

“PLAYTHINGS IN THE MARGINS OF LITERATURE”:
CULTURAL CRITIQUE AND REWRITING IDEOLOGIES IN *SUPERNATURAL*
AND *STAR WARS* FANFICTION

by

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a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away....

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ABSTRACT

Building on the questions of gender and sexuality proposed by the ethnographic analyses of first wave fanfiction criticism, I identify the ways in which fanfiction may function as a feminist response to the mainstream patriarchal culture of two media texts: the *Star Wars* films and the television series *Supernatural*. To frame this argument, I question the problematic associations of Henry Jenkins's massively influential metaphor of fan writers as "poachers," which implicitly supports Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer's vision of the lack of critical engagement engendered by popular culture. In my discussion of this metaphor and the prevalent resistance/incorporation paradigm of fan/producer interaction, I expand critical and theoretical notions of dialogue and intertextuality in terms of fanfiction works, and propose a shift in terminology for my own and future examinations of fan culture.

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I owe a big thank you to all the fan authors in both the *Supernatural* and the *Star Wars* communities who offered their insights and encouragement throughout the writing process, and whose stories are at the heart of this project. The fans who contributed to this thesis are too many to name individually; however, I am particularly grateful to Jen and Lea for their long suffering patience, as well as for years of shared experiences in both academia and fandom.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Of course, there are always the academics who just want to poke fandom with a stick and see what happens.”

—Liana. “Best Thing Ever.”

1.1—INTRODUCTION: LITERARY ENERGIES AND FANFICTION

When asked what topic I had chosen for my thesis, almost invariably my response was a question.

“I’m writing about fanfiction...?”

The question mark tended to creep in despite all my efforts to the contrary; after all, I could never assume that the person who asked would be familiar with the subject. Many were not, which wasn’t surprising. Quite a few were, which *was* surprising, and which made this thesis possible.

Fanfiction¹ is a term used to denote all fan-produced stories based on pre-existing texts, especially, given the ubiquity and influence of internet cultures, fan works produced for online discourse communities such as *Livejournal.com*, *Fanfiction.net*, and *Archive of Our Own*. Enabled by such discourse communities, each pre-existing text thus develops its own fandom: communities of fans who interact through multiple fan practices, including discussion of or debate about the source text, and the creation of fan works, including fanfiction. Fandom communities and the fanfiction produced within them are frequently derived from—but are in no way limited to—popular media productions; the source texts for fanfiction cross multiple media and genre boundaries

¹ Spelled “fan fiction” in most works on fan culture studies to date (see Jenkins, Busse and Hellekson, and Derecho, etc). The fan authors whose works I will examine in later chapters of my thesis, however, write it as one word; as such, it is their spelling I have employed throughout this work.

and therefore invite a reconsideration of the literary or cultural value afforded to one text versus another.² In his 1934 lecture “The Author as Producer,” Walter Benjamin wrote:

we have to rethink our conceptions of literary forms or genres [...] if we are to identify the forms of expression that channel the literary energies of the present. There were not always novels in the past, and there will not always have to be; there have not always been tragedies or great epics. Not always were the forms of commentary, translation, indeed even so-called plagiarism, playthings in the margins of literature [...]. All this is to accustom you to the thought that we are in the midst of a mighty recasting of literary forms, a melting down in which many of the opposites in which we have been accustomed to think may lose their force. (258)

It is from this statement that the title of, and part of the inspiration for, this thesis is derived. With publications spanning only the past two decades, the study of fan cultures is still a relatively new field, even if it is a rapidly expanding one. Analysis of the textual productions of these fandoms specifically— which “presupposes that the writing is actually worth reading” *as* writing, rather than simply as “evidence of a fan’s behaviour” (Coppa, “Brief History” 41)—is even newer. The fact that studies of fanfiction from a literary perspective—as opposed to the wealth of work conducted from a sociological perspective, usually in the context of gender or media studies (Pugh 11)³— are few and

² The fanfiction website *Archive of Our Own*, for example, lists the following broad fanfiction categories into which individual fandoms are sorted: TV Shows; Movies; Books and Literature; Cartoons, Comics, and Graphic Novels; Anime and Manga; Music and Bands; Celebrities and Real People; Video Games; Theater; Other Media; and Uncategorized Fandoms (“Fandoms”). While many of these categories are limited to popular texts, the “Books and Literature” category, for example, includes fanfiction derived from Arthurian mythology, works by Dostoyevsky and Dickens, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

³ See Busse and Hellekson’s extremely comprehensive bibliography, “Fan Fiction: A Bibliography of Critical Works.” Fanfiction studies tend, as this list demonstrates, to focus on slash fanfiction (defined

far between indicates a prevailing view of fanfiction that casts these texts as “playthings in the margins of literature,” secondary to more compelling objects of analysis. As Benjamin states, however, literary energies are channeled in different forms, and the imposed oppositions between “literature” in the form of novels and “literature” in the form of fanfiction may likewise come to “lose their force” (258). I am here adopting Benjamin’s position, that “we are in the midst of a mighty recasting of literary forms,” though I adapt his comment to the contemporary proliferation of fanfiction and its current position on the “margins of literature” and “official culture” (Benjamin 258; Fiske 33). It is no exaggeration to say that thousands upon thousands of these works are being produced by fans around the globe.⁴ Given the sheer number of works produced by fans, fanfiction is identifiable as a textual form that “channel[s] the literary energies of the present” (Benjamin 258); clearly, the texts merit examination in and of themselves.

1.2—A BRIEF NON-HISTORY OF FANFICTION

A definitive history of fanfiction upon which all fandom scholars agree has yet to be settled; as a result, many works in fandom studies offer the author’s own perspective on the history of fandom and its texts.⁵ Nor are academics unique in this desire to impose a history and date of origin upon the genre. As referenced in Abigail Derecho's “Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fanfiction,” fans

below) and, frequently, the reasons why women in fandom write such stories. As such, the investigations are frequently into the gender and sociological forces informing the texts, rather than the texts themselves.⁴ J.J Parrish notes that *Fanfiction.net*, one of the largest online fanfiction archives, hosts over “950,000 individual fan fiction titles by more than 220,000 writers” (21); since her writing in 2007, the site has changed formats and no longer offers a total fanfiction count, but *Fanlore.org* posits that “several hundred new stories” are “uploaded *daily*” (“FanFiction.Net,” my emphasis). The site hosts fanfiction written in over 31 languages, including Latin (“FanFiction.Net”). However, the site is only one of hundreds of fanfiction archives and fandom-specific websites devoted to fanfiction.

⁵ See, for example, Derecho; Pugh; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*; and Coppa, “A Brief History of Media Fandom.”

also provide their own theories and insights as to what they perceive to be the origins of their works; Derecho, for example, notes two fan-authored lists that “summarize the best-known milestones in the evolution of” fanfiction (66),⁶ though such lists also appear in multiple incarnations across fandom theory communities such as *Livejournal.com*’s *Meta_Fandom* community and *The Fanfic Symposium*. When comparing lists by both fans and academics (though the two identities are not always wholly separate), while different authors identify different texts as examples of fanfiction, there are three distinct and overarching schools of thought on fanfiction’s origin and history. In reverse chronological order, they are:

1. That the first fan cultures arose in the late 1960s out of science-fiction media texts like *Star Trek* and fantasy novels like Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *Darkover* series, both of which incited fans to create their own versions and revisions of the original stories for personal consumption or for publication in fanzines.⁷
2. That creative fan cultures originated from printed works, rather than media texts, taking the form of letter responses, early fanzines, or literary societies. This argument has more subcategories than the first, locating the origin of visible fan cultures with the first science fiction fanzines in the 1930s; in literary societies based on and continuing Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories or Austen’s works; or looks further back to the 1800s, when

⁶ Supercat’s “A (Very) Brief History of Fanfic,” and Juice’s “A History of Fanfiction” are the two lists she identifies as exemplary of fans’ interest in defining the history of their fictions.

⁷ See, for example, Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*. Though Supercat suggests a longer history for fanfiction in general, she locates the origins of slash fanfiction here, with Kirk/Spock as the first pairing. Juice likewise sees the 60s as the start of slash fanfiction, but unlike Supercat, while she proposes fanfiction texts that pre-date *Star Trek*, she writes that fanfiction “did not really develop and grow” until that point.

fan responses to serialized texts could impact the story's development in subsequent installments.⁸

3. Offering the broadest definition, that fan cultures and their texts are almost timeless, in that fanfiction can be said to encompass any use, retelling, and/or reinterpretation of mythology and other tales that originated in oral culture. This definition encompasses multiple works included in the literary canon, including those by Shakespeare, Chaucer, and earlier writers.⁹

None of the definitions and histories of fanfiction currently offered are wholly satisfactory, as they impose boundaries on the genre that are either too limiting or too broad. These competing definitions do, however, gesture toward a unifying creative impetus that informs the production of fanfiction texts: the desire to create a narrative rejoinder to the original work. Such a desire expands the conception of fanfiction beyond the limiting first definition that implies fanfiction can only “be understood as a product of fan cultures” toward the broader scope of the third definition (Derecho 62): “nonfan works” can also “explicitly mark themselves as revisions, continuations, and insertions” (Derecho 66).

Furthering the argument that refigures fanfiction as other than simply the product of a subculture, Sheenagh Pugh highlights the “obvious litfic/fanfic parallel” by noting that both kinds of fiction use “existing texts as starting points” and suggesting that “the same needs” can drive the creation of both literature and fanfiction (155). Pugh points to the inherent intertextuality of all works in her argument, enumerating the number of unauthorized sequels to literary works (particularly the works of Jane Austen) that have

⁸ See, for example, Bacon-Smith, *Science Fiction Culture*; Coppa, “A Brief History of Media Fandom”; Driscoll; and Thomas for examples of support for all three subcategories.

⁹ See, for example, Derecho, Pugh, Romano, and Supercat.

been published alongside the proliferation of online, fan-authored texts that draw from similar literary sources (47-67). By creating this parallel, she also suggests the unsatisfactory nature of “the notion that there must naturally be some intrinsic difference in *quality* between” what authors of published derivative literature do and what “pseudonymous, unpaid fan fiction writers do,” for even if there were such a difference, “it wouldn’t mean they were writing in different genres” (Pugh 11, original emphasis). This argument aligns so-called “official,” published works with fan texts, and so not only creates a space in which such fan texts may be considered as art, but also can be supported by all three differing definitions/histories of fanfiction. In the same decade that fans were challenging the heteronormativity of, or lack of strong female characters in, Gene Roddenberry’s *Star Trek*, Jean Rhys was challenging the marginalized and silenced position of Bertha, the “madwoman in the attic” in *Jane Eyre*, through the prequel narrative of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. After “more than 20,000 people cancelled their magazine subscriptions” following Arthur Conan Doyle’s decision to kill Sherlock Holmes, the author capitulated to pressure from his fans to bring the detective back to life (Pearson 96).¹⁰ William Gillette’s play, *Sherlock Holmes: A Drama in Four Acts*—produced after “The Final Problem” in which Holmes dies, but before “The Empty House” in which he returns—makes use of elements from many of Doyle’s stories; however, he encodes an implicit critique of Doyle’s solitary, borderline misogynistic detective by introducing a

¹⁰ A similar fan reaction arose in response to the conclusion of Edgar Rice Burroughs’ *Tarzan of the Apes* when it was published in *All Story* magazine. Fans wrote that while they enjoyed the story, the ending was disappointment enough to “make a lady swear” (Burroughs 247); many demanded a sequel. The subsequent publication of *Tarzan of the Apes* concludes with Burroughs’s note: “The further adventures of Tarzan, and what came of his noble act of self-renunciation, will be told in the next book of Tarzan” (241). Moreover, one fan’s comment that “Mr. B. [could] kill *Clayton*,” and the story would be “improved upon” as a result, is borne out in the sequel (244, original emphasis).

new female character for Holmes to fall in love with and marry in the play.¹¹ Speaking to the third definition, which locates “the roots of fan fiction” in “works now considered parts of the literary canon” (Jenkins, “Confessions” 3), works such as Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* or Robert Henryson’s *The Testament of Cresseid* can be read as variants of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* (Derecho 66); in fact, some fanfiction scholars propose that Shakespeare’s entire corpus may be viewed as early examples of derivative literature, and contemporary fanfiction is merely the newest incarnation of the same genre.¹²

I include this discussion and history of fanfiction not to propose an alternate definition of the genre—one that would undoubtedly prove to be equally unsatisfactory—but instead to acknowledge that there is a compelling history of texts that can be examined in this light, beyond what the scope of this project permits. My own discussion of fanfiction in this thesis makes use of media-derived texts—specifically, fanfiction based on the *Star Wars* films and the *Supernatural* television series—and more closely adheres to the first proposed definition of fanfiction as a result; however, I do not identify fanfiction as being purely limited to electronic or mass-media source texts¹³ or having to originate within fan cultures.

¹¹ The fact that Holmes “fall[s] in love and marrie[s]” at the play’s conclusion rewrites “a line of text” in Doyle’s work, “from which we learn that all emotions, particularly that of love, were abhorrent to the ‘cold, precise but admirably balanced mind’ of Mr. Sherlock Holmes” (Starrett 115). See also Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* 96-97.

¹² See, for example, Derecho, Pugh, Romano, and Supercat.

¹³ Hereafter referred to simply as “media” or “media texts.” While I recognize that the term “media” includes more forms than television and/or film, the term is employed in phrases such as “media fandom” within existing fan culture studies as a way to distinguish fan cultures surrounding television series or movies from those based on other sources such as books, bands, plays, or actors (Coppa, “Media Fandom”). I follow this example and the limitations it imposes on the definition of “media” throughout this thesis.

As is evident in the enumeration of texts that could fall under the broad definition of fanfiction, the impulse to critique a source text's presentation (or marginalization) of certain groups of characters crosses media boundaries. In this study, I propose to examine the notion that fanfiction functions primarily as a form of critical dialogue with an original text. I do so in response to earlier studies that conceptualize fans and their fanfiction purely in terms of opposition and resistance, as their focus on fan practices (including fanfiction) as only resistant or subcultural reinforces the popular positioning of fandom on the margins of culture, rather than as an integral part of it. The first instance of the incorporation of fan studies into literary studies—Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance*—concerned itself with the deconstruction of social hierarchies that marginalized fans and their practices by engaging in “close textual analysis” of fans' source texts, and thereby countering the “familiar assumption in popular culture study” that such texts are “stereotypical, repetitive, and unrealistic” rather than “serious considerations of pertinent human problems” (Radway 120, 187). Despite this initial confluence of fan and literary studies, Deborah Kaplan notes that “[t]raditionally, analysis of fan fiction is sociological,” tending to focus on the fan cultures surrounding the creation and reception of such texts rather than conducting “literary analysis of fanfiction texts for its own sake” (134). With Kaplan's article and Sheenagh Pugh's recent work, *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context*, the heretofore “unexplored territory” of literary analysis of fanfiction has started to be investigated, and it is within this burgeoning field that I set my work. I do not use the term “literary” here to suggest an approach to fanfiction grounded in formalist studies arising from, for example, narratology or New Critical approaches, however. Instead—and following

Pugh's use of the term—I return to the manner of “close textual analysis” demonstrated in Radway's work in my discussion of both works of fanfiction and the source texts from which they are derived (Radway 120). In so doing, I suggest a different model for conceptualizing fans' relationships to source texts and their producers (and producers' relationships with their fans) in general and, building on the questions of gender and sexuality proposed by the ethnographic analyses of first wave fanfiction criticism,¹⁴ identify the ways in which fanfiction may function as a feminist response to “the mainstream patriarchal culture” of two media texts in particular: the *Star Wars* films and the television series *Supernatural* (Bacon-Smith, *Science Fiction Culture* 96).

As source texts for fanfiction, *Star Wars* and *Supernatural* initially appear to be entirely disparate—the former a science fiction/space opera film franchise first released in the late 1970s and currently spanning over 30 years of films, media tie-ins, and cartoon spin-offs, the latter a gothic television series heavily reliant on American folklore, which premiered in 2005. Setting aside questions of medium, the two works demonstrate significant parallels. Although the two works are created for different genres, the genres themselves display some commonalities. As argued by Harry Benshoff, “[s]cience fiction, fantasy, and gothic horror all share th[e] power to construct alternative realities” in which “social constructs” are called into question (202). The social constructs questioned, however, do not necessarily challenge traditional gender ideologies, as “science fiction began as a subset of and reinforcement for the mainstream patriarchal culture” and, likewise, the frequent “insistence on female victimization” in the gothic demonstrates a “punishing and violent recapitulation to patriarchal norms” (Bacon-Smith, *Science Fiction Culture* 96; Benshoff 202). In terms of these texts specifically, the

¹⁴ See, for example, Constance Penley's *Nasa/Trek*.

original *Star Wars* trilogy (particularly *A New Hope*) and *Supernatural* both place heavy emphasis on the exploits of a male hero dyad: respectively, Luke Skywalker and Han Solo, and Sam and Dean Winchester. The characters themselves exhibit some parallels as well: Luke and Sam both possess mystical powers, Han and Dean are both emblematic of the “rugged bad boy” character type (Wright, par. 14), and both Han and Dean are inordinately attached to their means of transportation (the *Millennium Falcon* and a 1967 Chevrolet Impala, respectively). Additionally, both works are already implicated in dialogic authorship: while George Lucas and Eric Kripke both exercise considerable creative influence over their respective texts, as both *Star Wars* and *Supernatural* make use of a team of writers, neither producer is the sole author of his work. Most importantly in terms of this study, the focus of both works on the heroic, male character pair results in a corresponding marginalization of female characters, who are frequently pigeonholed into specific (and often subordinate) categories. Despite the reinforcement of mainstream and patriarchal cultural norms in both texts, the active fanfiction segment of both fandoms are heavily—if not overwhelmingly—female. The ways in which these women critique, respond to, and alter these original texts and their characters through the production of their own fictions is the central focus of this project; however, the ways in which the original texts and their producers critique and respond to their fans is of equal interest.

1.3—CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In my first chapter, “Writing the Rejoinder: Imitation, Critique, and Plagiarism in Fanfiction,” I discuss and challenge the three predominant and contradictory views of

fans: fans as passive recipients of culture, fans as thieves of intellectual property, and Henry Jenkins's influential depiction of fans as poachers. While I argue that fans' textual productions are evidence of activity rather than passivity, I demonstrate that the current prevalent metaphors for such fan activity (such as "poaching") engender equally negative associations as those metaphors that figure fans as passive. To do so, I examine the origin of Jenkins's metaphor in Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, and propose alternate terminology to conceptualize fanfiction—terminology that asserts fan activity, but does not carry the same implications of negativity or illegality as Jenkins's "poaching" metaphor.

In her introduction to *Theorizing Fandom: fans, Subculture, and Identity*, Cheryl Harris notes that there is a lack in current fan culture studies as, "the authentic voices of the fans themselves are rarely heard" (8). Harris's point in its inverse raises the difficult question of what constitutes "authentic" versus "inauthentic" fan voices—to speak of fans as "homogenous is almost certainly incorrect"; therefore, to consider one fan group more authentic than another would be to hierarchize the heterogeneity of their practices (49). The methodology of asking fans to define their own practices that she proposes, however, is a move away from earlier fan culture studies in which fans were treated primarily as objects of analysis.¹⁵ Following Harris's methodology, instead of "pok[ing] fandom with a stick" as the fan quoted in the epigraph to this chapter suggests is evident in academic studies of fandom, I approach the products of fan authors' creative engagement with source texts in the same way as one would the work of any literary

¹⁵ As Busse and Hellekson write in their introduction, unlike Jenkins's example of an academic who "situates himself as a fan" (18), an alternate theoretical approach is for the author (their primary example is Bacon-Smith) to "consciously construc[t]" themselves as "outside observer[s]" reporting on, but not invested in, the fan community (18).

author. Given this perspective on fanfiction that posits no distinction between “literary” and “fan” works, I have echoed the approach taken by many critics when discussing the works of living authors, and have communicated with authors in both the *Supernatural* and *Star Wars* fandoms to discuss their texts. In so doing, I treat the fanfiction authors primarily as writers, rather than simply as fans of a source text; I present a study of fanfiction as a form of prose fiction, a form that engages in an in-depth critical dialogue with other, pre-existing works. From this standpoint, and in reference to my communications with fan authors, I expand critical and theoretical notions of dialogue and intertextuality in terms of fanfiction works, and discuss the role of authorship in literary study, among other topics.

Building on this discussion of the language used to frame studies of fanfiction, in the second chapter, “‘Distressing Damsels’: Narrative Critique and Reinterpretation in *Star Wars* Fanfiction,” I make use of the proposed concept of the dialogue in an analysis of a fanfiction work against its media source text, *Star Wars*. That the source text discussed in this chapter is a film series is important as, in his refutation of readers as a purely passive audience for prescribed textual meanings, Michel de Certeau speaks only of readers in the most literal sense—consumers of printed texts, rather than electronic or mass media productions. The latter, he claims, leave no room for their audience to respond as authors (31), an assertion which implicitly recalls Adorno and Horkheimer’s perception of consumers of popular culture as inherently passive (1-2). This chapter counters de Certeau’s contention that media consumption permits nothing but passivity. I first examine the ways in which fandom crosses media boundaries, with reference to Marshall McLuhan’s contention that “the medium is the message” (viii). Regardless of

which history is ascribed to it, fandom and its textual productions span decades and multiple media developments. Through a discussion of fan cultural studies predating the current online culture of fandom and its texts, I demonstrate that while the change in medium used to disseminate fanfiction may have altered fandom as a *culture*, the critical role that I ascribe to fanfiction texts has not changed.

As an example both of the critical impulse demonstrated in fanfiction texts and the ability of fan authors to create these critical rejoinders in response to media texts, I examine the unauthorized *Star Wars* novel *Another Hope*, by fan author Lori Jareo, in terms of its role as a rejoinder in a dialogue with Lucas's creation. Although the novel itself crosses critical boundaries between appropriation and plagiarism, it is exemplary of the ways in which fantexts may be used to expose and rewrite problematic gender ideologies in original texts. In her article on the weakness of women in the *Star Wars* films, Jeanne Cavelos remarks of the character Padmé Amidala, "What a woman! If only George Lucas had let her be that woman" (314). Although Jareo's novel does not explicitly rewrite the female characters in the prequel trilogy of films, it does propose an Alternate Universe (AU) for the original *Star Wars* trilogy in which strong female characters are not sacrificed "to make the male characters look better" (Cavelos 306). Using both Lucas's script of the original *Star Wars* film (subtitled *A New Hope* when it was rereleased) as well as the licensed novelization by Alan Dean Foster to frame my discussion, and with reference to the dialogic aspect of fanfiction outlined in the previous chapter, I highlight the significant points of congruence and difference between the original texts and Jareo's revision. In so doing, I demonstrate that Jareo creates a "feminist countertext" out of the patriarchal material offered by the *Star Wars* films,

specifically the novel's explicit revision of *A New Hope* (Jenkins, "Star Wars" 58).

Whereas Jenkins and Brooker propose a division of male and female pleasures in reading and writing different genres, however, I argue that Jareo creates this countertext through fully participating within the science fiction genre of the original films and licensed novel. The juxtaposition of her work against Lucas's makes even more apparent the latter's lack in terms of its female characters—a lack made especially significant in light of *A New Hope*'s original inspiration in Frank Herbert's *Dune*.

From the broad definition of what constitutes fanfiction outlined earlier in this introduction, it is clear that fan authors do not discriminate between genre or medium of source texts when considering what has potential for (or what requires) critical rewriting to suit new needs and voices. Moreover, fanfiction authors themselves write across a variety of genres, from mythology to books to media productions, as well as in multiple narrative styles. In this chapter, "Sweetheart, This Ain't Gender Studies": Rewriting *Supernatural* Margins," I address Marshal McLuhan's division of "hot" and "cold" media in reference to fan authors' rejection of such imposed boundaries in the creation of their texts. McLuhan's contention that television is a medium that requires participation from its audience, however, is borne out through my discussion of the ways in which female fan authors write their fictions in response to male-centric media texts. *Supernatural* fan authors in particular frequently identify specific episodes in the paratextual notes to their fanfiction works, announcing their participation with and critique of those individual episodes as well as of overarching program ideologies. For this chapter, I analyze novella-length works of fanfiction produced for the *Supernatural J-Squared Big Bang Challenge*—an online community archived on the blogging website *Livejournal.com*—

because such works permit equal space for plot and character development as the television series against which the fanfiction is read.

The fanfiction written for the *Bigbang Challenge*, like all works of fanfiction across fandoms, is divided into different subgenres. Deborah Kaplan defines what she identifies as the three primary subgenres by which fanfiction texts are classified:

1. Gen or genfic. Shorthand for “general” or “general audience,” these stories do not involve a romantic character pairing.
2. Het. Shorthand for “heterosexual,” these stories involve a heterosexual character pairing, either taken from canon or of the fan’s own invention.
3. Slash. These stories posit a homosexual relationship between a source text’s heterosexual male characters. The term “slash” denotes the way in which such pairings are indicated by fan authors—separated by a forward slash, as in “Kirk/Spock” (138).

To Kaplan’s list of fandom subgenres, I add a fourth category used by fanfiction authors: “femmeslash” or “femslash,” which denotes a female character-centric version of slash fiction. Slash is “one of the most pervasive and distinctive genres of fan writing,” as discussed by Henry and Cynthia Jenkins and Shoshana Green (Green et al. 62); this contention is no less true of the *Supernatural* fandom. The overwhelming majority of stories produced for the *Supernatural J-Squared Big Bang Challenge* are slash fiction, predominately Wincest or J2 Real Person Slash (RPS).¹⁶ While gen stories are also common (tending to be “casefic” stories that echo the typical plot of an episode of

¹⁶ Both *Supernatural* fandom-specific terms, “Wincest” is portmanteau of “Winchester” and “incest,” posits a homosexual relationship between either the two Winchester brothers, or (though less common) one brother and his father, John Winchester; “J2” or “J-Squared,” part of the community’s name, refers to stories that romantically pair *Supernatural* actors whose names begin with the letter J. Of the 225 stories completed for the 2009 Big Bang Challenge alone, 193 were slash fiction (Missyjack, “SPN J2 Big Bang”).

Supernatural, involving the discovery of, research into, and solving of a haunting or other supernatural incident), het and femmeslash stories are in the minority, averaging fewer than ten stories produced in both these genres combined per *Big Bang Challenge* cycle. While “both fans and academics agree slash represents a way of rethinking and rewriting traditional masculinity” by critiquing assumptions of the heteronormativity of male characters in media fandoms and of what constitutes masculinity itself (Green et al. 71), Green et al. complicate the reductive outlook that “reads slashfic as [...] misogynistic” (Busse and Hellekson, Introduction 29). This chapter briefly touches on fanfiction authors’ rationales for writing slash fiction to demonstrate that that these stories can also be read as offering, in the inverse, a similar feminist critique of male-dominated texts as that which is explored in the stories under examination throughout this work. I make reference to slash fanfiction in recognition of its prevalence in the *Supernatural* fandom and to situate my own work in relation to it; however, given the “disproportionate treatment” of slash fiction in academic studies to date (Busse and Hellekson, Introduction 17),¹⁷ I chose to omit from my research those stories that were slash-centric, in order to focus instead on the rare het and femmeslash stories produced for the *Big Bang Challenge*.

Although all *Big Bang* stories are posted in an open forum, I contacted authors to seek permission to make use of their texts in this chapter of my thesis as, unlike Jareo’s novel examined in the previous chapter, these stories have never been published: while

¹⁷As the quotation from Busse and Hellekson suggests, studies of slash pervade the “history of fanfiction studies” (17). Examples of such studies include: Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women*; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*; Green et al., “Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking”; Mirna Cicioni, “Male Pair Bonds and Female Desire in Fan Slash Writing”; Elizabeth Woledge, “Intimatopia: Genre Intersections Between Slash and the Mainstream”; Kristina Busse, “My Life is a WIP on my LJ: Slashing the Slasher and the Reality of Celebrity and Internet Performances”; Kylie Lee, “Confronting *Enterprise* Slash Fan Fiction”; and Esther Saxey, “Staking a Claim: The Series and its Slash Fan-fiction.”

they may be read by anyone who accesses the community, there is a tacit assumption that only members of the *Supernatural* fandom will actually care to do so. Most of the authors who responded to my request were enthusiastic and granted permission for their works to be analyzed;¹⁸ regrettably, however, an examination of all the stories read for this chapter would require more space than this project permits. While I make reference to other stories in this chapter, my textual analysis is primarily focused on Silverspotted's "This One's About the Girls," as it is emblematic of the ability of *Supernatural*-based fanfiction to critique gender ideologies and to make central formerly marginalized voices. Finally, and in reference to stories that do not demonstrate the same level of rewriting or critique as Silverspotted's work, I return to the concept of the dialogue to figure fanfiction as breaking from the limited resistance/incorporation paradigm of audience response to media texts.

Having discussed through analysis of fanfiction texts the ways in which fans assert their positions as authors in response to problematic aspects of original works, in my conclusion I turn to the other side of the dialogue. Harris contends that a medium like television is "not a one-way transmitter," and fans may therefore create their responses to such programming. Furthering this assertion, she claims that "television producers, programmers and other industry personnel" do not create this programming "in a vacuum" ("A Sociology" 44). Although many authors of the original media works are not explicitly against fanfiction, few actively support it, and fewer explicitly engage with it. In this way, the producer and creator of *Supernatural*, Eric Kripke, is somewhat unique in

¹⁸ I only considered those works by authors who had granted me explicit permission to cite their stories available for textual analysis and extensive close reading. Works by authors who did not reply to my request at all are referenced by title, genre, and/or broad plot details. Stories by the few authors who requested I not discuss their works at all are omitted from any discussion or reference in the entirety of this thesis.

his continuation of the dialogue with his fans through conventions and explicit acknowledgement of the fan community in *Supernatural* episodes. I examine his portrayal of fans and fanfiction in the series, as well as the relation between the Winchester brothers and Chuck Shurley—a character who, within the series itself, is the author of a series of *Supernatural* novels—to propose that such episodes are rejoinders themselves to fanfiction utterances, and break from the current and reductive resistance/incorporation paradigm of producer-fan interaction.

1.4–CONCLUSION: WRITING ON THE MARGINS

Whichever history of fanfiction one personally ascribes to, the genre is not new. Given the ubiquity of the internet to welcome new authors, and each new text for fan authors to write about, it is, moreover, a genre that is rapidly growing in popularity. As Sheenagh Pugh argues in the introduction for her own fanfiction study, “[i]t seems worth trying to find out what it is people want so much” (11-12). Not only is it worth discussing what these authors “want so much”—or, as I would phrase the discussion, what it is that their works do in relation to the source texts—but it is also worth reconsidering the place fanfiction currently occupies in terms of culture. Fanfiction transcends the imposed division between “official” and “popular” culture in its source texts, and yet is viewed as external to both. Not differentiating between *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or the *Twilight* series for source material, fanfiction authors “pull [art] close and integrat[e] it into” their own creations (Jenkins, “Matt Hills” 23), and yet their texts are “automatically dismissed and mocked by those outside of the fan community” if, indeed, those external to the community have even heard the term before (Pugh 239). In the number of texts

produced, in its global presence and, I argue, its importance, fanfiction is as worthy of consideration as “any other highly successful, popular genre” (Pugh 11). Clearly, it’s worth considering a new place for fanfiction texts in our conceptions of culture.

CHAPTER 2

“WRITING THE REJOINER”: IMITATION, CRITIQUE, AND PLAGIARISM IN FANFICTION

Writers can't ask readers not to interpret their work. You can't enjoy a novel that you haven't interpreted—unless you model the author's characters in your head, you don't care about what they do and why they do it. And once readers model a character, it's only natural that readers will take pleasure in imagining what that character might do offstage, to noodle around with it. This isn't disrespect, it's *active reading*.

—Cory Doctorow. “In Praise of Fanfic.”

2.1—INTRODUCTION: FROM PASSIVITY TO POACHING

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer discuss what they perceive as the threat that mass-produced popular culture poses both to the high arts and to the people who consume this popular culture. According to their argument, this “culture industry” and its associated texts are distinct from canonical texts of “serious merit” (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 17) in that they are “no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production” (1). The culture industry, they argue, “

turns all participants into listeners and authoritatively subjects them to broadcast programs which are all exactly the same. No machinery of rejoinder has been devised [...] and [its listeners] have to accept organization from above. (Adorno and Horkheimer 1-2)

From this statement, it is clear that Adorno and Horkheimer see popular culture texts not only as homogenized pabulum, but also as unidirectional—without room for “rejoinder,” the “culture industry” permits only passive acceptance from its audience. Writing against this position, Henry Jenkins argues that “[f]an culture muddies th[e] boundaries” between producer activity and consumer passivity as expressed in this conception of the culture

industry, and recognizes that works of popular culture merit “the same attention and appreciation as canonical texts” (*Textual Poachers* 17). Jenkins critiques Adorno and Horkheimer’s problematic association of “popular” with uniformity (and by extension, disposability) and of consumers with passivity. Nevertheless, his own conceptualization of fans and their cultural productions is not wholly unproblematic.

Drawing on discussions of fan culture and production from his seminal work in fan culture studies, I will situate Jenkins’s primary metaphor of fans as “poachers” in opposition to the purely passive model of consumer response of Adorno and Horkheimer. I will complicate Jenkins’s model, and question the problematic associations of his “poaching” metaphor by revisiting its original usage in Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Discussing the fanfictions that are part of the *Supernatural* and *Star Wars* fandoms, I will analyse the roles and functions of these texts in relation to concepts of authorship—that of the creators of original texts, and that of the fans who derive their works from those texts. Although fan authors appropriate textual material without expressed permission, do such appropriations truly equate to “poaching”? In examining this question, I will highlight the misconception of fan practices that lies at the root of the language framing Jenkins’s formulation, and propose a shift in terminology for my own and future examinations of fan culture that will facilitate a vision of fan productions not as “poaching,” but instead as rejoinders.

2.2—PROBLEMATIC METAPHORS IN FAN CULTURE STUDIES

Like the popular culture texts on which it is frequently based, fanfiction is often maligned (or, arguably worse, dismissed) as the product of a “subculture that exists on

the borderlands” of contemporary culture (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 3). From Adorno and Horkheimer through to Jenkins’s first influential work on fan culture (which prefaced the “academic ‘discovery’ of fandom”) fans and the popular texts from which they often derive their works were considered “marginal to the operations of our culture, ridiculed in media, shrouded with social stigma, pushed underground by legal threats, and often depicted as brainless and inarticulate” (Jenkins, “Confessions” 3, 1). As these popular texts have recently “been adopted into the academy” (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 25), they have at some level been reclaimed from the negative formulation of Adorno and Horkheimer’s discussion.

Despite its current recognition by academia, fanfiction remains conceptualized as a “scribbling in the margins” of officially sanctioned culture (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 152). It is, however, a genre of writing that counters Adorno and Horkheimer’s perception of the culture industry as generative only of passivity and, thus, forbidding of critique or other rejoinder from its audience. The process by which fanfiction authors selectively appropriate and make use of textual elements in the production of new meanings is more akin to the reading and writing practices “considered acceptable in confronting a work of ‘serious merit’” in the “task of literary analysis” than to mere passive acceptance of an original work as complete and inviolate as its author created it (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 17, 25). Rather than exhibiting passivity, fanfiction authors,

[u]nimpresed by institutional authority and expertise, [...] assert their own right to form interpretations, to offer evaluations, and to construct cultural canons. Undaunted by traditional conceptions of literary and intellectual

property, fans raid mass culture, claiming its materials for their own use, reworking them as the basis for their own cultural creations. (18)

Not only does Jenkins conceptualize fans as active figures, but, through his use of the word “canon” and the implicit connection to “high culture” that word entails, he depicts fan-produced texts as “artistic productions validated by the official culture” (Fiske 39). To further characterize fans as active agents rather than passive, “mindless consumers,” Jenkins also likens them to “cultural scavengers” and “‘poachers’ of textual meanings” (“*Star Trek*” 172, 174). This analogy for fandom activities explicitly references the work of Michel de Certeau; Jenkins asserts that de Certeau’s “poaching” analogy in *The Practice of Everyday Life* “characterizes the relationship between readers and writers as an ongoing struggle for possession of the text and control over its meanings” (*Textual Poachers* 24). Extrapolating from readers and writers a comparable dyad of consumers and producers, Jenkins employs de Certeau’s terms to redefine fans as active producer-consumers whose “interpretive conventions provide the basis for action against the producer’s actions” (*Textual Poachers* 2), in place of a hierarchical and oppositional producer/consumer relationship in which the former prescribes meaning and the latter accepts it without question.

Turning to the origins of Jenkins’s metaphor, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau argues against the assumption that, as Adorno and Horkheimer claim, “consumption is essentially passive” (167), to posit instead that such a perspective arises out of a “legend [which] is necessary for the system that distinguishes and privileges authors, educators, revolutionaries, in a word, ‘producers,’ in contrast with those who do not produce. By challenging ‘consumption’ as it is conceived and (of course) confirmed

by these authorial enterprises,” de Certeau continues, “we may be able to discover creative activity where it has been denied that any exists” (167). Or, to rephrase de Certeau’s sentiment in Adorno and Horkheimer’s terms, the challenge to the strict division of producers and consumers proves the ability of fans to write a rejoinder where it has been denied that the machinery to do so exists.

In response to the contemporary culture that he sees as constructing binaries between writer and reader, producer and consumer—binaries in which “to write is to produce the text,” while “to read is to receive it from someone else without putting one’s own mark on it, without remaking it” (de Certeau 169)—de Certeau refutes the “assimilation of reading to passivity” imposed by the “official interpreters” of a text by characterizing the act of reading to poaching on the “private hunting reserve” of orthodox interpretations (169, 171). He writes, “[f]ar from being writers—founders of their own place [...]—readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves” (174). In reference to this metaphor, Jenkins argues that “[d]e Certeau gives us terms,” for conceptualizing the activities of “subordinate classes” within “dominant forms of representation” (*Textual Poachers* 26) and, figuring fandom as exemplary of a subordinate class engaging in “popular resistance,” it is this model that he unquestioningly adopts in his depiction of the practices of fan culture and cultural production. Employing de Certeau’s terms, Jenkins contends that “[l]ike the poachers of old, fans operate from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness. Like other popular readers, fans lack direct access to the means of commercial cultural production” (*Textual Poachers* 26). Two points, however, are left unaddressed in this metaphor—or at

least in Jenkins's use of it: first, the question of legality that terms such as "poaching," "private hunting reserve" and "despoiling" raise; second, the troubling association between fan practices and Orientalism invoked by de Certeau's phrase "despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves" (de Certeau 174) that Jenkins neither refutes nor qualifies in his own use of the metaphor.

These two analytical omissions do not suggest that de Certeau's argument needs to be dispensed with entirely when considering the practices that inform fanfiction, only the problematic terminology derived from it that Jenkins himself employs. In reference to the first omission, de Certeau's depiction of "reading operations" that counter the prescribed "legitimate" interpretation of the text by "insinuating inventiveness into the cracks in a cultural orthodoxy" (172) is an apt analogy for fan culture; fanfiction authors do use as the basis of their works the manner of "imaginary or meditative flights taking off from a few words" that de Certeau ascribes to active readers (170). In fact, in an echo of his argument that such readers "insinuat[e] inventiveness into the cracks," AnneMarie,¹⁹ a fan author with whom I have discussed fanfiction, states that the primary impetus for writing fanfiction is that "no book/tv show/movie has the ability to encompass everything, and the imaginative like to *write in the cracks*" (my emphasis). The connotations inherent in the language Jenkins chooses to employ, by contrast, contradict the very argument that Jenkins attempts to draw in regards to fan activity. Reflecting on the central metaphor in *Textual Poachers* in his subsequent article "The Poachers and the Stormtroopers: Cultural Convergence in the Digital Age," Jenkins states that "the cultural efforts" of fans-as-poachers can be seen as "collaborations with rather

¹⁹ All fan author names used in this chapter are the pseudonyms the authors selected for themselves, and which they indicated I had permission to use when quoting our conversations.

than acts of resistance against the culture industry”—a position which he articulates in contrast to the disruption of the “culture jammers” model, which is purely resistant in seeking to “‘jam’ the dominant channels of communication” (“Poachers and Stormtroopers”). While I agree that a model for fandom studies predicated on the notion of fan activity as “dialogic rather than disruptive” is most applicable, especially in terms of fanfiction, the language Jenkins uses to express this model actually attributes to fans the very “disrupt[ion]” and “resistance” that he seeks to contradict through his “poachers position” (Jenkins, “Poachers and Stormtroopers”): by definition, the act of poaching is both disruptive and resistant. While Jenkins’s intended argument of the “collective right to participate” in one’s culture exemplified by fan activity is sound (“Poachers and Stormtroopers”), his metaphor inherently contradicts that argument; in contrast to the image of filling in the cracks to render an incomplete work whole (as invoked by both de Certeau and AnneMarie), the characterization of such active reading practices on the part of fan authors as “poaching” or, worse, “despoiling” does not so much suggest “the validity of competing and contradictory interpretations” as Jenkins contends, but rather implies that, in the “ongoing struggle for possession of the text,” the text itself will be raided, fragmented and, by consequence, diminished (*Textual Poachers* 33, 24).

Underscoring the violence inherent in Jenkins’s analogy, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “despoil” as “[t]o strip or deprive (a person, etc.) violently *of* (some possession); to rob [...] *of* arms, clothes, or something material” and “[t]o strip of worth, value, or use; to render useless, mar, destroy” (original emphasis). The term “poaching” invokes similar associations of (illegal) gain through another’s loss.²⁰ My proposed shift from Jenkins’s

²⁰ The *OED*’s definition of “poach” not only depicts the illegality of the action, but also further characterizes such an action as deceptive and dishonest: “[t]o catch and carry off [...] illegally; to capture

“poaching” metaphor to one of a dialogue attempts to reconcile the disparity between argument and expression in Jenkins’s work.

In regards to the second analytical omission arising from Jenkins’s use of de Certeau’s metaphor, while the image of fans as poachers does recast fan/reader practices from passivity to active cultural activity, Jenkins’s use of this model and its terms that connote violence and illegality pushes the depiction of fan culture towards the opposite extreme: no longer passive, true, but aggressive and violent rather than simply active. This inversion of the traditional view of fan practices is echoed in the imperial and hierarchical associations inherent in the Orientalist imagery that de Certeau attributes to active readers and, by extension, that Jenkins attributes to fans and their practices. Instead of passive listeners dominated by the text, these fans who “despoil the wealth of Egypt” (de Certeau 174) for their own gain are akin to, in Edward Said’s terms, the Western authority that “deal[s] with the Orient” by “making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it” (3). In this view, fans “colonize” the object text, using its materials to construct their own interpretations upon it—much like Said’s contention that “Orientalism overrode the Orient” (96). The “*positional* superiority” of Western culture in Said’s formulation does, when attributed to fan practices, interestingly allow fans to possess the “authority” to “construct canons” (Said 7, original emphasis; 9) in a way supposedly denied to them by the culture industry, as their despoiling of the original text’s canon permits selection not only of what textual elements to appropriate, but also what to eliminate in their own, imposed interpretations. Moreover, like the imperialist perspective in which the Orient—specifically Egypt—

by illicit or ‘underhand’ methods such as a poacher uses.” Implicit in both terms’ definitions is the notion that the poacher/despoiler (in this analogy, the fans) is acting in the wrong, and is causing harm to something through this action.

“requires, indeed insists upon occupation” (Said 34), the image of fan-as-Orientalist could be extended to argue that media productions require and insist upon fan cultures in order to continue to be commercially viable. However, like the problematic associations of “poach” and “despoil” already discussed, inherent to the Orientalist language employed in this comparison is “the debased position of the Orient” or the original text, and a despoiling and diminution of it by the Orientalist fans (Said 96, 36):

This [Oriental] “object” of study will be, as is customary, passive, non-participating, endowed with a “historical” subjectivity, above all non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regard to itself: [...] posed, understood, defined—and acted—by others. (Anwar Abdel Malek, qtd. in Said 97).

Although a contrast to Adorno and Horkheimer’s positioning of *fans* as passive and acted upon by external forces, the analogy of fan activity and textual production to Orientalist discourse reverses, rather than eradicates, the problematic hierarchical relationship of fans, producers, and texts, in which one party is seen as lesser or is marginalized. Moreover, such a metaphor still places fans in, at best, a morally ambiguous position in relation to producers and their original texts.

As Simone Murray notes in “‘Celebrating the Story the Way it Is’: Cultural Studies, Corporate Media, and the Contested Utility of Fandom,” Jenkins’s “schema in *Textual Poachers* tends to posit fan cultures as rebelling against an essentially monolithic and stable corporate order” (12). This description again figures fans as purely oppositional, and does not take into account the interest which both draws a fan to a particular work or text, and which provides the entrance into the “institution of theory and criticism [...] where competing interpretations of and evaluations of common texts

are proposed, debated, and negotiated” (Jenkins *Textual Poachers* 86).²¹ This notion of “rebellious” or “resistance” on the part of fans suggests an interaction with dominant media representations predicated solely on fighting against the framework offered by its texts, rather than an interaction with the texts’ content. Even though fan participation and response may involve revision of the source text in the creation of a new narrative, such revisions nevertheless require a level of engaging with the source, rather than an outright rejection of it. Although the overwhelming majority of fan authors with whom I have communicated stated that they had occasionally felt dissatisfaction with the original work that generated their fandom, and that they had written fanfiction to correct what they perceived as a flaw in the work, they also indicated that their fan practices were not incited solely by the desire to critique the original text. Writes AnneMarie,

Usually, that’s the first reason I begin writing—out of a need to “fix” something or show how it “really should have gone.” I love perfect stories, but they don’t inspire me to write for them. [...] But if I don’t love something to start out with, I don’t criticize it. [...] The more I care about something, the more the aberrations drive me crazy, and I almost have to “write it better.”

It is this “love” for or fascination with the text that is not at all inherent in imagery of poaching or despoiling. Jenkins outlines and argues for the existence and validity of “creative activity where it has been denied that any exists” that de Certeau suggested almost a decade before *Textual Poachers*, and he pushes the metaphor further to eliminate the “major division between reading and writing” upheld by de Certeau by

²¹ To Jenkins’s credit, this lack is something he acknowledges fourteen years after the publication of *Textual Poachers* in the new introduction to his essay “*Star Trek* Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching.” Poaching, Jenkins writes, “offer[s] a powerful counterimage to prevailing stereotypes of fans as passive consumers [...]; yet it [...] also focus[es] on the frustration more than the fascination” of fans and fandom (37).

identifying fans as both consumers and producers of texts (de Certeau 167, 168; “Confessions” 2-3). Such a positive argument, however, is found not in Jenkins’s use of the “poaching” metaphor, but instead when he portrays fan writing as “borrow[ing]” resources from “already circulating texts” and “reworking” this borrowed content to manufacture new “cultural creations” (*Textual Poachers* 3, 8). These characterizations of fanfiction—in contrast to the diminutive connotations of “poaching,” wherein the original work loses something from being “poached” or “despoiled” by its fans—allow for fascination with each original work as well as creative and critical intent on the part of the fan author who, “recognizing the text as imperfectly designed,” actively engages with it and the producer’s original design (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 115). By using the poaching metaphor as central to his discussion of fan culture and its productions in *Textual Poachers*,²² Jenkins seems to disregard entirely de Certeau’s initial qualification that such active, nomadic readers are “far from being writers” (de Certeau 174); fanfiction authors are both, and the comparison is thus unsound in both its application and problematic in its implications.

2.3—ILLEGALITY, IMITATION, INVENTION

Speaking from the position of writers who create stories, all of the fan authors with whom I have discussed fanfiction perceive Jenkins’s comparison of fanfiction to poaching as erroneous. Referring specifically to the production of *Supernatural* fanfiction, Vambrace, for example, states that “[p]oaching’ has a negative connotation of

²² Though Jenkins employs the more useful and positive constructions noted above elsewhere in his text, it is telling that he chooses *that* paradigm of fan culture as the title of both this work and his subsequent article (published a decade later), “The Poachers and the Stormtroopers: Cultural Convergence in the Digital Age.”

‘stealing.’ Kripke”—referring to Eric Kripke, the creator of *Supernatural*—“gave us these characters and this world by publically broadcasting them. I didn’t steal a manuscript from his house.” Speaking of fanfiction in particular, Vambrace writes, “I think of it as ‘embellishing’ or ‘polishing,’ delving into those areas that can’t be addressed” in the show itself. She continues, “[i]t’s a way to talk back to the creator, to engage in dialog (even if the creator isn’t listening)”. Despite fan authors’ positions on the subject, the notion of illegality is prevalent in critical discussions of fanfiction,²³ and it is made explicit in Jenkins’s bald depiction of “fan culture” as “an open challenge [...] a refusal of authorial authority and a violation of intellectual property” (*Textual Poachers* 18). Though negative in its phrasing, Jenkins’s portrayal is not entirely without merit: as Rebecca Tushnet argues, source texts provide the “raw materials” from which fanfiction authors fashion “their own original works”(656), making use of the characters, history, and settings that comprised the original text. However, despite this derivativeness, these “practices of secondary creativity” on the part of fan authors can be perceived by authors as a means by which their fans “transcend passive reception” rather than as engaging in illegal action (Tushnet 653).

As characterized in Vambrace’s rebuttal against Jenkins’s poaching metaphor, authors of fanfiction do not consider themselves to be stealing anything from either the original works or the creators of these works. While this sentiment is unsurprising—it is unlikely that any author, fan or otherwise, would voluntarily accuse himself or herself of intellectual dishonesty—many creators whose works fans employ as the basis of their

²³ See: Rebecca Tushnet’s “Legal Fictions,” Simone Murray’s “Celebrating the Story the Way it Is,” and Caroline Ball’s “Who Owns What in Fanfiction: Perceptions of Ownership and Problems of Law” cited in this work; however, the extant number of works debating fanfiction’s place in intellectual property debates far exceeds the scope of this project. See “Legal Analysis” for a compilation of publications spanning the past decade in this field.

own texts also share this outlook. For instance, asked for his perspective on fanfiction, Joss Whedon, the creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and other shows, states: “I love it. I absolutely love it. I wish I had grown up in the era of fan fiction [. . .]. I didn’t make these shows so people would enjoy them and forget them” (Arpe). Similarly—and pertinent to the fandoms under discussion in this work—Eric Kripke has not only confirmed at fan conventions that he is aware of fanfiction (Amanda Straw, qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen), but also has incorporated it into episodes of the series—specifically, “The Monster at the End of this Book” and “The Real Ghostbusters,” which will be discussed in more depth in the final chapter of this study. Moreover, his choice to name two fan characters in the latter episode after “two prominent real life fans” has given rise to the joke that Kripke, in an inversion of the traditional direction of fanfiction, writes his own fanfiction about his fans (Zubernis and Larsen).²⁴ Of course, to portray authors and producers as unilaterally holding a positive position toward fanfiction would be reductive. As an example of the opposite sentiment, Diana Gabaldon recently wrote in her blog about fanfiction based on her *Outlander* series of novels, stating, “I think it’s

²⁴ As further examples of this pro-fanfiction sentiment on the part of authors, producers, and other creators, J.K. Rowling, Neil Gaiman, and Mercedes Lackey, among others, state that they are flattered by fanfiction based on their novels (see: Waters, Gaiman, and Lackey); and Marion Zimmer Bradley has written an article about the importance of fanfiction, entitled “Fandom: Its Value to the Professional.” Responses by Lucasfilm Inc. to fan productions are more contradictory. The corporation sponsors an annual *Star Wars* Fan Movie Challenge, and George Lucas is enthusiastic about fan tributes such as the short, spoof film *Troopers* (Jenkins, “Poachers and Stormtroopers”). There are, however, definite limitations on the nature of said approved fan productions:

As early as 1981, Lucasfilm had issued legal notices and warnings to fans who published zines containing sexually explicit stories, while implicitly giving permission to publish non-erotic stories about the characters: “Since all of the *Star Wars* Saga is PG Rated, any story those publishers print should also be PG. Lucasfilm does not produce any X-rated *Star Wars* episodes, so why should we be placed in a light where people think we do?” (Jenkins, “Poachers and Stormtroopers”)

Moving from content restrictions to questions of economic competition, “[b]y the late 1990s, Lucasfilm had adopted a stringent policy against all forms of fan fiction that might compete with their own professionally written *Star Wars* novels” (Jenkins, “Poachers and Stormtroopers”). For a more comprehensive list of authors and producers who are explicitly in favour of fanfiction, see “Professional Author Fanfic Policies” and “Fanfiction Supporters.”

immoral, I *know* it's illegal, and it makes me want to barf whenever I've inadvertently encountered some of it involving my characters" ("Fan-Fiction and Moral Conundrums," original emphasis). In a second blog post, however, she went on to moderate her position (albeit not to the point of explicit support) by noting that she has always appreciated alternate creative endeavors including "art, toys, clothing, [...] candles, [and] quilts" produced by her fans, but had not considered prior to her anti-fanfiction comments and fandom response to them that the same creative impetus behind these works might also inform the writing of fanfiction. She writes, "I very much appreciated the insights into fan-fic fandom provided by many thoughtful people [...] who put the case for fan-fiction writers acting primarily out of love. That particular aspect had *not* in fact occurred to me. [...] I buy the 'love' angle, and thanks for drawing that to my attention." ("Fan-Fic II," original emphasis). Not attributing the same attraction to and admiration for the original text to fanfiction as she did to other fan creations, Gabaldon's initially negative perspective on such textual productions embodies the problematic aspect of viewing "poaching" as the nucleus of fan textual productions. As a metaphor, "poaching" suggests that fanfiction is intellectual theft in and of itself, regardless of whether or not it is produced as a commercial venture (and, therefore, potentially as an "economic substitute" for the author's original creation [Tushnet 654]).

To expand upon the textual fascination or "love angle," as opposed to stealing concepts and characters, fans see themselves (and are perceived by many creators) as seeking to engage in a dialogue with the original texts and their creators by elaborating, rewriting, or critiquing the works on their own grounds, so to speak—through a narrative form of literary criticism that derives elements "freely, comfortably, and enthusiastically

from [the] canonical text” (Parrish 158). The derivative foundation for their writing allows fanfiction authors to create alternate meanings within a recognizable context, and create a platform for the “oppositional voices” marginalized “at the moment of production” (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 25). Speaking to the element of “fascination” with original texts in fan practices left unexamined in *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins, “Star Trek” 37), a central precept of fanfiction is that the best works are those dependent on inspiration, and that “the source of inspiration” is “the work of great authors” (Sullivan 16). Despite this inspiration, the work of such authors (or producers and creators, in the case of media fandoms) are only the starting point for new, fan-authored texts. As Rebecca Tushnet argues in her defense of fanfiction: “Section 107 of the Copyright Act” in the United States “allows ‘fair use’ of copyrighted material. Fan fiction should fall under the fair use exception because fan fiction involves the productive addition of creative labour to a copyright holder’s characters, it is non-commercial, and it does not act as an economic substitute for the original work” (654). Tushnet’s qualification of the “addition of creative labour” underscores the importance of the transformative use to which fanfiction authors put original works and appropriated story elements, and further rebuts Jenkins’s use of the poaching metaphor for fan productions.

Fan authors do more than “devour [their] way through the pastures of the media” (de Certeau 165); instead, they engage in “active textual and cultural work [...] expressed in processes of bricolage, hybridity, quotation, and modification” (Leppänen 62).

Fanfiction is thus a combination of imitation and the fanfiction author’s own invention. The balance between the two elements is imperative: the textual references and characters derived from the original work constitute the imitative aspect of a fanfiction text, and

situate the story *as* fanfiction, as connected to a pre-existing work, rather than as original fiction. The element of invention, however, is equally important in the creation of fanfiction, to situate the new text as an expansion, a critique, or another mode of rejoinder that, to use Kristeva's terms, works to "contradict and revitalize" the source text (78). Far from being mere plagiarism or slavish copying, fanfiction juxtaposes old and new elements, imitation and invention, analysis and genesis. In so doing, the production of fanfiction demonstrates "an affinity between the meanings fans produce and those which might be located through a critical analysis of the original story" (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 34), an affinity which does not preclude the potential for "improvement" upon the original story by the fans' reinterpretations and revisions of it. Through this juxtaposition and creative reinterpretation, the stories fans produce can be used to expose, critique, and respond to problematic elements in the original works which are their subject matter. Therefore, to regard fans' creative impulse as merely a violation of intellectual property is to ignore not only the creative input of fanfiction authors in their derivative stories, but also the extensive literary tradition of responding to an ostensibly closed canon through the creation of new texts.²⁵

2.4—CONCLUSION: A "MOSAIC OF QUOTATIONS" AND REWRITING THE METAPHOR

In his characterization of academic writing, Joseph Harris argues that "[o]ur creativity [...] has its roots in the work of others—in response, reuse, and rewriting" (2, qtd. in Parrish 44). Taken out of its original context, Harris's argument could be equally attributed to the production of fanfiction, which must interact with the source text upon

²⁵ See Sheena Pugh's *The Democratic Genre* for a discussion of the literary works and responses in which the roots of 21st century fanfiction may be found; while such fanfiction antecedents are important to arguments for fanfiction's legality, an in-depth discussion of such works is beyond the scope of this project.

which it expands, but whose authors articulate a sense of a concrete distinction between selective appropriation of story elements and intellectual theft. Similar to this depiction of academic writing is “another model” for active reading proposed by de Certeau: “the subtle art” of readers who “insinuate invention into the text itself” (175). Applying this model to fanfiction, given the creative labour on the part of fan authors—who, in de Certeau’s terms, “insinuate invention” into the “framework” of the “authorized writing” of the source text (175)—as well as the fascination with the original text inherent in works of fanfiction, Jenkins’s portrayal of the entire genre as a violation of intellectual property overstates the element of imitation to equate it with copyright infringement. Infringement, like poaching, suggests a conflict in which one party is damaged or otherwise marginalized. The opposite sentiment is articulated by fan authors when describing the role and function of their textual productions. For instance, Valerie writes that “copyright infringement,” when applied to fanfiction,

suggests a diminution, a finite amount of resources that become a source of conflict between producers and fans. But fanfiction, by adding in interpretations to the original source, in fact makes the world of that original creation bigger; it expands on the source and keeps it going long after the original is done. (“Re: Thesis Questions”)

Kit likewise rejects the idea that fanfiction lessens the original texts on which it is based, stating instead that fanfiction can be seen as “an elaborated discussion,” and a “compelling way” for a fan to “discuss and speculate endlessly” about a given text.

Rather than reinforcing the image of a “raid of mass culture” perpetrated by fans, as depicted by Jenkins (*Textual Poachers* 18), both of these positions speak against the

notion of fanfiction as a violation of, or an act of poaching upon, the producers' property. As Rebecca Tushnet notes, "[f]an fiction does not involve pure copying" (658), given that copying would merely be a recapitulation of the source text itself, rather than a creative and critical interaction with it. Instead, both quotations indicate an enlargement of a source text in place of repetition which, as Kristeva argues, "takes what is imitated (repeated) seriously, claiming and appropriating it without revitalizing it" (73). By contrast, the theory that informs Valerie's production of fan texts, especially, echoes Derecho's use of the term "archive" to refer to fanfiction's engagement with original texts: implicitly anti-hierarchical, a text that is an expansion upon another author's work is not inherently inferior to the original text, but instead adds a new layer to the "fictive universe" in which the original is set (MacDonald 135). Kit's characterization of her fanfiction as "an elaborated discussion" similarly refutes a hierarchical distinction between text and fan text; her choice of this metaphor is of particular relevance to my proposed shift in terminology for fan culture studies.

To view the discussion that fan texts embody in terms of imitation and invention, rather than repetition or infringement, the necessity is to "strike a balance" between "domination of the text" and "domination by the text" (Flynn 270), a formulation which encapsulates the tacitly understood but firmly demarcated line between what constitutes appropriate levels of imitation and what constitutes plagiarism. Judge Kozinski, quoted in Tushnet's article, remarks that "[n]othing today [...] is genuinely new: Culture [...] grows by accretion, each new creator building on the works that came before. Overprotection stifles the very creative forces it's supposed to nurture" (661). Similar to this image of creative cultural accretion is Julia Kristeva's definition of intertextuality, in

which, “in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect” (36). Kristeva emphasizes the importance of intertextual writing by stating that “the only way a writer can participate in history is [...] through a process of reading-writing” (65). The definition of the creative process as one of “reading-writing” places equal importance on both halves of the singular process, and echoes the characterization of fans as producer-consumers whose creative impulse is derived from concurrent fascination and dissatisfaction borne of close engagement with an original text: as Kristeva argues, “the one who writes is *the same* as the one who reads” (87, my emphasis). Kristeva’s depiction of intertextuality clearly can also encapsulate the processes of fan creativity and textual production; importantly, moreover, it can be used to bring fandom and fan texts out of what Kristeva calls “the margins of recognized culture” (65). Further underscoring the importance she places on the intertextual process of “reading writing,” Kristeva also states that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (65-66). Applying this contention to considerations of fanfiction, it is clear that the appropriative basis of creativity is not unique to such fan-authored texts. In fact, Kristeva’s “notion of *intertextuality*” can be expressed more broadly (66, original emphasis): if *any* text is a mosaic compiled from pieces of antecedent texts, then, implicitly, *all* texts are constructed in this manner. Given Kozinski’s definition of the ways in which culture progresses, the fan authors’ own definitions of fanfiction that echo Kozinski’s sentiment, and Kristeva’s argument for the inherent intertextuality of all writing, a shift in the terminology used to characterize fan cultures and their productions is clearly necessary.

Like de Certeau's image of "dances between readers and texts in a place where, on a depressing stage, an orthodox doctrine had erected the statue of 'the work' surrounded by consumers who were either conformers or ignorant people" (175), the complicated "intermediate positions" of active fan cultures in relation to media texts are predicated on a system of give and take, consumption and production, "allegiance" and "distance" (Tushnet 678-79): "[s]elf and other, reader and text, interact in such a way that the reader learns from the experience without losing critical distance; reader and text interact with a degree of mutuality. [...] Self and other remain distinct and so create a kind of dialogue" (Flynn 278). It is the concept of the dialogue—a concept also encapsulated in depictions of fanfiction's role by its authors quoted throughout this chapter—which I propose is more useful than the enduring and "influential notion of fans as 'textual poachers'" adopted by Jenkins and recapitulated in subsequent studies of fan culture (Parrish *iv*).²⁶

To replace Jenkins's terms for discussing fanfiction with Bakhtin's, the notion of the dialogue that the latter proposes permits "constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (Bakhtin 426). Speaking of "Bakhtin's term *dialogism*" (71, original emphasis), Kristeva argues that the model proposed by the term is one in which a "literary structure does not simply *exist*"—a static

²⁶ In his introduction to *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, Jenkins notes a "progression from the theories of audience resistance [...] that shaped *Poachers* toward new theories of audience participation" in his later works in a post-digital age of fan culture (2, 5). Despite his disclaimer, the metaphor, as Parrish notes in the introduction to her work, is one that has become a "persistent" and "influential" in fan culture studies (*iv*). It is referenced throughout the works of, for example, Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, Rebecca Tushnet, Rebecca Black, as well as J.J. Parrish. While Jenkins acknowledges the need to "[a]sk some new questions, push in new directions, [and] challenge what [he] said" in *Textual Poachers* (36), he also recognizes the enduring influence of the text: "it's one of the things you read when you want to be integrated into the fan community. They say, 'You want to be a fan? Read this.' It's become a sort of 'how-to' book" (15). In my own research, I have yet to find a single text or metaphor as influential and prevalent in discussions of fan culture.

model reminiscent of the unquestioned and passively received culture industry—but instead “is generated in relation to *another* structure [...] a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer [and that of] the addressee” (65, original emphasis). By ascribing writing to the addressee as well as to the original writer, Bakhtin’s “dialogic imperative [...] ensures that there can be no actual monologue” and, as a result, “threatens other more closed systems” in which those who are addressed, the audience of fans, are unable to respond (426-27). Although the poaching model that Jenkins adopts does allow for writing on the part of the audience, the language he employs casts fan writing in purely oppositional terms, rather than linking audience and author through writing. By contrast, when applied as a model for fanfiction studies, the conflation of author and fan-addressee suggested in Bakhtin’s definition of dialogue allows the possibility for an (admittedly idealized) space, “in which the author” of the original text “would merely be one voice among many and where his ideas would wield no more weight than any other” (Wexelblat 217). The threatening of closed systems of interpretation and the notion of a single author is especially important, given the gendered division suggested by Wexelblat’s masculine pronouns when referring to the author, and the fan author segment of fandom which is, according to previous fandom studies, predominately female.²⁷ As Kristeva notes, “Bakhtinian dialogism identifies “writing as [...] communication” (68); like de Certeau’s poaching model, which “allows for the validity of competing and contradictory interpretations” (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 33), the concept of a dialogue between fan and producer (or between fan and fan) through the production and reception of fan texts rebuts the notion of a single, legitimate

²⁷ See, in particular, Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women* and Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre*. Furthering this argument, Bacon-Smith notes that “[t]he number of men who do write fan fiction not only remains small, however, but continues to grow smaller” (*Enterprising Women* 172, note 24).

interpretation of a text determined by the producer and passively accepted by the consumer. Instead, as Kristeva notes, “Bakhtin considers writing as a reading [...] and the text as an absorption of and a reply to another text” (69), an argument which, applied to an examination of fanfiction, can be used to emphasize the importance and critical intent of these fan-authored rejoinders. Importantly, however, and unlike the poaching model, this concept not only deconstructs the hierarchy between producer and consumer maintained by de Certeau (in which active readers, still marginalized, may only produce their interpretations illicitly), but also provides a space in which the conversation continues, the “texts meet, contradict, and revitalize each other” (Kristeva 78), and the producers in turn respond to their fans through further textual production. Writing ten years before Adorno and Horkheimer, Bakhtin argues, “imagine the work as a *rejoinder* in a given dialogue, whose style is determined by its interrelationship with other rejoinders in the same dialogue (in the totality of the conversation)” (274, my emphasis). By engaging in this conversation through the creation of their own works, fanfiction authors counter Adorno and Horkheimer’s assertion: writing the rejoinder to the culture industry *is* possible.

CHAPTER 3

“DISTRESSING DAMSELS”: NARRATIVE CRITIQUE AND REINTERPRETATION IN *STAR WARS* FANFICTION

What a woman! If only George Lucas had let her be that woman.
—Jeanne Calvos. *Star Wars on Trial*, 314.

Want a different ethic? Tell a different story.
—Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, 164.

3.1—INTRODUCTION: CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Taken together, the epigraphs to this chapter speak both to the problematic portrayals of female characters in media texts, and to the solution that fanfiction offers to the audience of those texts: the ability of the fans to tell a different story, offer a different perspective, and rewrite equality into texts rife with marginalization of subordinated groups. As discussed in the previous chapter, de Certeau’s metaphors for active and resistant readers in *The Practice of Everyday Life* refute the “binomial set production—consumption” and “its corollary [the] major division between reading and writing” in order to ascribe activity to textual consumers as well as textual producers (de Certeau 168). Countering the assumption that “the public is moulded by the products imposed on it,” de Certeau’s analogies for this manner of active reading—specifically those which liken such active readers to nomadic poachers of the “private hunting reserve” of texts—provide the basis, within fandom studies, for recasting fans as active producers rather than passive consumers (de Certeau 166, 171). The depictions of active readers, however, are limited in *The Practice of Everyday Life* solely to those who consume printed texts. De Certeau discusses “[t]he ideology of ‘informing’ through books” (166, original

emphasis) and, while he rejects the hierarchical and unidirectional notion of “the producers’ claim to *inform* the population” through reading these books, it is because he locates “an indefinite plurality of meanings” within each text rather than a perceived flaw in the textual medium itself (166, original emphasis). De Certeau argues that other media, however, *are* flawed: consumers are, for example, “caught and collected [...] by television,” a medium which “captur[es] 9 out of 10 people” (165). De Certeau’s imagery here suggests that, contrary to the free and nomadic “poachers” of literature who indulge in “imaginary or meditative flights taking off from a few words” (170), television and similar media consumers are restricted—and, inferable from the terms “caught” and “captur[ed],” are restricted against their will—in terms of their movement and thought. Because of this restriction, he claims, they are incapable of resisting or engaging in dialogue with prescribed program ideologies. Elaborating upon this position, de Certeau contends that such media texts arise from

colonizing organizations whose products leave no room where the consumers can mark their activity. The child still scrawls and daubs on his schoolbooks; even if he is punished for this crime, he has made a space for himself and signs his existence as an author on it. The television viewer cannot write anything on the screen of his set. [...] He loses his author’s rights and becomes, or so it seems, a pure receiver [...]. (31)

De Certeau’s first assertion is, literally speaking, true: the line-by-line rejoinders that typified early modern women’s variations upon male authors’ stories, written as “ephemera and marginalia in the books they read,” cannot be reproduced upon the screens of media texts such as film or television (Derecho 68). And yet the majority of

fandom studies focus on fandoms that surround media texts rather than their literature-based counterparts.²⁸ From the sheer number of studies conducted on the subject, it is clear that not only have media consumers *not* lost their author's rights, but also that these media productions do, in fact, leave room for their consumers to "mark their activity" in rejoinder to the original texts (de Certeau 31). Moreover, these fan-authored texts create their responses by coming out of the margins (literal and figurative) to "open up possibilities" for alternative voices silenced within the media source material and, in so doing, to force a "reevaluation, on the reader's part, of all that is taken for granted" in the original texts (Derecho 76, 70).

In order to demonstrate that the active reading strategies de Certeau discusses apply equally across media fandoms, this and the subsequent chapter focus on media texts and the fan-authored rejoinders derived from them. To further my assertion that changing media does not significantly affect the ability of fan authors to construct narrative critiques through fanfiction, I first examine Marshall McLuhan's argument that "the medium is the message." I do so in reference first to the relatively recent shift of fanfiction from uniquely print media to online forums and, second, to the fan-culture studies that predate this shift, in order to demonstrate that the ability of authors to rewrite problematic aspects original texts through their fanfiction transcends the medium through which that fanfiction is disseminated. Turning to the fanfiction texts themselves, I argue that fanfiction functions specifically as a critique of the gender ideologies expressed in

²⁸ Most notable here are the multiple studies conducted by both Henry Jenkins and Camille Bacon-Smith. See also Taylor Harrison et al., *Enterprise Zones: Critical Positions on Star Trek*; Kylie Lee, "Confronting Enterprise Slash Fiction"; Andrea MacDonald, "Uncertain Utopia"; Roz Kaveny, ed. *Reading the Vampire Slayer*; and Will Brooker, *Using the Force*. This is not to say that all fandom studies are focused exclusively on media fandoms; Sheenagh Pugh's *The Democratic Genre*, for example, discusses media fandoms such as *Blake's 7* alongside book fandoms like *Discworld* and those fandoms that cross media boundaries from literature to film, such as *Harry Potter*. Overall, however, the focus of fandom studies is on media texts and the fan cultures surrounding them.

the source texts of two media fandoms that are, “for the most part, characterized by an underrepresentation” of women (Derecho 71): *Star Wars* and *Supernatural*. The focus of this and the next chapter will be the treatment of central, heroic male characters and their female character counterparts in these media texts, as well as the revision of these characters in fan-authored responses. In this chapter, I analyze the unauthorized *Star Wars* novel, *Another Hope*, by fan author Lori Jareo, against a reading of George Lucas’s *A New Hope* and, to a lesser extent, the licensed novel based on his screenplay, to highlight points of both congruity and difference between the works. In so doing, I demonstrate that, despite being removed from the literal margins of the original text, works derived from media texts nevertheless permit fans to continue to act as authors, and simultaneously to challenge problematic gender ideologies in critique of and dialogue with the original works and their creators.

3.2—MEDIA FOR MESSAGES: CHANGING PLATFORMS FOR FANFICTION PUBLICATION

In the introduction to his 1964 work *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Marshall McLuhan posits that “any technology gradually creates a totally new human environment”; he defines these technologies as “active processes” rather than “passive wrappings” for content (*viii*). His argument that “the medium is the message” positions the technological medium through which content is presented as being of greater importance than the content itself, since “it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action,” and which “has the power of imposing its own assumption[s]” on its audience (24, 30). Writing sixteen years later, de Certeau could be seen to take McLuhan’s assertion a step further, claiming “the means of

diffusion are now dominating the ideas they diffuse. The medium is replacing the message” (de Certeau 166).

When considered in respect to fanfiction, however, neither contention is applicable. When it “comes to telling our own stories,” Jenkins argues, “from the point of view of content, it [the technology] matters very little” (“Poachers and Stormtroopers”). Speaking of the changing technologies used in the production and dissemination of fandom activities—including fanfiction—since “the origin of media fandom” in the 1960s (Laura Hale, qtd. in Derecho 62), Jenkins continues:

while digital media attracts most of the attention these days, cultural convergence is larger than the “digital revolution,” [as] other technologies, such as the photocopier and the videotape recorder, have also fostered a more fluid or flexible relationship with popular culture. All of these technologies promise consumers greater control over the flow of entertainment and information into their lives. (“Poachers and Stormtroopers”)

The equalization of all technologies expressed in this quotation highlights the fact that, although fans have always been “early adapters of new technologies,” the relatively recent proliferation of online fanfiction archives and blogs has not altered the content of fanfiction itself, but has merely made it more visible. Busse and Hellekson suggest that “[t]he history of fan fiction makes clear that technology is complicit in the generation of fan texts” (13); however, as expressed in Jenkins’s depiction of such technologies, the term can be expanded to include everything from the technologies used in the production of the first science-fiction fanzines in the 1930s (Bacon-Smith, *Science Fiction Culture* 112), to the technologies used in the production of “podfics”—fan-produced audiobooks

of fanfiction—today. Underscoring the unchanging centre of fandom cultures, Bacon-Smith notes that “in the fan community, the *fiction* creates the community,” be it online or in print (*Enterprising Women* 57, my emphasis).

Busse and Hellekson identify “zines and vids” as the “artifacts most associated with fandom” (16); they further acknowledge that such productions have not been subsumed by new media, as “the use of new media and new technologies” does more to “ease access” to the fandom community for new members than it does to “affect form and content” directly (30). In reference specifically to Busse and Hellekson’s identification of fanzines as integral artifacts to the fandom community—to align their discussion more with my own focus on the textual productions of fanfiction rather than the visual productions of fanvids²⁹—it is telling that, while fanfiction is widely disseminated online and for free, hard copy fanzines are still produced alongside their online counterparts.³⁰ Moreover, many more recent fanzines are available in both print and e-zine form, or one can read each work of fanfiction individually online. Bacon-Smith writes of the niche market that fanzines (specifically media-based fanzines) fill for the “mostly female audience” of science fiction media, arguing that such publications permit fan authors a space in which to “expand the boundaries of official source products offered on the television and movie screen” (*Science Fiction Culture* 112). In fanzines, she continues, the authors can “change the characters—even kill them—because [...]

²⁹ Less work has been done on this subject than on fanfiction and fan cultures, but a discussion of fanvids and fanvidding practices can be found in both Bacon-Smith’s *Enterprising Women* and Jenkins’s *Textual Poachers*. Francesca Coppa’s “Women, Star Trek, and the Early Development of Fannish Vidding” is one of the few works focused exclusively on this fandom practice.

³⁰ In reference specifically to the two media fandoms under discussion in this and the following chapter, *Fanlore.org* lists well over 200 *Supernatural*-based fanzines and doujinshi in various fanfiction subgenres, printed between 2006 and the time of writing; even more are listed for *Star Wars*, given that its original media text was released in the 1970s (*Fanlore.org* lists fanzines ranging from 1977-2007 in this category). See: “List of Supernatural Fanzines,” and “Star Wars/Fanzines.” The term “doujinshi” refers to fan-created comics, most frequently in the Japanese manga style of art.

[e]ach story is perceived as that writer's take on the possible outcome of a given situation" (112-13). What Bacon-Smith here ascribes to fanfiction printed in fanzines (specifically, those fanzines produced in the 1980s) is true of what all fanfiction does or can do: to provide an alternate perspective on an original text that revises it to make room for new meanings or a new audience.

What separates fanzines from open fanfiction archives is that the democratizing aspect of the internet permits all fans to write and post their own stories, or comment to those of other fan authors, without concern of being rejected by a fanzine editor. As other authors have argued in their own studies,³¹ this opening up of fans' cultural spaces has significantly altered fandom as a culture —fandom is no longer purely a site of "an underground activity" as, due to the increased visibility of fandoms on the internet, many new fans are becoming aware of the community when they otherwise "would never have had access to fan fiction or other subcultural practices" (Jenkins, "Poachers and Stormtroopers"). What has not been altered is the textual productions of that community, since "every piece of fan fiction is, in its own way, an analytic engagement with the source text," regardless of the medium through which it distributed (Busse and Hellekson, Introduction 28). As one fan writes in an online journal entry by media tie-in author Keith R.A. DeCandido, "the internet is the ultimate Vanity Press, on a global scale [...]. [T]his technological freedom for as many fans as possible to contribute is a big plus" (klangley56, qtd. in DeCandido). The sentiment is one echoed in Jenkins's characterization of the creative impulse behind fanfiction: "fans envision a world where all of us can participate in the creation and circulation of central cultural myths"

³¹ See, for example, Jenkins, "Poachers and Stormtroopers," and *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*; Bacon-Smith, *Science Fiction Culture*, Hellekson and Busse eds, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*.

(“Poachers and Stormtroopers”). Not only, as both quotations suggest, does such open access enable all fans to contribute to the producer-fan dialogue through their texts, but also to expand the dialogue to one *between* fans, through feedback to or further revision of fan texts. Though it makes use of new media technologies, such communication in fact parallels the “interaction fans enjoyed before the advent of the Internet” depicted in pre-internet works of fan culture studies such as *Textual Poachers* and *Enterprising Women* (Busse and Hellekson, Introduction 14).

Sheenagh Pugh calls fanfiction the “democratic genre” in which “anyone can be an author” (122); likewise, open, online fanfiction archives “give all people more equal opportunities to engage in expressive activity, rather than granting already powerful actors even further resources and capacities to dominate cultural arenas than they already possess” (Rosemary J. Coombe, qtd. in Jenkins, “Poachers and Stormtroopers”). By contrast, to place the responsibility for managing creative and critical impulses only in the hands of fanzine editors, who may not share and individual fan author’s interpretation of a text, is potentially to introduce a new hierarchical division into fandom: no longer one of producer/fan-consumer, but instead one of producer/fan-editor/fan-author, with additional levels of “official” or “correct” interpretations imposed by one fan and accepted by the others to secure publication of their fanfiction. Fan authors write against narrative boundaries imposed by producers in source texts; instituting alternate boundaries upon the creation and distribution of fan texts would in fact counter the driving rationale of the genre—to challenge monologic, prescribed interpretations of original texts. As Jenkins writes, “[c]hanging the tools” of fan production “doesn’t insure that change will occur, but it does make change possible” (“Poachers and

Stormtroopers”). In respect to fandom’s cultural productions, changing the medium has not changed fanfiction’s message of revision and critique, but has in fact reinforced it by embodying the democratic genre (in which audience may engage in dialogue with producer) in a democratic medium (in which all audience members are potential contributors to the dialogue). As McLuhan suggests of new media in general, the new technology has “gradually create[d] a totally new [...] environment” for fandom and its texts (*vii*); the texts and their critiques, however, remain the same.

3.3—MASCULINE TEXT, FEMININE RESPONSE: “WOMEN’S PLEASURES” AND *STAR WARS* FANDOM

In their introduction to *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson argue that “fan fiction and the discourses surrounding it” cannot be viewed as a “uniform force of resistance,” as “fandom itself is not cohesive” (22, 6). Therefore, to ascribe a single position or rationale for writing fanfiction to fans as a collective group would be overly homogenizing; not only do fan culture practices differ between fandoms (Busse and Hellekson, Introduction 6), but also within fandoms as well. As one fan author puts it, each fandom “isn’t a coherent club” but instead “an anarchy of small interconnecting and overlaapping [*sic*] groups [...]”. Some ‘rules’ become generally accepted, but they’re never codified in any way and they’re constantly changing with each fandom’s zeitgeist” (Morgan). Acknowledging the diversity of fandom expressed in these observations, as well as the heterogeneity of each fandom’s practices and participants, there are nevertheless some broad claims that can be made specifically about the gendered composition of fandom as a whole. Fan culture studies over the past two decades indicate that while “men actively participate in a wide

range of fan-related activities” (Jenkins, “*Star Trek*” 43), the portion of fandom which actively engages with the original texts in order to rewrite and critique them in fanfiction is, overwhelmingly, female.³² As Jenkins suggests, “[f]andom is a vehicle for marginalized subcultural groups (women, the young, gays, and so on) to pry open space for their cultural concerns [...]; fandom is a way of appropriating media texts and rereading them in a fashion that serves different interests” (“*Star Trek*” 40). Given that, as Jenkins argues, “[m]edia fan writing is an almost exclusively *feminine* response to mass media texts” (“*Star Trek*” 43, my emphasis), there is a disparity between the intended target audiences of “theoretically, decidedly male-centric” texts, a commercial media “dominated by male producers,” and the predominately female segment of media fandoms that writes fanfiction based on these texts (Margare O’Connell, qt in Zubernis and Larsen; Busse 105). From the discrepancy between who produces the texts and who actively responds to them, it is unsurprising that a “feminist impetus” can be determined in the ways in which these female fan writers “manipulate and co-opt media representations” (Busse 105, 104) in order to create their own competing narratives within male-dominated media texts.

Hélène Cixous conflates the reclamation of space for marginalized voices within dominant discourse, through writing of this sort, with femininity; she argues that “[w]riting is working; being worked; questioning (in) the between” (86), and locates “femininity in writing” through “interchanging, mak[ing] the text gaps or form[ing] it out

³² In *Enterprising Women*, Camille Bacon-Smith (quoting Johanna Cantor) posits that over 90% of fan fiction authors are female (110). See also Derecho 71; Harris “Introduction” 8; Busse and Hellekson 17-21; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 114; Jenkins, “*Star Trek*” 40, 43; Zubernis and Larsen; and Pugh 131-32. This gender division is borne out in my own research. Although I did not ask the fan authors with whom I communicated to identify themselves as male or female (being more interested in their texts than their gender breakdown), all of those who volunteered this information indicated they were female.

of suspenses and silences” (92). It is this form of “writing, from and toward women” in order to “affirm women somewhere other than silence” that is also evidenced in the textual productions of female fans (93). Through (re)writing female characters out of canonical roles marked by “inaction and irrelevance” (Cavelos 306), fan authors counter the dominant media representations which, in terms of *Star Wars* and *Supernatural*, tend to give primacy to the exploits of their male heroes. Lori Jareo’s unauthorized *Star Wars* novel, *Another Hope*, can be viewed as an example of this proposed reclamation of “feminine interests” from a predominantly masculine-oriented text through such interchanging of characters and traditional gender roles (Jenkins, “*Star Trek*” 44). Jareo’s novel shifts the focus of George Lucas’s first *Star Wars* film, *A New Hope*, from its emphasis on male heroes to give voice to what Jenkins refers to as the “feminine countertext that lurks in the margins of the primary text” (“*Star Trek*” 58). However, while Jareo overwrites the “traditionally masculine action-oriented” science fiction genre of *A New Hope*, countering Jenkins’s oversimplifying account of female fans’ writing strategies, she does not “re-conceptualize [the] genre” of *Star Wars* in order to wrench the story to fit the “type[s] of women’s fiction” that are “more familiar and comfortable formulas” for expression: “the soap, the romance, and the feminist coming-of-age novel” (“*Star Trek*” 50). Instead—and more importantly to her resistance to the cultural ideology expressed in the original text, as well as her reclamation of a feminine space within it—Jareo “enter[s] into the archives of male-authored texts” (Derecho 67) by adhering to and expanding upon the recognizable generic signifiers of science fiction evident in a media text “by, for and about men” to add her own text to its archive (Judith Spector, qtd. in Jenkins, “*Star Trek*” 45). Given the recognizable elements of science fiction in general

and *Star Wars* in particular within the work, Jareo's novel cannot be viewed solely as a resistant text, though it displays elements of resistance against the original narrative of *A New Hope*. As it works within the already established storyline of *A New Hope*, Jareo's text must be read in dialogue with the original narrative of Lucas's creation, rather than the complete repudiation of it that "resistance" alone implies.

In their respective works, both Jenkins and Brooker contend that women's textual needs differ from men's regarding the uses to which science fiction texts are put by their fans. Further to Jenkins's suggestion that "women's fiction" is encapsulated by "the soap, the romance, and the [...] coming-of-age novel" ("*Star Trek*" 50),³³ Brooker questions whether "women's extended pleasures in the *Star Wars* films" are more "focused on storytelling than technology, for instance" (200). He expands on this perspective through his discussion of one female-run *Star Wars* fan community, in which "traditionally female purposes" are applied to the *Star Wars* universe (200): "Instead of discussing the internal workings of lightsabers or the call signs of Red Squadron," he writes, the female fans "debate whether Luke was better suited to Callista, the love-interest from Barbara Hambly's novels [...] or Mara Jade," a character in the Extended Universe (EU) novels (201).³⁴ Jareo, however, refutes this differentiation between male and female pleasures by both shifting the focus of *A New Hope* from male to female heroism (a significant plot alteration which will be expanded upon below), and by introducing an even tighter focus on the ostensibly male pleasure of technology than evidenced in the original films—the

³³ In *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins further discusses the differing needs of women and men in reference to the types of stories they write and enjoy in their fandoms.

³⁴ Brooker's observations may be true for the *Star Wars* community he references here. However, to claim that such discussions demonstrate "*traditionally female purposes*" (200, my emphasis), instead of serving the purposes of one fan community, upholds outdated and stereotypical gender divisions. Moreover, such a description implicitly pathologizes female fan interests that do not accord with the "traditionally female" ones Brooker outlines.

films that are supposedly “by, for, and about men” (Spector, qtd. in Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 45). Specifically, Jareo elaborates upon the technical specifications and weapons capabilities of the various starships in Lucas’s *Star Wars* universe.

The original film script describes the opening visual of a space battle: “A tiny silver spacecraft, a Rebel Blockade Runner firing lasers from the back of the ship, races through space. It is pursued by a giant Imperial Stardestroyer. Hundreds of deadly laserbolts streak from the Imperial Stardestroyer, causing the main solar fin of the Rebel craft to disintegrate” (Lucas). By contrast, Jareo writes in *Another Hope*:

The Imperial star destroyer, a much larger Corellian-made vessel, measured five-hundred-forty meters at its widest point and was now just a few kilometers behind the little ship. [...] Like other capital ships in the fleet, the *Devastator* had two stubby nodes atop its conning tower. Those nodes wrapped the ship’s titanium hull in a protective electron screen, deflecting both matter and energy. The half-dozen ten-millimeter laser guns on the fleeing *Tantive IV*, the so-called “Blockade Runner,” would never so much as sting its pursuer. However, the *Devastator*’s laser cannon came closer with each passing second to delivering a mortal wound to the rebel vessel. (13)

The discrepancy in detail between original script and fan novel could be seen as arising from a difference in media—a film may visually complete the textual gaps of a script, while a novel relies solely upon its text. However, the licensed novelization of *A New Hope*, “ghostwritten by Alan Dean Foster” and released a year before the film, shows a similar lack of focus on the technological specifics of the star destroyer in the same scene (Lucas and Foster v): “The source of those multiple energy beams suddenly hove into

view—a lumbering Imperial cruiser, its massive outline bristling cactus-like with dozens of heavy weapons emplacements. Light ceased arching from those spines now as the cruiser moved in close” (Lucas and Foster 4). The juxtaposition of Jareo’s phrases (which specify the names, sizes, origin of manufacture, and types of vessels and their armaments) against Foster’s (which only vaguely describe the same) counters Brooker and Jenkins’s division of “women’s pleasures” in science fiction texts from male ones. Jareo’s obvious interest in the technical aspects of the *Star Wars* universe—evident in the level of detail in her description—not only aligns with but further emphasizes the tropes of what Brooker calls the “traditionally male genre” of science fiction beyond that which Lucas and Foster themselves wrote (Brooker 199).

Jareo’s blurring of the textual gender division suggested by Brooker and Jenkins underscores the limitations of such artificially imposed distinctions. Altering the *Star Wars* universe to fit a notion of what “types” of fiction are appropriate to women and “their needs,” as Jenkins suggests (“*Star Trek*” 40), would do more to reinforce the binary of male and female-oriented texts than to expose the absence or problematic characterization of female characters within media genres produced by a male-dominated industry (Busse 105) and targeted at male audiences. It is the juxtaposition of fan text against original canon that allows fan authors the “opportunity to highlight the inequality of women’s and men’s situations” in these texts “by creating new versions of earlier stories and producing a contrast between the old and new tales” (Derecho 68). By engaging with the ostensibly masculine “needs” of the text in order to frame her “feminine countertext” to it (Jenkins, “*Star Trek*” 58), Jareo highlights this suggested

gender inequality in the *Star Wars* franchise—the contrast her novel creates between original text and fan text is not one of genre, but one of gender ideology.

3.4—“GEORGE LUCAS’S FAIRY TALE”: PROBLEMATIC PRINCESSES IN STAR WARS

Another Hope begins with the recognizable line, “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away,” which immediately sets the novel within the “fictive universe” of *Star Wars* (Jareo 9, MacDonald 135). This familiar opening also invokes the similar introductory refrain of fairy tales, which likewise frequently indicate that the story to follow took place long ago and far away. Jeanne Cavelos makes this fairy tale reference in *Star Wars* explicit in her article arguing for the fundamental weakness of female characters in the films. She refers to the films collectively as “George Lucas’s Fairy Tale” (305), invoking in particular for this allusion the major female characters’ roles of princess and queen. While Carrie Fisher (who portrays Leia in the original trilogy) contends that she views the character not as “a damsel in distress,” but as “a distressing damsel” (qtd. in Spangler 331), Cavelos notes that any power Leia possesses at the outset of the film is lost along with Leia’s home planet, the destruction of which concurrently “make[s] her title of princess meaningless” (308). Although Cavelos identifies Leia as secondary to the film’s plot, a “hanger-on, present to witness the heroism of men” (308), she locates this decline from “action hero [to] passive victim” at the moment Leia ceases to be a princess—with the destruction of Alderaan (308). Presenting Lucas’s films as participating in the fairy tale tradition, however, implies that her lack of power and passivity is inherent to Leia’s function as a princess in the narrative. In *Morphology of the Folktale*, in which he analyzes fairy tales to identify their recurring themes and functions, Vladimir Propp

argues that “the names of the dramatis personae change” between stories, “but neither their actions nor their functions change”; the prescribed functions of different character types “logically join together” to form the action of the narrative (21, 79). Speaking of specific character functions, Propp notes that “the sphere of action for a *princess*” consists of being a “sought-for person,” while “the sphere of action of the *hero*” is to depart “on [the] search” (Propp 79, 80, original emphasis). This gendered division of action is likewise apparent in Lucas’s fairy tale—the “quest motif” of *A New Hope* is reserved for the male “seeker-hero[es]” Luke and Han and their rescue of the princess-in-distress (Wright, par. 2; Propp 80). By contrast, “[w]ithin minutes of the movie’s opening, Leia is captured [...]. She spends the next hour [of the film] waiting to be rescued” (Cavelos 310).³⁵ Although the argument could be made that Leia initially participates in a quest narrative of her own—to deliver stolen Imperial plans to the Rebel Alliance—she does so “at her father’s bidding” (Cavelos 313); her agency is subordinated from the outset of the film to a (male) authority figure. Moreover, *her* quest fails, while that undertaken by the male characters succeeds. Though not in the sense she originally meant, Fisher is correct to describe Leia’s characterization as “distressing.”

Beyond the general fairy tale structure she derives from the *Star Wars* saga as a whole, Jareo directly alludes to the first film, *A New Hope*, by repeating the text seen at the beginning of that film:

³⁵ Though the focus of my argument is on *A New Hope* itself, as it is the primary subject of Jareo’s critique in *Another Hope*, it is worth adding that, as Cavelos notes, “Leia achieves a perfect three-for-three record” in the original film trilogy, “getting captured and awaiting rescue by Luke in all three films” (310). The phrase “awaiting rescue” is especially pertinent here, as it further emphasizes the passivity of a princess versus the activity of the seeker-hero; no indication is made of Leia seeking to escape under her own power.

EPISODE IV

It is a period of civil war. Rebel starships, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory against the evil galactic Empire. During the battle, rebel spies managed to steal secret plans to the Empire's ultimate weapon, the *Death Star*, an armored space station with enough power to destroy an entire planet. Pursued by the Empire's sinister agents, Princess Leia races home aboard her starship, custodian of the stolen plans that can save her people and restore freedom to the galaxy...

By immediately positioning her novel in relation to Lucas's film through both its title and introductory context, Jareo sets up the concurrent reading of multiple texts that is a primary facet of the ability of fanfiction to explore and critique the canon of original works. As Derecho writes, repetition "contains differences that make the second iteration [...] completely new and distinct from the first" (73). Given the divergence between the new text from the one which it "repeats," Derecho argues that "when one reads a work of archontic writing,³⁶ in other words, one is really reading two texts at once. The prior text is available and remains in the mind even as one reads the new version" (73). Derecho's proposed concurrent-reading strategy for works of fanfiction returns to the Bakhtinian notion of works functioning as "rejoinder[s] in a given dialogue" examined in the conclusion to the previous chapter (274). Rather than each work being considered separately as a "self-sufficient and closed authorial monologue" that "presumes only passive listeners beyond its own boundaries," works must be read in relation to each

³⁶ Deriving the term "archontic" from Derrida's *Archive Fever*, Derecho argues that "a literature that is archontic is a literature composed of texts that are archival in nature and that are impelled by the same archontic principle: that tendency toward enlargement and accretion that all archives possess. [...] [T]hey do not violate the boundaries of the source text; rather, they only add to that text's archive" (64-65).

other for the “totality of the conversation” to be understood (Bakhtin 274). Through the similarities to/repetition of elements of the original work, the new text may be “understood against the background” of both the original text itself, and all other “utterances on the same theme” (281). Given that such “responsive understandings” of original works are also “active understandings,” however, the new texts can also signal their “contradictory opinions, points of view, and value judgments” when read in conjunction with the work from which they are derived (Bakhtin 280-81). Such contradictions can be read as “resistance” to the source text (Bakhtin 280); however, it is important to note that the resistant texts can only be fully understood in relation to the original texts from which they diverge—resistance is in itself dialogic to some extent.

When considering Jareo’s *Another Hope* in reference to Bakhtin’s discussion, the prior text held in the reader’s mind against her fanfiction rejoinder is *A New Hope*, which George Lucas is quoted as calling a “boy’s film” (Brooker 200), and which is certainly dominated by male characters. Brooker notes that, given the masculine pronouns attributed to droids and other characters of otherwise indeterminate sex (such as Chewbacca), “eight of the nine main characters” in the original *Star Wars* trilogy are male (200); seven of those eight male characters are featured in *A New Hope* alone.³⁷ Even though Leia—a female character who, “within the female fan community” is seen as “kick[ing] enough ass to keep the plot moving” (Victoria Hoke, qtd. in Brooker 203)—is included in this list of main characters, apart from the suggestion of a burgeoning romantic relationship (between Leia and either Han or Luke), the film primarily centers

³⁷ Brooker identifies the main characters of the original trilogy to be “Luke, Han, Obi-Wan, Vader, Lando, Chewbacca, the two droids [R2D2 and C3P0] and Leia.” (200, note 473); Lando is the only one of the list not to appear in *A New Hope*. Brooker does not include Yoda in his list—and he, like Lando, does not appear in the first film—but it is notable that the influential Jedi Master is also portrayed as male.

on the action of, and interaction between, male character pairs, while Leia is “left on the sidelines” (Cavelos 309).³⁸ The film also emphasizes a binary of male action and female passivity. Hoke notes that “[t]he main roles for women in the *Star Wars* saga are, of course, Princess and Queen [...] they prefer planning to acting, require protection and rescue, and serve primarily to continue the Jedi bloodline” (qtd. in Brooker 200-203). Apart from the escape from the *Death Star* where she suggests the route through the garbage chute (an action which nevertheless depends upon the initiating action of her rescue by Han and Luke), Leia both literally and figuratively takes a back seat to the male characters, observing the piloting of the Millennium Falcon, and passively—if anxiously—waiting and watching during the ultimate attack on the (male-dominated) *Death Star* by (exclusively male) rebel pilots. The epigraph to Lucas and Foster’s novelization of the film—an epigraph presented as a quotation from Leia—exemplifies this emphasis on male activity and heroism: “They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Naturally, they became heroes” (2). In Lucas and Foster’s use of the exclusionary “they” versus an inclusionary “we” in this passage, Leia is both set outside the group of male heroes and their exploits, and is reduced, through her own words, to the role of an observer rather than an active participant. Given these details, “[o]n the face of it,” as Brooker argues, “*Star Wars* would seem to have little to offer a female fan” as “the whole culture surrounding [the films] is traditionally male” (200). It is this “boy’s film” and its representation of a patriarchal culture that provides the background, “first text” against which Jareo’s revisionist *Star Wars* history is to be read (Derecho 73).

³⁸ In *A New Hope*, the main male character pairs are Obi-Wan – Luke, Luke – Han, Han – Chewie, Obi-Wan – Vader, and R2D2 – C3P0.

The first edition of the novelization of *A New Hope* was entitled *Star Wars: From the Adventures of Luke Skywalker* (Lucas and Foster v), a title that explicitly positions Luke as the central, heroic figure of the *Star Wars* saga. This positioning is echoed in the title of the first film, which is explained in *The Empire Strikes Back* when Obi-Wan, speaking of Luke, remarks “that boy is our last hope”—the hope for the rebellion, and the titular “new hope” for the Jedi Order. Though Yoda replies “No, there is another” in reference to Leia, the female “other” that she represents is nevertheless figured as alternate—and secondary—to the male hero. As Lucas explains the evolving concept of the film, “it was always about these twins, and their father.... At some point I took the female lead and made her the hero and then, eventually, I shifted it around to the male character” (qtd. in Spangler 331, ellipses in original). Although Leia may have originally been central to the action of the film, the eventual shift in emphasis from Leia to her brother Luke does not merely recast her as a supporting character—as “even a supporting character can be compelling”—but instead figures her as a marginalized “onlooker” (Cavelos 305, 308).³⁹

Jareo’s novel implies a reversal of Lucas’s shift to a male hero in its title, explicitly invoking the “feminine countertext” (Jenkins, “*Star Trek*” 58) to Lucas’s film by announcing its discussion of *Another Hope*—of the “other,” female hero who is referenced, but never called upon, in Lucas’s saga. That Leia is never portrayed as this “other” hero, and never “receives any real Jedi training” in the films (Spangler 332) is

³⁹ The revision of *Star Wars* to exclude a female hero character is even more significant when read against one of the original inspirations for *Star Wars*: Frank Herbert’s *Dune*. See Kristen Brennan, “Dune” for a side-by-side comparison of aspects of the films that find their origin in Herbert’s novel; most important for this study is Herbert’s Bene Gesserit, a group of women who are rewritten in Lucas’s films as the (all male, in the original trilogy) Jedi. The comparison between the two works counters Matthew Stover’s argument that Leia was the “inspiration for” subsequent strong “female heroes,” whereas George Lucas had no sources to draw upon “for inspiration of his own” among the “helpless love interests and assorted victims” in science fiction predating *Star Wars* (Brin and Stover 323).

considered by some critics to be one of “the biggest of the [...] broken promises of the entire series” (Brin and Stover 339) As David Brin argues, speaking of the conversation between Obi-Wan and Yoda about this “other” hero who could bring balance back to the Force,

That statement—so filled with dramatic portent—promised a big payoff. When we learned that the “other” was Leia, that was just fine! Our appetites were whetted for her to do something marvelous! Only then...

...Do *you* feel that there was a payoff worthy of this clue? (Brin and Stover 339, original emphasis, ellipses in original).

The lack of payoff in terms of a female hero that Brin regrets here is reintroduced into Jareo’s novel though, interestingly, she chooses not to embody this “other hope” in Leia, as the quotation from *The Empire Strikes Back* in conjunction with her novel’s title would suggest.

In *Another Hope*, Jareo maintains the same sequence of events as *A New Hope*, but replaces the main cast of male heroes—Luke, Obi-Wan, Han, Chewie, and the droids, as Brooker identifies them (200, note 473)—with a sole female hero of her own creation: Ryoo Naberrie, a “mess management specialist” aboard the *Death Star* (Jareo 27). The insertion of this original female character demonstrates both Jareo’s knowledge of *Star Wars* canon, and a “compositional intertextuality” that broadens the scope of the primary original text (Busse and Hellekson, Introduction 28); in Jareo’s case, the previous story lines referenced are the “prequel trilogy” of *Star Wars* films, produced after *A New Hope*, but which bear directly on its events—Ryoo’s last name is a direct reference to Padmé Naberrie, Luke and Leia’s mother, who figured prominently in the prequel films and who

was equally problematic in her characterization.⁴⁰ Padmé, like Leia, is “initially a heroic figure” but ultimately “stands on the sidelines and cries as Palpatine destroys the Republic” (Cavelos 316). She is, Cavelos continues, “disempowered and marginalized [and] completely ineffectual” (316). Padmé’s ineffectuality is even more problematic in that the prequel trilogy films were released between 1999 and 2005, and so came out after a long tradition of “strong women heroes” in media productions (Cavelos, qtd. in Brin and Stover 324): with both sets of films, though especially the prequel trilogy, “*Star Wars* was moving backward, reinforcing old stereotypes” (Cavelos, qtd. in Brin and Stover 325). Of identification with female characters, Cixous argues she “cannot inhabit a victim, no matter how noble” and that she “detest[s]” passivity in such characters (77). Her argument can be used to explain Hoke’s contention that “*Star Wars*’ story is appealing and accessible to women; it is only its [female] characters that are not” (qtd. in Brooker 203): the female characters may be noble, but they are all too frequently victims. Ryoo’s similarity to “her beautiful, regal aunt” is remarked upon throughout the novel (29, 69, 202); given this explicit connection between Ryoo and Padmé, not only does Ryoo’s heroism in *Another Hope* question the emphasis on male characters in the original film, but it also permits Jareo to “rehabilitate [an] existing female character,” who fell short of her potential (Brooker 204), by effacing and overwriting Padmé’s limited cinematic role of “romance and reproduction” (Hoke, qtd. in Brooker 203). Though her

⁴⁰ Regarding the prequel trilogy as a whole, Cavelos contends that Padmé is “not a coherent character,” but “a paper doll with too many outfits instead” whose sole purpose in the saga is to fall “in love with Anakin, hav[e] his children,” and then die (320, 316). Cavelos’s argument can be seen to align *Star Wars* with another genre as formulaic and patriarchal as the fairy tale: the romance. Notably similar to this depiction of Padmé by Cavelos is Radway’s observation, using a Proppian analysis, of “the most basic structure of [...] actions” for heroines in an “ideal romance” novel (134). She writes, “the heroine transform[s] [...] into a mature, sensual, and very married woman who has realized her full potential and identity as the partner of a man and [...] the mother of a child” (134).

novel is set within the universe of the original trilogy, Jareo counters the canonical passivity and victimization of Padmé by choosing to retroactively rehabilitate the character through her portrayal of Ryoo as both a reflection of Padmé “in body and spirit” (202), and as an active, intelligent, and heroic character.

This discussion of the female characters both present and implicit in Jareo’s work is not to say that the male cast of characters from the original film are omitted altogether; the first hundred pages of Jareo’s novel parallel the sequence of events in *A New Hope* almost exactly (save for a few, spliced-in scenes to introduce Ryoo), often repeating long passages of dialogue from Lucas’s film and novel.⁴¹ However, the central male characters who are present throughout the original film are eventually removed from the action of the novel, thus presenting an “alternative history” (AU) for the Star Wars universe: Obi-Wan, Luke, and the two droids—along with the intercepted Imperial transmissions containing the *Death Star*’s schematics (Jareo 20)—are on the planet Alderaan when the *Death Star*’s attack causes the planet to “explod[e] into superheated clouds of gases and dust,” and so die along with the rest of the planet’s inhabitants (Jareo 117). Han and Chewbacca are similarly removed from the events of the novel. Having delivered their passengers to Alderaan shortly before it is destroyed, they receive their payment and depart (104); neither character appears again.

Important to the formation of critical fan texts are, as Busse and Hellekson argue, “understandings of *canon*, the events presented in the media source that provide the universe, setting, and characters” (9, original emphasis). Writing in the same universe and

⁴¹ See Jareo, Lori, 14-15, 18-22, 25-27, 30-39, 41-61, 70-73, 80-88, 98-100, and 115-17. There continues to be repetition of scenes and dialogue after 117, but as the novel’s major divergence from the film occurs at this point, the scenes and dialogue tend to figure different characters (generally, Ryoo instead of one of the male characters in *A New Hope*), or exhibit other alterations (see 124, 164, 169, 187, 206, 236-38, 254-64, 265-67, and 273).

maintaining roughly the same canon storyline as *A New Hope*, Jareo fills the roles vacated by the characters discussed above with the character of Ryoo, and so contests the necessity of a male hero in the boy's—and boys only—movie that *A New Hope* was created to be. Like Luke, Ryoo has “Anakin’s lightsaber” (Jareo 76), though instead of receiving it from the patriarchal Jedi mentor, Obi-Wan, she “brought [it] with her” from home, after finding the discarded belongings that “Anakin left behind when he vanished” (75); Ryoo is also the pilot who ultimately destroys the *Death Star* (282).⁴² Like Luke and Han, Ryoo orchestrates Leia’s rescue, though instead of relying on R2 D2 to discover the princess’s location, she discovers it for herself: she “search[ed] for the location of a recent arrival to the detention area. After a few minutes, the [data]pad returned the query: cell block AA-223” (76); moreover, Ryoo’s rescue is more “discreet” and effective in that the two women escape from the *Death Star* unnoticed (157): “she kept them on course, and the lightsaber in Leia’s hand lit their path. The women were away from the detention block in no time at all” (131). Finally, like Obi-Wan Kenobi, Ryoo is aware that “Leia [and] Luke” are Darth Vader/Anakin’s children, and she gives Leia Anakin’s lightsaber the way Obi-Wan does Luke in the film (210, 131). This alteration of canon is

⁴² Unlike Luke, however, after the failure of the first wave of pilots (all identified as men in both fan novel and film) to hit the exhaust port (Jareo 244), Ryoo and Leia propose a different, more reasoned line of attack:

“[...] The polar trench is too narrow and too shallow.”

“Get set to make your attack run.”

“Not the polar trench, but the equator.”

“You mean hit a docking bay?”

“They’re wide open.”

[...]

“You want to fly right up the middle?” Biggs was incredulous. “There must be a thousand turrets in there.”

“Their defensive batteries are all offline,” Ryoo said. (668-70)

Recognizing both the offensive difficulties presented by the original attack plans (difficulties none of the male pilots were aware of) as well as an alternate weakness in the *Death Star*’s defenses, the two women ensure that “this will end differently” (270), as Ryoo says: with the same destruction of the Empire’s battle station, but through female rather than male agency and heroism.

especially important for Jareo's construction of a feminist countertext to *Star Wars*, as Leia, even after she eventually becomes a Jedi in the EU novels, "never [receives] a lightsaber" of her own—a weapon that Cavelos characterizes as even more of a "symbol of male power" than the guns Leia does occasionally fire throughout the films (Cavelos, qtd. in Brin and Stover 324). The substitution of Ryoo for Obi-Wan is further underscored in Vader's assumption that Ryoo is, in fact, Obi-Wan. In a repetition of dialogue from *A New Hope*, Vader states "[h]e is here [...] I told you, he is here," when he is, unknowingly, referring to Ryoo herself (Jareo 169).

By having her characters default to using masculine pronouns, as Vader does, Jareo exposes the problematic ideology underlying the *Star Wars* franchise, one that devalues female characters in relation to their male counterparts. While Vader's assumption that the disturbance in the Force *must* come from a male character can be attributed to the fact that Obi-Wan is the only other Jedi of whom he is aware, similar instances pervade Jareo's text: speaking of the "detention personnel" after Leia's escape, Vader orders Tarkin to "have those men visually verify she is in that cell" (169-70, my emphasis); the officer who reports on Ryoo's piloting of a stolen shuttle states, "[m]y men and I are positive [...] Here he is, just before he goes out of range" (181-82, my emphasis); and Imperial soldiers are uniformly depicted as men (17), or are referred to collectively as "crewmen" or "wingmen" (273, 271). Nor is Jareo's critique of this prejudice wholly limited to depictions of the Empire, as male characters in the Alliance murmur that Ryoo is "*not a trained pilot*" (199, original emphasis) in contrast to the "thirty pilots in orange flight suits" assembled to attack the *Death Star*, all of whom are

men (244). It is, however, the Empire that Jareo indicts most specifically. On the *Death Star*,

[a] half dozen Imperial admirals, one army general, and a colonel sat around a black conference table, which was polished to a sheen. [...] These men, not one over fifty-five years old, controlled vast sections of the Navy or the Army. Scores of other men, mostly commanders of the Navy's capital ships, were in other conference rooms nearby, mapping out tactics for what was to be the final offensive against the rebel forces. (63)

The image of the collected commanding forces being, to a one, male—a fact which the full paragraph makes more explicit by providing a brief biography of each character—is juxtaposed against that of Ryoo, a “messworker” on the *Death Star* (66). Although the noun is gender neutral (as opposed to those used to refer to soldiers, pilots, and other Imperial officers), the implication is that the neutrality equates to femininity: Ryoo is a “typical” messworker, which is to say, a woman “of slight build” and, at least initially, “meek disposition” (64).⁴³ Through the contrast of male figures controlling the *Death Star* and the rest of the Imperial fleet with female figures at the bottom of the hierarchy in the role of “cook,” “waitress,” or “servant” (199, 134, 175)—all terms which are used to define Ryoo’s position—Jareo makes explicit the problematic gender ideology underlying Lucas’s films. Moreover, by equating this ideology with the Galactic Empire, the villains of Lucas’s created universe, Jareo firmly aligns gender inequality with evil, a

⁴³ Furthering the association of the *Death Star*’s messworkers with women is Leia’s observation of Ryoo that, “unlike *most women* of that grade, her hands were not tough looking” (29, my emphasis), one of the few instances in the novel where a group of people is specifically gendered female.

“threat” which is “eliminated” with Ryoo’s destruction of the *Death Star* (272), and which is rewritten with Jareo’s revision of *A New Hope*.⁴⁴

Jareo’s novel thus functions to rework what Cixous refers to as the “[s]ubordination of the feminine to the masculine order”—a subordination perceivable in *A New Hope*—by inverting the “opposition between *activity* and *passivity*” that Cixous discusses, in which “the question of sexual difference is treated” by associating masculinity with activity and femininity with passivity (65, 64, original emphasis). Given the insertion of a new female character to replace the overwhelming majority of male heroes in the film, Jareo’s text does not, to use Cixous’s terms, merely portray a woman “function[ing] ‘within’ man’s discourse, a signifier referring always to the opposing signifier that [...] puts down or stifles its very different sounds”; instead, through Ryoo, it works to “displace this ‘within,’ explode it, overturn it, grab it, [and] make it hers” (95-96). In its emphasis on the typically marginalized and oppositional voices of female characters within a “media product that, for the most part, [is] characterized by an underrepresentation of women,” Jareo’s novel embodies fanfiction’s ability to operate “as a technique of social, political, or cultural critique” when read in rejoinder against the original texts from which it is derived (Derecho 71, 66).

3.5—CONCLUSION: CROSSING CRITICAL LINES

Despite its feminist revisioning of Lucas’s male-centric films, there are “other constraints, ethical constraints and self-imposed rules, enacted by the fans, either

⁴⁴ As noted above, Jareo *does* critique the lack of female characters in the Alliance as well; however, it is not nearly as prevalent as with her portrayals of the gender division on the *Death Star* as Leia and, especially, Ryoo, are accepted into and treated as leaders of the Alliance: these “young wom[e]n [were] lightning rod[s] for the rebel leadership, having a preternatural talent to rally people to [their] cause. [They] seemed to inspire [...] allegiance” (207).

individually or as part of the larger community” that speak to the almost unilaterally negative reception of Jareo’s work (Jenkins, “*Star Trek*” 40).⁴⁵ As both Lev Grossman and Heidi MacDonald note, Jareo’s decision to sell her novel on *Amazon.com* crossed the critical line that demarcates (at least for fan authors) fanfiction’s tenuous position between “loving tributes” and illegality (Grossman). Though Grossman accurately argues that works of fanfiction “promote and enrich the creative work[s] they borrow from,” Jareo’s for-profit novel, as opposed to a non-profit-oriented, for-pleasure work of fanfiction (Grossman), moves the discussion of fanfiction’s potential status as plagiarism from a debate over intellectual property and the “fair use” defense, to copyright infringement in that it could “act as an economic substitute for the original work” (Tushnet 654).

Setting aside the cease-and-desist notice issued by Lucasfilm Inc.’s legal team in reaction to the unauthorized distribution of her novel (Grossman), what problematizes Jareo’s work and generated antagonism against it within the *Star Wars* fandom provides a concrete example of the definite but unarticulated fandom distinction between the transformative use of an original text and plagiarism elaborated upon in the previous chapter, a distinction which speaks against the position held by anti-fanfiction authors and producers that fanfiction constitutes infringement in and of itself.⁴⁶ Speaking of the

⁴⁵ See Goldberg, Lee. “No HOPE for this Fanficcer”; Hogan, Ron. “I Bet She Finds Our Lack of Faith Disturbing”; Scalzi, John. “The 2006 Stupidest FanFic Writer Award Gets Retired Early”; Imadra_Blue. “[meta] But What Are Your Thoughts on Dilution and Creativity?”; and Lazypadawan. “More thoughts on Another Hope-Gate.”

⁴⁶ In addition to Diana Gabaldon’s initial blog entry discussed in the previous chapter, especially vocal in their condemnation of fanfiction are Robin Hobb and Lee Goldberg, the latter of whom has written numerous anti-fanfiction entries dating from 2004 to 2009. See Hobb, Robin, “The Fan Fiction Rant”; Lee Goldberg, “Am I a Fanficcer?,” “What’s Stupid About It?,” “Another Day in Fanfic,” etc. More articles can be found through the “Fanfic” tag on his website. Goldberg’s anti-fanfiction sentiment is especially interesting in light of the number of media tie-in novels he has published—novels which are referred to by many fans and some works of fan studies as “official” fanfiction (see Pugh, Sheenagh *The Democratic*

ubiquity of derivative texts, Doctorow argues that “it’s no failing that we internalize the stories we love, that we rework them to suit our minds better.” And indeed, Jareo’s novel does rewrite *A New Hope* to suit different minds—and different and marginalized perspectives—better. Through it, she exposes the overwhelming emphasis on male characters both explicitly in her heavily-gendered descriptions and implicitly through the similarities and differences in characterization and plot that the reader notices between the original and new text. The amount of source material she appropriates from *A New Hope* without alteration or qualification, however—an amount which, combined, constitutes over a quarter of the novel—edges into Kristeva’s definition of repetition (“claiming and appropriating [...] without revitalizing” the source text [73]), rather than providing an alternate take on the original story to question and critique it.

Expressing this position in a comment to an online discussion of Jareo’s novel, fan author Ivylore remarks, “[t]hat the book could [...] have most of its introduction ‘cut and pasted’ from the ANH [*A New Hope*] novelisation *amazes* me” (Lazypadawan, original emphasis). Likewise, speaking of the balance between the “gift economy” and the commercial “market economy” to which he believes all art—and artistic tributes—belong, Jonathan Lethem entreats readers and writers: “[d]on’t pirate my editions; do plunder my visions. [...] You, reader, are welcome to my stories. They were never mine in the first place, but I gave them to you. If you have the inclination to pick them up, take them with my blessing” (68). Letham’s term “plunder” invokes similar negative associations as Jenkins’s “poaching”; the distinction he makes between editions and visions, however, is of more significance here. While Jareo does engage with Lucas’s

Genre). An examination of fanfiction versus its licensed counterpart of media tie-in novels, however, is beyond the scope of this project.

visions in order to open them up to heretofore omitted voices of female characters, the long spans of verbatim dialogue and entire scenes taken from *A New Hope* also suggests a level of “pirating” of Lucas’s original work in Jareo’s text that crosses the critical, if frequently unarticulated, line between what is and is not appropriate in the production of fanfiction.

Although the novel itself crosses critical boundaries of commerciality and appropriation set, respectively, by producers and fan consumers of media texts, Jareo’s work nevertheless functions as a rejoinder to Lucas’s films and Lucas and Foster’s novel by challenging *Star Wars*’ position as, in Bakhtinian terms, a “self-sufficient” text that “presum[es] only passive listeners beyond its own boundaries” (274). Jareo draws heavily upon aspects of the *Star Wars* universe and frequently makes use of Lucas’s own phrases and images; however, as Kristen Brennan notes, so too does *Star Wars* itself draw upon Frank Herbert’s *Dune*. Although the amount of material appropriated and transformed may not be to the same extent, the comparison is worth noting: “there are no new ideas under the sun,” and all works are, to some extent, intertextual (Doctorow). As Bakhtin characterizes them, textual rejoinders lead “a double life” (284). Such rejoinders, he argues, are

structured and conceptualized in the context of the dialogue as a whole, which consists of [their] own utterances (“own” from the point of view of the speaker) and of alien utterances (those of the partner). One cannot excise the rejoinder from this combined context made up of one’s own words and the words of another without losing its sense and tone. (284)

Applying Bakhtin's depiction of such texts to fanfiction studies, both Jareo's novel (and even Lucas's films) can be considered examples of textual rejoinders, each responding to a difference source text. As a result, by casting Lucas and his works as unknowing partners in this dialogue, not only does Jareo's novel contribute a new perspective to the source text under consideration—Lucas's *A New Hope*—but Jareo herself also counters what Benjamin calls the “distinction between author and public” by occupying a position that is an amalgamation of the two—as critical reader/public of Lucas's work and author of her own rejoinder (234).

Jareo's novel crosses multiple boundaries: the critical reception boundary of appropriation/plagiarism, the binary of homage/revision that marks its creative impetus, and multiple media boundaries—from original film/licensed novel as its source material to its own publication in both print and ebook form. *Another Hope* demonstrates that Jareo is not “captured and collected” by Lucas's film, and effectively counters de Certeau's contention that media productions engender only a “purely passive, purely receptive” response on the part of the audience (165). Instead, Jareo finds room within such a production to “mark [her] activity” and sign her “existence as an author on it” (de Certeau 31). Accepting that such a move also resulted in legal trouble, Jareo's work successfully moved a feminine countertext to a masculine-dominated industry out of the margins, and into the public eye. Fanfiction works such as Jareo's novel cannot hope to compete with corporations like Lucasfilm Inc. in terms of economic power or influence; there is a very real power differential between a self-published fan author and a franchise with its own legal team. Although still subject to discrepancies in *economic* arenas,

Jareo's work and its publication asserts the position of fanfiction not as the product of a subcultural movement, but as the utterance of an equal partner in the *creative* dialogue.

CHAPTER 4

“SWEETHEART, THIS AIN’T GENDER STUDIES”: REWRITING *SUPERNATURAL* MARGINS

Where is she, where is woman in all the spaces he surveys, in all the scenes he stages within the literary enclosure?

—Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*.

JO: You know, I’ve had it up to here with your crap. [...] Your chauvinist crap. You think women can’t do the job.

DEAN: Sweetheart, this ain’t Gender Studies.

—*Supernatural* 2.06. “No Exit”

4.1—INTRODUCTION: MESSAGES FROM MEDIA AND FANFICTION DERIVATIONS

As the first epigraph to this chapter implies, there is a demonstrable absence of strong female characters in much of the culture we consume. Cixous locates this absence primarily in “the stages of the literary enclosure” (67). The predominance of male-dominated media texts in the science fiction and gothic genres, like those under discussion in this work, demonstrates, however, that this lack is not unique to a single medium: women are likewise excluded from what could be called the “media enclosure.” This chapter turns from examining films produced in the late 1970s that “position women as marginalized or silent figures,” to the currently airing television series, *Supernatural*, which can be viewed as “moving backward [and] reinforcing old stereotypes” (Cavelos 325). In terms of female characters’ ability to “play by the same rules as the boys,” the changed medium and time has not changed the message (Cavelos 324).

Further to “the medium is the message” contention discussed in the previous chapter, Marshal McLuhan distinguishes between what he terms “hot” and “cold” media productions, categories that in turn define the ways in which consumers interact with a

given medium. A “hot medium,” McLuhan argues, is one that “extends one single sense in ‘high definition [...] the state of being well filled with data’” (36); “hot media” such as films “do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience,” and are therefore “low in participation”; by contrast, “cool media” such as television programs “are high in participation or completion by the audience” (36).⁴⁷ In fact, further countering de Certeau’s contention that “the television viewer cannot write anything on the screen of his set” and its implication that television as a medium forbids response, McLuhan asserts that, of the “cool” media he identifies, “TV is above all a medium that demands a creatively participant response” from its audience (de Certeau 31, McLuhan 293).

In including his work in this thesis, I recognize that McLuhan’s argument is focused on the technologies that transmit messages—the medium, rather than its content. Despite the fact that his discussion of media which encourage participation refers simply to the amount of mental activity required on the part of the audience to compensate for information lacking in the broadcast signal itself (a nod to the “low definition or low-intensity” image that characterized television technology contemporaneous to his time of writing [256]), however, McLuhan nevertheless creates a space for audience participation formulated in response to a media text. Building on his argument for this participatory audience response technologically required by the television medium, a similar framework applied to a participatory audience response to the message disseminated by television productions is useful for discussions of media fandoms and their productions,

⁴⁷ Building on this proposed division in terms of films vs. television, McLuhan argues that films “transfer the reader or viewer from one world, his *own*, to another, the world created by [...] film”; the audience “accept[s]” the experience “subliminally and without critical awareness” (249, original emphasis). Of television, however, he claims that “the [...] mosaic image demands social completion and dialogue,” as one cannot become fully absorbed in the fictional world created by a television program (255).

as it refutes the notion that such fans “settle down” and are “capture[d]” by television programs and their ideologies, and are incapable of resistant or alternative practices formulated in response to these texts as a result (de Certeau 165). By highlighting the “participant response” to a program located in *creativity* on the audience’s part (McLuhan 293)—a creativity that can be as equally applied to the message-based response of fanfiction as to the technologically required response of McLuhan’s argument—McLuhan’s argument can be read as suggesting a dialogue between the intended message of the original program and audience responses to it (293); to recast this argument in terms of my broader discussion of fanfiction, as television programming “does not tell all possible stories, or address all possible audiences,” it falls to the unaddressed audiences to recast the narratives and include themselves in them (Jenkins, “Poachers and Stormtroopers”). Applying McLuhan’s argument to the fan responses produced in rejoinder to media texts further counters the idea of a unidirectional producer/consumer hierarchy in media productions: television is not “a one-way transmitter, beaming its signals out across the void to land in our living rooms” (Harris, “A Sociology” 44), but instead a rich source from which fan authors derive textual elements to fashion into their own alternative texts.

Where this extrapolation from McLuhan’s argument fails as an applicable model for fandom studies is in his limiting of what media permit audience response. McLuhan compares the division of levels of participation between hot and cold media to the ways in which “a lecture makes for less participation than a seminar, and a book for less than a dialogue” (37). In both cases, the “hot media” examples require no more participation from the audience than a passive reception of a prescribed message, in contrast to the

potential to interact with or counter said message that his “cold media” examples permit (37). Setting aside the technological advancements that also eliminate McLuhan’s proposed distinction between “hot” and “cold” media, in terms of audience response to the *messages* of different media, all content can be said to be “cold” under McLuhan’s formulation: engendering a “creatively participant response” from the fan audience (McLuhan 293). Despite the trend toward media fandoms in fan culture studies⁴⁸—and although this work likewise focuses on media fandom-based fanfiction—works of fanfiction are far from limited to media texts. Fans, “concerned with pursuing knowledge and in seeking causes,” will focus their creativity and critical impulses on source texts which they perceive to be “incomplete and requiring participation in depth,” regardless of the medium in which the source text was originally presented (McLuhan 43-44). It is this manner of boundary crossing that I again examine in my discussion of *Supernatural*-based fanfiction in this chapter.

As McLuhan contends, television requires “participation, dialogue, and depth” on the part of the audience (289). Applying this contention to fandom studies, the *Supernatural* fan authors whose work I examine in this chapter engage in creative participation and dialogue with the original text, and “resist TV[’s]” problematic ideologies with “the antidote” of their own textual productions (McLuhan 287). Although *Supernatural* fanfiction, for the most part, falls under the subcategory of slash,⁴⁹ my primary focus in this chapter is again on narrative critiques that rewrite female gender

⁴⁸ The majority of fandom studies to date have been focused on media fandoms, but also predominately on the television fandoms of *Star Trek* and *Blake’s 7*. See: Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*; Green et al., “Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking”; Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* and *Science Fiction Culture*; and Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre*, among numerous others.

⁴⁹ As defined in the introduction, the term “slash” indicates works of fanfiction that imagine a homosexual relationship between two male characters (who are implicitly or explicitly heterosexual) in the source text.

roles to reform the presentation of the same in the original texts. As *Supernatural* offers a wider cast of (admittedly problematic) female characters for fans to work with than the *Star Wars* original trilogy, however, I examine fan recreation of canonical female characters, rather than the creation of original female characters as demonstrated in Jareo's *Another Hope*. This rewriting proposes a more explicit critique of program ideologies, because such rewritten characters offer points of congruence and difference with canon episodes that feature the same characters as the program producers envisioned them. I draw the fanfiction examined in this chapter from the *Supernatural J-Squared Big Bang Challenge* community (a fanfiction challenge hosted on the blogging website *Livejournal.com*), which imposes a minimum length requirement of 20,000 words on each work of fanfiction produced for the challenge. Such works are most fruitful to character analyses, as they permit equal space for plot and character development as a television series or a novel like Jareo's work. My primary text for this chapter is fan-author Silverspotted's "This One's About the Girls," which I read against the *Supernatural* episodes "No Exit" and "Born Under a Bad Sign." This work of fanfiction explicitly references only the latter of the two episodes, but its particular focus on the character of Joanna Beth Harvelle and her hunting exploits make the first episode—in which a similar situation is presented to different effect—of particular relevance. As it would be reductive to claim that there is a homogenous critical impulse informing the production of all texts within the *Supernatural* fandom, however, I also discuss works of fanfiction that do not participate in the rewriting of problematic gender ideologies. In so doing, I demonstrate that such texts nevertheless do offer oppositional and alternative

readings to ideologies expressed in media texts, rather than “conforming to the pattern of experience presented” in the original text as it stands (McLuhan 286).

4.2—“NOT EXACTLY JOHN WINCHESTER WITH TITS”: GENDER AND SLASH IN *SUPERNATURAL*⁵⁰

Supernatural, created by Eric Kripke, is a television series that follows the demon- and ghost-hunting exploits of the Winchester family—John, and his sons Dean and Sam—following the murder of Mary Winchester (John’s wife and Sam and Dean’s mother) by Azazel, a yellow-eyed demon. The focus of *Supernatural* is primarily on the two brothers (Sam and Dean), as Sam’s girlfriend Jessica is also killed by Azazel in the pilot episode. The mythology of the series has expanded in later seasons beyond the “urban legends and American folklore” presented in a “Monster of the Week” episode format that informed the show throughout the first two seasons (Eric Kripke, qtd. in Wright par. 2), and now includes a cast of angels, demons, and other players in the Apocalypse;⁵¹ however, the emphasis on a cast of male heroes has been maintained throughout the show’s duration to date. Julia M. Wright notes in “Latchkey Hero: Masculinity, Class, and the Gothic in Eric Kripke’s *Supernatural*” that the series “participate[s] in what recent critics have framed as a post-Clinton interest in masculinity.” While *Supernatural* may offer a “particularly complex depiction of working-class masculinities” as Wright argues (par. 4), the show, much like the *Star Wars* films, is nevertheless centered on its male characters almost to the exclusion of female ones. As Eric Kripke characterizes the intended focus of the show:

⁵⁰ The quotation for the first half of this subtitle taken from fan author Medie’s *Big Bang* fanfiction, “Of Handbaskets and Highways.”

⁵¹ At the time of writing, the show has just completed its fifth season and has been renewed for a sixth.

It's never been a show about Sam [but about a] big brother watching out for a little brother, wondering if you have to kill the person you love most, family loyalty versus the greater good, family obligation versus personal happiness. ... These are all issues that Dean faces, and in my opinion, they are just as rich, if not richer, than psychic children and demonic plans. (Kripke, qtd. in Wright par. 14, ellipses in original).

Although Kripke here deliberately shifts perceptions of the show's focus away from Sam Winchester to broader ideological conflicts, those conflicts are still explored, nevertheless, through another *male* character: Dean. Moreover, this shift from Sam, "the chosen hero of a mythic quest," to his older brother only reinforces the male-centric perspective of the series, as Dean, "gendered differently" than the "soft-spoken" Sam, is characterized primarily as the more masculine "rugged bad boy" (Wright, par. 14). As Cixous argues, "it is the same story. It all comes back to the man—to his torment, to his desire to be (at) the origin. Back to the father" (65). Her point here is applicable to the series as a whole given Kripke's above depiction of it: the "family" to which Dean is loyal is a family of men (father and younger brother); the "family obligation" to which he adheres is to the male-centric world of hunting demons and monsters; and "the greater good" he and Sam follow is, in the early seasons (and at the time of Wright's article), the quest the brothers inherit from their father to destroy a male demon.

Unlike the heroic triad of male characters (the Winchesters), and like the limited roles of queen, princess, mother, or floozy assigned to female characters in the *Star Wars* films as discussed in the preceding chapter (Brooker 199-200), female figures in the *Supernatural* television series fall into recognizable categories. Sam and Dean

Winchester “broadly fill the popular type of hunky heroes who fight the bad and protect the good [...] drink beer out of the bottle, win fistfights, outsmart nearly everyone, [and] can (if they want) get the girl in each episode” (Wright par. 14). By contrast, and following the “larger gothic tradition” in which the show participates and that genre’s “insistence on female victimization” (Wright par.1; Benschhoff 202), women are frequently the victims of the supernatural threat that the Winchester brothers, in turn, defeat. Women also (or concurrently) feature in a variety of stereotypically feminine roles: as objects for the Winchesters, particularly Dean, to pursue and seduce; as mother figures; or, particularly in reference to the show’s active female characters, as villains and/or monsters. In addition—and in connection to the broader argument about fanfiction authorship that I draw throughout this thesis—while male characters are presented (and, more importantly, accepted) as author figures, female characters who attempt to take on a similar role are dismissed. Regardless of their categorization, however, all the women in the series who appear in more than one episode, save two characters, ultimately die or are killed.⁵²

The second epigraph to this chapter continues with Dean’s assertion to Jo that “[w]omen can do the job [of hunting demons] fine; amateurs can’t. You’ve got no experience. What you do have is a bunch of romantic notions that some barflies put in your head” (“No Exit”). It is telling, however, that all the demon hunters who interact with the Winchester brothers throughout the series (Bobby Singer, Gordon Walker,

⁵² The two exceptions thus far are Becky Rosen and Lisa Braeden. Becky, introduced in “Sympathy for the Devil” (5.01) is anomalous in that she does not fit into any of the categories for female characters in *Supernatural* outlined above; she will be discussed further in the conclusion to this work. Lisa is a former romantic interest of Dean’s. Introduced in “The Kids Are All Right” (3.02) when a changeling captures her son, Lisa’s final appearance to date is the season 5 finale, “Swan Song” (5.22). As the final moments of the episode suggest she will also figure to some extent in season 6, it remains to be seen whether she will continue to break with the trend for recurring female characters in the series.

Pastor Jim Murphy, Daniel Elkins, etc) are men. While Ellen and Joanna Beth Harvelle (Jo) could perhaps be categorized as hunters in that they are aware of supernatural beings and how to kill them, Ellen refutes that active position by stating that she “just run[s] a saloon” (the Roadhouse), though “hunters have been known to pass through now and again” (“Everybody Loves a Clown”); furthermore, she expects her daughter Jo either to do the same or go back to university, as the notion of Jo becoming a hunter like her father is unthinkable (“No Exit”). Other major female characters involved in the hunting world (such as Missouri Mosely and Pamela Barnes) are psychics who dispense advice and charms but do not hunt—mystic roles reminiscent of that of Leia in *Star Wars*, whose “primary power” as a potential Jedi is shown not in terms of action, but in her “empathic link with Luke” (Spangler 333). Despite the contention expressed through Dean that women are certainly capable of hunting, it is not something that the series demonstrates, portraying instead a strict division between male and female activity in the hunting world.⁵³

It is in this male-centric fictive universe that the overwhelmingly female fan community surrounding *Supernatural* sets its fictions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, “given the material presented in the series” which does not offer many strong female characters as heroes with whom to identify (Anne Tomorrow, qtd. in Green et al. 73), the predominant sub-category of fanfiction produced in the fandom is slash. Though slash fanfiction is not the focus of this project, given its ubiquity within the *Supernatural* fandom, a brief

⁵³ The character who could be proposed as the exception to this rule is Mary Winchester, shown to be a hunter before she marries John. Demonstrating another parallel to *Star Wars* and its female characters, Mary wishes to give up hunting in order to lead a normal life—which equates to marrying and having children. This role is similar to the way in which Cavelos defines Amidala who, as discussed in the previous chapter, is viewed as disappointing to female fans, once Mary “fulfills the needs of the saga—falling in love with [John] and having his children—[...] she dies” (Cavelos 316).

discussion of this prevalent subgenre is necessary here to situate it in relation to the works examined in this chapter, which are not slash-centric.

Hellekson and Busse make reference to the problem of “fandom’s inherent [...] misogyny” (Introduction 21), a contention ostensibly supported by the proliferation of slash fanfiction. Countering this position, in their article “Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking,” Shoshanna Green, Cynthia Jenkins, and Henry Jenkins quote extensively from “theoretically-oriented fan discussion forums about slash” in order to identify the primary reasons for which female fans choose to write so heavily in this genre of fanfiction, and their results do not evidence any misogynistic impetus (63). In fact—suggestive of a more subtle rereading of canon by fans than a purely misogynistic impulse would permit—from the different rationales presented by fan authors quoted throughout the article, one can determine a parallel (if inverted) critical impulse as that which informs the stories I have chosen to examine both here and in the previous chapter: a dissatisfaction with and desire to revise narratives with problematic female characters. Worth quoting at length here as representative of the fact that “feminism has had many faces since fandom began” (Bacon-Smith, *Science Fiction Culture* 96), fan author Cat Anestopoulo writes:

The woman (me, you, whoever) views the fictional piece from the character’s point of view, and her emotions parallel his: anguish when he is hurt, triumph when he wins, etc. [...] [L]et us say that the “hero” is the main reference [...]; the buddy (his confidant and accomplice); [and] the screaming ninny (his romantic interest).

In this threesome, there are reasons to identify with the hero:

1. He is usually the main character (the heroine being seen less often, usually a supporting character).
2. [...] If the woman has spunk, it is not a value in itself but a source of excitement or annoyance for the hero. At worst, it is considered as cute.

There are reasons not to identify with the heroine [...] you don't want to be her, you don't want to enjoy the emotions she feels. (qtd. in Green et al. 67-68)

Anestopoulo's masculine-normative pronouns when referring to the hero, with whom the audience naturally identifies, points to the tendency of media texts "dominated by male producers" to be "by, for, and about men of action" (Busse 105; Judith Spector, qtd. in Jenkins, "*Star Trek*" 45). Her identification of the roles that, by contrast, are permissible for women in the same media texts to inhabit, can be seen as a reinforcement of Cixous's contention that "[e]ither woman is passive or she doesn't exist. What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought" (64). Anestopoulo's identification of female characters in media fandoms as "primarily pawns and patsies, taking little active part in the working out of their destinies" (qtd. in Green et al. 73)—and the idea that such characters require rewriting as a result—parallels the feminist critique of male-dominated texts explored through Lori Jareo's *Another Hope* in the previous chapter, and through the *Supernatural* fanfiction examined below. Instead of writing or rewriting women into the fanfiction, however, in slash fanfiction, the disappointing and unsympathetic female characters are written out. While the omission of these unsatisfactory female characters in slash fanfiction picks up on the problematic—or potentially misogynistic—portrayal of female characters within popular media productions, it is not in itself evidence of fandom misogyny. As there are already multiple studies that analyze slash fanfiction as texts and

slash authors as a subcultural movement, however, I continue in this chapter to examine those stories which engage in dialogue with the “potential barely hinted at in the series” in terms of its female characters through giving voice to—or rewriting the voices of—these characters (Agnes Tomorrow, qtd. in Green et al. 73).

4.3—OUT OF THE MARGINS: REWRITING EPISODES, REINTERPRETING CHARACTERS

Jo and Ellen Harvelle, the first non-demonic, recurring female characters in the series, first appear in “Everybody Loves a Clown” (2.02). It isn’t until “No Exit” (2.06), however, that Jo first attempts to break from her passive role of helping her mother take care of the Roadhouse and become an active hunter. In the episode, Jo discovers and researches her own case: a series of disappearances in Pennsylvania “[o]ver the past eighty years [...]. All from the same building, all young blondes” (“No Exit”). Overruling her daughter’s attempt to exert her own agency and ingenuity in a traditionally male-dominated world, Ellen insists that the Winchesters take the case instead; Jo, however, follows them to Philadelphia, where they discover that the disappearances are being caused by the ghost of America’s first serial killer, H. H. Holmes. Jo is captured by the ghost, but is rescued by the Winchester brothers, who encase the malevolent spirit in concrete.

While the episode demonstrates the first significant role played by a female character not personally involved with the case on one of the Winchesters’ hunts, Jo’s actions in the episode ultimately do as much to reinforce the “male privilege” of the hunting world in the roles assigned to male and female, as they do to overwrite it (Cixous

64). At the outset of the episode, when Jo presents her case, she muses that they're "either dealing with one very old serial killer, or —"

DEAN. (interrupting) Who put this together? Ash?

JO. I did it myself.

DEAN. Hmm.

SAM. I gotta admit. We hit the road for a lot less.

ELLEN. Good. You like the case so much, you take it. ("No Exit")⁵⁴

Before she is interrupted by Dean's assumption that Ash, another male hunter and tech-geek who lives at the Roadhouse, is the one who must have put together the case, Jo's speculation on the nature of the spirit foreshadows the actual result of the case. Although Sam and Ash are later the ones to (re)discover a serial killer's involvement by going through a list of criminals executed near to where the disappearances are taking place, Jo has, in effect, solved the mystery within the first few minutes of the episode. Like the producer/fan binary which imposes a rigid distinction between what is and is not "official" writing—a distinction which, given the discrepancy between an industry "dominated by male producers" and the overwhelmingly female segment of fandom who write in response to their texts (Busse 105), is also formed along gender lines—Jo's writing (of the case) is ignored and overruled by a trio of male characters. Her role as author, like her role as hunter, is not taken seriously. Further explicating the series' expression of the gendered division between official and unofficial authorship, Sam's comment that he and Dean have "hit the road for a lot less" is in reference to another author figure who underpins much of the first three seasons: their father, John

⁵⁴ All quotations from *Supernatural*, unless otherwise noted, are my own transcriptions of the episodes, which I have also checked against transcripts posted by Gelasius on the *Supernatural Wiki* website. Stage directions consist of my descriptions of the action on screen.

Winchester. After John's disappearance in season 1, Sam and Dean make use of his journal in order to piece together information about Azazel, to research and solve cases, and to learn more about the hunting world. In effect, John Winchester and the hunting life into which he raised his sons become almost synonymous with his writings. The journal can be read as the canon or original text within the series, from which the brothers derive their hunting narrative; Jo's case, by offering a different narrative/case than what is presented in this journal, is initially treated (and almost dismissed) as a challenge to the authorial control of John and his journal. Even when the case itself is accepted, its female author is not; once in Philadelphia, Sam confesses that he "feel[s] kinda bad, snaking Jo's case," but Dean makes explicit the same division of roles—and the appropriateness of such a division—that Ellen implicitly supports in her assigning the case to the brothers. He states, "[y]eah, maybe she put together a good file. But could you see her out here working one of these things? I don't think so" ("No Exit").

Dean's misogynistic attitude could be attributable to the character himself, rather than the overall gender ideology of the program; however, it is his opinion of Jo's abilities that are borne out in the episode and which, in turn, underscore the pervading gender ideology of the series as a whole. Although Jo is the first to solve the mystery, this fact is never acknowledged. Additionally, early in the case, Jo asserts, "I know what I'm doing" and, in fact, seems to know how to proceed better than the seasoned Winchester brothers: she comes up with a convincing cover story to gain entrance into the building (as opposed to their breaking and entering), and she thoroughly investigates the building's history (before either brother begins to do so). Dean, however, counters her assertion in the face of this evidence by retorting, "[y]eah, well, the jury's still out on that

one” (“No Exit”). Bearing out Dean’s perspective of Jo’s abilities, despite the initial expertise that Jo demonstrates, the moment that she ventures off alone into the walls of the building (a move reminiscent of the horror movie trope in which the blonde, female character goes into an unlit basement on her own) she becomes merely another victimized and helpless character. Upon seeing the ghost’s ectoplasm seeping from the walls, rather than using her knife or gun, Jo whimpers “Oh God,” and then screams—actions which parallel those of the second victim taken in the episode, Teresa (“No Exit”). Having first been rejected as an author figure, and then failing as a hero in her own right, Jo is likewise cast in the role of female victim, dependent upon (and not questioning the ability of) the male hunter-heroes to secure her rescue. Furthermore, although Jo ultimately does assist Sam and Dean in the containment of the spirit, she does so by further embodying the role of a passive, potential female victim: in the scene, Jo sits trembling in the middle of an underground chamber with her arms wrapped around her knees, feigning terror in order to lure Holmes into Sam and Dean’s trap (“No Exit”). Although this plan to trap the ghost could be viewed as a way to rehabilitate the victim’s role in the episode by turning it against the ghost/serial killer, it reinforces Jo’s position as secondary to the Winchester brothers—she is (passive) bait, while they are (active) hunters.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ It is important to note that Jo is first to suggest she be used as bait, but it is a suggestion made early in the episode, and one Dean rejects out of hand: “Oh, that’s hilarious. [...] if you think I’m letting you out of my sight...” (“No Exit,” second ellipses in original); by the time that Dean decides to use Jo’s initial plan, it is no longer one that she herself is considering:

JO. Let’s get the hell out of here before he comes back.

DEAN. Actually, I don’t think you’re leaving here just yet.

JO. What?

DEAN. Remember when I said you being bait was a bad plan? Now it’s kind of the only one we got. (“No Exit”)

Dean overrides Jo’s desire to rescue Teresa and escape the ghost by imposing his own authority (“I don’t think *you’re* leaving here”), and makes use of Jo’s idea—which proves effective, as she had anticipated—

The subsequent episode “Born Under a Bad Sign” (2.14), while not featuring Jo to the same extent as “No Exit,” makes use of her character in much the same way. Initially working as a waitress in a bar—returning to one of the roles she tried to escape at the beginning of “No Exit”—Jo is once again presented as powerless and victimized by an evil, male character: this time Sam Winchester, who has been possessed by a demon. The demon itself is gendered female (she is referred to by the name of her first host body, Meg), but ultimately assumes a problematic and hyper-masculine demeanor to pretend to be Sam and to victimize Jo. There is a tacit notion of sexual assault in this scene, as “Sam,” after confessing that he “care[s] about [Jo] a lot” and “can be more to [her],” forcefully shoves her against the bar and traps her with one hand, lightly stroking her hair with the other; Jo struggles ineffectively against him: “Sam, get off me! [...] Sam, no, no! Please!” (“Born Under a Bad Sign”). Not only does the scene reinforce the power differential between Sam and Jo to cast her as a victim of a supernatural agent but, through Sam and Jo’s discussion, the scene also sets Jo up in another role typical to female characters in the series—that of a potential love interest—by commenting on the romantic relationship between Jo and Dean originally envisioned by Eric Kripke (Ausiello, “One Tree Hill with Monsters”). “Sam” states,

You’re really carrying a torch for him, aren’t you? [...] It’s too bad. ‘Cause see, Dean, he likes you, sure, but not in the way you’d want. I mean, maybe as kind of a little sister, you know? But romance, that’s just out of the question.

only as a last resort (“it’s [...] the only one we got”). This outcome simultaneously removes Jo’s personal agency as well as refuses to acknowledge her initial ingenuity (“No Exit,” my emphasis).

He kind of thinks you're a schoolgirl, you know? I'm not trying to hurt you, Jo
[...]. ("Born Under a Bad Sign")

Once again, Jo is used as bait—though this time by the villain to trap one of the heroes—and once again “is a victim waiting to be saved” by a male character (Cavelos 310). After her rescue from the possessed Sam, Jo’s primary action in the episode is to help see to Dean’s wounds; when she tries to regain her active role and accompany Dean in his pursuit of the demon, he refuses: “I can’t say it more plain than this. You try to follow me and I’ll tie you right back to that post and leave you here. [...] That’s just how it’s gonna be” (“Born Under a Bad Sign”). Once again subject to the imposition of male determination on her social role, Jo acquiesces. The rest of the episode follows Dean and Sam, and Jo does not reappear in the series until the Season 5 episode “Good God, Y’all” (5.02).

Eric Kripke characterizes Jo’s character as a “mistake,” saying that he and the show’s writers “conceived the character wrong. She was the girl next door, she was the little sister, and her attitude was, ‘How can I help you?’” (qtd. in Ausiello, “One Tree Hill with Monsters”). Like the rationale for slash fanfiction expressed above, Kripke and the show’s writing team responded to this “mistake” of female characterization (and the resultant fan reaction against the character) by writing Jo out of the series for two and a half seasons—though she does return in 5.02, it is only for her character to die and be permanently written out of the series.

While many fans follow suit in their fanfiction by ignoring the character of Jo, there is, as Harris notes, a tendency among fans to “challenge individual episodes” and characters who conflict with the fans’ “overall meaning system” by rewriting the

disappointing characters, and reinterpreting episodes they perceive as lacking (“A Sociology” 47). Much like the female characters in *Star Wars* discussed in the previous chapter, Jo is often figured as weak when she could be an active agent. The following section analyzes a fan-authored text that features Jo in a primary role while also explicitly reexamining elements of “Born Under a Bad Sign,” and implicitly rewriting the events of “No Exit.” In so doing, the fan text offers a competing interpretation of the episodes that makes room for the series’ marginalized female characters (including, but not limited to, Jo) to be active participants in “the working out of their destinies” (Agnes Tomorrow, qtd. in Green et al. 73), rather than to remain passive “bait” for the male characters to employ when needed.

4.4—“APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEPTIVE”: REVISION IN “THIS ONE’S ABOUT THE GIRLS”

In her discussion of the contrast between female characters portrayed in media texts and female characters presented in fanfiction derived from those works, Tomorrow argues that it is “commendable that there have been so many fan stories involving [...] female characters, given the material presented” on television,⁵⁶ and that “this demonstrates the determination of writers to expand on potential barely hinted at” in texts as the producers intended them (qtd. in Green et al. 73). Tomorrow’s emphasis on some fanfiction’s expansion of the latent potential of female characters situates such works as “a literature of reform, not revolt” (Jenkins, “*Star Trek*” 54); unlike Kripke and his creative team, rather than ignoring or removing the disappointing female character to

⁵⁶ Tomorrow makes this argument specifically in reference to *Blake’s 7* and its fandom, but a similar emphasis on “pitting male characters against each other” while “the female characters [...] tak[e] little part in the working out of their destinies” is evident in *Supernatural* canon, as evidenced in the previous section (qtd. in Green et al. 73).

correct the “mistake” of her characterization (Kripke, qtd. in Ausiello, “One Tree Hill with Monsters”),⁵⁷ some fan authors choose to employ the scant canon material provided as the basis for their reworking of problematic ideologies in the series canon.

Silverspotted’s “This One’s About the Girls,” written for the *Supernatural J-Squared Big Bang Challenge* website, is exemplary of this “literature of reform.”⁵⁸ The story fills in the narrative gaps of the lives of two female characters in the series: Jo Harvelle and Ava Wilson. As mentioned in my discussion of “No Exit” and “Born Under a Bad Sign,” nothing is seen of Jo between her first, arguably failed, hunt, and her reappearance in the latter episode. Ava Wilson is a psychic child of Azazel, who is beginning to discover her abilities in her brief appearance in “Hunted” (2.10); she disappears at the end of the episode until “All Hell Breaks Loose: Part 1” (2.21), in which she pretends that she has no idea where she’s been in the intervening months (though it is later revealed that she has spent the time killing rival psychics). Although my primary focus here is on Jo as a reflection of the male hunter-hero characters who dominate the series, the points of congruence with and contrast against Jo’s characterization in both canon and fanfiction exhibited in Ava’s characterization in this story will also be discussed. Demonstrating the “strange mixture of fascination and frustration characteristic of the fannish response,” Silverspotted balances the “desire to revise the program material” with the “desire to remain faithful to those aspects of the show that first captured [her] interests” (Jenkins, “*Star Trek*” 55). Even as she rewrites facets of the

⁵⁷ Though, as discussed above, this impulse could be seen as one reason that so many female fans write slash fanfiction.

⁵⁸ Silverspotted’s story falls into the fanfiction subgenre of femmeslash, defined in the introduction to this thesis. As stated earlier, multiple studies have already been conducted on slash fiction; therefore, I will not be focusing my analysis on the slash aspect of Silverspotted’s story beyond noting the fact that it serves to exclude male characters entirely from primary roles in the narrative, even from the subordinated role of “love interest” that female characters traditionally fill (Green et al., 73).

same episodes to recast Jo as an active character, to offer an alternate explanation for Ava's whereabouts in canon, and to propose a different future for both characters, the author explicitly references specific episodes in textual allusions and her paratextual notes. In the apparatus typical to works of fanfiction, she writes: "**Spoilers:** general season two, but especially *Hunted* and *Born Under a Bad Sign* / **Warnings:** chapter 4 contains a violent altercation with overtones of potential sexual violence (compliant with altercations depicted in *Born Under a Bad Sign*" (original emphasis). These notes not only situate the author's story temporally and geographically within the larger canon of *Supernatural*, but also demonstrate the author's knowledge of (and, through the word "compliant," her intention to work to some extent within) the series canon. Moreover, the notes immediately invoke and limit the parameters of the source text against which the new fan work has been created, both as an "absorption and transformation of" the original (Kristeva 66), in order to enable a transformation of the gender portrayals within them.

The title of Silverspotted's story immediately announces this proposed transformation of *Supernatural* canon. By entitling her work "*This One's About the Girls*" (my emphasis), Silverspotted invokes the original text underpinning her work (the canon series), and suggests that, by contrast, it is not about its female characters. Busse argues that "the feminist impetus lies in the way women manipulate and co-opt media representations" ("Fandom and Feminism" 104); accordingly, although the story parallels the events of the latter half of Season 2, it does so through the perspective of two female characters rather than the two Winchester brothers. As Silverspotted wrote in a personal communication to me about this work of fanfiction, the impetus for this and her other

works is both to elaborate on “characters who [she] want[s] to know more about” and to “‘correct’ the text” (Silverspotted, “Re: Thesis Questions”). She continues,

I try to centre female characters in my writing, for [...] women are often underrepresented in the source material (*Supernatural* being a good example). In the case of *Supernatural*, I wrote fic about the female characters because I wanted to know more about them than the show told us [...]. I think that *Supernatural* had problematic portrayals of women from the very start, but that this became worse as the seasons progressed. (Silverspotted, “Re: Thesis Questions”)

As Kaplan argues, “readers of [a] piece of fan fiction can be assumed to be familiar with the source text and can therefore have knowledge” of canonical events “that need not ever be explicitly stated in the fan fiction” (148). By invoking “Hunted” (2.10) in her notes and by making central to her story Jo’s life as a hunter, Silverspotted implicitly invokes Ellen’s comment to Sam in the episode that, “after working that job with you boys” in Philadelphia—a reference to “No Exit”—Jo “decided she wanted to keep on hunting” (“Hunted”). Silverspotted’s story thus both “draws the reader [...] beyond [the] textual boundaries” of the series (which presents its narrative primarily through the experiences of the Winchesters) in order to “reclaim feminine interests from the margins of [this] ‘masculine’ text” (Jenkins, “*Star Trek*” 44), and fills in narrative gaps in the source text, which references Jo’s hunting, but keeps it off screen.

The H.H. Holmes haunting in “No Exit” provides the impetus for Jo’s decision to hunt in both the series canon and this work of fanfiction. Though making use of the source material offered in the series, Silverspotted overwrites Jo’s victim role presented

in “No Exit” by recreating the character as competent and self sufficient as a hunter: “She’s been on the road long enough now to have a routine, knows which coffee shops are likely to have free newspapers and how to trick library computers into letting her on the internet. She’s become confident with her weapons, especially the knife in her boot” (“About the Girls”).⁵⁹ Notable in this quotation is the present perfect form when referencing Jo’s hunting skills. Rather than disregarding what Stein calls the “expectations created by canon” by portraying Jo as always having been a strong hunter (248), Silverspotted writes in rejoinder to the canonical characterization of Jo by suggesting she has developed her skills over time since the events of “No Exit.”

In Silverspotted’s text, the first case Jo investigates—a return to and reassertion of the author role which she is denied in “No Exit”— is that of “a happy couple tragically torn apart, a sensational story of blood-spattered sheets” (Silverspotted, “About the Girls”). The case directly references the conclusion of “Hunted,” wherein the Winchester brothers discover this very scene at Ava’s house. Certain that “this is a case of demonic possession,” Jo “decides to risk a search for Ava,” and finds her “at the Greyhound terminal.” After determining that Ava was, but is no longer, possessed, Jo promises to “do [her] best to help” Ava get out of the town and away from the police’s questions (“About the Girls”). The quick, effective, and successful discovery of Ava’s former possession and current location rewrites Jo’s failure in “No Exit,” wherein she attempts to rescue Teresa, but her presence is of no help as she has likewise been captured (“No Exit”). Silverspotted actively answers and reacts to *Supernatural* in her revision of Jo’s unsuccessful hunt with a successful case that is not dependant on the Winchesters’

⁵⁹ As the fanfiction works under discussion in this chapter are posted uniquely online, no pagination is available for citation purposes.

intervention. Furthermore, by situating her fanfiction against events presented in the series—or, to use Bakhtin’s terms, “against the background of other [...] utterances on the same theme” (280-81)—Silverspotted expands a canon case to make Jo more effective than the Winchesters. As noted above, the brothers discover the murder scene at Ava’s at the end of “Hunted”; in the subsequent episode “Playthings” (2.11), it is revealed that they have spent the intervening month between episodes searching for Ava without success.

Throughout the story, the two female characters are, to use Kaplan’s terms, “in constant dialogue with each other [and] with the source text” (143). Engaging in the same manner of “responsive understanding [...] that participates in the formulation of discourse” that Bakhtin discusses (280), Silverspotted initially makes use of both characters’ canonical personas in a series of contrasts between the two. Ava states in “Hunted” that she is “a secretary from Peoria and [...] not part of anything” supernatural, and Jo is presented in “Everybody Loves a Clown” as somewhat of a tomboy; accordingly, in “This One’s About the Girls,” Ava “methodically fold[s] lady’s dress shirts so the collars are all perfectly displayed” instead of hurrying to avoid the police investigation, while Jo “grabs everything nonperishable she can find” along with “the salt from the cupboard” which, in the show’s mythos, can be used to ward a room against spirits and demons (Silverspotted, “About the Girls”). Refigured as an active hunter in the fanfiction work, Jo’s characterization demonstrates the greatest reform from her canonical counterpart. No longer, as Kripke describes her, “the girl next door, [...] the little sister” with an “attitude [of] ‘How can I help you?’” (qtd. in Ausiello, “One Tree Hill With Monsters”), Jo “enjoys this role [of a hunter] she has taken. Night hunts,

mostly, and simple one-person jobs, needing more cunning and planning than firepower” (Silverspotted, “About the Girls Furthermore, Silverspotted’s characterization of Jo and Ava figures both as what Cixous would call “whole and living wom[en]” who do not need to “recognize [...] the male partner” (79); as a result, the depiction of both characters in the fanfiction text rejects the categories into which female characters are pigeonholed in the series. The author’s revisioning of Jo as a hunter breaks the binary of good female passivity (either victims of supernatural threats or home-keeping female hunters) and evil female activity (the demons like Meg and Ruby or the self-serving, mercenary figures like Bela) and, as a femmeslash text, rejects her intended series role as Dean’s love interest. Finally, unlike other female hunters in the series who embody a “fiercely maternal quality” (Kripke, qtd. in “*Supernatural*”), Jo only “plays the mother” (Silverspotted, “About the Girls”). The performance implicit in the description of the action suggests that it is not a role with which Jo comfortably identifies, in contrast to her self-identification with the role of hunting: when speaking of herself and Sam, Jo states, “[w]e’re both... hunters,” recognizing no distinction between their roles. By contrast to the fan-added activity on Jo’s part, however, Ava still initially appears to be passive. In “Hunted,” when Ava offers to help Sam rescue Dean, she is told to “go back to [her] fiancé” because she’ll “be safe there”; similarly in Silverspotted’s fanfiction work, though she has no fiancé to return to, “[a]ll Ava can do is watch” as Jo prepares to depart on a dangerous hunt, because her implicit role in their partnership is that of domestic and secretary (“About the Girls”).

In these ways, the story at first can be seen to reinforce many of the problematic gender roles in the original text that it attempts to rewrite. In a seeming recapitulation of a

reductive gender role binary, Jo, fulfilling the traditionally male (as it is expressed in the series) role of hunting, is constantly “disheveled [...] in yesterday’s mud and bloodstained clothes”; her self-definition as a hunter explicitly aligns herself with the series’ male characters by presenting her position as equal to that of Sam; and even her name (Joanna Beth) is abbreviated to “Jo”—a homonym of the male-gendered name “Joe” (“About the Girls”). By contrast, Ava looks “like the proper secretary she is, all crisp lines, neat hair, [and] professional makeup”; watches reality TV and romantic comedies; works temping jobs to support Jo’s hunting; and takes on domestic roles such as making breakfast in bed for Jo (“About the Girls”).

However, while the two female characters seem to be gendered differently, ultimately, neither contrasting version of feminine agency presented is condemned or figured as lesser than the other. Moreover, that two female characters are shown to embody seemingly disparate roles highlights the fact that nothing in Jo’s disheveled appearance or her role as a hunter is *essentially* masculine, nor is Ava’s domesticity and secretarial work inherently feminine. The story plays on the cultural associations of appropriate gender roles (associations which are echoed to some extent in the series), and underscores the overly reductive nature of assumptions made along this binary line of thinking. Moreover, while Ava is an exemplar of “comforting normalcy” in contrast to Jo’s hunting activity, she is neither the passive victim as she appears to be at the end of “Hunted,” nor is she the active (and enthusiastic) murderer that she becomes in “All Hell Breaks Loose: Part 1” (Silverspotted, “About the Girls”). Instead, Silverspotted proposes through Ava a different manner of agency that occupies a middle ground between victim and hunter:

Jo's been determined to protect Ava from the evils of the supernatural, from the plans of the Yellow Eyed Demon and the effects of possession. But [...] Jo realizes that Ava can indeed protect herself. [...] Jo has been misled into thinking of Ava as weak and fragile [...]. But [Ava is] a confident young woman prepared to deal with the challenges that face her. ("About the Girls")

Through her revision of Jo's character and the traditional gender roles of hunters in the series, Silverspotted exposes both the program's problematic gender ideology and the desire from *Supernatural's* overwhelmingly female audience to see stronger female characters. Jo initially views Ava in much the same way that Dean and Sam—and by extension, the audience who follows the story as filtered through their perspective—initially view Jo: as weak, inherently helpless, and in need of protection. In this way, the fanfiction text can be seen to refute two distinct but connected binary modes of thinking. Canon/fandom interaction is frequently figured along strict notions of what constitutes appropriate reading and writing strategies. To frame this issue in Bakhtin's terms, although the fans are both readers and writers, they are enjoined to "passively understand" the prescribed message of a source text, rather than "actively answer and react" to it (280). Given that this binary, as previously noted, is frequently as much a gendered division as it is one of producer/fan, gender is implicated in the division of reading/writing strategies between "fan" and "author." Acting as authors (and therefore breaking from the first binary of reading/writing), fans not only offer a revision of canon through fanfiction texts such as "This One's About the Girls," but also may propose a more subtle rereading (and revision) of gendered divisions. Through its revision of both Ava and Jo, not only does Silverspotted's stories rewrite the program's implicit assertion

that women cannot function as effectively as hunters as men can as expressed in “No Exit” and “Born Under a Bad Sign,” but it also demonstrates that female characters don’t *need* to adopt the (male) role of hunting in order to be strong, heroic characters.

4.5—CONCLUSION: DIFFERENT CRITIQUES AND THE PROBLEM OF LOVE

Silverspotted’s work of fanfiction is by no means unique in its focus on female characters to the exclusion of, or at least as equal to, the canonically central male figures, though it is beyond the scope of this project to examine other examples in the same level of detail. Medie’s “Of Handbaskets and Highways” imagines a similar narrative reinterpretation of *Supernatural*, with Jo and an original female character, Nora, hunting alongside (and frequently besting) the Winchester brothers. Apocalypsos’s “Deep Breaths,” produced for this year’s *Big Bang Challenge*, acts in much the same way as Silverspotted’s story, save that it rewrites the two canonical mother figures of Mary Winchester and Ellen Harvelle, rather than Jo and Ava.⁶⁰ Though not entirely unusual, these stories are few and far between in the *Supernatural* fandom: after slash fanfiction (both *Supernatural*-based and Real Person Slash), the most common kind of story produced for the community is genfic, a term used to identify fiction in which no romantic relationships are suggested or alluded to; these stories instead tend to focus on new cases for the Winchesters to investigate.⁶¹ Despite the tendency of these stories to

⁶⁰ Like Silverspotted’s rejection of Jo’s role as Dean’s love interest alluded to in “Born Under a Bad Sign,” Apocalypsos rewrites Mary’s choice to agree to make a deal with a demon in order to live the normal life of wife and mother presented in “In the Beginning” (4.03). As she writes in the summary of her story: “Azazel offered Mary a choice, and she did what she had to do. She looked him in the eyes when he offered to bring her dead boyfriend back to life, and she told him no.”

⁶¹ On the *Supernatural Wiki*, fan author Missyjack itemizes by genre the *Big Bang* fics produced between 2007-2010. Her post was written before the completion of the 2010 *Big Bang* cycle, and so her statistics are based on the summaries that had been proposed at the time of her writing. According to her breakdown, of the fanfiction posted over the past three years, 66.25% was slash, 27.5% gen, and 6.25% het. While the

mimic the “male-centered,” mission based narratives of a typical episode (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 115), this is not to say that the stories themselves do not offer up different forms of critique. *What* the stories critique from the original series, however, demonstrates that fans and their fictions offer “less of a uniform force of resistance and instead [are] much more differentiated” (Busse and Hellekson, Introduction 22). In “The Syncretist,” Newredshoes makes use of history alluded to in “Route 666” (1.13) both to write an entirely new case and to recast the character of Cassie introduced in the episode as a character actively in charge of her life and relationship with Dean. Dayspring imagines in “Infrangible Road” a variation of canon in which John gave up hunting when Sam and Dean were children, both critiquing the canon character’s manic obsession and, though the course of the story, aspects of the war in Iraq. Even those texts that most reproduce the program’s narrative and character dynamics are still “critically responding to texts” in that female authors are “adopting male characters and role-playing them in ways that explore what it might mean to be masculine” (Thomas). This is not to say that the stories solve the problems inherent in the original text, as this would be an idealistic generalization of fanfiction: in fact, some of the stories produced by the fandom reinforce gender roles and the misogynistic attitudes of characters. All of these stories, however, challenge “the traditional notion of the single, individual author” through their presentation of alternate versions of characters and canon that “readers and viewers think they know” (Thomas; Pugh 69). In so doing, they force a reevaluation of the original texts by presenting in a recognizable context “new expression[s], meaning[s], [and] message[s]” (Kozinski, qtd. in Tushnet 662).

slash category includes femmeslash fiction, Missyjack goes on to note that only two works in 2007 and three in 2010 are femmeslash; no fanfiction in this category was written for the 2008 or 2009 cycles.

Jenkins argues that fanfiction is “a literature of reform, not revolt” (“*Star Trek*” 54). Based on this view, it would be reductive to suggest that only fanfiction that is entirely female-centric in contrast to male-dominated media texts can be said to demonstrate critical thought on the part of fan authors. Many fans “find empowerment in their consumption of popular culture,” and they in turn write fanfiction because “they like the source material so much that they want more of it,” and the canon of the original text is “of paramount importance” to the formulation of new fictions (Harris, “A Sociology”; Pugh 232). The so-called “love angle” emphasized here does not, however, automatically equate to the fans’ interpellation to the media and the meanings producers prescribe through their texts. As Jenkins notes, “if these programs did not frustrate fans, their desires would be satisfied by the original producers” and there would be no creative impetus for fanfiction (“Poachers and Stormtroopers”). Overemphasizing fans’ affinity with an original work runs the risk of ignoring the frustration that counterbalances this fascination; the perceived narrative flaws that require intervention, expansion, and revision through fanfiction; and the line between “dominating” and “being dominated by” a text (Flynn 270) As Jenkins argues, “[f]andom is not about Bourdieu’s notion of holding art at a distance [...] it’s about having control and mastery over art” (Jenkins, “Matt Hills” 23). The contention that fans have “control” and “mastery” over a text speaks to their role not as blindly interpellated subjects to the media, slavishly “maintain[ing] and increase[ing] the market for the original work” (Pugh 232), but instead to the role of free, creative agents who, recognizing their agency, “have given [them]selves license to do whatever [they] want” with the original text independent of the producers’ original intentions for it. As one fan author writes, “[i]f a story moves or

amuses us, we share it; if it bothers us, we write a sequel; if it disturbs us, we may even re-write it!” (Kim Bannister, qtd. in Green et al. 86-87). Allowing for the differences in critiques offered within various fan texts, and whether or not they “coincide with the values of the dominant, rather than the subordinate culture,” the practice of writing fanfiction “qualifies as a resistant artistic practice because, if nothing else, it is the means by which women write against the media products they consume” by adding to or overwriting aspects of the canonical narratives with their own texts (Derecho 69, 72).

The discourse around fan cultures and their textual productions is “already formulated around these axes of active/passive, resistance/co-opted.” (Jenkins, “Matt Hills” 11-12). In order to eliminate the binary of fan activity as either resistant or evidence of their interpellation, it is beneficial to return once more to the concept of the dialogue in respect to fanfiction that I proposed earlier in this work. Fan authors alter and critique original works through their own fictions; nevertheless, their desire to propose different ethical or ideological points of view through their stories is of necessity balanced against their use of recognizable characters, situations, and story elements. Without recognizable aspects of the original work, fanfiction would not be *fanfiction* at all, and could not reflect different perspectives or possibilities on the source text. Cinda Gillilan argues “that fandom itself is a ‘feminine’ and ‘liberated’ space, a protected location for oppositional or alternative constructions of dominant discourse” (qtd. in Harris, “Theorizing Fandom”). While offering these alternative meanings in response to the original text, the fanfictions are just that: responses in dialogue, rather than wholly separate, retaliatory monologues. Though offering rereading of characters and ideologies presented in the source texts, fanfiction does so with conscious reference to “the

background of other [...] utterances on the same theme,” both canonical and fan-authored, which are “made up of contradictory opinions, points of view, and value judgements” (Bakhtin 281).

As Jenkins writes, “[f]ans reject the idea of a definitive version produced, authorized, and regulated by some media conglomerate. Instead, fans envision a world where all of us can participate in the creation and circulation of central cultural myths” (“Poachers and Stormtroopers” my emphasis). Removing the binary of resistant/co-opted practice from discussions of fandom activity not only demonstrates that works of fanfiction offer more insight into original texts in their points of congruence and difference, but also permits a space in which producers may recognize and implement in their own works the critiques and new narrative possibilities offered in fanfiction responses. As a result, the removal of this binary allows for the extension of “all of us” referenced in the above quotation to include both producers and fans in creative participation to make new cultural meanings, including (but not limited to) more subtle and varied readings of gender. Through such “productive interaction” between reader/fantext and producer/original text, the different perspectives and marginalized groups recognized in fanfiction works may ultimately be brought out of the margins of officially produced culture.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Dear Tellers of Stories (regardless of medium): Without an audience, you are nothing. You are talking to yourself, you are daydreaming [...]. Without an audience, you are a tree falling in the forest with no one to hear. Stories are about communication, and communication requires at least two parties.

—blushingflower, qtd. in TheFourthVine, “Professional Writers vs. The People Who Love Their Work”

We’re making the show for the fans; we’re not making the show for the network.

—Eric Kripke, qtd. in Ausielo, “We Won’t Be One Tree Hill with Monsters!”

5.1—INTRODUCTION: WORKS IN DIALOGUE

The previous three chapters have examined fanfiction from the positions of both those who study it and those who write it in response to other texts. After proposing a shift in terminology from the archaic “passivity” or the “poaching” metaphor (which, while influential, is problematically suggestive of illegality) to the concept of a dialogue between fan and producer, I demonstrated how fanfiction texts may serve as rejoinders that expose problematic ideologies that lie behind “canon” works, through revision of the original narratives. Through the analysis of the ways in which these fantexts overwrite specifically gendered ideologies of the primary texts to open up new spaces for heretofore marginalized voices, I have argued that, while fanfiction is to some extent “about love” of an original work or universe, it is “not just about love” (Yonmei). Love alone for a text would be satisfied purely by the text itself, while the proliferation of fanfiction indicates a desire for something more or different than the original stories can offer to a diverse audience, since those original works “attempt to court a ‘mainstream’ [...] audience” (Jenkins, “Poachers and Stormtroopers”). As one fan writes of fanfiction in response to an online post,

I've written fanfic because I want to show how the ethics of a text are compromised by the text itself. I've written fanfic because I wanted to apply Donna Haraway's philosophical work to my favourite videogame. I've written fanfic because I found an existing retcon [retroactive continuity: new details added to a serialized text to alter the interpretation of previous events] really, really unsatisfactory. I've written fanfic because the original text was interesting but full of terrible plot holes. Love is sure as hell not all; it's often intellect, it's critical engagement. (Thene, qtd. in Yonmei)

The element of critical engagement mentioned by Thene is what separates fan texts from mere recapitulation of the ideologies expressed in original texts—texts that are geared toward a “consensus narrative” that “avoid[s] ideas [...] too controversial or innovative to gain wide acceptance”—or from being viewed as “simply an outgrowth of the marketing process” (Jenkins, “Poachers and Stormtroopers”). In its appropriation and alteration of textual elements, fanfiction moves characters and narrative possibilities “in different directions” and “rework[s] mainstream meanings” (Pugh 232; MacDonald 135). Even when the fanfiction works parallel the source texts—as with many *Supernatural* “casefics,” for example—fan authors still refute the notion of a sole authorial voice that creates while the fans remain silent and passively entertained. Through the creation of alternate texts, fans “reject the idea of a definitive version” of a text, a version that is inviolate and therefore unsuitable for continuation or alteration (Jenkins, “Poachers and Stormtroopers”). Regardless of an individual story's content, fanfiction is still distinct from (though written in reference to) the version of the text that is written and produced by a team of writers and producers and distributed by a media conglomerate. These

fanfiction works thus serve as evidence that although the fan authors “read and loved the story that the writer” or writers created, they “didn’t think about that story the way the writer wanted [them] to think” about it (Yonmei). Instead, fan authors find spaces for new narratives, points for revision, and a place in which to engage their active understanding and critical engagement through participating, as Bakhtin would call it, “in the formulation of discourse” between texts—the source text, and fan-authored responses to it (280).

As Henry Jenkins notes in his interview with Matt Hills, studies of fan culture tend to make use of a discourse “formulated around [...] axes of active/passive, resistance/co-opted” (11-12), with fanfiction figured as representative of fans’ resistant response to the dominant discourse, rather than a means of engaging in a dialogue with it. While some fandom studies attempt to alter the discourse that figures fandom as either resistant or co-opted by alluding to the “potential for communication” fanfiction presents (Jenkins, “Matt Hills” 27), what is rarely addressed is *who* it is that fans are communicating with through the creation of these new and alternative narratives. Inter-fan communication and feedback through fan communities (both online and in person) have been discussed in works such as Bacon-Smith’s *Enterprising Women*, Brooker’s *Using the Force*, and Jenkins’s *Textual Poachers*, among others. Fanfiction rejoinders, however, need not turn away entirely from the creators of the original text that engenders dialogue with (and within) the fan community, for the “primary interaction medium” between author(s) of source texts and fan authors “is the [source] text” itself (Wexelblat 209) As I have proposed throughout this thesis, Bakhtin’s discussion of texts as “rejoinder[s] in a given dialogue” is a useful model for considerations of fanfiction, but

such fanfiction rejoinders constitute only half of the dialogue “in the totality of the conversation” (274).

In this conclusion, I will turn briefly to the other side of the dialogue in order to highlight the increasing relevance of the concept of dialogue to the creation of popular media. Creators and the source texts obviously inspire fanfiction, but they also can respond to it. While it may be argued that the incorporation of fan practices into mainstream media production is a means of neutralizing the alternative narratives potentially offered through fanfiction, I read this incorporation instead as a willingness on the part of producers to, much like their fans, enter into dialogue with other texts and points of view—a willingness which in fact illustrates the influence that fans and their texts can hold. Through an examination of *Supernatural* episodes and the dialogue between the show’s creative team and their fan audience (as presented in the series itself), I will show from the other side of the conversation that the resistance/incorporation paradigm is not the only model for discussions of fanfiction. In that model, one side of this theoretical binary implies a rejection of the text, and the other a complete subsumption by it, and neither permits a space for conscious participation on both halves of the fan/creator dyad. Jenkins argues that, “[f]or fans, consumption naturally sparks production, [and] reading generates writing, until the terms seem logically inseparable” (“*Star Trek*” 41). But in considering *Supernatural*’s implicit acknowledgement of its slash fiction community, its explicit address to fandom, and its fan and author characters, I contend that the argument I have made for fanfiction throughout this thesis applies also to the show’s creative team. *Supernatural* demonstrates a rejection of the hierarchical relationship between producer and fans in which only the former holds the authorial

position; instead, the series draws from multiple texts and authors, fan and “official,” in the creation of a new, mutually constructed narrative.

5.2—“WHY DO THESE PEOPLE ASSUME WE’RE GAY?”: FAN RESPONSE AND RESPONSE TO FANS

Alan Wexelblat contends that the “primary interaction medium between author and fan is the text” (209), a model that suggests a dialogic interaction through texts (though, unlike what I have proposed throughout this thesis, Wexelblat considers the interaction of fan and author in reference to the source text alone, rather than through the creation of new texts that respond to it).⁶² Considering the notion of mutual construction that arises out of such interaction, Cheryl Harris argues that “[f]ans come to see themselves as ‘owners’ of texts (be they stars, shows, books, etc) and believe that they contribute to the production of the text over time” (“A Sociology” 48). Harris’s interjection of the term “believe” suggests a level of doubt as to the actuality of fan contribution to a text; even if fans do contribute to a show’s production, previous examples of such fan influence are strictly at the level of production—that is, the continued production of the media text versus its cancellation.⁶³ The example that *Supernatural* offers as a medium of “interaction between author and fan” (Wexelblat 209), however, is different: the show itself has become a space in which fans’ desires for

⁶² Although Wexelblat’s article does make reference to fanfiction, it is not the primary object of discussion. Instead, his consideration of fandom is focused primarily on fan-author interaction through message boards, which forbid the posting of fanfiction or story ideas.

⁶³ Wexelblat notes that “active fandom[s] [...] help a show which does not do well in the standard (Nielsen) ratings” (211), using the original *Star Trek* series, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Quantum Leap* as examples of shows kept on (or returned to) the air through organized fan activities (211). Henry Jenkins and Camille Bacon-Smith also discuss the same series and the fan cultures that preserved them in *Textual Poachers* and *Science Fiction Culture*, respectively. More recent examples of this kind of successful fandom campaign include the renewal after cancellation of *Family Guy* due to high DVD sales, fan response to the cancellation of *Jericho* which prompted the network to order another 7 episodes, and the campaign by *Firefly* fans which, while not resulting in the renewal of the series itself, helped to prompt the creation of the *Firefly* film, *Serenity* (“Uncanceled”; “Done The Impossible”).

specific narratives—desires which are expressed through the critical response of fanfiction—are “reflect[ed] back onto the canon of the show” (Sivarajan par. 1.3). Through the reflection of fanfiction tropes in episodes of the series itself—in both allusions to and direct acknowledgement of fandom—the series displays a joint construction of the story by creator Eric Kripke and the fan authors who respond to the show. In other words, the series itself presents an excellent case in point for the way in which fanfiction serves to highlight the dialogic nature of the relationship between artistic consumption and production.

Despite the number of authors in favour of fanfiction noted previously, the expression of support for such fan creativity is frequently tempered with the caveat that the authors themselves do not wish to see the fan works produced. The qualification is one typically framed in terms of legality; fanfiction itself occupies a tenuously legal space in its appropriative basis, but original authors nevertheless “exercise great care to avoid” even the appearance of narrative “contamination” from exposure to fan-authored texts (Wexelblat 220). Of pro-fanfiction authors who express this hesitation about fanfiction dissemination, Sarah Rees Brennan states that reading fanfiction “can get writers into nasty legal situations” (“Professional Author Fanfic Policies”). Terry Pratchett makes Brennan’s allusion to legal issues explicit with his comment about *Discworld* fanfiction, that he’d prefer it “not [be] put where [he] can stumble over it, just in case some joker decides to claim [he’s] ‘stolen their idea’” (qtd. in Pugh 125). Nor is this outlook limited to authors of print works. As the creator of the *Babylon 5* television series Joseph Michael Straczynski states of fanfiction:

Obviously, I can't say anything officially here [on the fan-run and fan-populated message board] saying "Go write fanfic to your heart's content."

[...] However, let me be ABSOLUTELY clear in this: I have NEVER said, "Don't write it." All I have EVER said is, "Don't put it in a place where I can see it or stumble over it." (qtd. in Wexelblat 215).

As Wexelblat characterizes this outlook on fanfiction, the "(permissive) first model has to be counterposed with the second (restrictive) model" in order for the author to maintain "authorial control over the text" in the face of the alternate stories that fans propose through their textual rejoinders (215).⁶⁴ It is this second restrictive model of authorial response to fan authors that is absent from the interactions between fan and creator in *Supernatural*. The absence of these restrictions on fanfiction likewise eliminates the "single authority or source of direction" of meaning in a text (Wexelblat 212). Instead, *Supernatural* canon and fandom exhibit a creator–fan dialogue enacted through both fanfiction responses to the original text, and the original text's response to fanfiction.

As one example of the editorial decisions made on the show in response to fandom criticism, the character of Joanna Beth Harvelle, discussed at length in the

⁶⁴ The necessity of keeping fan ideas out of sight imposed by Joseph Michael Straczynski and other authors was borne out with the *Babylon 5* episode "Passing Through Gethsemane." The episode was "scuttle[d]" for "over a year" after a fan proposed an idea similar to that which Straczynski had been developing for the episode (Straczynski). Similarly, Marion Zimmer Bradley blurred the boundary between fanfiction and "official" fiction by "gather[ing] the best of" her fans' stories for anthology publication (Bacon-Smith, *Science Fiction Culture* 118), until a fan who had submitted a story threatened to sue unless she was given "equal collaborative and monetary credit" for the novel Zimmer Bradley was working on at the time the story was submitted ("Darkover"). The second example is especially notable as the restrictions placed on *Darkover* fanfiction were not due to a threat to authorial control over the *content* of the source text—Zimmer Bradley states that she does not "feel threatened by stories not consistent with [her] personal vision of Darkover," and in fact welcomes alternative perspectives in fan stories ("Darkover"). Instead, they are imposed due to the risk of losing "several years' work" of Zimmer Bradley's own writing, as well as incurring the cost and "inconvenience of having a lawyer deal with this matter": risks that would prevent not only the fans, but also the original author, from engaging with the world of her creation. (Bradley, qtd. in "Darkover"). Authorial control, in this example, is willingly shared, and only restricted when it may be seized entirely.

previous chapter, was removed in the series after such criticism of her role in the series. Instead of reconceptualizing the character in response to this criticism, as fanfiction like Silverspotted's "This One's About the Girls" does, Kripke introduced two new female characters in the following season, revisiting and "learn[ing] from the mistake[s]" in Jo's character (Ausiello). Discussing the decision to cut one female character and to introduce two others in her stead, Kripke states,

the difference between us and other shows is when *they* make missteps, they say, "Go f--- yourself." When *we* make missteps we pay attention to the fans and we course-correct. [...] [The fans] have very strong opinions, specifically on the females we bring onto the show [...] and that's why we pulled back on the character of Jo. (qtd. in Ausiello, "One Tree Hill With Monsters," original emphasis)

Kripke's awareness of fan dissatisfaction, and the introduction of two female characters who are "fleshed-out [...] in their own right" rather than acting to emphasize the heroism of the male characters in response to this dissatisfaction, indicates a willingness on the part of *Supernatural* producers to engage in a mutual construction of the source text with the fanbase (Ausiello). The creative team "read[s] the boards" on fandom websites, they pay attention to fandom concerns, and they adapt the show and its characters as a reflection of those concerns (Ausiello).

While the interaction between fans and creator is visible in the show in reference to decisions concerning female characters, I argue that the most notable interaction between the series and its fanfiction prior to season 4 (a shift in producer-fan interaction that will be elaborated upon below) is in its encoding of references to slash fanfiction

within the source text. These references demonstrate awareness on the part of the writers and producer of the dominant trends within the *Supernatural* fandom. The majority of fanfiction produced by the fans is slash-based: of the 35,000 fanfiction works listed on the *Supernatural Newsletter* community website between the series pilot in September 2005 and the end of 2009, 58% were slash, and 36% of those slash fiction stories were Wincest (Missyjack, “Slash”).⁶⁵ The first recorded Wincest fanfiction within the *Supernatural* fandom was posted on September 14, 2005—only hours after the pilot episode aired (Missyjack, “Wincest”), and many main actors in the series have mentioned their awareness of Wincest and slash fanfiction in general produced for the fandom.⁶⁶ Catherine Tosenberger argues that slash fanfiction for *Supernatural* is not a “perverse ‘resistance’ to the show’s presumed nonincestuous heteronormativity” but in fact “an actualization of latent textual elements” (par. 1.1). Fans make use of the homosociality of the series’ focus on two brothers—for whom a “long-term committed heterosexual relationship [...] is the transgression” (Tosenberger par. 1.4)—and extrapolate from it textual details in order to generate their slash fiction. Reflecting the transformation of homosociality to homosexuality in the fans’ textual interpretations back into series canon, multiple episodes in the first three seasons involve new characters who, from their

⁶⁵ See the Introduction for definitions of *Supernatural* fandom-specific terms such as “Wincest” and “J2.”

⁶⁶ Jensen Ackles, who plays Dean Winchester, mentioned the subgenre of Wincest by name at the Asylum fan convention in 2007; he attributes his awareness of it to Kim Manners, a former director and executive producer of the show. Jared Padelecki, who plays Sam Winchester, said of fanfiction and Wincest at EyeCon in 2008, “it’s like [...] everyone’s taking a part and they’re not just watching it...and they’re really passionate about the show”; Jim Beaver wore an “I Read Bobby/John” t-shirt at the same convention. Misha Collins, who plays Castiel, has referenced slash fanfiction (and admitted to reading it) at multiple conventions; at the same conventions, he has also asked Jared and Jensen how they felt playing brothers on TV when they were lovers in real life (a reference to J2 RPS fanfiction), and informed another actor on the show that slash is a “great cultural asset.” (See Zubernis and Larsen; Sivarajan; and Missyjack, “Slash”).

external position to the brothers' relationship, immediately read Sam and Dean's interactions as evidence that they are a couple.⁶⁷

The first instance of this misinterpretation, "Bugs" (1.08) comes soon after the Pilot episode and the immediate slash fanfiction response it sparked, though there is no allusion to fans or slash fanfiction made in the episode itself. By contrast, in "Playthings" (2.11), there is a more explicit reference to the fanfiction community when Dean asks of Sam, "[w]hy do these people assume we're gay?" Sam's response, "[w]ell, you are kind of butch; they probably think you're overcompensating," like Dean's question, invokes an absent plurality of people who hold this opinion, rather than the sole woman in the hotel who made the erroneous assumption about the brothers' sexuality in this episode. Although fans are not (yet) explicitly identified in the show as the nameless "they" in these quotations, the implication is present. Moreover, through Sam's suggestion of an alternate rationale for Dean's performance of masculinity, the episode and its writers thereby acknowledge the potential legitimacy of this alternate interpretation of the text. The overt discussion within the series about the relationship that was formerly only inferred by fanfiction authors engages intertextually with (and implicitly validates) the majority of the textual rejoinders produced by the *Supernatural* fan community. This acknowledgement of fan writing practices within the series "poke[s] a little, loving fun, very loving fun," at the fans themselves (Kripke, qtd. in Jester); however, it does not do so to "strip consumers of any rights to participate within their own culture" (Jenkins, "Poachers and Stormtroopers") as the argument which equates fanfiction incorporation to the co-opting of resistant practices suggests. Instead, the acknowledgement is made in

⁶⁷ Episodes from these seasons in which this misinterpretation occurs include: "Bugs" (1.08), "Something Wicked" (1.18), "Playthings" (2.11), and "A Very Supernatural Christmas" (3.08).

rejoinder to fanfiction texts that can, in turn, continue to respond to the episodes that reference the fans' participation.

5.3—"I STRONGLY SUGGEST YOU GET A LIFE": BREAKING WALLS, CROSSING BOUNDARIES

When fan cultures are portrayed in media, the way in which they are presented is often satirical, a "distill[ation] of many popular stereotypes about fans" (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 10).⁶⁸ One popular example of such a portrayal is from an episode of *Saturday Night Live* that was guest-hosted by William Shatner, in which, during a skit "depict[ing] a fan convention," he tells the "Trekkie" characters bombarding him with questions to "[g]et a life, will you people? [...] I mean, for crying out loud, it's just a TV show!" (qtd. in Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 11, 10).⁶⁹ In *Supernatural*, a similar division between fans who are "fascinat[ed] with [a] particular" source text and the creator of said text is expressed in the characters of Chuck Shurley and Becky Rosen (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 11): respectively, the writer of a novel series also entitled *Supernatural*, and a fan who writes slash fiction about the two main characters in the novels. The portrayal of Chuck and Becky, however, does as much to blur the division between fan writer and series writer as it does to "poke [...] very loving fun," at the fan community (Kripke, qtd. in Jester). The fact that the same episodes that poke fun at the fans aim similar mockery toward the series itself also indicates an equality of creative investment in the show between the creators and the fan authors.

⁶⁸ Even when the portrayal of fans is a sympathetic one, the stereotypes of obsession with textual details or "hav[ing] little or no 'life'" outside of the source text are still recapitulated (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 11). See, for example, the fan characters in television series such as *The Big Bang Theory* and *Frasier* and films such as *Fanboys* and *Free Enterprise*.

⁶⁹ As Jenkins goes on to discuss, this portrayal of fans is not restricted to comedy alone, as a similar perspective on fans as "misfits and 'crazies'" is presented in news coverage of fan conventions. Moreover, he notes, William Shatner "repeatedly expressed many of these same sentiments in public interviews and clearly meant what he said to his fans" in the context of the SNL skit (*Textual Poachers* 11).

Wexelblat contends that “the degree to which the writer can be identified with any particular character” in a given series “is always uncertain”; fans, however, commonly “select one particular character in a text and identify him with the author” (218). Despite Wexelblat’s hesitation as to the validity of equating any one character with the writer, the metafictional elements of the episodes in which Chuck Shurley appears makes it difficult *not* to draw that connection between the series writers and the character. Not only is the character the author of a book series of the same name as the show—a book series comprised of novels with the same titles as the episodes from seasons 1-3—but also his pen name for the novels, “Carver Edlund,” is a combination of the names of two of the series’ writers: Jeremy Carver and Ben Edlund (Missyjack, “Chuck Shurley”; Sivarajan par. 3.4). Further aligning the character with the series creators, at the Salute to Supernatural convention in 2009 Rob Benedict, the actor who plays Chuck Shurley, described the character as an avatar for series creator Eric Kripke (Missyjack, “Chuck Shurley”). The identification of the series writers with an author figure—one who is, moreover, first presented as a prophet writing a new gospel and is ultimately revealed to be God (5.22 “Swan Song”)—seems to further emphasize the hierarchical divide between creator and fan.

This division, however, is one that is undercut when Chuck is first introduced in “The Monster at the End of this Book” (4.18), the first episode in the series in which the fandom community is explicitly referenced. During an investigation of a potential haunting in a comic book store, Sam and Dean encounter a character who, based on their questions, concludes that they’re fans who are “LARPing”:

DEAN. What is “LARPing”?

MAN BEHIND COUNTER. [...]. Live-Action Role-Play! And pretty hardcore, too. [...] You're asking questions like the building's haunted. Like those guys from the books. What are they called? Uh... *Supernatural*. Two guys, use fake IDs with rock aliases, hunt down ghosts, demons, vampires. What are their names? Uh... Steve and Dirk? Uh, Sal and Dane? (“The Monster at the End of this Book”).

After being made aware of the novel series that details their lives, the brothers track down the author, Chuck Shurley. The author, like the character who first directs Sam and Dean to the novels, also believes at first that the brothers are merely die-hard fans of his work. In an echo of William Shatner's comments on *Saturday Night Live*, Chuck states,

CHUCK. Look, uh... I appreciate your enthusiasm. Really, I do. It's, uh, it's always nice to hear from the fans. But, uh, for your own good, I strongly suggest you get a life. (*he tries to shut the door, but DEAN puts out a hand to stop it*).

DEAN. See, here's the thing. We have a life. You've been using it to write your books. (*He shoves the door open and enters, forcing CHUCK to back up into the house*). (“The Monster at the End of this Book”)

The preceding quotations suggest that the show and its characters are in fact *challenging* the ostensibly rigid binary of fan/creator through the introduction of author and fan characters. In the first quotation, for instance, the confusion of the Shurley's characters' names with “Sal and Dane” references Kerouac's *On the Road* and its main characters

Sal and Dean. Eric Kripke cites the novel as being an inspiration for the series, and alludes to the novel in *Supernatural* not only through the names of the series' main characters, but also through the road-trip format that is the basis of the show (Wright par. 2; Keveney). Kripke's acknowledgement of the source stories that inform *Supernatural* points to the inherent intertextuality of all works, including his own series. Like works of fanfiction, the show "invoke[s] discourses, symbols, and narratives" from a variety of sources (Tosenberger par. 5.1), signaling its derivation from—and, accordingly, its fan appreciation of—both Kerouac's novel and tales from "myth and folklore" (Sivarajan par. 1.1). Therefore, the intertextual basis of the series echoes the creative methodology of fanfiction—in that elements from an original work are used as inspiration, appropriated, and then transformed to make a new text.

In the second quotation, the distinction between author and fan community is further eliminated, as the brothers' meeting with the creator of the novel series "shatter[s] the barrier between fandom and text" (Sivarajan par. 3.4). Chuck's comments echo those of William Shatner, which position writers and actors in a superior position to fans who can be shut out and ignored at the author's discretion. Dean's response that he and Sam "have a life" ("The Monster at the End of this Book," my emphasis), and his forcible entry into Chuck's house eliminates this hierarchy: the author cannot shut out his "fans" through a "one-way flow of information" through his texts (Sivarajan par. 4.1); instead, he must acknowledge that despite being the "official" writer, his voice is merely one of many and, as a result, "his ideas [...] wield no more weight than any other[s]" (Wexelblat 217). In effect, the series makes explicit the dialogic relationship between consumption and production, as Sam and Dean are here seen simultaneously as fans of Chuck's novels

and as the creative source for them. This dual positioning of the main characters “give[s] fans a greater stake” in the creation of source texts, “and mak[es] them more equal participants in the larger conversation between mediums and audiences” (Sivarajan par. 4.1): without Sam and Dean’s lives, Chuck’s novels would not exist—a tacit acknowledgement that the fans are what keeps a show going (an acknowledgement made explicit in the second epigraph to this chapter). This connection between the characters’ lives and written texts also conflates the roles of author and fan-author, as Chuck, in using Sam and Dean’s lives to write his books is, in fact, writing Real Person Fanfiction (RPF) much like a large subsection of the *Supernatural* fandom.

The introduction of Chuck and Becky’s characters breaks the fourth wall between series and audience, a division which typically “applies to fandom as well: fans are fans, producers are producers, and separation is expected to be maintained. The creative boundaries parallel the social boundaries” (Straw, qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen). The conflation of producer-author and fan author in Chuck’s character, however, demonstrates a willingness on the parts of the creators “to appreciate and participate in the transformative culture” of fandom and fanfiction, and to continue the dialogue instigated by fanfiction texts by creating their own rejoinders to them (Sivrajan par. 4.3). This willingness to make use of appropriative and transformative writing practices typically attributed to fanfiction is further borne out in some of the minor characters in the series. At the *Supernatural* fan convention presented in “The Real Ghostbusters” (5.09), two characters who are role playing as Sam and Dean, Barnes and Demien, are named for the moderators of the *Television Without Pity* fan forums for *Supernatural* (Missyjack, “Demian and Barnes”). That the two characters are also a couple

demonstrates an inversion of the typical direction of fanfiction; making use of the same transformative culture as fanfiction, Eric Kripke can be said here to be writing fanfiction about his fans—*slash* fanfiction, no less (Sivrajan par. 4.3). Similarly, in “I Believe the Children Are Our Future” (5.06), the character of Julia Wright is introduced. Though unlike Demian and Barnes’ namesakes, it has not been confirmed by the show’s creators whether or not the character is named for the Julia M. Wright whose article, “‘Latchkey Hero’: Masculinity, Class and the Gothic in Eric Kripke’s *Supernatural*,” is quoted throughout this thesis; given the example of Demian and Barnes, however, it does not seem an unreasonable stretch to make, and the connection is one that has also been proposed by other fans (Chan).

The most explicit reference to fans, however, is clearly in the fan character of Becky Rosen. First introduced in “Sympathy for the Devil” (5.01), Becky is one of the few female *Supernatural* fans portrayed in the series. She also is shown to write Wincest fanfiction and to keep a *Livejournal*, much like a significant amount of actual *Supernatural* fans (“Sympathy for the Devil”). Initially, Becky seems to embody the negative stereotypes ascribed to fans in parodies such as the *Saturday Night Live* sketch. When first contacted by Chuck, Becky angrily states, “I’m a fan, but I really don’t appreciate being mocked. I know that *Supernatural* is just a book, ok? I know the difference between fantasy and reality” (“Sympathy for the Devil”), a contention that speaks against assumptions that fans have no life apart from their fandoms. The moment Chuck tells her that the novels are real, however, Becky screams, “I *knew* it!” and thereby reinforces the very stereotype she initially appears to quash (“Sympathy for the Devil”). Although her portrayal as a (negatively) stereotypical fan initially seems to imply a

negative outlook on the fandom on the part of the producers, Becky's character is unique among recurring female characters in the series in that she is not pigeonholed into any of the traditional categories for such characters. Becky appears in more than one episode, but her second appearance does not end in a tragic death, nor is she figured as passive or dependant on the Winchester brothers for rescue; in fact, she is the one to organize the *Supernatural* fan convention and tricks Sam and Dean into attending. Moreover, as "The Real Ghostbusters" culminates with the implication that Chuck and Becky are now in a relationship, despite the satirizing of fans' obsession with *Supernatural* through Becky's character, the episode ultimately implies a loving equality between fan and creator, rather than maintaining the notion of a hierarchy between them.

Not all responses to this "self-conscious storytelling" in *Supernatural* are positive (Miller), as many fans of the series "did not want their already controversial practices to be further exposed" through direct acknowledgement in the source text of their fandom (Sivarajan par. 4.2). However, through the accurate representation of the fandom and its texts in *Supernatural* in fact invites fans to continue to participate in a dialogue with the series. Even if such representation involves "a light joke" as to the content of the majority of fanfiction based on *Supernatural*, the series does not shy away from acknowledging and even welcoming its slash-writing fans (Sivarajan par. 4.2). Fan portrayals also move beyond these light jokes: in "The Real Ghostbusters," Demian and Barnes are the ones to defeat the ghosts, thereby saving Sam and Dean's lives; Becky tells the Winchesters where the demon-killing gun they've been searching for over the previous season and a half is located by recalling a scene from one of Chuck's novels.⁷⁰ Although the show

⁷⁰ That Becky is the one to uncover this detail can also be read as a refutation of the stereotypical portrayal of fans. The ability to remember individual episodes or details is figured in the *Saturday Night Live* skit as

does make light of its fandom, it concurrently demonstrates the integral role that fans play by showing them in a productive and helpful roles in the episode; moreover, in the same episodes in which fans are parodied, the show also mocks its own characters and tropes. Fans at the convention repeat overwrought—and canonical—conversations between Sam and Dean; one fan questions why the brothers always lose their weapons while fighting spirits, pointing both to the frequency with which this occurs and the ease with which it could be avoided; and the same fan later comments, when faced by the ghosts haunting the convention site, “[y]eah, how original. *Supernatural* bringing in more creepy children. Sigh,” a self-conscious acknowledgement of the ten prior episodes of the series that also featured evil children (“The Real Ghostbusters”).⁷¹ By parodying both the fans *and* the source text, while also showing the fans in vital positions within the episodes, Kripke et al. “rehabilitate the image of the fan, [...] validate fan practices,” and ultimately “celebrate fandom” and its relationship—both critical and supportive—with the series (Zubernis and Larsen).

Through the representation of fanfiction and its authors, the creators engage in dialogue with the source texts in much the same way that fanfiction authors do—the primary difference is that the texts with which the *Supernatural* writers engage are fan-authored, rather than licensed media works. The series legitimizes its fan cultures and engages in a reciprocal relationship with them through its direct acknowledgement of fanfiction, rather than co-opting or rejecting them entirely. Wexelblat argues of Joseph

trivial—evidence that the fans have “little or no ‘life’” outside of the source text (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 11). The detail that Becky remembers here, however, is ultimately of paramount importance, as it leads the Winchesters to a demon who helps them to stop the Apocalypse.

⁷¹ In chronological order, the episodes featuring monstrous children are “Dead in the Water” (1.03), “The Benders” (1.15), “Provenance” (1.19), “Playthings” (2.11), “The Kids Are All Right” (3.02), “Jus in Bello” (3.12), “No Rest For The Wicked” (3.16), “Yellow Fever” (4.06), “Family Remains” (4.11), and “I Believe The Children Are Our Future” (5.06).

Michael Straczynski that, “in a sense, he is ‘one of us’—a fan of his own creation” (225); this contention can be applied to the creative team of *Supernatural*, but also should be taken one step further. In their adoption of fan writing strategies, reflection of the fan writing community, and elimination of the opposition between author and fan-author, they are not only “fan[s] of their own creation,” but also fans *of their fans*. The creative team of *Supernatural* offers textual rejoinders derived from already derivative fanfiction and, in so doing, continues the conversation between creators and fans in an unhierarchized and mutually constructed textual space.

5.4. CONCLUSION: COMING OUT OF THE MARGINS

Demonstrating the beginnings of a move away from the “familiar” separation of high from “‘low’ or popular culture”—in which “[h]igh culture is authored; pop culture is not” (Wexelblat 211)—in *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins discusses the introduction of the notion of “authorship” to popular texts, allowing them to be “adopted into the academy” and to be studied “in essentially similar terms to traditional literary works” (25). While Jenkins goes on to argue that the academic construction of a popular text’s authorship runs the risk of “link[ing] the interests of the academy with the interests of the producers rather than [...] the consumers,” who once again become “passive recipient[s] of authorial meaning” (*Textual Poachers* 25), the recognition that texts typically considered to be disposable are as worthy of study as canonical texts suggests by contrast a shift away from a rigid high/low cultural binary towards a more flexible inter-influential perspective.

A similar shift in perspective is evident in reference to fanfiction. No longer simply relegated to the fringes of culture, fanfiction has begun to pervade aspects of the “official culture” whose margins it is meant to be content to occupy (Fiske 33). The increasing number of studies on fandom and fanfiction, the recurring controversies about fanfiction’s legality, and the explicit reference to fan cultures in *Supernatural* all indicate a growing recognition of value in works that have heretofore been ignored or dismissed. The boundaries between “legitimate” culture and fan responses are becoming increasingly muddled: award-winning authors like Terry Pratchett and Cory Doctorow have admitted to writing fanfiction (Pratchett, qtd. in Pugh 125; Doctorow, “In Praise of Fanfic”), and multiple novels that alter or continue previous works—arguably licensed fanfiction—have been published, many of which are considered “work[s] of ‘serious merit’” (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 17).⁷² As Thene argues, “in pre-modern times, different writers working with the same characters and the same storylines was called *culture*. These days, it’s called fanfiction” (qtd. in Yonmei, emphasis original). Thene here emphasizes the parallel lines along which both fanfiction and the derivative works considered “legitimate” or “literature” are conceptualized. And yet, when named *as* fanfiction (and outside of popular culture or fan culture studies) these texts are still met with condescension or treated as the products of a bizarre subculture. Perhaps given this predominant outlook on fanfiction, the fan authors cited in this and other works on fans and the fiction they produce still frequently employ pseudonyms to separate their daily lives from their fan lives.

⁷² Popular examples of “literary fanfiction” cited in fandom studies are Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, and Shakespeare’s entire corpus, as all of these works are reinterpretations of preexisting texts. See, for example: Coppa, “Writing Bodies in Space”; Derecho; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*; Parrish; Pugh; and Stasi.

The stigma these fan authors perceive as still being attached to fanfiction indicates that, despite growing recognition of fanfiction in popular and academic discourse, the fan still constitutes a scandalous category in contemporary culture, one alternately the target of ridicule and anxiety, of dread and desire. [...] [T]he fan remains a “fanatic” or false worshipper, whose interests are fundamentally alien to the realm of “normal” cultural experience and whose mentality is dangerously out of touch with reality. (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 15)

The association of “fan” with “fanatic,” with the latter term’s connotations of “religious and political zealotry, false beliefs, orgiastic excess, possession, and madness” is outdated, however, along with the converse (and equally negative) equation of fans to passivity (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 12). Furthermore, although fanfiction’s place as a marginalized form of textual production may be somewhat entrenched in academic consciousness, the two categories of fan and academic are not, in fact, very far apart at all: fans, like academics, students, and “consumers of popular culture, read intertextually as well as textually” to uncover meaning within and make arguments about a given work (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 37). Moreover, as the popular culture works from which fanfiction is most frequently derived become objects of academic study in and of themselves, and as the production of “legitimate” texts also moves into digital forms, fanfiction can no longer be dismissed as merely the product of a subculture. Instead, its importance as a popular and growing genre of literature deserves new recognition and placement within cultural considerations. Fanfiction has permeated, though perhaps under a different guise, too many structures of the “official culture” (Fiske 33) against which it is ostensibly opposed, for it to continue to be considered otherwise.

In my grade 10 Honours English class, our final assignment was to write the thirteenth chapter of *Lord of the Flies*, taking care to emulate William Golding's style and tone as much as possible. Though at that point I had yet to discover fanfiction as a genre and an online community, this was my first experience of the blurred line between "fan" writing and "official/academic" writing categories. Nor is that high school experience unique in blending the two categories. In the third year of my BA, the professor of one class gave us the option to write, in place of a final research paper, the conversation that Jane Austen and Lord Byron would have while on a date (or in bed). In a fourth-year seminar, we were once again presented with the option to deviate from the traditional academic format of the essay. This time, the assignment was to *rewrite* a fairy tale to give voice to formerly marginalized characters, to imagine a sequel, or to alter the narrative in order to suit contemporary ideological standpoints, all while bearing enough similarity to the original tale for the revision to be recognizable as such. These anecdotes serve to encapsulate the argument of this and other works on fanfiction and fan culture studies; that is, although it may not be recognized, fanfiction pervades "official" academic structures not only in what is read (such as the canonical examples of fanfiction mentioned in the introduction) but also in what is written. Whole graduate seminars are spent in the study of this manner of writing back to the canonical text to examine the critiques that such narrative forms of literary criticism permit—whether the original work is *Jane Eyre*, *Star Wars*, or *Supernatural*, the premise of the new text, created in dialogue with and critique of the source, remains the same;⁷³ panels on fanfiction and fandom

⁷³ In the Fall semester of the 2010-2011 academic year, Dalhousie University is offering a course entitled "Postcolonial Intertextualities and Victorian Ghosts: Dialogues in Decolonization." The course is based on the examination of "the intertextual and historical dialogues connecting postcolonial to nineteenth-century literature by examining contemporary texts that engage with Victorian texts"; in essence, the seminar is in

pervade academic conferences; and authors like Henry Jenkins identify themselves both as fans and as academics, recognizing no distinction between the two categories.

In part, this work arose out of a statement by Walter Benjamin, who writes, “we have to rethink our conceptions of literary forms or genres [...] if we are to identify the forms of expression that channel the literary energies of the present” (258). Fanfiction, as a rapidly growing genre of writing, is emblematic of the kind of new form of expression being used to channel “the literary energies” of contemporary writers that Benjamin discusses. As fanfiction increases in visibility outside of cultural studies, more rejoinders to the works by fans are made possible, so that a critical discussion about problematic program ideologies and outdated gender portrayals can be enacted through the source texts that pervade popular culture and media. In essence, these critical texts are no longer simply “playthings in the margins of literature” (Benjamin 258) that may be detachedly studied or ignored entirely. Rather, as Benjamin writes, “we are in the midst of a mighty recasting of literary forms, a melting down in which many of the opposites in which we have been used to thinking [...] lose their force” (258). Such divisions are losing their force; by contrast, it is increasingly evident that the Force is with fanfiction and its authors. In the “melting down” of the binary between that which is “official” or authored and that which is popular or fan-authored, fanfiction has overflowed the margins into which it has formerly been cast, and has entered as a full participant into the cultural conversation.

fact centred on the examination of published fanfiction based primarily on *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations*.

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