained through their initial communities and move through the early stages quickly, focusing much more intensely on the critical conversations that exist and inform the communities, rather than the hierarchy of specific fan communities.

Once a fan writer initially navigates through a fandom, the steps shift and refocus. Fandoms are meshed together—viewable through the crossover fiction that permeates fan communities—and critical conversations overlap between fan groups. Each fandom regards themselves as partial owners of the source material—fan fiction is a labor of love, and while fan writers receive no form of monetary payment, the responses received from fan communities help sustain, and improve, their craft. Fan writers, in their exploration and mingling of fandoms, begin to dig into questions not always evident in the original source material, and in that mingling they learn how to thoughtfully answer questions in a manner that utilizes personal knowledge and textual evidence.

Again, there is the overarching idea of ownership—fans recreate and re-envision the original stories, acting as authors in control of the story as they manipulate the evidence provided by the original author. Fans are writing to meet their own needs as interpreters, as well as to answer their own quandaries about the text in a way that appeals to their way of thinking and analysis without focusing on the original author's words and notions. As such, it is important to briefly think about the legality of fan fiction. Fan writers are writing in another author's created,

and copyrighted, world without paying for the chance to manipulate the source text. As previously discussed, not all published authors are agreeable to the idea of fan fiction, but Rowling is on the list of authors who enjoys fan fiction and has publicly acknowledged her acceptance of fan work. The issue always comes from the idea that fan fiction writers may gain monetary compensation for their fan work. Rowling's public stance on fan fiction was outlined as follows, "Her [Rowling's] concern would be to make sure that it remains a non-commercial activity to ensure fans are not exploited and it is not being published in the strict sense of traditional publication" (Walters).

The question of ownership seems to, in the most simple of senses, come down to the idea of financial ownership—Rowling's concern with fan fiction remaining *non-commercial* and with publication remaining as digital, fan-supported, and *not* traditionally published are key. While the author's intellectual property is vital, as the writing shows dedication to the author's professional craft and personal creativity, it is the rights of publication and production that seem to be at stake in fan fiction writing. Ownership is not, it seems, the intellectual ownership of the source material, but instead the financial ownership of the material. Fan writing is in no way influenced by money—fans work on their craft because they think it is important, because their ideas are crucial to the critical conversation surrounding the fandom. Fan writers seem to inherently understand the dissonance between financial ownership and intellectual ownership, and present this dissonance very simply each time a piece of fan fiction is published to fan communities. Fan fiction comes with a disclaimer, which serves as a fan's statement that *they* do not own the source material and that *no* copyright infringement is meant in the writing of the fan fiction. In some instances, the disclaimer can be simple as Livejournal user "pretty_panther" demonstrates by simply writing "I own nothing" (pretty_panther). Other disclaimers make sure

to note the original author as "calrissian18", another Livejournal user, does when they write "I own my imagination and this computer, other than that my world pretty much belongs to JKR" (calrissian18). Each example demonstrates the fact that the fans know that the worlds they play in are not their own and if all that is required to stay in the world and create their own side of the story is a public disclaimer, fans seem more than willing to admit their *financial* lack of ownership.

Writing as a fan, with no financial obligation or benefits, presents writers with an opportunity to learn their craft and to shape how they write. The fan fiction produced in each community runs the gambit from Mary-Sueistic, wherein authors inject themselves into the source material in the vehicle of a two-dimensional character, to hybridize characters and settings that dig into questions regarding literary analysis, to the blending of multiple source materials as a method of investigating larger problems through the context of literature and writing. Through the process of reading and following the clues laid out by the original author, fan writers are finding a way into the secret world beyond what original appears in publication.

In a way, theorist Pierre Macherey's statements on literary production help to inform this claim. He speaks of the author-figure outlining his or her own choices and decisions as it applies to the process of reading, writing, and creating of the source text. It is in listening and understanding the confessions of the author that readers evolve into more than just passive participants. He states that "unlike the simpler reader who faithfully follow the work, we can reach towards this truth by racing ahead and marking out the path; we no longer submit to the unfolding of the work, we participate in the systematic construction of its fiction" (Macherey 22). Fan fiction produces a place for writers, with varying degrees of talent and dedication to their craft, to move beyond the desire to play in someone else's world. Through the close reading

of the source text, as well as the eagerness displayed in the fan writer's zeal to continue the story or figure out the puzzle before the author-figure has clearly defined the answer, fans become part of the fiction. In helping construct the fiction, however minutely that occurs, fans are staking a claim in the source text—their previous readings and conversations have informed their understanding of the paths that lies ahead of the author-figure and fan writing is the exploration of those paths. Macherey rightly states that "we are no longer readers; we find a home in the margins of the text" (Macherey 72). Fan fiction writers move past passive reader and find their niche in the material of the text as well as within the communities that have been created around the source text.

For a select number of fan writers, the next step from writing general (or specified sub-genre) fan fiction is to branch out and begin to create new worlds for *others* to begin to play in. Becca Schaffner, in talking with fellow fan writers, examines this very development in her "Defense of Fanfiction". She states that

> although not all authors are comfortable with the idea of their stories generating fanfiction, I think this will change. My friend Aja says, tongue-in-cheek but meaning it, 'One day I will publish my grandiose set of novels, and when I do, I hope I attract intelligent and amazing writers to develop a fandom around them—there are so many characters that could do so many things other than what I have planned for them, but because that's Not The Way The Story Goes, I can't really write it, you know?' … and the highest possible achievement is that someone else would want to write about what you wrote first. (Schaffner 617).

She reflects on the idea that having fan fiction written about a given fandom as an achievement, that in a sense it is an honor to have others play in a world that the author created.

She goes on to explain more about the idea of a fan fiction writer becoming a published author—citing an actual instance.

> Sarah Rees Brennan, whose YA fantasy *The Demon's Lexicon* was published by McElderry Books in June, was best known for several years as the *Harry Potter* fanfic author Maya. When she officially withdrew from fanfiction writing in 2008, with a Livejournal name change and a website of her own, she left her loyal readers over two thousand pages of fanfiction in PDF form. And the readers *are* loyal; after the fanfiction's removal, and two months before the release of her debut novel, "sarahtales" was still listed as a friend by 5797 Livejournal uses. In fact, upon announcement of her first novel, her online fans leapt into action and created a fan community for her original works. (Schaffner 618).

Obviously, Sarah Rees Brennan's example is not standard situation in which most fan writers find themselves. What it can be, however, is something that fan writers think about and acknowledge as they write. Through writing in someone else's world, fan writers are given a chance to think about elements of fictional worlds they enjoy, as well as fictional settings and situations they would be interested in exploring, or even possibly in creating.

Sarah Rees Brennan states, in regards to fan fiction and her own literary work that, "I think fanfiction is very cool. It's a way to have fun, be imaginative and practice your writing. And if you want to write some based on my books, I'll be very flattered and pleased: you have my permission to go right ahead. I can't read it, because that can get writers into nasty legal

situations, and you're not allowed make money off it. Otherwise go right ahead" (Brennan). She understands fan fiction writers and their desire to create within someone else's world—she acknowledges her fans and their desires to write within her world while still maintaining a distance that keeps her, as an author, out of copyright and financial troubles.

This seems to be a logical step from fan writer, where one publishes semi-anonymously and in virtual communities or fan 'zines, to recognized author, where publication occurs in traditional formats (print and digital) with recognition and financial ownership of the text. Scholars who have studied fan fiction often talk about it as a composition practice—people practicing their craft through the vehicle of another's work. Black focused on the idea of fan fiction and adolescence, thinking about how the creative writing practices and procedures of fan fiction can be carried over into adolescent writing activities—academic papers, further creative works, college work. In this manner, fan fiction can be used as a stepping stone—authors are able to work out the kinks in their writing style through writing for someone else's world and characters, and then move on to produce their own kind of writing. While this is not the case for every fan fiction writer, and in truth may be very idealistic in nature, it is vital to acknowledge the potential that fan writers can move into more traditional avenues of authorship.

The movement from fan writer to traditional writer brings with it a set of questions that are essential to look at in terms of fan writing practices. We have looked at fan fiction writing as a form of authorship—fans claim an intellectual hold over a small part of their selected fandoms and with that sense of ownership, the fans craft their own facets of stories. Fan communities thrive on the communal sense of authorship and ownership—thousands of fan writers contributing to the overarching fanon (the canon of fan fiction for a set fandom) in order to analyze favorite texts. We have seen how fan writers contribute to the critical discussions

regarding text—the analytical observations that occur through creative writing and the conversations that are produced from fan responses to the creative works. Fans react passionately about the fandoms they love; skills are sharpened through the fan writing experience and writers begin to branch out from their comfort zones.

One of the viable steps for fan writers is to remove themselves from the position of a fan writer and step into the role of a traditional author, as demonstrated by Sarah Rees Brennan. In this step, the fan writer stops analysis of another's work and begins to lay down initial meaning of his or her own fictional settings. One of the biggest draws available in writing fan fiction is the ability to analyze another's story and to make meaning out of the existing text; with the possibility of becoming an author in the traditional sense, the style and purpose behind the act of writing shifts. Fan writers move from interpretive acts to creating meaning in their own, taking up a similar position to that which Barthes calls the Author-God.

A fan writer takes up the mantle of a primary author—pushing their will into the creation of a text, rather than manipulating a preexisting text. While fan writers are not making up their own world and characters, they are in many ways drastically shifting the world of the Author-God. In a mythological sense, this makes the fan writers into something akin to demi-deities—they have the power to manipulate the world, but not to create the initial world. Fan writing is not about subverting the power of the world-creator; instead, fan writing relies on the ability to not only exist within a set source text but also to provide support and analysis of that source text that takes the form of creative manipulation. In looking at the fan-writer-turned-tradition-author scenario, the demi-deity fan writer has become an Author-God, providing a sandbox in which *others* can play.

Through having the experience of writing fan fiction, playing in someone else's world, does this make for an author-figure who is aware of the power they have as an author? Barthes talks of the Author-figure as having power to influence the text simply because they have created it. Fan writers move beyond the claim an Author-figure has on the text, choosing to use their own interpretive skills in order to create their place within the source text. Perhaps in having been in the position of a fan writer, a newly-minted Author-figure is able to navigate ownership and create a sense of communal ownership directly from the start of the writing process.

The experiences that the former fan writer had within fan fiction communities help to shape them as dominant Author-figures. In understanding this, it becomes possible to see fan fiction as a potential training ground and proving ground for writers. Writers begin first with familiar stories, using fan fiction as a way of reshaping characters and scenes through their own interpretations or desires, and usually with the assistance of an author-analogue character. In essence, the writers use the author analogue, and the very personal attachment to the source text, as training wheels into the craft of writing. Writers move through growing pains, learning not only how to write fiction but also how to read sources critically. Fan fiction communities offer novice contributors chances to understand how to both give, and receive, constructive criticism as well as the ability to participate in craft talks regarding writing.

From that initial experimentation and the later explorations through general and slash fiction, crossover writing, and the other avenues of fan fiction that were not addressed within this writing, the fan writers gain a level of creative ownership over the text—the community embraces the source text and begins to reshape the Author's world into something utterly relatable. If a fan writer then takes that step into traditional authorship, they do so with the

privileged position of understanding the benefits of fan writing and the ideas of fan ownership as

a creative kind of ownership rather than anything financial.

The Craft of Writing: The Next Great Adventure

Over the course of the framework laid out by Barthes, Foucault, Bakhtin, Jenkins, and the rest of the cast of theoretical characters, we have ventured through the journey of fan writers as well as the fictional works they create. Traditional literary theorists shaped a working understanding of not only what is contained in the notion of the author-figure, but also in the relationship of author-figures to the texts produced. This was especially helpful in understanding how fans move from gushing enthusiast to novice writer, and then finally to consistent contributor and beyond. From this more traditional approach, it became possible to weave in my contemporary theorists who focus heavily on fan culture and fan fiction writing practices. These theorists cover everything from traditional fan writing practices and procedures, educational practices involving fan fiction, and then also what lies beyond fan writing.

All of these theorists and critics have shaped my understanding of fan fiction as an adventure towards authorship. Fans take their knowledge and passion about the source text and mix liberally with close reading and textual analysis. The result of this blend ends up being writing that places the fan contributors in the role of creators wherein they are making decisions and interpretations about the source text. Fan fiction provides a space to play with the text, shape interpretations, and craft clever and creative stories while engaging in critical conversations with peers.

Each person who engages in fan fiction writing initially engages in communities for their own reasons—for some the writing is an escape, for others it is about analyzing literature, and for others still it is an adventure in meaning making. My own initial explorations were about escaping *into* wonderful worlds through reading and writing, but after a while my experiences

led me into the path towards authorship. Since my discovery of the *Potter*verse, I have received my very own Hogwarts letter, ventured down Diagon Alley with Harry and company, and helped defend Hogwarts from the Dark Lord, all from the comfort of my computer and the virtual communities in which I have participated.

While fan fiction is not, in a sense, traditional authorship, it *is* an avenue for writers to work through complex issues raised in text as well as their own lives. Contributors work through their selected texts, using the virtual space to participate in discussions about canon, interpretation, editing and revision, and overall the love of the source text(s). We have seen the steps of the journey towards authorship, from tentative Mary Sue to veteran contributor, and briefly begun to untangle the genres present in fan fiction. Through the lens of a variety of literary theorists, authorship has been defined as a negotiation between the texts produced and the original authors, as an interaction between readers and the authors, and as a creation of communities of authors who share similar goals and notions regarding a text.

Fan fiction allows these definitions to flourish and shift into something more than expected. Fan authors do not set out, in their first shy postings or initial fan fiction uploads, to alter their way of thinking or to open the text up for deep literary analysis. It begins, as it has been stated time and time again, as a labor of love between fans and their favorite stories, settings, and characters. And despite the writing shift from the personal writing to the impersonal writing, with a nod to T.S. Eliot's theory, it still remains a labor of love, though as writers evolve so do the demonstrations of this affection. No longer are writers gushing over their favorite characters and infusing the original canon with author analogues; the progression has fan writers working to express their devotion to the source text through textual analysis that digs past surface understanding and into the meat of the source material.

We have, over the course of this study, begun to understand the surface level authorship as it exists in fan fiction communities. This understanding, however, is just the first step towards blending authorship with the practice of fan fiction. From this point, it becomes possible to push further into specific fan fiction genres as a way into analyzing the specific benefits of certain fan practices, as well as what is at stake in the undertaking of such writings. This push, which will best be completed through a continued exploration of slash fiction and crossover fiction, will allow for a study of the texts produces right alongside a study of the fan authors and their processes. This process, which ideally would take the form of case studies of specific authors and the works produced, makes room for multiple fan authors contributing to a basic understanding of fan writing process and communities. Through infusing the study with multiple fan writers' perspectives, it becomes possible to dissect authorship from a range of experiences, taking into account what individual authors consider as a personal question of what's at stake as well as how that relates to the more communal question of what's at stake.

This deepening interest, which puts an emphasis not on the fan writer but instead on the work created—harkening back to Barthes and Foucault—will open up the discussion to include the actual works that are produced in fan communities, rather than just looking at the genres and authors generally. This shift, from the generalized look at fan fiction authors and the community to the individual focus on fan productions, will allow for a deeper analysis of the methods of various fan writers as a way to track similarities and differences between the styles, choices, and interpretive skills of the writers. Through close readings of fan works, we are able to look at the subject matter being covered in the writing—what topics are discusses, what methods are employed to get to the heart of the analysis, and how does the fan contributor gain a sense of ownership through authoring new stories based off of the old.

Through continuing this exploration, I hope to move past looking solely at fan fiction and the communities that support this style of writing. Using fan writing practices as a jumping point, I want to look more broadly at fan practices that still maintain a deep level of analysis while branching out from the existing written form. All fan work is based on taking ownership of the source text and finding a niche that allows a person to become a creator—I want to delve into the ins and outs of how *other* forms of fan-created works allow for the fan to become the creator. In a way, avenues like fan art allow contributors to be a part of the primary source text while still infusing the work with their own interpretations and analysis, so this branch is another method into deepening the understanding of authorship and fan productions.

While my own experiences are limited to fan fiction (in a whole range of fandoms with a focus on all the big fan fiction genres), it would be beneficial to open the gates up to multiple fan productions in order to create a working dialogue between fan contributors of all sorts, the communities they participate in, and the original source texts they draw on. It is important to showcase fan fiction, and fan works as a whole, as a training ground for future creative endeavors. In exploring this notion of fan-productions being a training ground, the question that comes into play is: a training ground for *what*?

As the third chapter suggests, in some cases the fan writer takes the leap past fan fiction and into a traditional published author, a person who now creates the source texts that others will dig into. This option, however, is only one possibility. Through the study of fan productions, fan contributors, and fan communities, I want to discover what else is out there for fan writers and artists who want to use their fan works as a jumping point into other opportunities.

While the scope of this writing was to provide a general exploration of the journey of fan writers within the community, as well as a look into the various stages of community publication, all under the umbrella of authorship, more has been discovered over the course of the writing. Not only can we look at fan fiction as a valid form of authorship, wherein fan contributors work with a text in order to create their own spin on favorite stories and dig into interpretation and analysis that comes from their own close readings, but we can begin to look at fan fiction as much, much more. From fan fiction as first a private experience and then as a communal adventure in authorship and analysis, we can deepen our exploration by looking into the potential inherent in fan fiction. We can look at fan production as a place to experience writing, art, music, interpretation, and analysis where the learning that occurs through participation is organic and authentic because the participants approach the act first, and foremost, as a labor of love.

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