NARRATIVES OF A FALL: *STAR WARS* FAN FICTION WRITERS INTERPRET

ANAKIN SKYWALKER'S STORY

by

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My thesis examines *Star Wars* fan fiction about Anakin Skywalker posted on the popular blogging platform LiveJournal. I investigate the folkloric qualities of such posts and analyze the ways in which fans through narrative generate systems of meaning, engage in performative expressions of gender identity, resistance, and festival, and create transformative works within the present cultural milieu. My method has been to follow the posts of several *Star Wars* fans on LiveJournal who are active in posting fan fiction and who frequently respond to one another's posts, thereby creating a network of community interaction. I find that fans construct systems of meaning through complex interactions with a network of cultural sources, that each posting involves multiple layers of performance, and that these works frequently act as parody, critique, and commentary on not just the official materials but on the cultural climate that produced and has been influenced by them.

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For my sister, Jessica, who insisted that I give the Prequel Trilogy another chance, thereby changing the course of my personal history - so in a way, this is all her fault. We continue to watch a lot of *Star Wars* whenever we are together, except for that one time with the Vikings.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

NARRATIVES OF A FALL:

STAR WARS FAN FICTION WRITERS INTERPRET ANAKIN SKYWALKER'S

STORY

My thesis examines the construction of a fannish tradition among *Star Wars* fan fiction

writers. I focus particularly on their interpretations of the character Anakin Skywalker.

This character is especially significant as a window into the tradition because his story

spans all six films in canon and thus provides an orienting perspective at the center of the

plot from which the canonical story can be understood. While many fan fiction writers

can and do choose to write their own narratives from the margins rather than a central

position, when they choose to write about Anakin - and *how* they choose to write him -

reflects significantly on their understanding of the saga and its meanings. This is true

even when they opt to sideline the character in order to focus on other aspects of the

story, rejecting the canonical storytelling priorities to develop their own, or when they

reconstruct the character and his story in ways that read the original text against the grain

and use it to create a new patchwork of meaning.

Fan fiction has begun to be recognized within the academy as a genre of

transformative work, following the 1992 publication of Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers*

and paralleling the ongoing process of "opening" the canon in other ways. This greater

recognition of fan fiction as a cultural force has led to the creation of such supportive and

analytic endeavors as the *Journal for Transformative Works*, associated with the

Organization for Transformative Works and oriented toward a scholarly study not only of

fan fiction but of other culturally appropriative vernacular productions. As such, an in

combination with the rise of internet fandoms in the age of Web 2.0, the study of fan

fiction has gained interest and relevance in recent years, and continues to grow grow

more popular within the academy.

I have focused my study on a group of fan fiction writers who post regularly to

livejournal.com (more commonly known as "LJ"), choosing this platform because of its

popularity among fans and its highly interactive nature, both of which encourage

discussions within the community about the material in question, whether at a particular

moment that concerns a single piece of fan fiction or a broader question of interpretation

related to the fandom and its tradition in a holistic sense. I have further restricted my

selection by choosing to follow posts only from those fan fiction writers whose bodies of

work, taken as a whole, demonstrate substantial concern with Anakin's story. Anakin is

particularly useful as an organizing focal point for my investigation because his story

spans all six of the canonical films that chronicle his rise, fall, and redemption, as a key

character in the original materials his explication and further development in fan fiction

has given rise to a wide-ranging body of work at the heart of *Star Wars* internet fan

fiction.

For those not familiar with Anakin Skywalker's story: Anakin is the protagonist of

a set of six films: *Star Wars: Episode I: The Phantom Menance; Star Wars: Episode II:*

Attack of the Clones; Star Wars: Episode III: Revenge of the Sith; Star Wars: Episode IV:

A New Hope; Star Wars: Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back; and *Star Wars: Episode VI: Return of the Jedi.* Anakin is discovered as a child in slavery by the Jedi and brought to Coruscant to being training at the Jedi Temple.[1] As a young man, he falls in love and, although attachment is forbidden to Jedi, secretly marries Padmé Amidala.[2] A few years later, during the height of the Clone Wars, Anakin is plagued by visions of his secret wife dying in childbirth. He pledges himself to Darth Sidious, who is both the Dark Lord of the Sith and, in his guise as Supreme Chancellor Palpatine, the leader of the Republic, in return for the promise of saving Padmé's life. Palpatine/Sidious, foreboding that the Jedi will attempt to overthrow him in spite of Senate opposition, declares them enemies of the Republic, and Anakin (now Lord Vader) leads an attack on the Temple, in which nearly all of the Jedi are killed. His former mentor, Obi-Wan Kenobi, hunts him down, and in the ensuing fight Anakin is severely injured, leading to his enclosure in the life-support suit familiar to many viewers from the Original Trilogy.[3] The Original Trilogy details the adventures of Anakin's son, Luke, as he learns the truth about his father's past and attempts to overthrow the Emperor while also saving his father from the Dark Side. At the end of the final film, Vader saves Luke and redeems himself by destroying the Emperor (Palpatine/Sidious) at the cost of his own life. The final scenes of the 2008 DVD release show Anakin, his youthful good looks restored, joining other Jedi in the afterlife.[4] Critically, most of the fan fiction on Anakin Skywalker I have found is focused on his turn to the Dark Side in some way: either explicating how or why it happened (often in counterpoint to George Lucas's claims, in the 2008 DVD special features, that he made a

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"Faustian pact"),[5] or creating an alternate storyline in which, thanks to some detail, his fall is averted altogether.

      I analyze the fan fiction posted by several writers, the comment threads that accompany their stories, and the "meta" (non-fiction interpretive writing by fans that seeks to illuminate some aspect of story or character and also forms part of the fannish tradition) they have produced. Though I use only publicly available blog posts in my analysis, the months I spent within the fandom, writing and posting fan fiction and reading fan fiction posted by others, has contributed significantly to my understanding of how fan fiction communities operate, as well as helping me to develop a stronger sense of the community aesthetic. This endeavor was crucial to ensuring that the examples I chose were as cogent as possible from an ethnographic perspective. Further, the LJ fan fiction writers whose work I refer to here have been consulted and offered the opportunity to comment on my analysis, with varying levels of participation according to their preference. In this way, I hope to provide a contextualized analysis of the fannish tradition on Anakin Skywalker, at least within the LJ fandom.

      My theoretical viewpoint is derived primarily from Roland Barthes' now-famous *The Death of the Author*. While one need not have read Barthes' declaration of textual independence in order to participate in reading and writing fan fiction, an adherence to his basic premise - that the meanings of any given text are not circumscribed by the history or intention of its author - underlies the fannish undertaking of interpretation that makes possible fan fiction's exploration of possibilities beyond the source material.[6]

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The fan fiction writers whose work I study are engaged in a project of interrogating the canonical text in order to better know the characters within it. Because the text is often ambiguous, these writers will derive slightly different Anakins from the source material; and, extrapolating from the knowledge of character they have gained through their close readings and questionings of the text, they will write somewhat different characters into and through their stories. They insist upon the right to produce their own idiosyncratic interpretations, rather than seeking consensus amongst themselves or bowing to intentions stated by George Lucas or the multitude of writers and artists he has drafted to produce his ever-expanding fictional universe.

I work from the point of view that such fannish interpretations are not "wrong," regardless of how well or poorly they conform to the intended meanings of Lucas or others in the franchise, or indeed those preferred by trained critics of film or literature. In fan fiction as in literary criticism, one need not produce the definitive reading of a text in order to claim validity of interpretation; one need only offer an interpretation that is internally consistent and reasonably argued. The goal is not to persuade readers of a single, resolved meaning that will silence opposition, but to produce a new dimension of significance that enriches the "text" for other readers. The validity of one interpretation does not inherently preclude the equal validity of an alternative, even contradictory, interpretation. Multiple, and apparently mutually exclusive, meanings may be supported by the same text. This multivalence, deriving from ambiguity, has been acknowledged at least since Paul De Man's seminal examination of Archie Bunker's ambiguous dialogue,[7]

so it is not new, but an appreciation for multiplicity of significance is central to the ethos that guides the production and reception of fan fiction.

Fan fiction writers on the Internet are both purposefully exposed and notoriously elusive. Their fannish identities are constructed and foregrounded on a daily basis, while their personal lives and demographic information are rarely displayed in public posts. We may approach such performances with an understanding that all versions of ourselves are to some extent fictions - though they may be serious fictions that represent important truths. Furthermore, my experience in online *Star Wars* fandom has persuaded me that, as far as the formation of a community and the development of its tradition are concerned, a fan's performance of her identity online is the one which is treated as "real" within the context of online interaction: we are who we say we are; the only knowledge other users have of us is derived from the accounts we give of ourselves. These identities performed on the Internet in fannish spaces are the ones that speak to each other and set community norms for fans' behavior. They are the ones which dictate, mediate, and transgress.

In addition to providing interesting extra-textual dimensions of meaning, the folkloric character of Internet fan fiction's production and performance demonstrates the resilience of vernacular culture in the face of its proposed demise in the post-industrial era of mass media. So far from eradicating "authentic" folk culture, mass media entertainment has been appropriated by its fans for their own storytelling purposes. In developing their own narratives in multiplying variants from the source material, fans have chosen to pursue themes and types of narrative not dissimilar from those that appear

in much earlier, more classically folkloric, vernacular narratives. Fan works continue to be irreverent, reinterpretive, and mutually informative in ways that powerful media owners cannot control. Folklorists, social theorists, and scholars of mass media cultural can benefit from studying the narrative traditions emergent on the Internet.

The difficulty one immediately encounters is that Internet fan fiction does not fit neatly into the already-described categories assigned to folk activities by academics over the last hundred and fifty years; folklorists working in the field have to grapple with emergent discourses. The form itself is highly syncretic, weaving together the official narrative (in the case of *Star Wars*, this includes six live-action films, two animated television series, one animated theatrical film, and numerous novels, comic books, and video games), the fannish tradition (incorporating both creative fan works and the interpretive essay genre known as "meta"), and outside literary and cultural influences (this factor varies widely from fan to fan). In one sense, then, all fan fiction is pastiche. The value of a given piece for its audience lies not in its originality of concept, but in the skill of execution with which the author weaves together the various threads of inherited meaning. Thus performances of fan fiction are expected to rely heavily on intertextuality, and demonstrate the author's skill in weaving together threads from a variety of influences. It should be said here that neither the choice of which elements to use, nor the pattern ultimately created from them, is arbitrary. This textual interweaving itself constitutes an act of interpretation that both explicates and enhances the tradition as it has come down to the storyteller. Each act of fic-sharing is thus necessarily both critical and creative.

I started reading and posting *Star Wars* fan fiction on LJ in Winter 2010, at the suggestion of pronker, whose work I had encountered on fan fiction.net and whom I had contacted as part of a class project. Thanks also to pronker's recommendation, I was quickly introduced to the LJ community jedi_news, which acts as a news service for the LJ *Star Wars* fandom, reporting - as its daily posts remind readers - on "anything of interest to the *Star Wars* fandom." In addition to fan fiction, this regularly includes such offering as videos (both fan videos and official clips), humor posts, franchise news, interpretive or speculative discussions, works of fan art of various kinds; there is also a catch-all "miscellaneous" category for "anything of interest" that does not readily fit into one of the above areas. Through jedi_news, I became familiar with the work of other fan fiction writers on LJ, and gained a much more developed sense of the community aesthetic than I would have been able to attain otherwise. I continue to read the jedi_news' daily reports for fannish discourse on Anakin Skywalker, and since the departure of one of their editors in March 2011 I have acted as a back-up editor in hopes of returning some service to the community. In any case, the jedi_news remains my primary lens for understanding the LJ *Star Wars* community as a whole.

It is also through jedi_news that I became familiar with the work of selonbrody, irnan, and ansketil_rose. All three of these writers deal with Anakin Skywalker's story in distinctive ways, producing texts that interpret his character in light of the fannish tradition; I read their stories (usually called "fics"), and those of each writer in my study, both as literary texts and as pieces of the tradition that they reflect and perpetuate.

In addition to familiarizing myself with the discourse of the *Star Wars* community through the update service provided by jedi_news, I have consistently written and posted my own fan fiction and meta on LJ, engaging with the community as a participant. This insider perspective is integral both to my research and to my theoretical orientation: I contest the "othering" of fans in both the academy (where it has been contested by others, as well),[8] and within the broader context of contemporary culture, in which fans and their activities are regularly treated as trivial, dysfunctional, even inaccessible.[9] As a longtime fan myself, I seek to analyze "ficcing" - the activities associated with reading, writing, but especially *sharing* fan fiction - from the inside out. Posting my own fan fiction, and responding to the comments left by other fans, has introduced me to other fans whose fics - as well as their non-fiction discussions - treat Anakin Skywalker's character in diverse ways that become more intelligible when understood as part of a network of fannish meanings.

Besides the individual blogs I have been following, I have also followed postings on Anakin Skywalker in an LJ community managed jointly by estora and attanagra, sw_meta. The interactivity of these non-fiction posts has frequently revealed points of congruence and difference in fannish interpretations in ways that expand the discourse. Most recently, I have added one more dimension to my own web of understanding, by creating another LJ community, fanlit_project, in which members are invited to read fan fiction critically. Some of the writers whose work I have been reading have expressed interest and joined the group; others are less invested in such discussions. These

differences are important because they reveal aspects of each writer's own positionality within the fandom.

Fan fiction as an area of scholarly inquiry is relatively new. The classic text is Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, and his approach has set the tone of the discourse thus far. His study is incisive and comprehends both an extraordinary breadth of material and a close examination of its cultural significance; but it also has the obvious disadvantage of being outdated. Published in 1992, his work inevitably misses much of fan fiction's transition from a print-based niche to an Internet genre so popular that LJ now has an interest page for it. The cyber-revolution facilitated the sharing of fan fiction in ways that no one could well have anticipated; and the *Star Wars* franchise in particular was given new life by the release of the Prequel Trilogy films in 1999-2005.

I use Jenkins's construction of fan fiction as textual appropriation, especially in Chapter II , to demonstrate how fans take ownership of the mass media texts and their meanings, adopting and adapting them as part of their own vernacular culture. There are, however, some important caveats here. Since Jenkins's analysis relies heavily on printed fanzines and convention culture, it cannot account for the performative nature of sharing fan fiction online in forums that encourage rapid response.[10] More problematic, Jenkins's account, though celebratory in tone, treats readers and writers of fan fiction as a discrete, somewhat secretive subcultural group. Since he is explicitly at great pains *not* to do this - he devotes almost the entirety of his first chapter to addressing and debunking negative stereotypes of fans - I would suggest that this kind of appreciative "othering" does not

reflect a flaw in Jenkins's approach, but rather is a necessary part of the groundwork he was laying in fan studies. The very process of marking a "thing" (whatever it may be) out for study requires some drawing of intellectual lines: it must be *this,* and not *that.* The scholar has to characterize the material for study somehow, even if the "material" is really people. One of the advantages, for me, of utilizing an approach based in participant observation was the ability to blur these carefully-drawn lines somewhat, to build on the foundation laid by scholars like Jenkins while also living within the community I study.

The tendency to write about ficcers as a group apart probably derives from the academy's attachment to "scholarly distance," which curiously parallels the privileging of "aesthetic distance" in our culture noted by Jenkins himself.[11] In any case it has persisted with little challenge, with the first major shift in scholarly writing about fan fiction coming in 2006, heralded by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse's collection of essays. Spanning a broader field of interest than previous works that deal with fan fiction, dealing with multiple fandoms, and taking fans and their fictions seriously, this collection undermines some of the assumptions made by scholars about the value and interest of fan fiction, both for the fans and as an object of academic inquiry.[12]

In addition to these approaches and others like them, which may be broadly considered under a Cultural Studies umbrella, fan fiction also lends itself well to literary study, an orientation which has been too little explored. The most significant work to have attempted such a reading so far has been Sheenagh Pugh's *The Democratic Genre: Fanfiction in a Literary Context.* I use her analysis to talk about the wealth of

background knowledge that forms the body of intertextual reference on which fans rely as they make their own stories.[13]

Other scholarly work not directly relating to fan fiction per se may be usefully applied. Bill Ivey's *Arts, Inc.: How Greed and Neglect Have Destroyed Our Cultural Rights* is a timely work that handles the situation of vernacular art in the age of new media, and it reflects on many of the issues that frame the cultural status of fan fiction[14]. Richard Bauman's work on performance, particularly *Verbal Art as Performance*, provides a useful tool for analyzing the ways in which fans present and respond to stories within their communities as performative events.[15] Patricia E. Sawin's rearticulation of Bauman's theory, accounting for both gender and the affective experience of performance - for performer and audience - helps me to consider the specifically feminine spaces of fan fiction writing and posting, and to understand how they function as a girls-only celebration, a festival.[16] Roberta Pearson's *Fandom in the Digital Era* provides another, more legally oriented, perspective.[17] Legal perspectives considering fair use and copyright law are not introduced to the scholarly discussion of fan fiction often enough, which can lead to a somewhat warped perspective: works of art - perhaps especially those which take part in participatory culture - are not created in a legal, cultural, or political vacuum. I use these analyses to inform my discussion of fan fiction and copyright in Chapter IV.

Finally, a review of the literature relevant to the study of fan fiction would not be complete without considering both feminist literature and audience studies. The fans who read and write fan fiction are overwhelmingly women, and their gender performance is

woven around the narratives in ways both obvious and obscure. Furthermore the

preoccupation with male bodies demonstrated in much fan fiction can be better

understood in the context of its creation by women, for women.[18] Fan fiction, then, is a

production of active female audiences who step up to become creators and transmitters of

the fannish tradition in a context that remains gender-specific. The foundational study for

women as readers is Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance*; it applies to the authors I

study not so much in terms of the romance structure, though that is sometimes present,

but as an interrogation of the exclusively feminine and overwhelmingly private (Radway

is at pains to show how reading time is *personal* time for the women in her study) activity

of consuming and producing romance or fan fiction in real space, which contrasts sharply

with the communal context of storytelling in cyberspace.[19] Radway operates within the

larger realm of audience studies as a field, with some literary excursions, and I have

relied heavily on *Media Studies: A Reader*, edited by Sue Thornham, Caroline Basset,

and Paul Marris, to help me develop a sense of that intellectual space from which to

proceed.[20] Sawin, noted above, has provided some framework for understanding the

genderedness of feminine performance; but the materials collected during my research

also become more intelligible when "classic" pieces of feminist criticism are applied -

even though fans' interactions frequently defy the expectations of such theories. Laura

Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* has been important in this regard, as has

Mary Russo's *Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory.*[21]

 In Chapter II , I explore the development of "head!canon" as a fan's interpretive

process that seeks to derive an internally consistent narrative from an often conflicted

body of source materials. This is a necessary step toward understanding fan fiction in context, and lays the groundwork for following chapters, in much the same way that forming a head!canon lays the groundwork for a fan to build her own interpretation of the story. Head!canons are formed as fan fiction writers grapple with the material in an attempt to create fic, and the process of devising a head!canon often leads to more fic. Fics are written both to elaborate head!canon and to comply with it, and these fics, as well as meta discussions that reference head!canon, often influence the interpretations of other fans in a mutually constitutive process that perpetuates writing even as it slowly changes the tradition. Head!canon is thus interesting both from a literary perspective, as a means of defining a fan's position with regard to any aspect of the *Star Wars* narrative, and from an ethnographic perspective, as a way of understanding fans' relations to the tradition to which they belong.

In Chapter III, I investigate the specifically feminine dimensions of fannish performance, emphasizing in particular the ways in which they function as appropriation not only of media texts, but of male power. Fans rewrite not only stories, but power and gender relationships, in ways that comment on the "source" material, on the pre-existing body of fan works, and on other cultural (inter)texts. Understanding how this feminist appropriation works can enable us to understand the cultural importance of fan fiction both within the communities that engage with it, and also in a more global context, as a site of resistance.

Chapter IV deals with performance again, furthering the feminist perspective set out in Chapter III in order to examine some of the ways in which fan fiction is

contextualized as festival - the ways in which it calls attention to itself and to the author's

and audience's performances. Performativity is intricately layered in fan fiction posting

through such markers as disclaimers, authors' notes, and an appropriate icon selected to

demonstrate either the fan's positionality or some aspect of the posted fic. In addition, it

is frequently followed by comment threads in which respondents also use specifically

chosen, fandom-related icons, and an argot that is intelligible only within the context of

the fannish discourse (and sometimes only in the context of a particular author's

readership). All these performative techniques ground Internet fan fiction in a fannish

space that embeds storytelling within a context of fannish festival. LJ is the communal

bonfire around which writers share fics while readers dance around the edges.

Chapter V highlights the specifically "modern" problems encountered by fan

fiction enthusiasts. Unlike vernacular productions and reinterpretations throughout most

of history, the interactions of media fandom with its source texts are threatened by

modern conceptions of intellectual property and copyright and trademark laws. Fans

respond to these threats with disclaimers, with varying degrees of resistance and

compliance, and consistently with humor, often parodying the power structures that aims

to monitor or curtail their activities. The behavior of fans with respect to such

institutional efforts is analogous to the behavior of folk groups under restraint by

repressive and/or colonial governments in the past; it is also a part of a part of the

tradition, reinterpreted by each new storytelling performance. I take these tensions

between producer and fan as a given and investigate how fannish responses function as

performance in an online context.

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Notes

[1] *Star Wars: Episode I: The Phantom Menace.* Dir. George Lucas. 20th Century Fox, 2008. DVD.

[2] *Star Wars: Episode II: Attack of the Clones.* Dir. George Lucas. 20th Century Fox, 2008. DVD.

[3] *Star Wars: Episode III: Revenge of the Sith.* Dir. George Lucas. 20th Century Fox, 2008. DVD.

[4] *Star Wars: Episode VI: Return of the Jedi.* Dir. Richard Marquand. 20th Century Fox, 2008. DVD.

[5] *Star Wars: Episode III: Revenge of the Sith.*

[6] Barthes, Roland. 1968. "The death of the author". *Participation*. 41-45. 2006.

[7] De Man, Paul. 1979. "Semiology and rhetoric." *Allegories of reading: Figural language in Roussea, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

[8] The last two decades have seen the publication of a number of books and articles that deal respectfully with fans and fan culture. Perhaps most famously, Henry Jenkins has continued the trajectory he began with *Textual Poachers* in 1992 to deal with emergent fan culture; dealing in fan fiction more specifically, Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson have co-edited an collection of essays called *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* and continue to publish the *Journal for Transformative Works*, in association with the Organization of Transformative Works, which also manages an archive for fan works; and the International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts now includes a division on Convergence and Participatory Culture. All of these developments point to a movement - still limited, but steadily gaining ground - within the academy that seeks to deal with fans and their works seriously and critically.

[9]See as an example CBS's popular sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*, which gets its (considerable) laughs from the misadventures of a group of fanboy physicists.

[10]Jenkins, Henry. "Scribbling in the Margins: Fan Readers/Fan Writers." *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture.* 1992. New York: Routledge.

[11] Jenkins, Henry. "Get A Life: Fans, Poachers, Nomads." *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture.* 18.

[12] Busse, Kristina and Karen Hellekson, eds. *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays.* 2006. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.

[13] Pugh, Sheenagh. *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context.* 2005. Glasgow: Bell and Bain Ltd.

[14] Ivey, Bill. *Arts, Inc: How Greed and Neglect Have Destroyed Our Cultural Rights.* Berkeley: U of C Press.

[15] Bauman, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance.* Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, Inc. 1984.

[16] Sawin, Patricia E. "Performance at the Nexus of Gender, Power, and Desire: Reconsidering Bauman's Verbal Art from the Perspective of Gendered Subjectivity as Performance." *The Journal of American Folklore.* 115.455. Winter 2002. 28-61.

[17] Pearson, Roberta. "Fandom in the Digital Era." *Popular Communication.* 8. 2010. 84-95.

[18] This exclusively feminine space is *not* exclusively heterosexual; but as posts that deal with individual ficcers' sexual orientation are often "friends-locked" (that is, not publicly available) and as sexuality in general is an intensely private subject for many people (fans and otherwise), this admittedly important factor seems more suited to a quantitative analysis that does not identify its subjects, rather than a qualitative analysis that quotes individual blogs directly. I therefore do not take up the issue here, though I hope quantitative researchers may investigate it in the future.

[19] Radway, Janice A. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature.* 1984. Chapel Hill: U of NC Press.

[20] Thornham, Sue, Caroline Basset and Paul Marris, Eds. *Media Studies: A Reader*. 3rd ed. Eds. Sue Thornham, Caroline Basset, and Paul Marris. New York: New York UP, 2009.

[21] Russo, Mary. "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory." *Feminist Studies / Critical Studies: Theories of Contemporary Culture* Vol. 8. Ed. Kathleen Woodward. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. 213-229.

CHAPTER II

FICTION AS INTERPRETATION:

STAR WARS FAN FICTION WRITERS, THE CONSTRUCTION OF HEAD!CANON,

AND FANNISH CRITICS

Star Wars fanfiction writers engage the "canonical" texts of the officially produced materials in ways that both appreciate the originals and subvert, extend, or reinterpret them. Fanfiction accepts authorial intent as only one of a network of interrelated determiners of meaning, and writers of *Star Wars* fanfiction refer frequently to "head!canon" (typically spelled with the intrusive punctuation) as the structure of meaning that describes their understanding of the *Star Wars* universe as a whole. Each fanfiction writer interprets the original texts somewhat differently, and fanfiction writers restrict their head!canons by rejecting or ignoring parts of the official universe that they consider marginal.

The construction of head!canon is complicated in at least three ways. First, not all fans have access to all the materials produced as part of the extensive *Star Wars* franchise. Economic and regional factors render some of the materials unavailable to many fans, due to the vagaries of international publishing and broadcasting, and the expenses involved in gaining access to "special editions" and the like. Second, the *Star Wars* canon is ranked hierarchically by its producers in a complicated system of contradictions and countermandments (called "retcons" for "retroactive continuity") that

challenges even the most dedicated fan's ability to negotiate. Third, Lucas himself has

offered interpretations - notably in the interviews and commentaries that have

accompanied DVD releases of his films - and then, not infrequently, has revised not only

his own metatextual assertions but also the stories themselves (often in conjunction with

the release of a new piece of the saga). Fans vigorously debate the canonicity of these

authorial interpretations and revisions.[22]

Fanfiction as a genre of transformative work has been too long neglected in the

academy, and though it is now gaining recognition, not enough has been done to study it

in context.. The most cogent analyses of fanfiction to date have come from cultural

studies scholars. Even within this field, the studies have been limited, but a few key

arguments have pointed the way. For example, Henry Jenkins has examined fan

production as a form of appropriation of mass-produced texts. He suggests that fans

subvert and read against the grain of the official text, making the textual territory their

own, sometimes in criticism of or opposition to the original.[23] Sheenagh Pugh has argued

that fanfiction writers utilize their canon in a system of allusion that includes not only

their own texts and the source materials but also the community's knowledge of other

literary and cultural sources, enabling them to interweave meanings by referencing

canonical events or specific lines that will resonate with readers.[24] Deborah Kaplan

addresses fanfiction's critical nature, treating fan-produced stories as an attempt to

interpret characters by mediating between fannish readings and the source texts[25];

although Kaplan may not give full weight to the highly individualistic nature of these

interpretations. Will Brooker examines how fan communities continually negotiate what

they accept as canon, and the sources they are willing to incorporate in establishing hierarchies of canon and legitimate interpretations[26]. Crucially, however, scholars have yet to address the fans' own understanding of their texts as interpretive within the context of fannish discourse, leading to a hobbled analysis of fanfiction both as individual texts and as a mode of cultural production.

While I agree with Jenkins that fanfiction appropriates the source texts for fans' own creative efforts - what he calls "textual poaching" - this is only a secondary effect of a larger process. I argue that fanfiction functions in many of the same ways as literary criticism. In addition to asserting ownership over the texts, *Star Wars* fans' head!canons and the narratives they produce are not merely extensions or alternatives of the official materials: these narratives function as interpretations of scenes and characters within the *Star Wars* canon. Fanfiction is an interpretive genre. By closely reading livejournal.com (LJ) posts and comments by *Star Wars* fans about their head!canons, and examining specific fanfiction texts constructed in congruence with them, I will demonstrate how fanfiction writers use their narratives as interpretations of the official texts.[27]

The relationships between head!canon (the structure of meaning that informs and defines a fan's interpretation), meta!fic (fanfiction specifically intended to explicate a particular aspect of the narrative or character),[28] and meta (non-fiction interpretive writing by fans that frequently generates, accompanies, and responds to the interpretive fanfiction genres discussed in this paper)[29] are complex, and intelligible only in terms of how they are understood by the communities that produce and read them. The typical scholarly approach to fanfiction has been to treat all its forms as equally reinterpretive of

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the canon, usually asserting that the fan productions somehow subvert the original texts. While such endeavors have provided interesting analyses, their emphasis on slash (same-sex romantic pairings) and feminist rewritings of female characters has more to say about academics' interest in queer theory or gender studies than about fanfiction as it as produced and shared within fannish communities. Fanfiction writers define the type and level of interpretation in their texts through the generic distinctions they have devised. Ignoring such distinctions seriously hinders any attempt at analysis.

While there are certainly posts detailing fanfiction writers' head!canons and the influences that have produced them, most of the discourse about head!canon does not consist of discrete posts or messages, but rather of casual mentions embedded within other texts. Author's notes preceding or following a piece of fanfiction, for instance, will frequently explain how a particular story fits into the author's head!canon, or what portions of the larger *Star Wars* narrative she has rejected in order to create this narrative. Generally the writer will attempt to justify such a rejection, often by pointing out that the element is inconsistent with other parts of the canon.[30] The point, however, is usually not to persuade other fans to the writer's way of thinking, but rather to situate her story or interpretation within a larger narrative context. If a fanfiction writer rejects most of the post-RotJ EU[31] (any story set in the official "Expanded Universe" that takes place after the events of *Return of the Jedi*), she will often tell readers so as a preface to her fiction. Readers will then know to disregard such questions as Luke's feelings for Mara, the strained relationship between Han and Leia, or the birth of the Solo twins[32] — events whose value and legitimacy many fans question.

The complicated interrelationship between meta and fic, as developments of head!

canon, is expressed when fan fiction writer irnan discusses how she thinks about Leia

Organa, and the thought processes and character analysis that led to her own creative

development of the character:

> I wrote this Leia fic[33] - I've been meaning for a while now to write about
>
> what I think her childhood was like; all the things that went into [Leia's
>
> decisions] the swallows and amazons verse.[34] [...]
>
> Let's start with canon!

From here, she goes on to detail the line of reasoning which leads her to believe that the

Skywalker family's bonds are enhanced through telepathy.[35] irnan thus explains in meta

the interpretation she develops through the process of writing her narrative — more

commonly referred to as "fic" — and both the meta and the fic are manifestations of the

head!canon she constructs regarding Leia's character. irnan uses her conclusions about

the Skywalker family's telepathic connections to interpret an entire set of relationships

and to explain the canonical distaste Leia has for her biological father: irnan situates

Leia's antipathy in a context of loneliness and isolation which she also explores in her

fiction.

One of the uses of head!canon, then, is to contextualize a particular story for

readers. In this sense it works in a way analogous to techniques in an oral tradition that

remind listeners of other parts of a story cycle, bringing to mind the pieces of the

tradition that are most relevant, sometimes specifically rejecting a known element.

Rather than simply describing a fanfiction writer's position, the construction and

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elaboration of head!canon constitute discursive practices intended to aid readers. At the

same time, however, this is not its only or primary function. Head!canon enables a

fanfiction writer to deal with an intimidatingly capacious and often conflicted body of

material. As LiveJournal user attanagra explains in the comment thread to one of her

own LJ posts,

> I think it's mostly a function of my writerly passion for continuity. When
>
> things don't fit, I want to make them fit, and so I end up with a kind of
>
> hierarchy of canon-ness based on what fits the best/makes the most sense.
>
> There are a LOT of factors that go into determining any little story-bit's
>
> place in the hierarchy (not that I really think of it like that all the time.)
>
> And of course my personal preference for this bit or that goes into it too.[36]

attanagra's quote demonstrates her understanding of head!canon's primary importance as

a way of reconciling inconsistencies within the original material. This process of

reconciliation is structured by what the writer interprets as the most important aspects of

the original material. Whenever a conflict arises between two items in the original

materials, the fanfiction writer will generally resolve that inconsistency according to her

preferred interpretation of the story. Sometimes she dispenses with one of the two items

and keeps the other; at other times, the author constructs a narrative that explains the

seeming discrepancy in such a way that the two can coexist. In this case, the result will

be a piece of head!canon fic. irnan uses a similar strategy in writing the fic that

reinterprets and justifies Leia's inconsistent behavior. Devising a head!canon and writing

fic are not separate activities; they are mutually constitutive productions of meaning.

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The nature of head!canon is idiosyncratic, demonstrating a single fanfiction writer's narrative meanings. The strategies that generate head!canon, however, tend to be remarkably similar from one writer to the next. The same techniques of closely "reading" the canonical texts produce diverse responses at points of ambiguity, where the writer must determine her own interpretation. In addition, head!canons speak to and influence each other by inspiring questions that head!canon fic seeks to answer. irnan asserts,

I think the longer we're involved in a fandom, the more our relationship

with the fanfic we read changes, and the more we read or write the more

discerning we become about what we read and/or write. Our personal

headcanon, our interpretation of what we see onscreen, is hugely

influenced by other people's: we look at their work and say, *that's not the*

Anakin Skywalker I see in canon. Over time, that point of view changes,

until it becomes a question of what we do see in canon, and not what we

don't. I find it's an enormously fun process, like peeling an onion:

removing the layers of other fans' interpretations until I discover my

own.[37]

irnan's position is that "headcanon" functions as an interpretive creation, and that each fan's selective process is influenced by interaction with other fans, so that the meanings she privileges shift over time. Head!canon forms a dynamic system which is constantly rereading and reinterpreting texts, and also generating new transformative works which further fans' own meanings.

Exulting in the interactive nature of meta and fic within the fan community, fanfiction writer selonbrody explains, "I'm glad it made you think of [irnan's] meta, since that's what made me think of the story! :) I love we have the ability as an LJ community to inspire each other like that."[38] The meta to which selonbrody refers was posted by irnan a few days before, and detailed her interpretation of the Padmé Amidala character and her catastrophic relationship with Anakin Skywalker.[39] The post resulted in a lively and extended discussion in which several members of the fanfiction community participated: offering evidence for irnan's interpretation, countering it with their own, or identifying points at which the canonical texts could be read in multiple ways — privileging, rather than attempting to erase, the "gray areas." This particular meta is especially interesting because it specifically addresses the relationship between irnan's own corpus of fanfiction and her developing head!canon:,

> I've got several fics with [Padmé] lined up, but [...] I can't seem to get a
> proper grip on her characterisation at the moment. The fic where she keeps
> passing on every opportunity to tell her family about Anakin [...].   The fic
> where she and Anakin are in bed, him sitting up against the pillows and
> her playing with his right hand, and she goes "didn't you have a scar
> here..." and he says, sleepy, without thinking, "yeah, a pirate pinned my
> hand to the counter in the junk shop with a knife once when Watto
> wouldn't deal with him", and she's first horrified and then, when she
> realises he's fallen asleep, decides he must have been joking. Surely he
> was joking.[40]

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irnan has since written and posted the fic detailing Anakin's scar she describes above, so evidently she was able to sort out her network of meanings and "get a grip on [Padmé'sl characterization." But part of the way she constructs her interpretation of the character is to work out her meanings through language, generating them in the piece of meta (quoted above) which will also become fic. In fact, there are snippets of fiction embedded within the meta post; irnan inserts dialogue from her developing fic into her meta post. The fic that eventually results from her own generative process, complicated and extended by the participation of other fans (at the time of writing, 31 comments have been posted to her entry) is within the genre that fans identify as meta!fic, which in this case forms part of her head!canon.[41]

The creation of head!canon is an intertextual process that incorporates influences from the original materials, the works produced by the fanfiction writer's community, and the metadiscourse of the fandom. But this does not mean that fanfiction writers seek a final consensus. Brooker and others have tended to underestimate the individualistic nature of head!canon and portray fannish interpretations as attempts to mediate a single meaning on which the fan community can agree.[42] Sharing head!canon, however, aims to enhance the discourse, adding another node to the network of potential meanings. The primary value here is not consensus, but richness: fanfiction writers do not seek a resolved meaning, but revel in multiple dimensions of significance. As ficcer estora, commenting on the controversial canonical materials by professional EU writer Karen Miller, asserts,

My interpretation of the relationships between characters is no doubt far

from your interpretation, or Karen Miller's interpretation [...].[43] But you

know what? That's still really cool, even if I don't agree with someone

else, because without different interpretations we wouldn't have all of the

awesome stories and theories floating around today.[44]

For estora, achieving stasis amounts to closing the door on fanfiction; without

ambiguities to interrogate, there is no longer any need to write. But estora also conceives

of her head!canon somewhat differently from other fanfiction writers; most writers, like

attanagra, construe their head!canons as attempts to derive some sort of consistency from

the conflicting materials with which they are presented. estora values multiplicity so

much that she considers all canon constructions to be discrete universes of meaning: "I

have my own Head!Canon, of course, which is like a parallel to real canon."[45] So while

her appreciation for diversity of interpretation is representative, estora does not see her

Head!Canon as a way of making sense of the original material, but as an alternative to it.

Other fanfiction writers, by contrast, understand their head!canons as idiosyncratic ways

of negotiating textual interpretation, analyzing characters and meanings through their

fics. They seek to create head!canon fics that not offer an internally consistent narrative

that not only comply with the official canon, but actually render the official version more

intelligible.

In her head!canon fic *Thirteen Steps to the End of the World,* selonbrody rereads

and rewrites the trajectory of Anakin's rise and fall in light of his canonical childhood in

slavery on Tatooine (to which the films seldom refer after he wins his freedom in Episode I). She begins:

> Anakin passed out sooner than most would under that kind of assault, because he was small, but later than most his age, because he was strong. Shmi [...] held his bruised head in her lap and ran her fingers through his dirty hair once the Zeltron finished with her. She hushed his murmured apologies and inwardly cursed the life that made her four-year-old son think he had to protect her, when she was his mother, damn it, and she was supposed to be able to do that for both of them.[46]

Here selonbrody sets up the history of violence and powerlessness that constructs her interpretation of Anakin's character from his very early childhood, before he ever encounters the Jedi, to his eventual fall to the Dark Side. She thus plausibly explains his canonical obsession with saving the people close to him, especially women.[47] In the opening scene of her fic, four-year-old Anakin is trying to protect his mother from rape, and the experience of witnessed rape forms the basis for his understanding of power and violence throughout his life, and sets up the defensiveness and aggression that define his behavior as a young adult. selonbrody interprets Anakin's seemingly erratic behavior as the natural result of an internal conflict between a compassionate nature and a learned strategy that can be summarized by the familiar adage "the best defense is a good offense." Nature and nurture are at war in selonbrody's narrative, and violence becomes the whip that continually urges Anakin down a crooked path he doesn't want to follow. His antipathy toward the authority figures who reinforce their positions through violence

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is also introduced here, and selonbrody's interpretation redefines Anakin's anti-authority resentments, which in canon are either unexplained or construed as a character flaw and the influence of the Dark Side, as a lingering effect of his childhood enslavement.[48]

Later in the same piece, selonbrody teases out some of the implications of such a childhood, reinterpreting the canonical events through the lens her head!canon provides:

> Anakin didn't trust Master Yoda or Master Windu, or indeed
> anyone on the Jedi Council. [...]
>
> It was… the rank itself. Anakin had long ago decided that freedom
> meant never having to say, "Yes, master." He'd said it directly to Gardulla
> only once when he'd been under her ownership, but her guards got a kick
> out of making him address them the same way, and had ways of enforcing
> it. He'd first tasted freedom when he and his mother were finally sold, and
> not just because they had privacy for the first time in his life. Anakin said
> "Yes, master," "No, master," and "I'm sorry, master," to his face, but at
> home it was always Watto. Home was a little pocket of freedom, because
> there were no masters there, only he and his mom and a flimsy façade of
> security. [...] The Council [...] were the Masters, and they were in charge.
> [...]They didn't realize how easily they could hurt those they ruled.[49]

selonbrody uses this passage to explain Anakin's refusal to admit his fears for Padmé, and his reason for demanding the rank of Master, to the Council.[50] She addresses Anakin's painful history with the term *Master*, situating it first in the painful context of his slavery in Gardulla's palace, then reconstructing it as a word that never had to be said in the

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home: freedom is not the ability to choose one's own path, but a respite from having to reinforce through language another being's dominance and his own powerlessness. Anakin's life with the Jedi redefines *Master* again — for them it is a rank: Anakin is appalled by their unawareness of what their own titles suggest and their careless use of power. So selonbrody interprets Anakin's life with the Jedi as a form of slavery by first stating that "freedom meant never having to say 'Yes, Master,'" and then juxtaposing Anakin's definition of freedom with the fact that he must continually address other Jedi as Master, in order to maintain his place among them and strive to match their rank. selonbrody draws out the similarities between his slavery on Tatooine and his subservience to the Council to demonstrate that real freedom was never a possibility for Anakin. The penultimate line of selonbrody's fic, referring to Anakin's pledge to Sidious, is: "It's easy to give up your freedom when you never had it in the first place."[51]

In addition, selonbrody's head!canon fics interpret Anakin Skywalker as a character constructed and confounded by language, exploring elements that are established in the canon, but never explored. It is canonical that Anakin is bilingual, speaking both Huttese and Basic (what we hear in the movies as English) from very early childhood. selonbrody suggests that neither language is Anakin's mother tongue: in her head!canon fic, Anakin grows up speaking "the language of freedom," at home with his mother - a third language not known in the canon that selonbrody calls *Tal*. selonbrody has produced an interrelated series of texts that explain the provenance of Tal and its significance historically and in Anakin Skywalker's life. Most important for her interpretation of the canon, however, is that both Basic and Huttese are languages of

slavery: first Anakin's literal childhood slavery on Tatooine, then his de facto enslavement to the Jedi, who will not allow him to marry, visit his mother, or own possessions.

selonbrody is not alone in making language the prism through which she focuses an interpretation of Anakin Skywalker. irnan says:

> Obi-Wan is the one who teaches him to read Basic, and Anakin soon realises his new Master thinks he couldn't read at all before that, which does sort of hurt his pride, but he doesn't know how to explain the language of the Magh'ran and his mother's people and Feisal and the seifa and the city in the canyons to Obi-Wan, and anyway he's supposed to be unlearning all of that in order to become a Jedi – they even speak Huttese differently, let alone Magh'ran – so Anakin doesn't try, and Obi-Wan carries on seeing what he expects to see in his new apprentice.[52]

Like selonbrody, irnan is concerned with what this third language and culture (created by the fanfiction writer) means for Anakin's relationship to his fellow Jedi and his ongoing relationships with women (chiefly his mother and Padmé). Both fanfiction writers represent Anakin as illiterate in the dominant language, and they are both are at pains to present him as deeply embedded within a matriarchal context, so that his transition to the Jedi Temple and the more male-dominated society familiar to viewers from the films distances him from his fellow Jedi, makes him unknowable. For irnan in particular, the canonical claim that Anakin is "too old" to be trained as a Jedi is true, but not because of any inherent flaw in Anakin; it is because he can never find his place within the

patriarchy. He is unable to adapt to the gender roles and power dynamics that the Jedi Council is tasked with reinforcing, and so he is constantly Other. irnan thus reinterprets Anakin's difference, gendering him feminine in a masculine sphere. irnan is concerned with the lasting effects of Anakin's childhood slavery, but she interprets them in terms of the Jedi's ignorance; it has never occurred to Obi-Wan that there might be areas of knowledge of which he knows nothing. Both writers demonstrate the Jedi's tendency to erase Anakin's history, to pretend that he comes to them as a blank slate — selonbrody through her exploration of the disjuncture between Anakin's experience with the title *Master* and the power structures it implies and the Council's casual use of both, and irnan through suggesting that Anakin — a savvy kid who rescues Jedi from a sandstorm in the canon — always remains at least partially unknowable to the Jedi, because of the questions they (and the canonical texts) never ask.

Head!canon thus develops from an interrogation of the fannish tradition, which includes both the official materials and fan productions. Fannish criticism is a process of inquiry: fans ask questions and seek their answers in the texts. Sometimes they must provide the answers themselves, through writing new pieces of the tradition. These answers both establish their interpretations and often lead to further interrogation; and because fanfiction is written to be shared, fannish inquiry is conducted on multiple levels: individually and collaboratively, with reference to the official canon and in the context of other fannish contributions to the tradition. All such influences contribute to the construction of a fanfiction writer's idiosyncratic head!canon.

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Head!canons interact with each other, with the source materials, and with other literary and cultural texts. In this way, they are similar to other intertextual and transformative works already recognized by the literary academy — James Joyce's *Ulysses*, for instance. Unlike such texts, however, head!canons function as a part of the "oral" tradition[53] which they also selectively redeploy and interpret. Once posted, each head!canon fic or meta becomes a point on the constellation of meanings recognized by fans. Head!canon is thus both narrative and interpretive, without ever seeking consensus. For fanfiction writers, it comprises the structure of meanings in which they understand the *Star Wars* story; for scholars, it provides a structure of interpretation in which to understand each writer's corpus. By recognizing the generically distinct forms of interpretive fanfiction and meeting them on their own terms, scholars can better understand these texts both ethnographically and as literary works. Academics in cultural studies, literary studies, ethnography, cultural anthropology, and film and media studies can benefit from examining fanfiction in context. Such contextualized analyses can help us to better understand how communities develop generic distinctions, how individual fans interpret existing materials and create their own texts, and how narrative traditions are constructed in the age of new media and convergence culture.

Notes

[22] The most famous example is probably the "Han shot first" controversy, in which DVD releases of *A New Hope* do *not* show Han Solo firing first at the bounty hunter Greedo, from under the table, although the 1977 theatrical release did. Such revisions are notoriously common in *Star Wars* "canon," and are meant to replace earlier versions and their meanings; but inevitably, many fans prefer older versions that suggest different interpretations of characters and storylines.

[23] Jenkins, Henry. "Scribbling in the Margins: Fan Readers/Fan Writers." Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture. New York: Routledge, 1992. 152-184. Print.

[24] Pugh, Sheenagh. "The Knowledge." The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context. Glasgow: Bell and Bain Ltd., 2005. 25-46. Print.

[25] Kaplan, Deborah. "Construction of Fan Fiction Through Narrative." Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays. Eds. Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006. 134-152. Print.

[26] Brooker, Will. "Canon." Using the Force: Creativity, Community, and Star Wars. New York: Continuum, 2002. 101-115. Print.

[27] Head!canon is not discussed exclusively on livejournal.com, but the blogging platform encourages conversations between fans in a way that the strictly reader-to-writer and writer-to-reader format of a fanfiction archive like fanfiction.net does not. Additionally, unlike many fanfiction archives, livejournal.com allows fans to post about a variety of topics, including head!canon, on their own journals or in communities, without relegating such posts to their own area of a given archive. It is, in other words, a highly intertexual and interactive way of generating and discussing narratives.

[28] Meta!fic is fiction intended to interpret a character or situation through narrative; it is distinct from meta proper, which is the a non-narrative interpretive genre, usually written in essay form. Fic, as the other half of the neologism, is fannish shorthand for "fanfiction" in any context.

[29] Fannish discourse, unlike the academy, lacks a sharp distinction between literature and criticism. The same post will often include both nonfiction commentary on the source materials (including other writing by fans) and a piece of fanfiction that seeks to enhance the narrative tradition. Comments on such posts tend not to differentiate between these elements, but respond to both the narrative and the commentary as the writer's interpretation of the characters, scenes, or storylines she addresses.

[30] While "head!canon"is the shorthand term used to encompass a network of textual generation and interpretation, not all posts that deal with such topics refer to "head!canon" explicitly; it is often unnecessary to point out that the question at issue in a discussion is head!canon, because all the participants already treat it as such.

[31] "Post-RotJ" refers to any events in the *Star Wars* universe which take place after the events of the canonical film *Return of the Jedi.* The EU is fannish shorthand for the "Expanded Universe," George Lucas' term for authorized narratives set within the *Star Wars* universe he has created. These works constitute several degrees or "levels" of canon, which are hierarchically organized in a continually evolving form on Wookiepedia, a *Star Wars* version of the popular Wikipedia open-source encyclopedia. Wookiepedia represents a shared body of knowledge continually mediated to reflect a fannish consensus. Fanfiction writers frequently refer each other to Wookiepedia to provide evidence for their claims, or to point out a particular item of canon that they are choosing to include or reject.

[32] I have chosen these particular examples because their desirability as part of the canon is widely disputed among fanfictionwriters, and because they are some of the easiest examples for readers with a casual knowledge of *Star Wars* to understand.

[33] In the original livejournal entry, "this Leia fic" was hypertext that linked to the narrative manifestation of the same set of ideas that generated her meta post.

[34] In the original livejournal entry, "swallows and amazons verse" was hypertext that linked to the master post for this interrelated set of stories irnan has developed that present an AU (alternate universe) for the *Star Wars* saga.

[35] irnan. *About Leia Organa.* 20 Sept. 2010. http://irnan.livejournal.com/176708.html Accessed 16 Nov. 2010

[36] attanagra. "Clone Wars: Evil Plans." http://attanagra.livejournal.com/24561.html 16 Nov. 2010. Accessed 18 Nov. 2010.

[37] irnan. "star wars meta / fic pet peeves." 11 Oct. 2010. http://irnan.livejournal.com/178626.html Accessed 03 Aug. 2011.

[38] selonbrody. "Fic: Tell Them Stories." 5 Sept. 2010. http://selonbrody.livejournal.com/37910.html#cutid1 Accessed 18 Nov. 2010.

[39] irnan. "i've been thinking about Padmé lately." 3 Sept. 2010. http://irnan.livejournal.com/174435.html. Accessed 18 Nov. 2010. Web.

[40] irnan. "i've been thinking about Padmé lately."

[41] The interactions between meta!fic and head!canon fic are complicated, but in broad terms head!canon fics tend to focus on the story presented as part of a larger narrative structure; they are concerned with making sense of a large body of material, and filling in gaps or providing explanations as needed. Meta!fics often have a tighter local focus; they interpret by detailing a single moment, rather than by relating that moment and its meanings to the rest of the established narrative.

[42] Brooker, Will. "Canon." *Using the Force: Creativity, Community, and* Star Wars. New York: Continuum, 2002. 101-115. Print.

[43] Karen Miller is an Expanded Universe author whose interpretation of the relationship between Anakin Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi has been hotly contested, chiefly over fans' desire to read her texts as homoerotic, which Miller, aligning herself with George Lucas's intentionality regarding the characters, claims not to have intended. The entire controversy centers around the meaning and importance of authorial intent in constructing canon, and has generated a variety of fics which reread and reinterpret Miller's texts, as well as reams of meta that do the same.

[44] estora. "Ryn, Anakin, Kakkik, and the Issue of Chemistry." 21 Oct. 2010. http://wyncatastrophe.livejournal.com/96533.html. Accessed 18 Nov. 2010.

[45] estora. "Ryn, Anakin, Kakkik, and the Issue of Chemistry."

[46] selonbrody. *Thirteen Steps to the End of the World.* 3 May 2010. http://selonbrody.livejournal.com/11390.html Accessed 23 Nov. 2010.

[47] selonbrody expands on Anakin's problematic relationship with women throughout her corpus, focusing on the violent loss of his mother, who dies in his arms when Anakin is eighteen or nineteen (depending on which version of the canon is privileged), and the terror of losing his wife in childbirth which drives his fall to the Dark Side in Episode III.

[48] It's worth noting here that the canon's failure to address the long-term effects of slavery on Anakin's psyche is one of the themes fanfiction authors most often seek to rectify; frustrated by the canonical assumption that leaving Tatooine (and his mother, still in slavery) has made everything all right, fanfiction writers attempt to fill the silence.

[49] selonbrody. *Thirteen Steps to the End of the World.*

[50] Revealing, incidentally, selonbrody's own sense that the canonical explanations — that he will be expelled from the Jedi Order, and Padmé removed from her post in the Senate, if their relationship is discovered, and that Jedi orthodoxy requires him to let Padmé die, rather than fearing loss — are somehow insufficient reasons for his behavior; they are external, and selonbrody seeks an internal logic for the character.

[51] selonbrody. *Thirteen Steps to the End of the World.*

[52] irnan. "Anakin Skywalker headcanon." *ancient songs of sadness.* 5 June 2010. http://irnan.livejournal.com/164029.html#cutid1 Accessed 23 Nov. 2010.

[53] Walter's Ong's 1980 "Literacy and Orality in Our Times" initiated the idea of a "secondary orality" for audiences of radio and television; the expanded implications of such an orality in the age of Web 2.0 have not been comprehensively analyzed. It seems clear from my research, however, that fanfiction writers and readers do interact as bearers of a tradition that is not fixed but continually evolving, that is passed from person to person and never formally studied, and that changes with each new storyteller: very similar, in fact, to what we know of oral traditions in any culture.

CHAPTER III

LOOK AT THAT:

THE FEMALE GAZE AND OGLING JEDI

During the last half-century, while the dominant culture has been busy

objectifying women and subversive elements have been busy decrying it, many women

have been busy objectifying men. Ignoring the supposed impotence of the female gaze,

women in media fandom have been gazing their fill and inscribing men's bodies in their

fan fiction texts. While the dominant culture has only occasionally revealed the same

female desire, unmediated by patriarchal commentary,[54] the vernacular communities of

women who make up the vast majority of fan fiction writers have gone "poaching" on

male territory unhindered.

Examples of such appropriation, rife with the sexualization of male characters

who in the source materials betrayed no sexual interest, abound in many fandoms and fan

fiction communities. I take as my example a piece of *Star Wars* fan fiction recently

posted by a fan who may be considered more or less typical for her fandom - a young,

female university student, whose interest in *Star Wars* is focused primarily on the Prequel

Trilogy. Posting under the username estora in a variety of fora - not only on

livejournal.com, but also with significant recognition on such mainstream sites of fan

production as theforce.net, archiveofourown.org, and especially fanfiction.net - she has

produced a substantial body of fan fiction that deals primarily but not exclusively with

the relationship between Anakin Skywalker and his mentor and friend, Obi-Wan Kenobi.

I choose estora's work not because she is representative of *Star Wars* fan fiction writing -

though the themes she handles are certainly widespread within the fandom - but because

she is widely acknowledged within the fandom as a particularly excellent storyteller.

In one of her more well-known stories, a novel-length offering called *From the*

Ashes in the genre fan fiction readers and writers commonly designate as "AU" - stories

which depart significantly from the canonical plot elements - Obi-Wan is on a slow

journey to discover his own feelings, slowly realizing his forbidden attraction to his

former Padawan, Anakin Skywalker (in canon, by this time in the story Anakin is himself

engaged in a forbidden relationship and secret marriage with a female character, Padmé

Amidala, and thus unavailable for the fulfillment of Obi-Wan's fantasies, so this is one of

the ways in which estora's universe differs significantly from the canon). The course of

this journey follows roughly the narrative sketched by Janet Radway in *Reading the*

Romance: at the beginning of the story, the two characters are caught in a love-hate

relationship; as the story progresses, they come to appreciate each other more and are

held apart by a series of misunderstandings; the end of the story is yet to come, since

From the Ashes - like much fan fiction - is posted as a serial, but several of estora's

comments hint at a future happy ending.[55] It would be possible, then, and perhaps

productive, to conduct an analysis of *From the Ashes* as women's literature at the level of

structure. Such a reading, however, would miss at least two elements which I believe are

crucial to understanding both *From the Ashes* and fan fiction more generally.

The first of these elements is that a purely structural[56] analysis is not likely to give

full appreciation to the complex internal journey each of the characters undertakes. The

philosophy underlying estora's use of AU is: "One moment. One choice. A lifetime of difference."[57] In other words, she takes as her starting place a single change from the canonical plot - in this case, instead of following orders and leaving Padmé to her fate to help his Master, Obi-Wan, battle the Separatist leader Count Dooku as he does in canon, in the *From the Ashes* universe Anakin leaps after her, thereby sullying their relationship with his perceived inability to put duty first. Obi-Wan is seriously injured in trying to take Dooku alone, and the first twenty-odd chapters deal extensively with the repercussions of Anakin's choice - both personally, for both Anakin and Obi-Wan, and interpersonally, as they work their way toward an often uneasy peace with each other. So although a "romance" reading would certainly acknowledge that they were being kept apart, it would miss the protracted character studies that explicate their slow turn toward each other. Anakin and Obi-Wan in *From the Ashes* are not types; they are complicated people, and the explication of their psychologies (separate, but moving toward congruence) is arguably more important in the story as a whole than any single plot point.

Second, a structural analysis would miss the almost exultant genderedness that comes out of *From the Ashes*. A straight female writing for (mostly) other straight females, estora has written all but two of the thirty-two chapters posted to date from the point of view of one of the two male leads, as they dance around each other. At crucial moments in the story, she appropriates their eyes to view the other with an avidly heterosexual female gaze, objectifying the other member of this dyad. I doubt whether this is a consciously political move on estora's part, but it certainly represents a type of agency that feminists have too long been hesitant to recognize. Since Laura Mulveys

"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," we have tended to assume that it is a man who looks, and a woman who is looked at. In *From the Ashes*, a man does look, but he looks with a woman's gaze, and he does not look at a woman, but at another man.

It should be said that, from a narrative point of view, this kind of gazing could be construed as a homosexual male gaze, thus obviating the consideration of female agency. I think this would be a mistake largely because of the deeply contextualized nature of fan fiction; in its performance and reception it is more like oral storytelling than it is like what the academy has been accustomed to call "literature." I do not wish to argue that female fan fiction writers always or necessarily or indeed usually write themselves and their own voices into their stories. But the audience is aware that estora is a woman, one of them; and estora is unquestionably aware that her audience is composed almost entirely of women. One of the reasons they are reading the story in the first place, if the reviews are any gauge of intent, is that readers found both Anakin and Obi-Wan extremely attractive in their on-screen portrayals. Further complicating the situation, the gaze is not by any means consistent over the course of the story, but is deployed at key moments for dramatic effect. I wish to examine one such moment, which I regard as the primary turning point in the Anakin/Obi-Wan relationship, and demonstrate how it functions both as an appreciation and as an appropriation of the sexualized male body, as estora indulges her own delight in looking and invites readers to look with her. In order to conduct my analysis, I will turn to a feminist version of performance theory, articulated by Patricia E. Sawin,[58] as the theory in the academy today which has the best chance at

capturing the most dimensions of this gaze that is not only given and received, but also performed in context.

Feminist theory has been described as "one of the most complex and internally differentiated of the various movements in theory".[59] Politically motivated feminist theory's techniques are appropriated from Freudian and sometimes Lacanian models of psychoanalysis, as well as poststructuralist modes of linguistic analysis. Coinciding roughly with the end of the New Critical period of literary criticism, the founding mothers of feminist theory in the second half of the twentieth century participated in the opening of the literary canon through the 1960s and 70s, a move which has obvious implications for cultural studies scholars eager to work in the emerging fields of new media and participatory culture. Heralding the literary (rather than psychological) study of gender, these early feminists "gave Freud a new relevance by virtue of his nearly constitutive role in gender theory," as discussed by literary historian Nicholas Birns.[60] The strictly literary perspective with which Birns engages, however, has the disadvantage of failing to recognize the important contributions to gender studies from folklorists, anthropologists, and other scholars whose work demands an attention to lived experience.

The emergence of gender studies as a natural by-product of the deconstructions attempted by second-wave feminists has given rise to an unfortunate tendency, both within academic circles and in the larger culture, to suppose that any interrogation of gender complexities must necessarily be a feminist undertaking. The rise of masculinist studies within the last decade and a half has not yet served to break this alignment. In fairness, however, it was the work of feminists during the first years of the

poststructuralist period that rendered the perception that masculinity was a sort of human default untenable. This was particularly true of the so-called "French feminists." As Birns observes, "French feminist participates in post-structuralism's overhauling of binary oppositions and arbitrary absolutes".[61]

Kristeva's work was influential in spreading recognition of Lacan's version of psychoanalysis so that it served, at least partly, as an alternative to Freud. It is Lacan's discussion of the "mirror stage" of infant development[62] that informs Laura Mulvey's now-famous "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema," which undertook to analyze the scopophilic gaze and female objectification in the movie-viewing experience. (Significantly, Mulvey's article focused on the cinema setting, and not on television, the viewing of which is a far more communal experience that encourages less identification.) French feminists are also famous for inscribing what is called "écriture feminine": a writing that is "less methodical, more irrational, less intellectual, and more experiential" than traditional Western writing by men.[63]

Patricia Sawin has been instrumental in pointing out the problems of psychoanalytic theory from an ethnographic perspective, noting in particular a sometimes confusing double-meaning of the word "desire" across disciplinary contexts.[64] While Sawin negotiates the problems of conducting feminist performance analysis across literary/ethnographic disciplines through an interrogation of Mulvey's article alongside Richard Bauman's foundational *Verbal Art as Performance*, it seems to me that the problem of defining desire is actually part of a larger problem of psychoanalytic theory which does not reveal itself until it is applied to lived experience as well as more stable

texts. That is: psychoanalytic theory as it is known in literary circles works best at the level of metaphor. (Thus, for example, "penis" does not mean "penis," but *power*.) This is not to say that actual sex, desire, and lack are not present in either lived experience or in texts; but the relevance of psychoanlytic theory lies in its ability to draw out of existing materials a metaphoric or allegorical narrative of desire, lack, and sexual identity construction. When taken literally, it begins to defy actual experience.

For scholars who deal with the "raw" materials of daily life, therefore, it is more constructive to consider a performatively-oriented model of feminism. Or, to turn that around: to apply performance theory, but through a feminist lens. I am particularly drawn to the feminist adjustment of Bauman's performance theory suggested by Sawin, as it builds on established models of performativity to provide some framework for how an analysis specific to women performers could be conducted. While a "feminist reading" could thus mean many things, I intend to employ feminist theory in reading Chapter 23 of *From the Ashes* to reveal the female gaze as it appears there, and to consider its possible implications in context, both for the fan fiction community and for a wider society. It is at this point that performance theory becomes important: the writers and, to a large extent, the audiences, of internet fan fiction are performing not only the narratives, but their own identities as fans, women, and storytellers. By focusing on the problems women endure within a still-patriarchal dominant culture, we run the risk of undervaluing power women posses within subcultural and vernacular communities like fandoms - perhaps *especially* in fandom, which in mainstream culture is often perceived as

primarily male. Thus my analysis is derived from the text, but has implications for

ethnography as well.

> We may as well take as our starting point Mulvey's assertion that
>
> [a] male movie star's glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the
>
> erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete,
>
> more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition
>
> in front of the mirror.[65]

In Mulvey's influential feminist application of psychoanalysis, all movie viewers identify

with the active male hero and objectify the passive female character(s). This she

construes as an attempt to circumvent castration threats and resultant unpleasure.[66]

Mulvey does not allow for the possibility of a corresponding female gaze. This might be

due to a shortsightedness on her part, or it might be because the narrative cinema she

analyzed did lend itself well to a deeply patriarchal reading through Lacanian

psychoanalysis. As Susan R. Bowers has said,

> [t]he mythological figure of Medusa, that primary trope of female sexuality,
>
> is a good example of how profoundly the male gaze structures both male
>
> and female perceptions of women and of the antidote to the male gaze.[67]

More ominously, she adds, "Rediscovering and remembering the vitality and dark power

of that Medusa can help women to re-member themselves."[68] The suggestion of "dark"

power has connotations that are particularly distressing within the context of *Star Wars*

fandom, but more importantly it seems that female *Star Wars* fan fiction readers and

writers are not in need of re-membering themselves or their power; there is no need to

recover what has not been lost, and I find little evidence that, in this vernacular context that operates in an almost entirely feminine space, women are lacking in power.[69] In any case, in fan fiction it is clear that women do look, and with great enthusiasm.

Chapter 23, as I have noted, marks a turning point in *From the Ashes,* both for Obi-Wan's character (as he comes to the unwanted realization that he is attracted to his former apprentice),[70] and for the relationship between our two male protagonists, as Obi-Wan reacts negatively to his newfound self-knowledge and rejects a confused Anakin. Here at this juncture between old and new, between mystery and knowledge, between being and becoming, estora pauses the narrative to linger on Anakin's form. Obi-Wan's eyes become the focal point through which the audience's desire is channeled. She says,

"Sometimes I wish I knew what goes on in that mind of yours, Obi-Wan," Anakin says, easily slipping past the barriers of his reverie as he approaches, flushed and sweaty. "What are you thinking about?"

Obi-Wan doesn't speak yet. A long moment later finds his hand resting on Anakin's damp cheek and the loud buzz of voices fades into the background. "I'm thinking…" he replies absently, not really having an answer. His thumb makes a gentle movement which he knows can be interpreted as nothing other than a caress, and he wets his lips. "I'm thinking…"

I'm thinking I have absolutely no idea what I am doing.

Reluctantly his hand falls from Anakin's face. "I'm thinking it has been a while since I last sparred with you. Care to join me?"[71]

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What follows is the enactment of a trope - significantly, one more common in film than in literature - in which a fight or mock-fight acts as a metaphor for building sexual tension. The clear desire with which Anakin is introduced here, "flushed and sweaty," while Obi-Wan mindlessly caresses his cheek, operates on two levels. It functions homoerotically within the text - Obi-Wan's sexual feelings for Anakin are at this point obvious to the readers, though not to himself - but it also functions communally within the *con*text. That is, female readers are invited to watch Obi-Wan watching Anakin, and desire and objectify them both. The scene is thus intensely voyeuristic, with the audience's pleasure intensifying as Obi-Wan's guilt and desire dare each other higher and defy Anakin's innocence. There are implications here for the construction of both character and audience identities. estora's Anakin is far less likely than Obi-Wan to become the subject of unspeakable desires, because Anakin's performance within the "romance" text estora has constructed is coded as male, while Obi-Wan is essentially playing the role of the romantic heroine. Obi-Wan is therefore transgressing the boundaries of who can or should gaze appropriately (in both senses of "appropriate"), while the (female) audience that looks with him participates in this transgression, appropriating it for their own desire.

The end of their sparring match plays out in a metaphor of sexual release, as they knock each other to the ground and Anakin falls sprawling "[r]ight on top" of Obi-Wan. Immediately estora draws the scene out into a literary version of slow-motion, letting the audience's gaze linger over Anakin's body and make it their own. Through Obi-Wan's eyes:

Anakin swallows, and Obi-Wan can see the bob of his Adam's apple. "Yes,

Master," Anakin breathes huskily, so close that Obi-Wan can feel his

breath on his own lips. Neither move, both worn out by the intense

sparring session. One second. Two seconds. Obi-Wan becomes acutely

aware of the proximity, of the fact that Anakin's firm body is completely

stretched over his, shoulders touching shoulders and hips aligned with

hips. Their harsh breathing mingles, chests moving against each other, and

a droplet of sweat trickles down Anakin's brow, tracing its way down his

handsome face.[72]

The scene mimics the culmination of a sexual encounter - "worn out by the intense

sparring session" could almost be "worn out by the intense sexual release" - playing on

the widely recognized correlation between sexuality and aggression to lend the text

layered meanings of violence and desire. At the same time, it invites the female reader to

appropriate the male sexuality so blatantly displayed for her own voyeuristic enjoyment.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, one might argue that in this text, where both of the

characters are presented as male, the text nonetheless genders Anakin as feminine in

order to objectify him further (subverting and inverting his aggressively coded

masculinity in the rest of the story), an argument which would preserve the maleness of

Obi-Wan's gaze. Indeed, this is the line of reasoning I would expect most feminist

scholars to take.

Unfortunately, however, such reasoning is circular. It works only if we assume that "feminine" is code for "recipient," "passive," "objectified." In other words, the gaze can only gender Anakin feminine if we assume that anything which is the object of a gaze is feminine - in which case, for feminist theory that deals with the lived experience of actual women and therefore must presume some relationship between the concept of feminine gender and the practice of living as a woman, we would be creating for ourselves an inescapable tautology. Far from recreating Mulvey's argument that women identify with the male heroes of the screen and objectify their sisters, then, I argue that the context in which fan fiction, including *From the Ashes*, is shared informs the meaning of the text. It is not only, though it is most explicitly, Anakin who is looked at here; and it is not only Obi-Wan, but also the female audience, who looks. I therefore reject Mulvey's assertion that "pleasure in looking [is] split between active/male and passive/ female" (Mulvey 19). In fact, these scenes from *From the Ashes* function as a sort of strip-tease for a female audience - a strip-tease *of* a man (Anakin), *by* a woman (the author, estora), for the pleasure of *both* a male character (Obi-Wan) *and* many actual women (the primary audience of estora's fan fiction).

Of course, this multivalence itself raises questions of homoeroticism: if estora is treating us to a strip-tease, albeit in the guise of a man, and the audience participates with her in enjoying this male display, are there not dimensions of lesbianism as well as heterosexual desire? More importantly, however, the gaze in *From the Ashes* functions to reclaim an active role for women, who take ownership of men's bodies through their inscription, dissemination, and enjoyment. Fans like estora could, of course, claim an

active role for women by allowing a female character to take the lead in a heterosexual narrative. estora's solution, however, this makes a spectacle of *two* men, rather than just one: the audience is presented with two objects for appropriation and desire.

Findings like these have been all too rare in media studies, perhaps because the tendency has been to focus on official versions of mass media and popular culture, which still demonstrate highly conservative, patriarchal constructions of sex, power, and the gaze. Much of the problem no doubt lies in the insularity of academic disciplines; the scholars who conduct internet ethnography among fan fiction writers are not often, or not often enough, the scholars who conduct psychoanalytic (or other) analyses of mass media texts. I am not suggesting that we do not live in a patriarchal society, nor that conservative, patriarchally sanctioned constructions of gender do not persist. But careful analyses of vernacular responses to that culture demonstrate what folklorists have long recognized: regardless of what the officials of culture may want us to say, the "folk" can and do make their own meanings. Power is constantly subverted. And women do look, even if their gaze is less often represented in the officially sanctioned products of the dominant culture. Given the chance (as with the easy interactions provided by internet accessibility), they will invite others to look, too. The female gaze may have gone underground, but in fan cultures it is alive and well, and being performed at length, and with great attention by both writers and audiences - a process to which we will now turn.

Notes

[54] Two songs bookending the era under discussion come to mind: The Weather Girls' *It's Raining Men* and Katy Perry's *Peacock*. The first promises men of every type thanks to Mother Nature's wrangling with the angels, describing their bodies in spare detail but with great enthusiasm; the second features the singer's demand that the man to whom she is speaking strip for her assessment.

[55] Radway, Janice. *Reading the Romance*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P. 1991. Print.

[56] I mean "structural" in a fairly literal way, as the form of the plot. The multiple angles from which an analysis could be profitably undertaken suggest the richness of estora's work as a cultural text, whose multivalence webs out to encompass readers' own meanings.

[57] As demonstrated on her LiveJournal homepage: http://estora.livejournal.com

[58] Sawin, Patricia E. "Performance at the Nexus of Gender, Power, and Desire: Reconsidering Bauman's Verbal Art from the Perspective of Gendered Subjectivity as Performance." *The Journal of American Folklore*. 115.455. Winter 2002. 28-61. JStor.

[59] Birns, Nicholas. "Deconstructing Gender." *Theory After Theory: An Intellectual History of Literary Theory from 1950 to the Early 21st Century*. Toronto: Broadview Press, 2010. 129. Print.

[60] Birns 137.

[61] Birns 141.

[62] Birns 140.

[63] Birns 142.

[64] Sawin 46.

[65] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Theories of Representation and Difference: Visual and Other Pleasures*. Teresa de Lauretis, ed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. 20.

[66] Mulvey 25.

[67] Bowers, Susan R. "Medusa and the Female Gaze." *NWSA Journal.* 2.2 1990: 217

[68] Bowers 217.

[69] Significantly, the attainment of power/authority in this space is not necessarily linked to "external" privilege such as race or social class, but on one's ability to perform successfully as a storyteller. While casual mentions embedded in comment threads lead me to believe that many of the participants have at least some college education, race (like gender) is indicated only at the user's discretion, while the economic barriers to reliable internet access continue to drop, and no longer exclude participants from lower socioeconomic brackets.

[70] Citations from this section of *From the Ashes* lead one to estora's fanfiction.net page, rather than her LJ page. This is because, during the process of posting the story, she altered her procedure and began posting the story to her LJ *as links*, rather than reformatting and posting an alternate version. Fans sometimes respond on fanfiction.net, and sometimes to the LJ post from which they were linked. The interconnectedness here is important to the way estora sees herself as an author, operating continuously across a variety of fora; other fans choose to differentiate their personalities on the different fan fiction sites, rather than perform the same identity across multiple sites.

[71] estora. "Freefall." *From the Ashes*. <http://www.fanfiction.net/s/5609369/23/From_The_Ashes> Accessed 14 March, 2011.

[72] estora.

CHAPTER IV

PERFORMANCE, GENDER, AND "SQUEE" CULTURE

Applying any kind of theory in folklore is inherently a process of constructing some sort

of coherent narrative out of a body of material that is natively more fluid rather than

rigidly defined. This is a necessary project, if we are to render the materials we study

intelligible to scholars in our own discipline and others, and yet it presents a certain

conflict with an equally essential project of representation, because in folklore - by

contrast to literary studies - we have not only to analyze the texts at our hands, but to

present the texts so that they are available for study.

I wish to state at the outset that I do not conceive of performance theory as the

only one which can be applied productively to fan fiction, either narrowly to specific

texts, or more broadly, with a view to the conventions of the genre. A variety of

interdisciplinary approaches can and should be used in analyzing fan works. But the

nature of storytelling in internet fan fiction communities is such that its significance

cannot be understood without reference to performativity. Therefore performance theory

is key to the analysis of fan fiction texts, individually and in relationship to each other,

and I draw on performance theory to construct my narrative of fan fiction. Approaching

my materials from an interdisciplinary perspective that engages with both literary and

cultural studies, I will use close readings of a variety of fan fiction texts - selected from

the range of such texts with which I engaged through the course of a year's participant observation - to demonstrate both how performance theory can help us to understand these emerging cultural texts and how developing their analysis can enhance ongoing uses of performance theory.

Although the "textual poaching" that takes place in fan fiction writing is academically interesting on its own merits, for literary and aesthetic reasons, the main reason why online fan fiction communities are (or should be) particularly compelling for folklorists resides in the performativity of storytelling. The discourse that surrounds "ficcing" (writing, reading, and especially *sharing* fan fiction) is intensively interactive, hyperbolically festive, and almost preternaturally reflexive. I will call the (highly conscious) construction of this ongoing festival *squee culture*.

Fans use the term "squee" in two ways: first, as an onomatopoeic representation of an excited squealing noise, with a strong connotation of approval that verges on euphoria; second, as a verb that suggests the action of making this sound (but note that this second usage can also be figurative), as in: "I squeed *so hard*." In the online context, where I have yet to see a single fan posting that includes audio support for "squees," the level of abstraction is heightened. In spite of the onomatopoeic nature of the term, use of "squee' seems to serve rather as the representation of an emotional state than of any actual utterance. Because emotional reactions are rendered both silent and invisible by the nature of the medium, however, "squee" is used as a stand-in for cues that are visual, aural, *and* verbal: it is an utterance that carries no linguistic content but constitutes an act of performance intended to take the place of such cues, which would be readily available

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in physical proximity and yet are inherently unavailable in the LJ context. It collapses not merely time and distance, but also categories of expression. "Squee" is thus uniquely qualified to represent the culture that both elicits and produces performances of squeeing. It concisely renders the spirit of celebration that informs acts of ficcing, and it is in this spirit that I redeploy the term here.

Karen Hellekson has already examined the habit of gift-giving in online fan fiction communities, taking reciprocity as the centerpiece of fannish interaction and exploring its role in constituting community.[73] Her description of these gifting behaviors does correspond well to my own experience, and her exploration of the genderedness of such gifting is helpful, but I argue that gifting is only one dimension of a much larger context of celebration that includes gifting, iconmaking, manipping (manipulating photos), fic-posting, and of course commenting on all such activities. All these modes of fannish production become more intelligible when they are understood as integral parts of an ongoing festival.

It is not my goal here to provide an exhaustive account of fannish creative activities, even within the limitations of *Star Wars* fan fiction on LJ. My primary concern here is to analyze the narratives around Anakin Skywalker's fall. It is crucial, however, to provide a sense of the context in which these narratives are developed. One of the advantages of a folkloristic, rather than a purely literary, analysis is that it takes into account the other "texts" that are produced by, around, and through fan fiction narratives. Purely textual analyses can certainly provide us with good aesthetic reasons for appreciating fan fiction. They may provide us with political ones. But they cannot

demonstrate the very real cultural value - both emic and etic - of such a continually (re) generative community festival.

Though there is substantial overlap between ficcers (the people who engage in reading, writing, and sharing fan fiction) and practitioners of other fannish activities - costuming, gaming, etc. - the network of creative fan productions of which fan fiction is the center constitutes a very different culture from other aspects of fandom. Ficcers represent a special subculture within fandom. I do not pretend to understand all the forces that serve to maintain ficcing as a distinct subculture within any fandom, but I do want to point to some of the ways in which the community (often playfully) furthers its own creative interests.

Relying heavily on Richard Bauman's articulation of performance theory, articulated in *Verbal Art as Performance*, I try also to take into account developments that have been made in the analysis of performances and identities in the years since he first published his foundational work. In particular, I draw on Patricia Sawin's reevaluation of Bauman's work from a feminist perspective of constructed gender identity as performance. Sawin's ideas both inform my analysis of the materials I have collected, and provide a way to theorize my points of departure: where Sawin is concerned with performance only in a public, embodied sphere of mixed genders, the fan fictions texts I examine here are shared within a women-only context whose genderedness is both playfully enacted and stripped of much of its hegemonic power. Whatever else fan fiction may do or be, it is at least a performance of *something* - perhaps of many things at once. Thus performativity becomes for my analysis a sort of unifying theme.

The classic text for performance theory, particularly in ethnographic research, is Richard Bauman's *Verbal Art as Performance*. This is obviously a linguistic endeavor from the outset, though a number of other theorists, following in Bauman's wake, have developed the applicability of his ideas in less verbally defined contexts. The focus on linguistic cues in *Verbal Art* can be both helpful and occasionally constricting in a study of fan fiction: helpful, because Bauman provides us with a very clear framework for identifying the ways in which fan fiction is indeed "keyed" as performance; constricting, because the very emphasis on identifying the "bounding" of performance events tends to correspondingly de-emphasize the performativity of *all* interactions. Bauman suggests at the start that "Fundamentally, performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the asumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence."[74] Bauman situates his view of performance sociolinguistically by noting that the competence of which he speaks "rests on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways,"[75] and goes on to explain that performance speech, more than ordinary communication, calls attention to itself *as performance*, inviting the audience to enjoy and evaluate it as such.[76]

In any case Bauman's work signaled a disciplinary shift without which my own work in fan fiction could never have happened; as much as performance theory does provide at least one analytical framework in which to better understand the sharing of fan fiction in internet communities, it may be even more significant that before the work of Bauman and his associates Roger Abrahams and Dell Hymes, pushing the field "to reorient folkloristics away from a devotion to disappearing remnants of the past and

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toward the study of cultural materials of ongoing relevance in the conduct of social life,"[77] there would have been no study of internet fan fiction communities, even assuming there had been an internet in which to study them. Bauman's theoretical work in performance paved the way for an opening of the folklore "canon" in ways that paralleled the opening of the literary canon during roughly the same era.

All acts, when conducted in public, to some degree constitute performances. This is an unavoidable reality of living amongst other human beings, who in the ordinary course of their own lives read, more or less casually, the "texts" presented by others in passing, whether these come in the guise of bodies, utterances, or some other medium. We even perform for ourselves - who hasn't at some point found herself humming to lighten the chore of some tedious work? But while all acts are performative, some acts are *more* performative than others. And we sometimes helpfully *stage* our performances for each other's enjoyment and evaluation. This intentionality may not tell us much about the text so produced (thus explaining why literary scholars have been less than enthusiastic in analyzing it), but it has everything to do with lived experience.

Patricia E. Sawin's "Performance at the Nexus of Gender, Power, and Desire: Reconsidering Bauman's *Verbal Art* from the Perspective of Gender Subjectivity as Performance" can help us to bridge the gap between conceptualizations of identity and performance, as can Karin Sellberg's "Transitions and Transformations: From Gender Performance to Becoming Gendered." It should be noted that *gendered* subjectivity as performance is not the only kind that merits interrogation; nor yet even the only kind that bears relevance to a study of fan produced texts in internet communities. But

genderedness is certainly the aspect of subjectivity, and of identity performance, which has garnered the most development in academic circles, and the lessons learned in considering gender as performative, and in applying performance theory to "gendering" acts, have implications for the study of performance in other contexts, of which gender is only one dimension. Further, gender does have particular relevance for a study of fan fiction, inasmuch as fan fiction communities are decidedly feminine spaces. (To date, I have not encountered any "ficcers" on LJ who do not identify themselves as female/ women.) Indeed, the subject of my own analysis is both grounded in performance and inherently feminist, by virtue of the fact that all the storytelling performances I have collected to date have been by women, for women. "Squee culture" demonstrates an intense awareness of fan fiction as a gendered sphere; it is a girls' club with an ongoing party. As discussed in Chapter III, the reading and posting of fan fiction often constitute highly conscious (yet playful) acts of gender performance, as fans negotiate sexual identity, power, and desire.

Sawin's adjustment of Bauman's theory furthers our understanding of fan fiction (and other materials) in a variety of ways. Not least of these is the increased emphasis she places on feeling and human experience; as she asserts:

> To understand the place of folklore (construed as uncommodified, esthetic, small-group
>
> communicative interaction) in contemporary culture, we also need to go
>
> farther 'inside,' to explore psychological and emotional dimensions of the

experience of the performance event, indeed, to locate the genesis of the

sociopolitical in the most minute and mundane interactions.[78]

I am not preeminently concerned with the "sociopolitical," inasmuch as it seems

to me rather backwards to investigate fan fiction from a sociopolitical perspective when it

has so far been consistently undervalued as an artistic endeavor - that is, I fear that by

emphasizing the worth of fan fiction as a site of resistance, we run the risk of failing to

understand it as art. But the sociopolitical value of fan fiction, resistant or not, must

come from its status *as art* - as creatively parodic and intertextual work that produces

meanings that are more than the sum of its raw materials. It is possible, of course, to read

fan fiction as art/literature from an outsider perspective; understanding its value within

the communities that read and write it, however, would be more difficult. Sawin hits

precisely upon the point with her suggestion that we adjust our frame of reference to

include the affective dimensions of performance, and this perspective has informed my

own research; one way of achieving the insider perspective is through rigorous

participant observation: by engaging in the process of the community reflexively. While

the self-consciously explicit nature of much LJ communication does render the

genderedness of interactions visible to the casual observer, their affective resonance can

be better understood through experience than through observation alone. Thus one's own

positionality becomes a focal lens through which both the emic and the etic are brought

to bear on the same field of experience. This is not an easy, but it is a worthwhile,

endeavor - and it is certainly needed in internet fieldwork, perhaps even more than in

other areas of ethnography, precisely because the texts that result from online performances can be too easily decontextualized and reduced to *mere* texts.

At the same time, however, there remain some difficulties with even Sawin's articulation of performance theory, particularly when it is applied to internet communities and their performances. This is true of most theory and its interaction with internet research to date; academic theory has yet to catch up with the new media of discourse. Sawin suggests, for instance, that

> There was so much in the definition [of performance] that specified
>
> behaviors that, in our own experience and in the range of cultures and
>
> situations with which we were familiar,were problematic for women:
>
> displaying competence and accountability, making one's actions subject to
>
> evaluation, calling attention to oneself.[79]

I submit that this is not as much of a problem in internet fan fiction communities as it might be in physically public sites of performer/audience interaction. This may be partly because fan fiction spaces are (as noted above) so strongly feminine; but I think another key dimension is that posting fan fiction is already accepted by the audience as a welcome act; the audience has come for precisely this, to see someone else (another woman) tell a story. In responding, the reader may also perform her own enthusiasm, frequently in a gendered way - by reference to the "hotness" of the male characters or a "slashy" pairing - but the stigma of drawing attention to oneself, as found in Russo's "Female Grotesques"[80] is ameliorated by the fact that all the people engaged are women drawing attention to themselves, and that this is expected behavior within the context of

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the interaction. On the other hand, however, it is possible that some desire or instinct to evade attention - to avoid drawing attention to oneself - inheres in the practice of "lurking," which we are unable to effectively problematize because it takes place off, or at least under, the radar. Even LJ's user-tracking mechanisms can be thwarted; and if they could not, then certainly attempting to track readers who wished to remain anonymous would still be an ethically questionable enterprise for the ethnographer.

One of the more interesting aspects of gender performance within the context of fan communities on LJ is that it exists *only* through self-identification; we read other users as women because they present themselves as such. There are explicit gender markers on profiles (optional, and my experience not often visited), but the most important cues are delivered implicitly, through one's own use of commentary (verbal or visual). The femininity itself is derived through performance, and is at least somewhat resistant to external labeling. Women fan fiction writers "own" their womanhood in ways that are specific to the internet space in and through which they act - for instance, through the presentation of icons that identify favorite male characters are desirable, or through the framing of stories like estora's *From the Ashes*, whose implications for appropriation and the female gaze we discussed above. Sawin's re-integration of the emotive experience into the meaning of a performance allows us to see that internet fan fiction communities may hold a special appeal, above and beyond the aesthetics of storytelling, in that they are decidedly "safe" spaces for feminine performance. Further, Sawin's attention to a folkloric context helps to bridge the gap between theorizations of feminine performance like Laura Mulvey's (to which Sawin refers extensively in her

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article) and enacted performance as experienced by the participants and by ethnographers. Critically, she argues:

> Now, instead, I argue that the problem with extending Bauman's performance theory [...] to other genres and media is not an issue of scale, but of conceptions of the person. Performance is a multi-layered phenomenon. We must constantly be aware both of the actual human beings who act and observe and of the relative subject positions posited by the cultureand genre. Further, we must recognize that these discursive positions in a sense "create" the participants (as performer/spectator), while the participants (as performer/audience) reciprocally "create" these positions as effective social realities by embodying and reinstantiating them.[81]

Drawing on conceptualizations of the "person" developed by Judith Butler and others, Sawin goes on to explain the interaction of subjectivity and performance in this way:

> Recent feminist theories of subjectivity further problematize the actor's degree of agency and replace the straightforward enactment of a solid "identity"with an indeterminate cycle in which the subject, through performance, constitutes and stabilizes the identity that in turn constitutes the subject[...][82]

The development of subjectivity is a process of negotiation that *requires* performance, and this is at least as true in fan fiction communities as it is anywhere else. But the

layering of performances to which Sawin has alluded above is especially complicated in internet fan fiction because posting constitutes a bounded act of storytelling performance a la Bauman, while the framing of that performance enacts a performance of identity which is typically layered with the poster's gender, primary fandom interests, perspective on the character(s), preferred level of formality, relationship to the franchise owners (resistant/deferent) and so on.

Notice, for instance, that the "Chancellorcide" story by estora has been re-posted from fanfiction.net to LJ, and has garnered a second set of enthusiastic responses within the relatively smaller audience there. pronker in particular responds not only *to* the posted fic, but with a short fic image of her own that places her *within the context of the story*. She not only fills the role of audience - what Sawin would call *spectator* - but also takes briefly the role of performer/actor: "Glad to see this here *peers down Invisible Hand's shaft to spy on Palpatine, *who is recovering slowly and boy is he mad*"[83] she says. So the first part of her response ("[g]lad to see this here") offers approval, what Bauman would call the *evaluation* typically conducted by the audience within the context of a bounded performance. But then pronker steps forward not only to take the role of performer, telling a story, but also insinuating herself into the fiction text so that she performs a role *within* the story. This type of interaction, rupturing the (always permeable) performer/audience and fiction/non-fiction barriers, frequently by presenting one's response to the fic as taking place within its boundaries, is typical within the fan fiction community. A frequent variation is for readers of a fic to respond by speaking directly to the characters, or to continue the fic by speaking *as* the characters, role-

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playing their reactions or producing speculative continuations of the fic. In all such cases, as Sawin describes, the roles of spectator and audience are mutually created in the act of performance. Further, an active audience can stage its own performance in response to the storyteller's offering, foregrounding a reciprocity that is key to maintaining community interactions in this highly textual space. In internet communities, there is no "background": to be present is to speak, and to speak is to perform.

A further dimension to the performative nature of fan fiction is introduced by the deeply "embodied" tenor of its texts. Francesca Coppa has argued that "fan fiction develops in response to dramatic rather than literary modes of storytelling and can therefore be seen to fulfill performative rather than literary criteria."[84] She grounds her argument in the dramatic origins of media fandom that rose in the late 1960s and 70s, demonstrating how media fan fiction draws on a knowledge, shared by both writers and readers, of how canon characters behave in physical space: a familiarity with their embodied (un)reality, derived from witnessing their physical dramatization of stories. Fan fiction thus carries with it a layer of intertextuality that references familiar performances outside the fic and its immediate context in cyberspace. Coppa also makes a distinction between folk and fan culture that seems more political than inherent, though it may prove important for fans' continued operation as producers of transformative works within a larger culture which privileges copyright owners and media moguls:

> Although fans themselves often seek continuities between their art-making
> practices and those with a much longer history [...], this conflation of folk

and fan cultures may blur important distinctions between them, not least of

which is the relatively recent idea that stories can be owned.[85]

Coppa is right, but she is also wrong: fan behavior does not demonstrate much

recognition that stories can in fact be owned, thought they are aware of the legal

ambiguities surrounding fan productions. As we have seen in previous chapters, fans

instead demonstrate a sense of ownership over the characters, asserted by the creation of

head!canon and the determination of in-characterness vs. out-of-characterness. In fact,

one of the most striking consistencies across fandoms is the sense of ownership asserted

by the fans over both the canonical narratives and their own creative, transformative, and

interpretive works. This "blurring," far from being a simple matter of error, in fact

reflects a deep ideological divide between the fans and the producers that leads to what

Henry Jenkins has described as "textual poaching."[86] It also further substantiates the

affective dimension of fandom's implicit recognition of canon characters as culture

heroes, as we discussed in Chapter III.

In any case, Coppa recognizes the import of multiplying performances in

theatrical tradition, and the implications such a performative reading must have for our

understanding of fan fiction when it is applied. As she points out, each production of a

given play is essentially a riff on a known theme.[87] Fan fiction functions similarly: just

because we have read one fic in which Padmé persuades Anakin to turn from the dark

side before the canonical disaster on Mustafar does not mean that we will not want to see

another if it is well-executed. This tendency to tell the same story over and over should

be familiar to any folklorist.

Part of the way that storytelling functions as performance in Internet fan fiction is through the notes, disclaimers, and comments that frequently accompany fics. It should be noted that while this is always true, it is more developed in some fora than others. Fanfiction.net, for instance, provides a relatively limited platform for such interactivity, with reviews listed on a separate, linked page; though the author's notes and disclaimers are immediately visible to anyone who accesses the fic, leaving or reading reviews requires navigating away from the main page. LiveJournal.com, by contrast, is a blogging platform that lends itself especially well not only to interaction between the storyteller and her audience, but also between the members of that audience in the form of comment threads that respond to particular fics and to each other. Francesca Coppa discusses extensively fan fiction's preoccupation with the presentation of "bodies in space"[88] as a textual feature, likening the physical deployment of characters within the fictional space of the story to stage directions. But in addition to this dimension of embodiment, fora like LiveJournal encourage a virtually embodied audience that reacts to the "staged" performance of the fic itself and to the performer/author who presents it to them, so that not only is the fic itself preoccupied with embodiment, but so is the act of posting and responding to it.

While fan fiction may be described as folk narrative, the more specific sub-categories of myth, wonder tales, or legends tend not to apply very consistently even to individual fics. Any given piece may incorporate elements from multiple academically recognized genres, as well as other influences which fall outside currently existing academic classifications. This should not be surprising, since fans are not concerned with

scholarly convenience at all. (They do, however, recognize and adhere to their own generic distinctions in a highly conventionalized manner.)

There are multiple ways of selecting stories (usually called "fics" in fandom) for analysis along literary or folkloric lines; all of them have merit. Narratives of Anakin Skywalker demonstrate a strong tendency to conceive of the character as a sort of post-modern culture hero, as I have mentioned above; (re)tellings of his story grounded in this understanding encompass a wide variety of tones and meanings. He may appear as tragically fated, romantically conflicted, or even patently ridiculous, even within a single author's body of work. For instance, estora's fic *Chancellorcide* presents the Anakin Skywalker as a sort of lovable buffon, not unlike the Fionn of Scottish hero tales. Hero tales relate the adventures of a cultural hero, the giver and protector of the culture (Anakin or Fionn, respectively).[89] Such figures have supernatural powers (as Anakin clearly does) and live in a sort of time-outside-of time, or "time before time"[90] - in this case, "a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away."[91] This portrayal of Anakin, it should be noted, is common in *Star Wars* humor fan fiction generally and is especially prevalent in the subgenre known as crack!fic. estora's rendering of the character is thus her performance of a fairly common theme within her tradition.

While the specific plot elements of *Chancellorcide* don't correspond with any exactness to those of the hero tales, the construction of characters is strikingly similar. Anakin is presented as an ill-advised bumbler much like Fionn, and Obi-Wan's continued warnings and reminders bring Conan sharply to mind. Significantly, *Chancellorcide* is part of a larger group of fics by estora (known collectively under the title *The Bane of His*

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Existence) which play on this crack!fic characterization of Anakin and Obi-Wan for humorous purposes, with Obi-Wan's frequent reminders of the dangers inherent in excessive use of boot polish.[92] Anakin's decision-making skills are on a par with Fionn's throughout, as when his solution for silencing Obi-Wan's criticism is to knock his head against the wall, demonstrating a slapstick sensibility much like the cycle of hero tales told about Fionn. The plot itself, like those of the tales, is arbitrary; actions proceed from no very clear motives, and causality is at best a secondary concern. The Anakin of "Chancellorcide" corresponds easily to James MacKillop's discussion of popular - but not elite - representations of Fionn: "The popular Fionn, the Fionn of oral tradition, is a highly protean character, much cruder than the Fionn of manuscript tradition [...]. To a certain extent, the very ubiquity of a heroic character is enough to invite his deflation."[93]

Analyzing individual works of fan fiction as folkloric texts can be a productive endeavor. Certainly many fics demonstrate elements that are familiar to folklorists from much older traditions. At the same time, however, analyzing fan fiction *only* as a text seems to miss a crucial aspect of the way fan fiction is produced and shared within fannish communities. The act of posting a fic is a storytelling performance. *Star Wars* fans thus frequently recount the narrative(s) of Anakin Skywalker's rise, fall, and redemption in their own variants.

Notes

[73] Hellekson, Karen. "A Fannish Field of Value: Online Fan Gift Culture." *Cinema Journal* 48.4. 2009: 113-118. Web. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/cj/summary/v048/48.4.hellekson.html

[74] Bauman, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance.* 11.

[75] Bauman 11.

[76] Bauman 11.

[77] Sawin, Patricia E. "Performance at the Nexus of Gender, Power, and Desire: Reconsidering Bauman's Verbal Art from the Perspective of Gendered Subjectivity as Performance." *The Journal of American Folklore*. 115.455. Winter 2002. 28-61.

[78] Sawin, Patricia E. 30.

[79] Sawin 31.

[80] Russo, Mary. "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory." *Feminist Studies / Critical Studies: Theories of Contemporary Culture Vol. 8*. Ed. Kathleen Woodward. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. 213-229.

[81] Sawin 45

[82] Sawin 45.

[83] pronker. "Chancellorcide." estora. *One Moment. One Choice. A Lifetime of Difference*. http://www.estora.livejournal.com/59092.html. Web. Accessed 15 June 2011.

[84] Coppa, Francesca. "Writing Bodies in Space: Media Fan Fiction as Theatrical Performance." *Fan Communities and Fan Fiction in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, Eds. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2006. 226.

[85] Coppa. 226

[86] Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

[87] Coppa 236-7.

[88] Coppa. 233-5.

[89] Anakin's status as a cultural hero, both in canon and in fan fiction, merits a separate analysis. For those purposes, he is probably more easily aligned with Cuchulainn than with Fionn. In either case, his character is influenced by literary, cultural, and filmic considerations, so that Anakin himself appears as a somewhat hodge-podge figure, cobbled together to make a tragic hero who dies and is reborn as a monster, only to be redeemed. The cycle of death and rebirth in his personal story also marks him as a figure of mythic significance.

[90] Toelken, Barre. *The Dynamics of Folklore: Revised and Expanded Edition*. Utah State UP: 1996. 39.

[91] *Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope*. Lucas, George. 20th Century Fox. 1977.

[92] estora. *Chancellorcide*. http://www.fanfiction.net/s/5925146/3/Chancellorcide Accessed 11 May 2011.

[93] MacKillop, James. "The Fenian Cycle." *Myths and Legends of the Celts*. London: Penguin Bookks: 2005. 219-242.

CHAPTER V

FAN V. MAN: THE CULTURAL VALUE OF FAN FICTION

UNDER CURRENT U.S. COPYRIGHT LAW

One issue that is of concern both to writers of fan fiction and to the producers and distributors of the popular culture texts with which they generally work has been either ignored or shunted aside as irrelevant: the legality of fan fiction vis a vis current copyright laws.[94] The legal position of fan fiction and other fan works under U.S. copyright law remains ambiguous for fans, copyright owners, and legal scholars and activists, and yet legal questions remain a present concern within the context of fans' storytelling performances, providing a counterpoint to the tone of celebration we discussed in Chapter IV. These legal concerns are so prevalent that the presence of a disclaimer at the beginning of a fic has become one of the communally accepted ways of "keying" a storytelling performance, marking out the fic for enjoyment and evaluation. The construction of the disclaimer itself, in many cases, also serves to set the tone for the fic it helps to present. I propose to examine some of the relevant literature regarding fan fiction's often ambiguous relationship to copyright law in the U.S., and also attempt to note some representative responses within a particular fandom, by examining how fans perform their relationship to the franchise through their own disclaimers. Appropriately, the case of *Star Wars* fandom because of its long history and because Lucasfilm's conflicted and inconsistent stance on fan fiction is instructive; and within the framework

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of "ficcing" we have examined, I hope to draw some conclusions about how fans

themselves view their works within a larger legal and societal framework.

A few items of caution should be noted at once. In the first place, at the time of

this writing no instance of lawsuit based on allegations of fan fiction as copyright

infringement has yet gone to trial,[95] so any legal analysis (including both the scholarly

opinions I cite and the conclusions I hope to draw) is necessarily speculative. There are

not even any close analogies to fan fiction present in the realm of current legal precedent

- the closest may be the "vidding" activities of users on video-sharing sites like YouTube,

but in fact such vidding presents a more extensive challenge to commercial interests than

fan fiction is likely to do, because (as we shall see) fan fiction fundamentally cannot

serve as a substitute for the original materials; it's parodic nature relies heavily on a

thorough knowledge of the canon. Further, the case-by-case nature of fair use

interpretations makes it difficult to predict what any court might choose to do in a

particular case. This is especially true because fan fiction itself is highly diverse,[96]

ranging from works that are recognizable as fan fiction only by the author's assertions to

those which include extensive quoting of the original materials, so that not all fan fiction

is created equal, as it were: the potential defenses of fan fiction under current copyright

law are not equally applicable in all circumstances. Additionally, I do not intend to deal

here with questions of international copyright law,[97] even though internet fandom pays

little or no heed to physical borders in its production and reception of fan fiction, and

even though the country of origin of any particular source material may in a given case

prove relevant. Such a consideration of often conflicting international copyright laws is

outside the scope of this project, and while I acknowledge the legal questions which may arise from their presence and the decidedly globalized nature of fan fiction, my purpose here is to examine rather the implications of U.S. copyright law for fan fiction writers' literary creativity and performance as contributing members of their communities. Further, the legal defenses for fan fiction which are most likely to prove useful in the U.S. are not ones which have international scope, as will be seen.

Fan fiction clearly appropriates, or "poaches" its source materials.[98] Without this appropriation fan fiction could not exist; in its capacity as parody - thought not in its capacity as adaptation - it depends for its meaning on an understanding and evocation of the original work(s). Therefore, fan fiction writers generally do not claim levels of originality for their works that would exempt them from copyright prosecution. In other words, the presence of "copying" in this context is uncontested, and we can therefore leave aside any consideration of whether fan fiction does in fact make use of copyrighted materials (fannish disclaimers insisting no infringement is intended notwithstanding). Fan fiction might, however, claim protection against prosecution for copyright infringement under at least two broad headings: free speech and fair use. I examine both.

Free speech is probably the less likely of the two defenses, but it is not impossible. If a television show were to portray a radically racist, sexist, and homophobic view of American culture, for instance, then a fan fiction which undertook to rewrite the official narrative from the point of view of a minority lesbian might potentially be construed as constituting an act of political speech that sought to criticize both the dominant ideology and the views expressed by the show's producers through

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their work. Copyright law which prevented such works would impermissibly chill the

fan's right to free speech. And as we saw in Chapter II, fan fiction can and does regularly

constitute a form of critical interpretation of cultural texts, achieving through narrative an

effect of critique similar to that in which literary scholars engage. Though the critiques

are not framed in the genres traditionally recognized by the academy, this fact does not

inherently make them less legitimate: literary scholars are not and should not be the only

persons with a right to speak freely about texts of any kind. One might legitimately claim

that the same point could not be made as effectively through other means; the rewriting

itself is the act of subversion. Such political dimensions may form a relatively small

portion of the copious volume of fan fiction currently being disseminated on the internet,

but nonetheless it should not be ignored.

The other, and perhaps more likely, defense for fan fiction is provided under the

doctrine of "fair use." This defense has grown more tricky in the years since *Campbell v.

Acuff-Rose Music*,[99] due largely to the introduction in Justice Souter's decision (indebted

to Pierre N. Leval's article "Toward Fair A Fair Use Standard" in the *Harvard Law

Review*, as commentators have noted),[100] of the concept of "transformative" use.

Transformative use as a measure for determining fair use is obviously flawed because it

plainly ignores such specifically protected uses of copyrighted material as the creation of

multiple copies for instructional use. However that may be, a substantial number of fan

fictions may indeed be construed as transformative works. Indeed, the Organization for

Transformative Works, whose existence we noted above, has an entire archive (known as

the Archive of Our Own)[101] devoted to their preservation as works of cultural

significance. Thanks to the current ambiguities of legal precedent, this may or may not

be deemed grounds for ruling in favor of the defendant by any given judge. As it

currently stands, and pursuant especially to *Campbell*, the transformative nature of the

work is neither necessary nor sufficient for a "fair use" ruling, but it is relevant. In any

case, while transformative has been defined as "adding value," it seems that judicial

practice has been far from consistent in interpreting the criteria for transformativity. The

famous Souter decision, however, does explicitly protect works that engage in parody, so

that if fan fiction is accepted as such (as I have argued throughout), legal precedent must

fall on the side of protecting works of fan fiction.

While at least one scholar has already attempted to predict how current copyright

law could potentially be interpreted in a court case involving fan fiction in the U.S.,[102] my

aim here is somewhat different. I seek to incorporate a fannish perspective and to

determine what, if anything, is the impact of current copyright law on the fan fiction

community, and how this may or should effect a scholarly analysis of fan fiction, often

lauded as transgressive. In order to answer these questions, I will analyze both the

currently available scholarly literature on U.S. copyright law and fan fiction, and the

disclaimers that fans produce in responses to their anxieties, which I interpret as integral

to precisely the kinds of performances of fannish identity we have been exploring here.

In this context, therefore, copyright issues and the concerns fans have about them,

affectively, have at least the potential to restrain and redirect the context and content of a

fan's performance fully as much as the issues of gender which we took up earlier. I take

the point of view that fan fiction is culturally significant and valuable and therefore

deserving of protection and recognition, and this is an assumption that underlies my entire analysis. Others may disagree, especially if they benefit from extended protections for copyright owners.

Fannish literature on the topic of copyright is extremely limited; though most fan fiction includes a disclaimer (often of a humorous nature) from the author, there is very little discussion about the possible legal ramifications of fan fiction within fannish discourse.[103] Academic discourse, meanwhile, has focused primarily on the cultural and communal aspects of writing and sharing fan fiction, and has therefore tended to elide legal considerations.[104]

Fan fiction writers nearly always include some form of disclaimer with their stories. These range in style from very causal, even joking, disavowals of ownership to the use of formal, legalistic language and everywhere in between. Sometimes a single fan will employ a variety of styles over the body of her work. The use of such disclaimers both displays a sense of anxiety about the potential legal issues surrounding fan fiction and constitutes a performance of fannish identity vis-a-vis the establishment.

LiveJournal.com fan writer ansketil_rose frequently uses humor as a part of her disclaimer; for instance, in an entry dated 17 February 2011, she says, "I do not own! I do not own! I do not own! I do not own! Please! Stop, I beg you! Don't sue me! I do not own!"[105] The disclaimer is humorous on its own hyperbolic merits. But frequent readers of ansketil_rose's fan fiction will note another dimension here: ansketil_rose's works deal extensively with power relationships - from the Sith practices of Emperor Palpatine and his pawns to the debauched behavior of Louis XIV's court and the adventures of space-

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anime seducers, she is concerned with power, the lack of it, and the effect it has on those within its sphere of influence. So this particular disclaimer resonates not only with the particular story to which it belongs, but also with the entirety of her fan fiction corpus.

Her previous entry[106] reveals a much more somber tone: "I do not own *Star Wars* and am not making any money with this story."[107] Both this disclaimer and the one discussed immediately above reveal a primary concern in the financial aspects of any alleged copyright infringement; the disavowal of all financial interest is perhaps one of the most marked tendencies of *Star Wars* fannish disclaimers.[108]

Next on the list of entries, ansketil_rose's disclaimer strikes a balance between the formal and informal styles so far described: "I do not own *Star Wars*, nor am I making any money. *Star Wars* belongs to the Great Bearded Lucas in the Sky."[109] here she pairs a fairly serious disclaimer with a decidedly humorous, even mocking, credit to the original creator of the *Star Wars* (and copyright holder) of the *Star Wars* franchise, the famously-bearded filmmaker George Lucas.

Another entry under the same tag is more explicit about the relationship between fan fiction, disclaimer, and fun: "I do not own Star Wars and am generating no money, only amusement."[110] Functionally, this disclaimer again both acknowledges the storyteller's debt to her mass media source and asserts a humorous, partly self-deprecating positionality with respect to the powerful copyright holder(s).

One more example should suffice for a consideration of ansketil_rose's corpus. In an entry dated 08 September 2010, she says, "I own this not, making no money, I am. Only a humble fan, yes indeed."[111] This choice of construction for her disclaimer

references the easily recognizable speech patterns of one of the most familiar *Star Wars*

characters, the ancient Jedi Master Yoda. The use of "Yodaspeak" here immediately

expresses ansketil_rose's solidarity with the rest of the fan community (if nothing else,

they represent the people most likely to identify the speech pattern and enjoy the

amusement she demonstrates in her pastiche-type redeployment of it for her own

purposes) and at the same time signals a belief that legal action isn't really all that likely -

as indeed it seems not to be, given the lack of actual court cases mentioned above.

Furthermore, by appropriating Yoda's unusual and highly recognizable way of speaking

English, her disclaimer itself functions as a parody of the *Star Wars* materials. She

performs her fannish identity by demonstrating her parodic intent, her familiarity with the

materials (and importantly, in vernacular culture to *know* the tradition is to *own* it), and

her willingness to acknowledge but not to bow to the copyright owner(s) whose mass

media materials become a part of the tradition she reworks to establish her own meanings

and message.

LJ user pronker follows a much more formal approach in assigning disclaimers to

her fan stories. One disclaimer she uses multiple times is: "I own nothing

recognizable."[112] It should be noted that here the disclaimer makes no allusion to the

actual owner/copyright holders; it does not identify them, even in the most oblique

manner. Also in contradistinction to ansketil_rose, pronker does not post a disclaimer

with each unique entry, but - posting a chaptered fic titled *As Clear As Mud* - she posts a

single disclaimer, at the beginning of the story. It would be possible to read her barebones

disclaimer as a form of resistance, but it more likely demonstrates the writer's assurance

that anyone reading this piece of fan fiction (dealing with *Star Wars* characters whose names are familiar in popular culture) will immediately recognize the origins of Anakin Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi. The disclaimer is so embedded within her performance of fannish identity that pronker takes for granted the reader's knowledge of her source materials and their creator. Mention of Lucas himself is an optional dimension of her disclaimers, which she does sometimes include in her corpus (discussed below). But here pronker makes no demonstration of her own positionality in regard to the powerful copyright owner(s). Also, by the turn of phrase "I own nothing recognizable," she implicitly devalues the recognizability of her own unique style, her "voice"; she privileges instead the characters she has borrowed and the world in which they operate, rather than her own (significant) contributions and reworkings, which radically alter not only the particular details of the story but its overall trajectory and many aspects of its message.[113]

At times across her capacious listing of fan stories, pronker does include a specific reference to Lucas within her disclaimer. This is the case with her short story "Second Person, Tense," also archived on AO3: "I do not own Star Wars, as I am not George Lucas, and no money is being made from this fanfiction."[114] In this case again we see the preoccupation with financial gain as the presumed impetus for punitive legal action, including allegations of copyright infringement. Why Lucas makes an appearance in the disclaimer here, and not in some of pronker's other stories, remains unclear.

estora follows a similarly formal strategy for crafting her disclaimers. The following has appeared at the beginning of nearly every chapter of her novel-length (and

still ongoing) fan work *From the Ashes*, on fanfiction.net, but, curiously, *not* when the same story is crossposted to her LJ: "This story is based on characters and situations created and owned by George Lucas. No money is being made and no copyright or trademark infringement is intended."[115] More comprehensive than most, estora's disclaimer clearly positions herself and her story as owing a creative debt to the original *Star Wars* films developed by George Lucas, but also as transformative of them; she is making something new from something old, using the philosophy for the creation of "alternate universe" stories that she explains on her LiveJournal.com page as "One moment. One choice. A lifetime of difference."[116] Whether the fact that estora does not *intend* infringement would help her cause in a legal conflict is at best ambiguous; perhaps more importantly, it is the nature of alternate universe stories to transform the original materials, and thus transformativity is likely to reside at the heart of a fan fiction defense, even more with alternate universe stories than with others.

In any case, estora does not take her disclaimer so seriously as to render it sacrosanct; for Chapter 28 of the same story, she alters the disclaimer significantly for humorous effect: "This story is based on Council orgies and tentacles created and owned by George Lucas. No hot sex is being made and no copyright or wet naked Padawan infringement is intended."[117] Since George Lucas has certainly never produced any Jedi Council orgies, nor any tentacles - in fact *Star Wars* is famously family-friendly - the first part of the disclaimer is clearly not intended to be taken seriously. The second part, even more outrageous, roams so far afield as to assure us of the dullness of the author's sex life and the sanctity of the person of any wet naked Padawans who happen to be in the

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vicinity (Padawans are a rank of Jedi in the *Star Wars* universe, and several of them do appear within the Prequel Trilogy; but to date, none of them has ever been featured wet and naked outside of fan fiction). Further, the fact that estora includes these disclaimers when posting on fanfiction.net, but not when posting on LJ, suggests that she perceives the audience requirements as being different across the two fora.

Crucially, as well, estora is writing within the "slash" genre of fan fiction, which portrays homosexual romantic (and sometimes sexual) relationships, usually between two men. She plays on the tropes surrounding such stories here, by referencing "hot sex" and the "wet naked Padawan." She thus privileges her performance of fannish identity over questions of legal liability, even within the context of her disclaimer, which here becomes merely another dimension of her performance.

Occasionally, a fan's chosen disclaimer will miss the point entirely, at least so far as legal issues are concerned. selonbrody, unlike the other writers we have discussed, does not set off her disclaimer with a heading indicating its status as such. Nevertheless, in the author's notes to her story "Ophelie Qui Se Promene Le Ciel," she does offer a disclaimer of sorts, in which she eschews any mention of the *Star Wars* characters with whose relationships her story deals, and instead gives credit to a work one may fairly regard as being in the public domain: "This fic was inspired by Act VI, Scene IV of Hamlet. All elements of verse belong to William Shakespeare."[118] She has transmuted the disclaimer into a statement of her literary influences on the story, in which snippets of narrative are broken by excerpts from Shakespeare's play. These snippets function both to set the tone for the story and to comment on both selonbrody's narrative and on the

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canonical source materials, while selonbrody's narrative similarly comments at once on *Hamlet* and the central love story of the *Star Wars* Prequel Trilogy. In addition to legal dimensions, the presentation of disclaimers has been adapted by ficcers as one of the "markers" of performance, which sometimes takes precedence over the legal concerns.

Courts may well consider that fans could tell similar stories by creating entirely original materials, therefore obviating the need to use the mass media productions which generally give rise to fan fiction in the first place. For fans, however, this argument misses the point. Fan fiction draws much of its resonance from its relationship to both the canonical source material and to the compendium of other fan works that inform the collective fannish tradition. As we saw in Chapter II , much fan fiction also functions as interpretation.

Additionally, creating an entirely original story would not enable fans to perform within the context of their communities - the kind of "keyed" or "bounded" performance Bauman enables us to identify, in which speakers draw attention to their competence by signaling a desire to perform speech acts in socially appropriate ways would be completely impossible.[119] Crucial here is a distinction between *parody* and *adaptation*. Linda Hutcheon considers adaptation to be

- An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works

- A creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging

- An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work[120]

Star Wars fan fiction, in my experience, meets all of these criteria, but Hutcheon herself says that fan fiction does not count as adaptation.[121] I find her reasoning less than

persuasive, but I nonetheless agree with her conclusion. She defines adaptation as "repetition, but repetition without replication."[122] This seems to me to suggest a parallel to her famous definition of parody in *Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. Though her title is now a century behind, the rise of fan fiction was part and parcel of late twentieth-century culture, and its evolution continues to reflect the global culture of the twenty-first century Internet, even as the sharing of fan fiction informs the creation of Internet communities based on common interests and shared narratives. In that work, Hutcheon says, "Parody, therefore, is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expensive of the parodied text."[123] Under Hutcheon's definitions, either adaptation or parody could apply with varying degrees to any of the fan fictions we have discussed over the last three chapters.

It is not an either/or proposition: fan fiction appropriates, adapts, and parodies its source materials (of much broader scope than any single media fandom) in an ongoing intertextual play of meanings that each reader must constantly (re)negotiate. I would suggest, however, that - in part because of the power dynamics enforced by media franchises through copyright laws and other assertions of ownership backed by the establishment, the critical and subversive associations of *parody* make it more fitting to the spirit, at least, of fan fiction sharing than *adaptation* as the word is generally used. Parody in fan fiction comments - often critically - on the source texts without devaluing them, and its intent is only sometimes humorous.

Silencing such acts of storytelling would not only be affectively damaging to real and vibrant communities, but also would decrease the diversity and richness of the larger

cultural structures to which they belong. Since copyright laws are intended to encourage, rather than discourage, creativity, this would seem to run contrary not only to the public interest, but also to the intention of the specific laws themselves. In any case, fan fiction is never simply the impulse to tell a story. Fan fiction inherently represents an attempt - more or less successful, depending on the skill of the author - to contribute to a shared tradition. It thus fulfills an important cultural function within fannish communities. One may question whether copyright laws that act to chill this form of speech do not enforce the suppression of vernacular reworkings of hero tales and other lore in a manner eerily reminiscent of eighteenth-century colonialist tactics for eliminating local folk traditions that were seen as threatening the dominant forces. Though the intention in the case of copyright law lacks the overwhelming political force of an eighteenth-century colonialist state, the sheer power that can be mobilized by the companies controlling the copyrights to mass media sources carries too much weight to be discounted. Though the First Amendment ensures only that the government will not pass legislation that interferes with freedom of speech, still public interest lies overwhelmingly on the side of more, rather than less, freedom of speech, and the spirit, at least, of the First Amendment should inform any judicial proceedings in which an agent of greater power seeks to suppress the speech of a party of lesser power - whether by means of copyright law, of any other.

Even outside the fan community, there is a public interest in protecting the creation and sharing of transformative fan works. Sheenagh Pugh points to this interest, albeit obliquely, when she notes the value of "literary" fan fiction.[124] Indeed, she highlights the importance of highly transformative fan fiction when she asserts that

if you do want to develop your own voice, then you need to want 'more

from' your canon rather than 'more of'. There has to be something your

canon did not do, and which you want to, some viewpoint or insight that

did not come through and that profitably might.[125]

 The specific examples she chooses are Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and George

Macdonald Fraser's *Flashman*,[126] but the same rationale could easily be applied to many

works of media fan fiction. If the public has an interest in the availability of *Wide*

Sargasso Sea, then surely it has an interest in the *Hamlet/Star Wars* mashup "Ophelia

Who Walks the Sky."

In this context, then, applying copyright laws to fan fiction is not only a

questionable interpretation of fair use doctrine; it is also an impermissible chilling of the

right to rework familiar materials to say something new that carries special resonance

precisely because of its associations with stories that already have (other) meanings for

the audience. The threat of legal action, applied to fan fiction, serves to stifle the very

creative impulse copyright law is designed to foster, quashing what it is meant to protect.

Further, because fan communities function essentially as modern-day folk groups,

creating and preserving a form of vernacular culture in the face of mass media society,

largely through their shared storytelling traditions, the oppressive fear of legal action via

copyright law (whether or not a claim against any particular fan fiction writer could

succeed or not) functions to repress not only the creative work of individuals, but also the

growth and development of entire communities. Though the interests of copyright

holders in protecting the right to make derivative works and garner the proceeds of them

are indisputable, the implications of applying even the threat of a copyright suit against

writers who are most often ill-equipped to defend themselves, both financially and from

an experiential perspective, tip the scales in our constant balancing of interests too much

in the favor of powerful mass media copyright holders. Current U.S. copyright law needs

to be re-evaluated in terms of emerging forms of cultural production in order to avoid

stifling the creative drives it is meant to protect.

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Notes

[94] Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York UP, 2006.

[95] Stendell, Leanne. "Fanfic and Fan Fact: How Current Copyright Law Ignores the Reality of Copyright Owner and Consumer Interests in Fan Fiction." *Southern Methodist Law Review.* 158 (2000). 1551-1582.

[96] A quick search of fanfiction.net, one of the largest archives for fan fiction on the Internet, reveals sections for literally hundreds of media fandoms, all of which can also be searched by genre, character, or pairing.

[97] The discrepancies between U.S. and international copyright law would make such an effort unproductive; while arguments for the preservation of fan fiction in the U.S. might rest on the kinds of "fair use" tests applied in Cambell vs. Acuff-Rose Music, the same tests could not be said to apply in other countries. Additionally, the media fandom I have chosen to use as an example maintains its corporate presence within the U.S., and therefore is most obviously subject to U.S. law.

[98] Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture.* New York: Routledge, 1992.

[99] Several scholars have noted this difficulty; for a fuller examination of the decision's influence on subsequent case law, see Bunker, Matthew. "Eroding Fair Use: The 'Tranformative' Use Doctrine After Campbell." *Communication Law and Policy.* 7 (2002). 1-62.

[100] To date, every article I have found that deals with *Campbell* also mentions Leval; for this reason, I have not cited any particular article, but the extent to which legal scholars have presumed him the originator of the concept of "transformative" use (as replacing, evidently "productive" use) should be noted here.

[101] Those interested in further examining the archive can find it here: http://archiveofourown.org.

[102] Stendell, Leanne. "Fanfic and Fan Fact: How Current Copyright Law Ignores the Reality of Copyright Owner and Consumer Interests in Fan Fiction." *Southern Methodist Law Review.* 158 (2000). 1551-1582.

[103] A visit to the Archive of Our Own website will easily demonstrate the type and prevalence of fannish disclaimers. A Google search for "fan fiction + copyright" returns search hits overwhelmingly from academic and professional, rather than fan-based, sources.

[104] The limited number of scholars working with fan fiction has necessarily limited the field. However, interested readers can get a reasonable understanding of the range of discourse by examining the body of works produced by leading scholars Henry Jenkins, Deborah Kaplan, Will Brooker, and Karen Hellekson.

[105] ansketil_rose. "Tag: Anakin Skywalker." *The Office of Ansketil Rose.* http://ansketil_rose.livejournal.com/tag/anakin%20skywalker.

[106] Under the tag "Anakin Skywalker" on her livejournal.com page; throughout this section I refer to the disclaimers visible from the tags page, *before* accessing the links to individual entries. This is important because disclaimers here - as typically elsewhere, as well - are visible without accessing the entry; they are not curtailed by cut text, as the fics themselves usually are.

[107] ansketil_rose. http://ansketil_rose.livejournal.com/tag/anakin%20skywalker.

[108] This tendency is noticeable on the major fan fiction archives, such as fanfiction.net and archiveofourown.org; any search for "Star Wars" should provide several examples.

[109] ansketil_rose. http://ansketil_rose.livejournal.com/tag/anakin%20skywalker.

[110] ansketil_rose. http://ansketil_rose.livejournal.com/tag/anakin%20skywalker.

[111] ansketil_rose. http://ansketil_rose.livejournal.com/tag/anakin%20skywalker.

[112] pronker. "A Wet, Pretentious Story, ch. 1 and 2." *pronker*. http://pronker.livejournal.com/10049.html

[113] A quick perusal of pronker's works quickly reveals that not only this story in particular, but also her entire body of work, demonstrates a preoccupation with sexual materials (sometimes explicit, sometimes not), primarily exploring male/male relationships, that seriously critique the portrayal of all interpersonal relationships within the canonical *Star Wars* universe.

[114] pronker. "FIC:Second Person, Tense (M) Anakin/Obi-Wan slash. And tentacles." *pronker. http://pronker.livejournal.com/62666.html*

[115] estora. Chapter 1. *From the Ashes.* http://www.fanfiction.net/s/5609369/1/From_The_Ashes

[116] estora. *One Moment. One Choice. A Lifetime of Difference.* http://estora.livejournal.com

[117] estora. Chapter 28. *From the Ashes.* http://www.fanfiction.net/s/5609369/28/From_The_Ashes

[118] selonbrody. "Ophelie Qui Se Promene Le Ciel." *Blowfish.* http://selonbrody.livejournal.com/7330.html Web. Accessed 15 June 2011.

[119] Bauman, Richard. Verbal Art as Performance. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, Inc. 1984.

[120] Hutcheon, Linda. "Beginning to Theorize Adaptation." *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2006. 1-32.

[121] Hutcheon 9.

[122] Hutcheon 7.

[123] Hutcheon, Linda. "Introduction." 1-29. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms.* New York: Methuen, 1985.

[124] Pugh, Sheenagh. *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context. 194.*

[125] Pugh. Sheenagh. *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context.* 194-5.

[126] Pugh, Sheenagh. *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context.* 194.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Star Wars fan fiction writers tell Anakin Skywalker's story in ways that resist, enhance, and appropriate its franchise-approved meanings. They join with other fans on LJ in a community festival that celebrates the stories, the characters, and the act of ficcing. In the process, they engage in layers of performance that include their own identities as fans, as women, and as storytellers, while also presenting the characters in their story as embodied stage performers.

Scholarly work on fan fiction is still noticeably thin - and there are not, as far as I know, any existing studies that deal specifically with *Star Wars* fan fiction. This thesis is not long enough to be comprehensive. I have chosen to focus on fan fiction as women's performance and re-signification, but these areas and others still merit further exploration. Severely lacking in the academy are analyses that read fan fiction texts *as texts*, rather than as symptoms of some cultural impulse. But this denies their meaning within the communities that produce them: fan fiction is shared primarily for enjoyment - that of the author as well as the audience. A study devoted to the analysis of Anakin's relationship with Padmé across a single author's corpus, for instance, could be productive. Taking an ethnographic perspective has necessarily led me to seek multiple tellings and a community aesthetic: this has the benefit of revealing the embeddedness of fan fiction within its communities, and of beginning to develop a theoretical underpinning for studying fan fiction as folklore; but it has also the downside of

preventing me from looking too closely at any one text, *as* a text. Literary analyses of fan fiction so far have been limited; a next stage in my own research might be to examine some individual texts in the *Star Wars* fandom with closer attention.

A further dimension that requires further analysis, perhaps across fandoms, is feminist performance. I have tried to point toward some of the ways in which fans enact their identity as women in ficcing, and to analyze some of the effects of writing and reading in an exclusively gendered space. I focused on the playful character of such performances, often cheerfully objectifying male protagonists for the (straight?) female audience's pleasure. This does not, however, account for the widespread disdain for female (but not male) "original" characters - characters created by the fan to interact with the canon characters within the fic. While beyond the scope of a study of fan fiction interpreting Anakin Skywalker, an analysis of OFCs (original female characters), often known by the derogatory label "Mary Sue," is a necessary next step toward understanding women's performances in online fan fiction communities.

Crucially, as well, more work remains to be done in the area of parody vs. adaptation, which frequently overlap in the experience of reading fan fiction. Applying Linda Hutcheon's theories of parody and adaptation (as noted above) to an extended analysis of specific fan fiction texts will have the benefit both of encouraging closer readings of fannish texts as literary works, and of helping to theorize fan fiction as a site of resistance and re-signification.

This thesis, then, is offered as a point of departure toward further work. Its overarching theme might be considered one of layering: it seeks to identify the strategies

fans use to make their layered meanings; it identifies at least some of the complex layers of performativity that create palimpsests of author, audience, and text; and finally it pulls back to look at fan fiction through the layer of the outside world, the legal and cultural powers that exert force upon fans and their fictions. Operating within - or perhaps after - a deconstructionist paradigm, we can now move toward pulling apart these often interwoven layers to examine each of them more closely and identify others.

Star Wars fan fiction, through all its layers of performance, can serve many functions. It certainly provides entertainment for the ficcing community; it often acts as critique or resistance, both in-universe as it appropriates, through parody, adaptation, and re-contextualization, the stories as told by the franchise, and in the real world, as it comments on the contemporary society in which it is written. As a form of art, therefore, it has significant cultural value. But it also works as interpretation. Each act of storytelling that calls attention to itself is not merely seeking evaluation of its display of competence, though it certainly does that; it is also offering a re-interpretation of the story through its characters. The narrative means something different if we read it through the lenses of Anakin's childhood in slavery on Tatooine than it does if we read it as defined by the ongoing tension in the Anakin/Obi-Wan partnership. If we read it as a story of star-crossed lovers, or as a struggle against fate, it means something else again.

Fans write their stories into a tradition that is at once celebratory and critical. Sometimes they choose humor over tragedy; at others they explore the angst-ridden doubts of the canon's dashing heroes. But what all these storytelling performances have in common is that each telling - each performance - is an assertion of ownership over the

characters that carries them forward into the fannish tradition. To tell a character's story is to make it your own; it is also to add your story of the hero to the myriad that comprise the ever-expanding constellation of narrative that is the community tradition. From that point of view, there are as many Anakin Skywalkers as there are fans who lay claim to his story by telling it again, in their own way. "This is my Anakin Skywalker" - show me yours.

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