Read/Write:
an Aesthetics of *Harry Potter* Fan Fiction

by

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Class of 2013

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in English

Middletown, Connecticut  
April, 2013
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CHAPTER ONE:

Harry Potter Fan Fiction 101

“The Shoebox Project” began in 2004. It is a serial narrative detailing the lives of four boys at a British boarding school in the 1970s. Interspersed with narrative passage are items that a particularly sentimental boy might collect in a shoebox under his bed: notes passed during class, letters exchanged over the summer, photographs, crumpled Valentines, trading cards, paperback books, broken glasses, and chocolate wrappers. The co-authors insist that their project is a work in progress, but there has been no new material since 2008. Five years later, fans have accepted that there is nothing new forthcoming, but they are still having a hard time accepting the end: “Now that I’ve finished the Shoebox Project I feel so empty like what I am supposed to do with my life anymore.” Fortunately for these fans, there is a sequel to the adventures of these four boys: J. K. Rowling’s wildly popular Harry Potter series. “The Shoebox Project” is a fan-written story that details the young lives of Harry’s parents.

More than half a million stories about Harry Potter have been uploaded to fanfiction.net, itself just one of many archives, blogs, and forums that host Harry Potter fan fiction online. This vibrant online community of readers and writers produce and share works of fiction and visual art.

Of course, fan fiction authors and readers are only a small subset of Harry Potter fans at large. J. K Rowling’s fans have turned the boy wizard’s adventures into a multi-billion dollar franchise, making the author richer than the Queen of England.

1 Tumblr post by nopelanding, February 2013.
and inspiring a series of eight movies, a theme park, and merchandise ranging from stuffed owls to toy broomsticks to a variety of candies. But among Rowling’s devoted readers there are not only consumers; there are also producers, personal creators who fashion a range of *Potter*-inspired cultural products—including songs about the series, known as “wizard rock,” a YouTube series of puppet shows, and a plethora of unofficial recipes for wizadlly drink “butterbeer.” This community of fan production and interaction is known collectively as the *Harry Potter* fandom. But no aspect of the fandom has been more fertile creative ground than *Harry Potter* fan fiction.

Fan fiction is, essentially, a story inspired by an existing creative work. These stories take elements of the original and rearrange them in new and unpredictable configurations, which fans acknowledge for the way they reveal or distort the core features of the original. Like much, if not all, literary expression, fan fictions are texts made out of other texts. But unlike much other literary writing, fan fiction emphasizes its subordinate role: a satellite that always points to the larger planet around which it constantly circles.

*Harry Potter* fan fiction in particular consists of stories inspired by the world or characters established in the *Harry Potter* series. This can and does include everything from stories that rewrite the canonical texts by retelling them from a particular character’s first-person perspective—rather than from the third-person omniscient narrative, focalized through Harry, that Rowling favors—to stories that expand on the *Harry Potter* universe by imagining stories that Rowling did not tell—narratives about the adventures of Harry’s parents or the children that he’s imagined to eventually have—to stories which fundamentally alter some basic feature of
Rowling’s universe—stories that turn Rowling’s British wizards into American “muggles” (mere non-magical humans) on vacation.

The one commonality that the thousands of Harry Potter fan fiction stories share is their avowed dependence on the original canon of J.K. Rowling’s novels, and the films and peripheral texts and publicity materials that surround them. While some subscribe to the idea that all “official” Harry Potter material, from video games to interviews with Rowling to DVD bonus features, is part of the canon, others are purists who subscribe only to the seven books of the series.

The canonical story unfolds over seven books, each covering one academic school year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. At the beginning of the first book, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, Harry is unaware of his magical nature. Raised by his aunt and uncle, Harry has lived a Cinderella-like existence in a cupboard under the stairs until the half-giant Hagrid arrives to announce his heritage. His parents were not killed in a car crash, as he had been led to believe, but rather were murdered by a powerful dark wizard, Voldemort. Voldemort also attempted to kill Harry, but he was protected by his mother’s love, which rebounded Voldemort’s killing curse and incapacitated him. As he learns the basics of magic at Hogwarts under the direction of headmaster Albus Dumbledore, Harry must also deal with his newfound celebrity as savior of the wizarding world and train for a prophesized confrontation with Voldemort. Along the way he encounters a variety of magical creatures and a rotating cast of Hogwarts professors. As Harry ages and matures, darker themes in the books emerge. In the background to this final confrontation with
true evil, Rowling raises questions of slavery, sexism, and bureaucratic corruption.

By *Deathly Hallows*, what began as a fantastical boarding-school story in *Sorcerer’s Stone* has become a meditation on manifestations of evil and perspectives on death.

Throughout the series, Harry’s best friends are with him at almost every turn. Ron Weasley is the youngest boy in a poor wizarding family; he often feels overshadowed by his five older brothers and his famous best friend. Eventually Harry develops a romantic relationship with Ron’s younger and only sister, Ginny. Harry’s other best friend, Hermione Granger is the smartest witch of her year, a muggle-born witch who is not conventionally beautiful and tends to be a know-it-all. After years of petty arguments and jealousy-inducing romantic interests on both sides, Ron and Hermione are eventually married.

Hogwarts is divided into four Houses: brave Gryffindor, kind Hufflepuff, wise Ravenclaw, and cunning Slytherin. Gryffindor and Slytherin are the dominant houses, always in direct competition while Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff generally support the current winner. The “Golden Trio”—as fans call Harry, Ron, and Hermione—are all Gryffindors; Slytherin was Voldemort’s house during his time at Hogwarts and its students are generally cast as evildoers.

Though Harry never knew his parents, he finds a number of parental figures. Amongst his teachers, Albus Dumbledore, the Headmaster of Hogwarts, and Minerva McGonagall, the Head of Gryffindor House, serve as mentoring figures to the trio. Most prominent outside of Hogwarts is Sirius Black, Harry’s godfather and his father’s best friend. Sirius escapes from wizard prison Azkaban in the third book of the series, using his ability to transform into a large black dog. Werewolf Remus
Lupin was also a friend to Sirius and Harry’s father, James. He is briefly a professor at Hogwarts in *Prisoner of Azkaban* and often provides fatherly advice to Harry, particularly after Sirius’s death in *Order of the Phoenix*. While they are at Hogwarts, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and James Potter comprise three-fourths of the “Marauders,” friends, Gryffindor classmates, and mischief-makers. The last of the group is Peter Pettigrew, a devotee of Voldemort who sent Harry’s parents to their death and blamed Sirius, which resulted in Sirius’s imprisonment.

Voldemort’s supporters, known as Death Eaters, have gone into hiding after his downfall. They include Lucius Malfoy, father of Harry’s school rival Draco, and Bellatrix Lestrange, cousin to Sirius and his eventual murderer. Other evil-doers include well-intentioned but ultimately destructive government figures, like Cornelius Fudge, ineffectual Minister of Magic, and Dolores Umbridge, who ruthlessly adheres to a corrupted system of rules. Self-promoting figures like celebrity author Gilderoy Lockhart, who takes credit for others’ achievements in a series of best-selling books, and Rita Skeeter, a snooping reporter who stirs up trouble for Harry and his friends, cause harm but are not explicitly evil. Potions Professor and head of Slytherin House Severus Snape rounds out the rogues’ gallery. A double agent between Voldemort’s Death Eaters and Dumbledore’s Order of the Phoenix, Snape’s loyalties are unclear for much of the series. During their time at Hogwarts, he was a rival with James Potter and his friends. He is often the first suspect in any foul play by Harry and Ron, though Hermione often speaks up on his behalf. Ultimately, it becomes clear that he has been serving Dumbledore loyally in the dangerous role of double-agent in order
to make up for the youthful mistake that lead to the death of Lily Evans, his childhood friend and romantic interest, who also happens to be Harry’s mother.

The most obvious and insistent theme of the series is the battle between good and evil. The characters are sketched along these lines from the beginning, though by the end of the series perennial villain Snape is revealed to be good and Dumbledore’s character is called into question.

The books made their debut on 30 June 1997 with the UK release of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* by publisher Bloomsbury. Scholastic paid $105,000 for the rights to American publication: an unheard of amount for an unknown author. The title was changed for an American audience to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. This was just the beginning of Rowling’s rags-to-rich- than-the-queen story. *Chamber of Secrets* was released in the UK in July 1998 and came to the US in June of 1999; *Prisoner of Azkaban* was released in the UK in July 1999 and came to the US in September of that year. By the time *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* was published, both countries released the book on the same day: 8 July 2000. This coordination of releases speaks to the beginning of Potter-mania. Impatient American fans were finding ways to get their hands on British editions of the books before their release in the US, so Bloomsbury and Scholastic coordinated their releases to preserve sales and prevent spoilers. The publication of *Goblet of Fire* marked the beginning of midnight release parties in bookstores. At this point the series was so popular that it occupied the top three spots of the *New York Times* bestseller list, prompting complaints from other publishers. In July 2000, the *New
*York Times* created a separate bestseller list for children’s books in order to free up the top slots for other authors.

This is an important time in the history of *Harry Potter* fan fiction. With the release of the series’ fourth book, the books’ popularity was cemented. These first four volumes were released in quick succession, over a span of only two years in the United States. The fifth *Harry Potter* book, *Order of the Phoenix*, would not be released until the summer of 2003. Fans refer to this period between books as the “Three-Year Summer,” a reference to the books’ adherence to a school-year structure. During this time, fans sated their desire for more *Potter* by dressing up and roleplaying as favorite characters, discussing the books on forums and through fan clubs, and, of course, writing and reading fan fiction. The Three-Year Summer was a fertile time for speculative fan fiction as authors turned to stories as a way to rise above the noise of Internet forums in proposing their predictions.

A film version of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* debuted in theaters in November 2001, drawing crowds of existing fans and establishing new fans of the series during the Three-Year Summer. By the time the fifth book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, was released in June of 2003, Internet retailer Amazon had already received 875,000 pre-orders worldwide. The series continued strongly through the seventh book. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* sold 9 million copies within 24 hours of its July 2005 release; *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* sold 11 million copies within the first 24 hours of its July 2007 release.

The longer pauses between these book releases and the continuing series of films increased the series’ fan base as the end approached. Midnight release parties
continued for the books and movies. The last film, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part II*, was released on 15 July 2011, bringing a sort of closure to the series. J.K. Rowling launched a website in the summer of 2011, *Pottermore*, where fans could, for the first time, purchase e-books of the series and access new material from Rowling herself about the books and the world of *Harry Potter*. Though the series of seven books that comprises the core series is finished, the *Harry Potter* fandom endures today: Universal Orlando Resort plans to open an expansion of their “Wizarding World of Harry Potter” theme park in the summer of 2014.

From the start, *Harry Potter* fan fiction has been an Internet-based phenomenon. FanFiction.net, which hosts stories from thousands of fandoms, spanning TV shows, books, manga, and video games, hosts over 600,000 stories dedicated to *Harry Potter* alone. (The second most prolific fandom on the site, manga series *Naruto*, includes some 300,000 stories.) Other story-hosting websites, such as HarryPotterFanFiction.com, FictionAlley.org, and SugarQuill.net, are dedicated solely to *Harry Potter* stories. Some sites, notably MuggleNet.com and The-Leaky-Cauldron.org, post news about the fandom and host discussion forums in addition to enabling the exchange of fan fiction. Some fan fiction sites are more specific still. Sycophant Hex is a network of archives that contain *Harry Potter* stories dedicated to distinctive niches: “Eros & Sappho” (stories featuring homosexual relationships between *Harry Potter* characters), “Occlumency” (stories about the morally ambiguous Potions Professor Severus Snape), and “Ashwinder” (stories that imagine a romantic or sexual relationship between the darkly conflicted and often repellent
Professor Snape and Hermione Granger, Rowling’s unwavering good girl). Levels of moderation and curation range broadly between these archives. FanFiction.net has almost no quality standards, but does not allow explicit sex or violence. FictionAlley.com was created in response to this policy as a place for adult writers to post their more erotic or sexually explicit stories. Sycophant Hex requires a registered account verifying that the user is over 18 years of age in order to access certain content. A staff member validates each story submitted to Sycophant Hex before it is posted. LiveJournal has been a popular place to post fan fiction as well, but as the site was designed more for personal blogging than story archiving, it is much more difficult to navigate.

Fortunately for the reader, there are websites that offer recommendations to facilitate finding stories among archives, blog sites, personal web pages, and any other place online that fan fiction can be found. Systems for ranking quality, rating explicit content, and identifying desirable features of a story vary wildly among sites. Given this dense and elaborate structure of labeling and categorization, the experience of finding a particular fan fiction story is something like finding a book in a particularly disorganized library or bookstore.

Because of the breadth of content that it hosts, FanFiction.net’s categorization system is somewhat generic. That being said, it still incorporates a number of fandom-specific features. This header appears at the top of the FanFiction.net page
for browsing *Harry Potter* stories:

The main features of the site are listed at the top and are available from all pages: log in/sign up, browse, “just in” for recently published stories, communities, forums for discussion. The “betas” page allows authors and editors to find each other. Under the *Harry Potter* sub-heading, a set of drop-down menus allows filtering of search results. The “World” menu demonstrates fannish distinctions between particular eras of the *Harry Potter* universe. Under this menu a fan will find options for Books, Movies, Pre-Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Post-Hogwarts, Founders, Marauders, and Next Generation. The distinction between Books and Movies shows a level of attention to detail on the part of authors; this indicates which set of details surrounding the same story they are working with.

The rest of the categories are time periods. Pre-Hogwarts, Hogwarts, and Post-Hogwarts each represent a time in Harry’s life. “Hogwarts” is the time focused on in Rowling’s series, but in fan fiction it is only one of many available settings. Founders fictions take place around the founding of Hogwarts and feature characters who are already amorphous historical figures by the time Rowling’s novels begin. Marauders stories feature Harry’s parents’ generation; Next Generation stories are about Harry and his friends’ children, briefly seen from a distance in the epilogue of *Deathly Hallows*. The “Characters” drop-down menus feature over 300 characters from which to choose. There are two menus so that readers can search in pairs for their favorite
sets of characters, whether they are friends, enemies, or romantically involved. In short, the fact that fan fiction is a vast, dense virtual world allows readers and writers to create and reproduce small niches devoted to focused tastes and interests.

Another aspect of fan fiction that derives from its online existence, hinted at by the “betas” page on FanFiction.net, is the communal and reciprocal relations that spring up between readers and writers, who may well swap roles. Stories are linked to authors’ pages, which not only list all postings by that author, but often include a message from the author as well. Author’s Notes (conventionally described by writers and readers as the “AN,” or “A/N”), are integrated into the stories themselves, unavoidably asserting the presence of the author. They are an established part of the fan fiction world and range from simple acknowledgement of the editor to personal anecdote. Often they include apologies for delayed updates or ridiculous content. These notes range from conversational and engaging, often encouraging the reader to leave a response or review of the story, to combative or satirical. Disclaimers that J.K. Rowling owns all creative properties are common. The AN from chapter 4 of “Harry Potter and the Methods of Rationality” by Less Wrong (the most-reviewed story on FanFiction.net) offers a disclaimer, as well as the reasoning behind a specific decision:

Disclaimer: J. K. Rowling is watching you from where she waits, eternally in the void between worlds.
A/N: As others have noted, the novels seem inconsistent in the apparent purchasing power of a Galleon [the unit of currency in Harry Potter]; I'm picking a consistent value and sticking with it. Five pounds sterling to the Galleon doesn't square with seven Galleons for a wand and children using hand-me-down wands.
Like Less Wrong’s note, authors’ notes typically assert the presence and agency of the parodist. Their personality and commentary on both the canonical text and their own writing is not only present along with the story; it is placed before the story, sometimes working like an introduction. In fan fiction, the author is available to offer reasoning behind a decision, excuses for later-than-promised updates, and responses to critiques. They also point to another author, acknowledging the value of the *Harry Potter* texts by writing thousands of pages inspired by the series and simultaneously criticizing details of the books, like inconsistent currency exchange. While Rowling is somewhat distant, “eternally in the void between worlds,” this author is present, immediate, tied to the text and acknowledging the existence of a reader.

Such comments point to an important feature of the culture of fan fiction: its writers and readers see themselves as part of a popular and egalitarian community where advice, feedback, and encouragement is exchanged among equals who are distinguished only by their relative skill and energy. It is also important to writers and creators that their work is part of a rich cultural tradition. The fan fiction critic and advocate who calls herself Super Cat, for example, facetiously proposes that Ug created the first fan fiction when he added a mammoth to Grog’s cave painting. This self-understanding of a literary tradition that reaches back to the beginnings of human communication may not be entirely accurate, but the fact that fan fiction proponents are invested in establishing a long and celebrated lineage demonstrates the seriousness with which they consider their craft. Super Cat also points to a number of stories inspired by other stories, from Greek Mythology to imitators of Jane Austen’s...
novels. While it may be appealing to members of the fan fiction community to see themselves as adherents of an ancient, marginalized tradition, many also recognize a more recent origin for the current phenomenon of fan fiction: the Kirk/Spock fandom based around *Star Trek: the Original Series* that began in the 1970s.

*Star Trek* was originally broadcast between 1966 and 1969. It became a hit in syndication during the 1970s, inspiring five more television series, films, books, and games. Its influence on pop culture continues; the franchise rebooted with a successful film in 2009, with a sequel to follow in 2013. A cohesive fan culture first developed in the 1970s; fan fiction authors and readers were a subculture that existed alongside the show’s larger legitimate fandom.\(^2\) The most well-known sector of the *Star Trek* fan fiction community are “slashers,” who produced and consumed stories about an erotic relationship between Jim Kirk, brave captain of the starship USS Enterprise, and Mr. Spock, the Enterprise’s half-alien first officer. The first published Kirk/Spock story, *A Fragment Out of Time*, appeared in September of 1974 in the fan magazine *Grup III*. The story is less than two pages long and the characters are unnamed, but the accompanying illustration clearly depicts Kirk and Spock, as portrayed by William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy, shown in an intimate embrace. Before this moment, erotic writing and fan stories about *Star Trek* characters existed, but this story’s publication sparked a public debate and eventually a cohesive subculture of slashers within the wider fan community.

The designation “slash” comes from the punctuation between character names, such as Kirk/Spock, indicating that the fan works are about a homosexual

\(^2\) Penley 100.
relationship between the two named characters. Slash stands apart from “het” or “heterosexual”, concerned with heterosexual relationships, and “gen” or “general”, non-sexual fan fiction. Confusingly, character pairings in het fiction are also connected with a slash (as in, Snape/Hermione). While originally the ‘/’ indicated homosexual pairings and an ampersand was used to indicate heterosexual ones, the slash has been adapted as the universal punctuation for any romantic pairing, while the word “slash” is used to designate a genre of homosexual pairings. “Slashers” are fans who engage in the writing or reading of fan fiction. While slash is specific to homosexual relationships, “shipping” is the more general term for the romantic pairing of characters. An abbreviation of “relationship,” to ship a pair of characters is to advocate for a romantic relationship between those characters, through producing fan works, consuming fan works, or even simply crossing your fingers that they will wind up together in the source material. This short vocabulary lesson encapsulates a number of fannish practices: the isolation of the community through jargon, the subdivision of the community by particular generic interests, and the emphasis on language and textual presentation.

In some ways, Kirk/Spock fan fiction can be viewed simply as an extension of tendencies already built into practices of popular reading and writing. As scholars like Janice Radway and Thomas Roberts have pointed out, popular fiction has long encouraged a vision of popular literacy and community in which the barriers between author and readers were assumed to be permeable. The overlap between fan fiction
and genre fiction exists in reading and writing practices as well as content and aesthetic. In many ways, fan fiction makes implicit popular practices explicit. While the devotee of detective fiction might devour hundreds of disposable paperbacks featuring different characters in similar plots, the fan fiction reader might read hundreds of online stories, infinitely more disposable, featuring the same characters in the same scenarios. Although the most acknowledged and clearest lineage of *Harry Potter* fan fiction is the *Star Trek* fandom, other genres with ties to collective storytelling exert influence on the authors and readers.

Genre paperbacks, and romance novels in particular, are influential on both the artistic form and the cultural practice of fan fiction communities. In *An Aesthetic of Junk Fiction*, Thomas Roberts identifies four categories of fiction: canonical fiction, which is studied in the classroom; serious fiction, which is aimed at an educated audience and aspires to become canonical; plain fiction, also known as best-seller fiction; and junk fiction, paperback home of the fantasy, Western, sci-fi, mystery, and romance, trading in genre and convention. In identifying these different styles of fiction, Roberts is most concerned to argue that they reflect not so much levels of accomplishment or sophistication but, rather, different purposes and organizing principles. A pulp novel is not just a lesser version of a serious novel, but a different kind of literary expression, involving different expectations and practices for readers and writers. Roberts asserts that readers of junk fiction are expected to have a “genre competency,”¹ that is, they are expected to be cognizant of the conventions and archetypes of the styles of fiction they read and to be attentive to the

¹ 60.
way the conventions are adjusted and altered by individual practitioners. The important premise is that texts are reconstituted from conventional features and that informed readers are especially attuned to the skill or innovation that writers bring to these familiar elements.

In many ways, fan fiction resembles what Roberts calls junk fiction. Like junk fiction it occupies a distinctive niche and format. Junk fiction appears in paperbacks; fan fiction appears in fanzines and, more recently, the Internet. The audience for junk fiction is more interested in the genre as a whole, its tradition, than a specific author or story. Fan fiction is a collection of satellite stories, always subordinate to the canon of the original text and the collective that is the fandom. And like junk fiction, fan fiction emphasizes a collective, egalitarian, and reciprocal literary community. The collaborative or communal efforts of junk fiction authors produce an interrelated body of work, with any one work being inconsequential or incomprehensible without its surrounding context. The fan fiction community creates a similar dynamic, full of references, allusions, and in-jokes.

Perhaps the type of junk fiction most closely related to *Harry Potter* fan fiction is the romance novel. A large portion of fan fiction stories emphasize sex and romance in ways that are often surprisingly close in theme and convention to the core features of the romance novel. Janice Radway’s classic study *Reading the Romance*, which offers both a critical analysis of the romance genre and an ethnography of its community of readers, offers compelling insight into the practices of the *Harry Potter* fan fiction community.
In Radway’s critical account, the practiced and astute readers of the romance novel are engaged by a consistent set of generic conventions, which turn especially on the fate of the protagonist. The basic plot structure of all romance novels is the same, although deviations from the formula are an integral aspect of genre fiction. The plot centers around two characters: the hero and the heroine. The heroine is unusually beautiful and unaware of her beauty, intelligent and with a fiery disposition. The hero is distant, but committed to the public good. At the start of the story, the heroine’s social identity is destroyed. The hero and heroine meet and have a series of misunderstandings and miscommunications. After an emotional separation, the two are tenderly reunited and demonstrate their love for each other.

The fan fiction story “Hinge of Fate” by Ramos follows Radway’s formula closely. In the first chapter, Hermione discovers that she is pregnant, destroying her belief that she is a virgin. As the story unfolds we discover that Severus Snape had raped her while he was under the coercive Imperius Curse, and therefore not in control of his actions. Due to her fortitude the two escaped the gang of Death Eaters who had kidnapped them, but Hermione’s memory of the event was suppressed and Severus was badly injured. As she nurses him back to health the two form an unsteady friendship, fraught with misunderstanding and emotional recollections. Eventually they realize romantic feelings, get married, and survive the final battle with Voldemort.

By casting these two characters in the romance genre’s archetypal roles, author Ramos illuminates their preexisting attributes that are particularly suited to the genre. Radway notes that romantic heroines “exhibit special abilities in an unusual
occupation,” a conspicuous parallel with Hermione’s muggle upbringing and academic excellence in the wizarding world. Romantic heroines are described as having “glorious tresses;” Rowling repeatedly makes reference to Hermione’s unruly hair. Severus’s commitment to the public good is demonstrated both in his position as a teacher and in his dangerous role as a double agent. He is depicted as tall, dark, and brooding. By effectively importing these existing characters into a romance novel, fan fiction reveals the latent characterization and unrealized erotic potential in *Harry Potter*.

Similarly to Kirk/Spock authors who revealed an erotic undercurrent in the *Star Trek* series, authors like Ramos have made apparent the existing romance archetypes in the *Harry Potter* series. The somewhat complementary personalities and characterizations of Hermione and Severus go some way towards explaining the popularity of fan fiction stories in which the two are partnered romantically, even though the two characters barely interact outside the classroom in Rowling’s books. These aspects of character design are present in the books, but fully exploring their narrative compatibility as romantic hero and heroine still manages to feel subversive. It is an intentional subversion and transformation of the original material, but it also depends on erotic potential that is present but inert in the *Harry Potter* books. Again, what is implicit or latent in the source text is made excruciatingly clear in the fan fiction.

Junk fiction, as Roberts sees it, consciously places itself in a popular literary tradition and builds allusions and comparisons into its design on which subsequent
writers can artfully elaborate. If that is true of genre fiction generally, then *Harry Potter* could be regarded as a supreme work of genre fiction. For Rowling’s novels draw directly and indirectly from a host of popular traditions—mythology, history, classic and canonical literature, and genre fiction—and her astute readers in the world of fan fiction knowingly select and elaborate on her references. The novels are a synthesis of the English public school novel—à la *Tom Brown’s School Days*—translated into the gothic material of castles, secret passageways, and witches. Likewise, in the growth of Harry, they give us reinvention of classic stories of heroic narrative.

Rowling also cleverly salts her texts with references, allusions, jokes that attentive readers can recognize. The most transparent application of this is in the characters’ names. Remus Lupin is a striking example: any familiarity with Roman mythology or Latin will immediately reveal to the reader his wolfish nature. While his being a werewolf is clear to the attentive reader, it is not made explicit to Harry himself for almost the entirety of the book. In this way, the name is also reminiscent of the structure of mystery or detective stories. The well-informed reader is a few steps ahead of the characters in realizing that Lupin’s name participates in multiple codes from different genres and traditions: a microcosm of the incredible diversity of genre evoked by *Harry Potter*. The series incorporates conventions from the school story, Bildungsroman, and Gothic traditions, as well as others.

*Harry Potter*’s incorporation of the Gothic goes some way towards explaining its popularity. Gothic themes proliferated in 90s American culture. Works like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The X-Files*, Ann Rice’s vampire novels, and horror films all
touched upon the same resurgence of the Gothic. At the same time, an anti-Gothic movement emerged, symbolized by an obsession with angels and the popularity of Oprah, preaching a doctrine of transcendence. The anti-Gothic is “inspired by the belief that self-transformation is as simple as a fairy-tale wish.” Harry Potter, the orphaned Cinderella figure whose self-transformation is enacted through his initiation into the ways of wizardry, epitomizes this 90s Gothic dichotomy. The Gothic content of the series also provides fan fiction writers a rich tradition from which to draw, particularly the more romantically minded among them.

The series draws on a wide range of other texts, either providing understanding and enjoyment for those able to recognize the references or operating as an introduction for the younger, unfamiliar reader. The school story aspect introduces the characters as novices into a special world of arcane meanings and signs, especially Harry and Hermione, raised in muggle households and therefore previously unexposed to this magical world, reflecting the position of the reader and facilitating the beginner’s-style magic classes that are for the benefit of the reader as much as the characters. Harry’s ignorance of magic even after years of lessons is demonstrated in chapter 24 of *Half-Blood Prince* when Harry uses a spell that he has found written in the margins of a book. The incantation “sectumsempra” is designated “for enemies” by its creator, and a reader with knowledge of Latin will recognize that the spell translates to “always cut” or “cut forever.” Indeed, the spell is designed to sever body parts without allowing for reattachment. The unwitting use of this powerful spell displays both the knowledge discrepancy between an informed reader
and the characters and the power of language to affect permanent change on Harry’s world.

Language and its apparent mysterious power to reshape and transform the world is a major theme of the Potter canon. Throughout the series, Rowling thematizes the magical power of language, in its malevolent and benevolent forms, through spells, legacies, riddles, passwords, and arcane texts. All of these are ways of viewing words as forces that act directly and mysteriously in the world. But in addition to these broad features of the Harry Potter canon, the series also includes more narrowly focused examples that highlight the power of storytelling. In Rowling’s novels, rewriting is a way of changing reality.

One of the most concrete examples of rewriting in Harry Potter is Professor Lupin’s lesson on boggarts in Prisoner of Azkaban. As professor of Defense Against the Dark Arts class, Lupin focuses on malevolent magical creatures. A boggart is a being that manifests as a visual representation of its target’s greatest fear. Professor Lupin teaches the class to defeat boggarts by casting a charm that forces the boggart to assume a humorous form, which can cause it to inspire laughter, which is fatal to boggarts. When the students take turns changing the appearance of the boggart, its original form is still visible in the new, humorous, form. When the boggart appears as the menacing Professor Snape, the charm dresses him in a different set of clothes; the spider form of the boggart loses its legs and rolls around; the severed-hand-boggart is caught in a mousetrap. In the humorous, altered form, it is still clear that the boggart
was Snape, a spider, and a severed hand. The students adapt the source material of the boggart’s form and completely appropriate its authorial intent. The visibility of the source material makes the boggart a metaphor for fan fiction: by casting this charm, the students are making light of a potentially sinister occurrence, while authors of *Harry Potter* fan fiction often remake the children’s series into something dark.

Rowling’s novels also thematize writing itself by including various authorial figures among the characters themselves. While the example of the boggart is humorous and positive, Rowling dramatizes the dangerous power of writing by creating two malevolent characters who use their skill with texts in nefarious ways to promote their own ends while negatively affecting those around them. There are two minor characters in the series who are professional authors: Gilderoy Lockhart, the self-absorbed autobiographer, and Rita Skeeter, the gossipy reporter. Lockhart steals true stories of heroic deeds from others, erasing their memories and passing the valorous acts off as his own work in a best-selling autobiographical series. His true skill lies not in creating stories, but in performing the memory charm that allows him to steal from others. He is more bumbling than malicious and eventually gets his comeuppance when his famous memory charm backfires and causes severe amnesia.

Skeeter is a malicious reporter who is far more concerned with stirring up controversy and selling papers than approximating the truth. While Lockhart recounts basically true events with one major change, Skeeter’s style of reporting is completely based on fallacy. Her magical quill dramatizes the notes that she takes

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4 Johnson 208.
during interviews, giving up any pretense of accurate reporting and twisting any situation into something scandalous from the moment it becomes written. While her interviewee’s words may be true, by the time she writes them down they are a string of ribald lies. Harry, Hermione, and Dumbledore, all consistently righteous characters, are particular targets of her slander. If charming the boggart is benevolent fan fiction, merely pointing out humorous aspects in the original material, Lockhart and Skeeter represent authors who deliberately manipulate the source text with malicious intentions.

Lockhart and Skeeter are the major producers of published and widespread texts, but other characters communicate through the written word as well; the recurring theme here is the potential for betrayal or deceit. A Gryffindor student’s carelessness with the written word leads to the fugitive Sirius Black’s acquisition of the Gryffindor Tower passwords and facilities his attempted murder of Peter Pettigrew. In Chamber of Secrets, the interaction of writing and reading from Tom Riddle’s diary threatens Ginny’s life. The cursed diary that she finds is designed to sap her life force as she writes, unwittingly communicating with Voldemort in the process. Voldemort uses the written word to possess her, eventually using her to set a giant snake loose on the school. Harry’s detentions with the contemptible Professor Umbridge in Order of the Phoenix leave him physically scarred by the act of writing: as he repeatedly writes “I will not tell lies” with an enchanted quill, the words are carved into the back of his hand; his blood serves as the ink on the page. In each of these instances, the written word, whether employed maliciously or carelessly, leads to violence and physical harm. These texts are casual, informal types of writing: a list
of reminders, a diary, and the meaningless lines copied during detention. All of these instances are centered on characters producing their own texts; reading the texts of others is a different matter in *Harry Potter*.

Producers of the written word, from Lockhart to Umbridge, are negative characters in the *Harry Potter* canon, but characters who focus on consuming texts are more complicated and nuanced. The main representative of reading rather than writing is Hermione. Unseen authors write the library’s books, more names than characters. Hermione’s close affiliation with the library and schoolwork is overwhelmingly positive. Her research and interpretative skills are valuable, from her discovery of Nicholas Flamel’s identity in *Sorcerer’s Stone* to her insight into the story of the three brothers in *Deathly Hallows*. She is initially taken in by Lockhart’s misrepresentation, which demonstrates the potential weakness of her trusting attitude toward books. On the first day of his class she has already read all of his books and is enamored by his self-proclaimed skill. While Harry and Ron are quick to point out his demonstrated ineptitude, she insists that his books reveal the truth.

Hermione learns to be more critical of texts, eventually becoming angry at the omission of house elves in *Hogwarts, A History*. Hermione sees house elves, magical beings bound by servitude, as slaves in the wizarding world. When she learns that Hogwarts employs dozens of the creatures, she begins a crusade to free them. By pointing out that the creatures are not mentioned in the definitive book about Hogwarts, Hermione demonstrates that she is an informed reader, aware of what is
present in the text as well as what is missing. Hermione’s relationship to the house elves’ plight demonstrates her ability at reading, but also reveals her failure at writing. The organization that she starts in order to protest the elves’ enslavement, the Society for the Protection of Elfish Welfare, garners no interest from other students: Harry and Ron point out that S.P.E.W. is a particularly off-putting acronym. Clearly, Hermione does not have a way with words.

While the boys are not in the same league as Hermione in terms of reading, their writing ability is far superior. They falsify their divination homework in *Goblet of Fire*, making up dark dreams and wild predictions of death to please their morbid professor. Hermione’s disdain for their cavalier attitudes marks a clear separation between their relationships with the written word. The boys are willing to craft fictions and are met with great success. Their predictions of burns and drowning are realized in the tasks of the Triwizard Tournament, where Harry faces a dragon and Ron is briefly imprisoned underwater. Potentially it is their cooperation that creates success. Hermione does not consult with others in her creation of S.P.E.W., which fails; her research, on the other hand, is entirely dependent on a community of authors and fellow researchers. Harry and Ron work together on their divination homework, and are shown consulting with Hermione for homework help throughout the series. Success as a group is a theme throughout the series and one that is visible in the community of fan fiction writers. Beta readers, fans who volunteer to proofread or edit others’ works, and commenters offer authors encouragement and constructive criticism.

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5 Schanoes 194.
6 Friedman 198.
One way to understand the skepticism surrounding writing in *Harry Potter* also offers an explanation as to why this series in particular has spawned so much creative activity. Skeeter and Lockhart, as well as *Hogwarts, A History*, epitomize “the inadequacy of official written narratives, such as newspaper articles, to convey an accurate understanding of significant events.” The house elves, a necessary but unseen aspect of life at Hogwarts, are ignored in *Hogwarts, A History*. Hermione’s indignation at this shortcoming is mirrored in the attitude of the fan fiction author. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* is the official written narrative, and rather than the non-inclusion of the omnipresent but invisible house elves, these authors bring to the forefront subtexts, side plots, sexual tensions, backstories, and subversive themes. In many ways, these writers of fan fiction are simply making good on the possibilities already suggested by the canon.

In short, the *Harry Potter* series provides fertile ground for the metanarrative of fan fiction in part because in myriad ways it already dramatizes the creative and destructive powers of language and narrative. In taking up Rowling’s creations, the creators and readers of fan fiction situate themselves as similar not only to the author but also to her characters. The fan fiction community encourages, and even conflates, reading and writing. In order to understand fan fiction, familiarity with the source material is required. But there is also a necessary flexibility. Fan fiction changes the familiar. Participating in fan fiction is an acknowledgement of the value of the original material, but also an assertion that something could or should have been

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7 Schanoes 138.
different. Fan fiction is a celebration of both consuming and producing texts as it breaks down the division between author and reader.
CHAPTER TWO:

A community of readers, a community of writers

Between the ages of 8 and 17, Erin spent every minute of her free time thinking about *Harry Potter*. She believes that the series changed her life in irreversible ways, but for her the world of *Harry Potter* involves more than just J. K. Rowling’s seven books. Her conception of the Potter-verse includes the Warner Brothers films, fan fiction, even midnight release parties. Of all these Potter vehicles, fan fiction holds a particularly meaningful place for Erin. “I almost treat fan fiction as more correct than the movies,” she tells me:

If they changed something in the movies, I got really upset. But if someone does a completely wild fan fiction that is not plausible, it doesn’t offend me. And I think it’s because fan fiction authors acknowledge that they are sort of doing something different, whereas the movies are almost claiming to be the *Harry Potter* books in another form.

This is the fan’s perspective on what distinguishes fan fiction: awareness of its subordinate position and the freedom that comes with that acknowledgement. Erin sees fan fiction as an assortment of perspectives that help her understand the world presented in J. K. Rowling’s books. When the surprising news was revealed in *Deathly Hallows* that Severus Snape had once been in love with Harry’s now dead mother Lily Evans, Erin sought out fan fiction to help her assimilate the news. She wanted to read what fans had written about the characters’ relationship, she explains,
in order to understand “how Snape would have been thinking about it when he was in
school.”

She remembers a story she read in the early 2000s about a romantic
relationship between Harry and Susan Bones, a particularly minor character. “In some
ways,” she says, “the Susan Bones who I read in that fan fiction was more real than
the Susan Bones in the canon. I understood her better, and things I learned about her
through that fan fiction allowed me to appreciate her more in the canon.” For Erin,
fan fiction is a kind of critical reflection and extension of the canonical body of *Harry
Potter* fiction. It helps her to complete and explore the world that is visible in J. K.
Rowling’s novels. But, as has always been said about serious art and criticism, fan
fiction also informs Erin’s view of the real world. Because the books have been such
a large part of her life, they provide a good lens for self-reflection.

Now an English major in her last year at Reed College, Erin says that the peak
of her obsession is behind her. Her once encyclopedic knowledge of all things *Harry
Potter* has faded in recent years, but the books still reside in a prominent position at
the top of the bookshelf in her dorm room. All seven hardcover books are a heavy
burden to take to college. When I spoke with her, she was wearing a plaid flannel
shirt, not *Harry Potter* paraphernalia. She does bear a passing resemblance to
Hermione Granger: she has a huge mane of curly brown hair. Her fingers twisted in
the curls as we talked, drawing more attention to her most Potter-ish feature. She
refers to her relationship with *Harry Potter* as addiction, to fan fiction as a “fix”
between book releases. When I asked about this particular word choice, she
immediately apologized: “I guess that’s kind of problematic.” Despite her intense
thoughtfulness—she tended to take a full minute to think before verbalizing an answer to my questions—she readily acknowledges the limits of her critical vocabulary. She explains that addiction and obsession are a shorthand for Potter fans who cannot find another way to describe the experience of obsessive investment: “it’s not quite the right word for it, but it’s how people communicate that Harry Potter is a larger part of their life than the average citizen’s.”

I wanted to understand the experience of fan fiction devotees like Erin. So, as part of the research for this thesis, I looked for ways to learn more about the legion of devotees who make up the fan fiction universe. I constructed a survey addressed to readers and writers of fan fiction. The survey included questions about Harry Potter, Harry Potter fan fiction, and fan fiction in general. Between January and March of 2013 I administered the survey through Google Forms. (The questions and quantitative results are included in the Appendix.) I sent a link to many acquaintances within the fan fiction community, asking them to pass it along. The survey was posted on the Wesleyan student blog Wesleying in early February along with encouragement to “forward it outside the Wesleyan bubble.” A link was also tweeted to MuggleNet Fan Fiction (@MNFF) and Audiofictions (@Audiofictions), the audiobook podcast for the MuggleNet community. Although this survey was in no way scientifically designed or administered, it did give me a richer view of the phenomenon of fan fiction.

Respondents self-selected, skewing the results towards fan fiction readers, but 31% of total replies claimed to never have read Harry Potter fan fiction. One hundred
eighty three people responded to the survey; the responses reflected a wide range of fan experiences, from respondents who had never read the *Harry Potter* books until recently to those who had dressed up in costume to attend midnight book and movie releases. While there was much diversity of response, there were also a few common threads among fan fiction readers that started to touch on the heart of the fandom.

To deepen my understanding of fan fiction writers and readers, I followed up with five of the respondents to my survey and conducted more intensive interviews with them through video chat. Each interview lasted between ten and forty minutes and was tailored to the individual based on their survey responses. I recorded audio from the interviews to ensure accuracy of quotes and will refer to respondents by pseudonyms. The focus of these interviews was on developing a portrait of a series of individuals and their experiences with fan fiction. In addition to studying larger trends, insight from a personal experience and perceptions of the larger movement provide a ground-level perspective of fan fiction. In presenting these personalities I hope to demonstrate the range of individuals who are involved in fan fiction, their motivations and interests, and their reflections, as knowledgeable witnesses, on fan fiction. Fan fiction is a vast and varied continent and I am only beginning to map out its shores. The body of already-existing fan fiction includes thousands of texts, addressing a wide range of topics and featuring a diversity of characters. The views that I sketch out here can only be provisional and make no claim to be definitive. But with the help of these individual writers and readers as guides, we will begin to see the landscape of *Harry Potter* fan fiction take shape.
For many fans who grew up with *Harry Potter*, exposure to fan fiction began at a young age, while the books were still coming out. The large majority of respondents to my survey (87%) are currently between the ages of 18 and 25. This means that they were between 4 and 11 when *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* was released in the United States in 1998. Forty-two percent of total respondents—the early adopters—read their first *Harry Potter* book before age 9. First encounters with fan fiction generally came along much later. This makes sense, as the peak of fan fiction—spanning the years between the 2000 release of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and the 2003 release of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*—came a few years after the initial wave of popularity for the early *Potter* books, These first responders were between 6 and 16 during the Three-Year Summer, which corresponds with a popular range of ages for first fan fiction experiences: 53% of respondents who had read fan fiction reported first reading fan fiction before the age of 18.

The rumored gap between male and female involvement in fan fiction was visible in my survey largely through the self-selection of respondents: 158 of the 183 identified as female. The divide became clearer when expanded outside the *Harry Potter* fandom. 74% of female respondents (116 of the 158 total) reported that they had read stories in other fandoms, compared to only 9 of the 21 males who responded. And even though almost half of the male respondents have read *Harry Potter* fan fiction, only one claimed to have written it. Considering that 31% of all female respondents say they have written *Harry Potter* fan fiction, it’s likely that the rumor that fan fiction is largely written by women is true.
Although the fan fiction community is expansive, it is also somewhat isolated. Few survey respondents reported discovering fan fiction through pure coincidence; the two most popular ways of encountering fan fiction were word of mouth and through fan sites. Cassie, a master’s candidate in special education, first heard about fan fiction when she was in middle school. “My friend’s sister had mentioned something about fan fiction once, and I was skeptical about it, just because it sounded, like, weird, you know?” Eventually she sought out fan fiction during a bought of insomnia. “I got stuck there,” she says, “because it gives you something to do when you can’t sleep and sometimes they’re actually really good stories.” Of the 145 survey respondents who reported that they had read fan fiction, 47 said that, like Cassie, they had first heard about fan fiction through word of mouth. Another 31 said that they found fan fiction through other websites. But many do not remember their first encounter with fan fiction. One survey respondent said, “I honestly don’t remember how I got there.” In my interview with Erin she offered an explanation for her hazy memory: “I don’t remember my first exposure because it was sort of always prevalent from the time I entered the fandom… I don’t really remember a time before Internet fan fiction.” Now 20 years old, Erin has been heavily involved in the online Potter community since the early 2000s.

Zachary is also a seasoned Harry Potter fan, and something of a celebrity within the fan fiction community. As a reader for MuggleNet’s podcast Audiofictions, each week he reads listener-nominated fan fictions aloud, in the style of audiobooks. His work with Audiofictions reflects his aspiration to become a voice actor, which is
also clear through his style of speech. He describes people’s reactions in quotes, complete with silly voices. He is currently unemployed, though he works as a volunteer at a local library. When we talked, a huge display of elaborate *Harry Potter* Lego sets was visible on the shelves behind him, demonstrating the same dedication that was apparent in Erin’s transportation of all seven books to her dorm room.

Zachary first became involved with fan fiction in his early teens, through fan sites and roleplaying. His main motivation was dissatisfaction with the existing content: “I started writing fan fiction because there weren’t a lot of good stories about my favorite character, Remus Lupin.” Zachary also role-played as Lupin, even creating a MySpace profile for the character. The page is still online; “I left it up,” he says, “for nostalgic reasons.” Although Zachary mentioned attempting to dress like Remus Lupin while in high school, his style has since changed. His hair is short and he wears square glasses, but he does sport a mustache similar to actor David Thewlis’s facial hair in his film portrayal of Lupin. Zachary’s fascination with Remus has endured: on the podcast he introduces himself by his username, a reference to Lupin. His Skype username and email address both incorporate Lupin’s name as well.

Zachary’s experience has been immersive; he is even using the fandom as an outlet for professional aspirations. This sense of ardor is not uncommon among fan fiction readers. The act of seeking out more material in addition to Rowling’s thousands of pages demonstrates, at the least, a time commitment to the *Harry Potter* universe. Many people used a language of addiction to describe their experience with fan fiction. When asked in my survey, “How did you start reading fan fiction,” more
than a dozen different people indicated that they immediately became “addicted” in some manner. These responses ranged from, “I was hooked,” to, “I got addicted!” The development of a range of vocabulary indicates that this mindset is, if not pervasive, at least fully developed within the fandom. One respondent said, “I get the impression that the Shoebox [Project (a wildly popular Marauders era novel-length story)] was the gateway drug for a lot of people.” Another described her experience with fan fiction as “a downward spiral.” About her first exposure to Draco/Harry slash fiction, another said, “I was scandalized and hooked.” A few more “never looked back” or “haven’t stopped since.”

In interview with Erin, she expanded on this vocabulary, recognizing its problematic aspects and refuting the negative connotations:

I think addiction might not necessarily be the right word because it implies a loss of control, or that there are negative consequences of this, of being hooked on something. I might give you a different answer if I were up at 4 a.m., unable to go to sleep because I was reading a really amazing story or crying over the death of a character. But addiction has sort of become another way of saying that *Harry Potter* has changed my life in irreversible ways. I think the reason people use these surrogate words is that they’re the closest I think anyone can get to fully representing the intense scope of being a devoted *Harry Potter* fan.

Despite the negative connotations of her reference to addiction, Erin doesn’t see writing and reading stories about *Harry Potter* as a negative experience. In the survey
responses, though, there is a hint of self-deprecation: as if admitting devotion to such a pastime requires some sort of acknowledgment of the ridiculousness of it all. These labels affectionately deride fan fiction as a worthless activity—much like Robert’s labeling of genre fiction as “junk.”

The vocabulary of addiction hints that readers of fan fiction recognize in their devotion to popular writing something relating to the Gothic tradition and its fascination with an aesthetic of compulsion. As Mark Edmundson explains, possession is central to the Gothic tradition both in the stories it tells and in its address to its readers. Not only does the hero-villain of the Gothic novel aim to possess the trembling heroine, the writer of Gothic literature aims to “grab hold of the reader, make it so he can’t put the book down, can’t think of anything else.” For Erin, kept up until 4am by her “obsession” with *Harry Potter*, this promise or threat is fully realized. Edmundson also suggests that “addicted” is the 90s equivalent of the Gothic “haunted.” Addicted fans are not interested in escaping their fandoms, but rather see the focus of their obsession as a source of light in their life. This attitude has more in common with the Gothic heroine pulled into a romantic relationship with a brooding stranger than with Oprah’s talk show guests struggling to kick their habits.

Jess, a 22-year-old with a degree in creative writing and no career plans other than “becoming a housewife and writing a ton,” acknowledged nothing negative about fan fiction in our interview. Her blithe spirit denies the darker Gothic undertones of her position and yet also sets her up as a classic Gothic heroine.

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8 Edmundson xi.
For Jess, fan fiction is less like a hobby and more like a lifestyle. The way she tells it, she has always understood the world in terms of fan fiction. Before she found online communities, at the age of 11, she wrote a story about the Haunted Castle ride at Disney World. Her penchant for turning her fantasies about pop culture narratives and artifacts into stories, a fascination that developed even before she knew that other people wrote fan fiction, goes some way towards explaining her inclination to “ship” (or imagine otherwise unrelated characters in a sexual or romantic relationship) characters in any media available. Although she is a self-proclaimed “Bible thumper,” Jess is most interested in erotic fan fiction. But she has a very clear vision of what’s she’s looking to read (or looking to create): Gothic narratives of obsessive love and the inevitable consummation of desire.

Jess is heavily involved in a number of fandoms, not just *Harry Potter*. She got her start in fan fiction at a young age, moving from writing stories about the Haunted Castle to the Nick.com message boards, where she found stories about *Hey Arnold!*, an animated children’s show about a group of friends growing up in the city. The cartoon was strongly appealing to Jess because of the obsessive love exhibited by one of the characters, Helga. Helga is a tough girl who bullies and insults Arnold in public, but is secretly in love with him, even going so far as to keep a slightly creepy shrine to him in her closet. Somewhat like the obsessive Helga, Jess does not do fandom halfway. She “ships” about every genre, even the cartoons and movies that she watches with her younger siblings. She invents romance stories to insert in those narratives because they are all that is available at the time. “It forces you to be really creative because when it’s a kids’ program with no romantic or sexual content, you
get to make it up yourself.” By contrast, she comments that adult-targeted shows, like *Grey’s Anatomy*, in which “every single person is screwing every single other person” are less appealing because there’s nowhere new and creative to go with that source material. “Fixing” the problem of unfulfilled romantic potential seems to be Jess’s goal in writing fan fiction.

Even though she may be writing explicit sexual content, Jess does not consider erotica to be pornography. To her, pornography is focused on bodies, while erotica is focused on emotions. In describing her inclination to imagine sexual relationships in even the most kid-friendly media, she makes an important distinction between the physical and the emotional:

- Porn is just two people doing it and it’s just dirty and disgusting.
- Erotica is beautiful, it’s literature, it’s pretty, you care about the characters, you care about their emotions, you care about like who are they, what’s their back history, what’s their relationship to each other, why are they having sex, how do they feel about it.

Of all of my interview subjects, Jess seems most similar to Radway’s typical romance reader. Her focus is on the emotional development between characters, which is what makes fan fiction stand out as an excellent genre for the writer of erotica. With fan fiction, character development is built-in, pre-existing. A fan fiction short story allows the reader to jump in, with all of the background information so important to emotional erotica already established.

Jess is a prolific writer. Her first foray into fan fiction totals about 180 pages. During our interview she reached to the bookshelf next to her and showed off a few
of the texts that she has written in her 11-year career. They were all thick spiral-bound books, each hundreds of pages long. She is currently working on her sixth novel, which is not fan fiction, but entirely her own creation. She would love to be published, but is not currently making an active effort towards that end. For now, she is happy to be a housewife who writes a lot, although she wishes her fiancé, a graduate student in computer science, would read more of her work because “three-quarters of the stuff that’s going on in my head is related to writing. It’s a huge part of my life.” But then, she claims to not really know how to turn on a computer, which, she says, evens out their relationship.

When it comes to romance, Jess has a clear idea of what she is looking for. A particularly obsessive character must be present in the source material; Helga from *Hey Arnold!* is the first example of a trend. Jess described the type of love that she wants to read and write about:

I don’t like it if it’s just like, “Oh I have a vague crush on you” or whatever. I like it when it’s, “Hello you are my end-all-be-all, you are my perfect in life and I will go crazy mebonkerpants to get you and my while life revolves around you. I will lie, cheat, steal, and kill to get to you.”

She admits that this scenario would be disturbing in real life, but finds it endearing in works of fiction. *Hey Arnold!* is a particularly attractive fandom to Jess because it features the unusual phenomenon of a female character experiencing this obsessive type of love. Referring to figures like the Phantom of the Opera, Jess notes that obsessive men pursuing women are far more common. Severus Snape fills this role in
the *Harry Potter* canon; years after Lily Evan’s death he is driven to protect her son, Harry, by his guilt over her death. In *Half-Blood Prince* we learn that his Patronus (a protective charm that takes the shape of something of particular importance to the caster) takes the form of a doe, a tribute to Lily. Dumbledore asks, “After all this time?” to which Severus replies, “Always.” In his dying moment he asks to look into Harry’s eyes, which look just like Lily’s. The Phantom and Snape share something of the Gothic hero: tall, dark, and mysterious. Helga, the Phantom, and Snape all also share unhappy endings. In the mainstream media, it seems, obsession tends to end sadly.

While she is attracted to romantic obsessives, Jess’s own writings tend to avoid the unhappy conclusions those characters usually meet. Sad endings bother her; she wants to fix the canon: “Screw this, I’m writing it happy.” In this desire to write stories that manage to combine mad obsession and happy resolution, Jess epitomizes the hybrid of the demonic and angelic that Mark Edmundson sees as typical of the Gothic resurgence in 1990s America. She simultaneously summons and denies fears of possession, dominance, and desire unfulfilled. The other consistent trend in her writing is the Gothic paradigm of dominant men and submissive women. As the counterexample of Helga shows, this is by no means her preference for source material. In fact, her favorite couple of all time is Batman and Catwoman; however, she does not write fan fiction for that pairing. “Catwoman would be on top,” Jess explains, dismissing such a possibility. “I mean, she’s the definition of dominant and I don’t know how to write that.”
While she is willing to invest a huge amount of time in the narration of one particular romantic scenario, Jess has almost no interest in critical reflection on the significance of fan fiction or on the issues raised by the stories that inspire her. Her verbal tic is, “I don’t know.” On the other end of the spectrum from Jess, though, is Erin. For Erin, fan fiction is a way of understanding and completing the world of *Harry Potter* and, through that, for understanding the real world. Because the books are such a large part of her life, they make an easy lens for self-reflection. The experience involves more than the books: her concept of the story is “every single thing that’s ever happened to me regarding *Harry Potter*,” which she casts as a distinctive and complete personal experience. She calls her personal understanding of the *Harry Potter* universe her “head canon,” meaning that you think of some scenario not represented in the original *Harry Potter* novels, “This totally happened behind the scenes, there’s no way it couldn’t have.” Because there is limited space in the books, but the story continues before and after, and even during the events narrated by Rowling. For Erin, finding new stories that fit into the logic of her “head canon” is the appeal of fan fiction:

We don’t know everything about what happened before Harry came to Hogwarts, we don’t know everything about what happened after he left it. And even though J. K. Rowling’s word is god, it’s still useful to have talented authors help try to conceive of what’s missing.

For Erin, fan fiction is a way to fill in the holes that are left in even the most detailed story. Harry’s journey as presented by J. K. Rowling is met with all sorts of restrictions: the page count, the timeline, the focalization through one character. As
Erin and fans like her, see it, *Harry Potter* is a complete universe waiting to be explored; J. K. Rowling’s books are just a starting point, the introduction to a larger world.

Using fan fiction to understand or augment the canon is what drives Erin. She seeks out answers to specific questions. After Severus and Lily’s relationship was explained in *Deathly Hallows*, as noted above, she sought out fan fiction about the pairing in order to understand the characters’ motivations. She connects this interest with her attraction to Dean/Seamus fiction (stories about two minor characters, Harry’s dormitory roommates), saying that their homosexual relationship is “totally there in the books,” but that she only understood the implications of their friendship after exposure to that body of fan fiction. When she questioned her own sexuality, Erin explained that she used fan fiction as a way to “view my identity through these books that had comprised such a large part of myself for the past 14 years.”

Fan fiction writers and readers respond powerfully to individual characters from the *Harry Potter* universe and develop intense interests in certain figures or in the combination of specific characters. For Zachary, this manifests as his idolization of Remus Lupin; for Erin the pairing of Dean and Seamus has a particular appeal. For respondents to my poll, Hermione Granger and Luna Lovegood were the overwhelmingly favorite female characters. Only a few other female characters were mentioned by survey respondents, and not frequently: Ginny Weasley, Nymphadora Tonks, and Minerva McGonagall were all mentioned, but each only received between
one and three mentions. The favorite characters, Hermione and Luna, are frequently shown reading in the *Harry Potter* books. Hermione is constantly in the library or working on homework; Luna is a vocal advocate for the magazine that her father publishes. It is not surprising that female readers identify with the females in the series that spend most of their time reading.

While some interviewees said that it was hard to associate gender with authors’ anonymized screen names, Celeste has found the fan fiction community very female-driven. Her attitude towards slash fiction is one of an observer:

> As someone who reads a lot in general, I like observing and I like watching and I don’t necessarily want to be a part of things. I feel like a lot of times, if it was a straight pairing and you were a straight woman, I feel like you would feel pressure to identify with the woman and not with the man, but if it’s a same sex pairing then you could identify with both, or one and then switch, or neither. It’s very different types of relation to the character, almost like astral projection or something.

Her comments are in line with Constance Penley’s analysis of the Kirk/Spock fandom within a feminist context. Penley argues that erotic stories about same-sex couples circumvent “the built-in inequality of the romance formula, in which dominance and submission are invariably the respective roles of men and women.”

With such a range of characters, authors, and readers, *Harry Potter* fan fiction allows readers to have it both ways. Jess uses fan fiction to actively create these Gothic tales of

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dominance and submission with little variance; Celeste finds that fan fiction allows her to explore changing roles in a feminist context.

While Jess is the most prolific writer whom I spoke with, Celeste is the greatest reader. Celeste likes fan fiction that reads like a novel:

I like multi-chapter things that span a long period of time. Nothing that is just strictly action or just strictly romance, but well rounded. They have a larger cast of characters, and it’s not just dialogue, there’s action, there’s some kind of story arc, some kind of conclusion is reached.

In the way she talks about fan fiction, it is clear that she considers it like any other piece of literature. During our interview she compared it to her current reading, a James Baldwin novel. While the Baldwin is enjoyable to read, fan fiction is different: it is quicker to read, she likens it to a high. She reads from a number of different fandoms, from *Harry Potter* to the BBC show *Sherlock* to the Christopher Nolan film *Inception* (“He doesn’t really give backstories to the characters, so I really liked that people in the fandom invent backstories”). She compares fan fiction to remix culture, like music mashups or a Rashomon episode of a TV show. While some fans are picky about characterization, Celeste likes to see the same person embodied in different ways. She doesn’t perceive of them as real people, although she does “probably care more about their feelings than I do about a lot of real people.” Mashup style fan fictions reward familiarity with the source material. Characters become tropes that you can see manipulated, Alternate Universe stories incorporate small details in completely different contexts; it is familiar, but also completely foreign.
Celeste and Jess are opposites in many ways, but they each find something of value in *Harry Potter* fan fiction. For Jess, the fandom is another context for her repetition of the same narrative, another framework upon which she can construct her story. Celeste prioritizes variety: a range of perspectives and experiences. Through slash fiction, she can realize this shift of context in the same scene, even the same literary moment. The range of *Harry Potter* fan fiction demonstrated through just this small sample is incredible. Much of the variety is a matter of the fandom’s enormous popularity at its peak and its lengthy existence. The volume of texts already existing has skewed the fandom towards people like Celeste: observers and readers.

Zachary himself has stopped writing fan fiction, and he sees himself as part of a larger trend within the fandom. The submission box for *Audiofictions* has been empty for months, and the stories that he does read are by the same handful of authors. Only 40 respondents to the survey said that they were still heavily involved in the *Harry Potter* fandom. He thinks that there are two reasons for this. First, immediate praise is hard to come by these days:

> Things have become so clichéd in the fan fiction world that it’s not as easy to write say, a Marauder fic, and have it heavily praised. That was the thing that I, and I think a lot of people, were looking for: they just wanted to hear people say, “Oh, it was so good, I love that character, it’s just so wonderful it made me cry!” Everybody wanted to hear that and it used to be you could get it like that; you can’t get it anymore.
As the number of available stories increased, readers were less likely to become authors because they were able to find what they were looking for instead of creating it. Today, a reader like Zachary, who first started writing fan fiction because he was dissatisfied with treatments of his favorite character, would be able to find a huge wealth of stories with all sorts of characterizations of Remus Lupin. Because there is such a volume of work already present, there are fewer authors driven by dissatisfaction with the state of the fandom. Most readers can find their niche already fully developed.

Zachary’s other hypothesis about the decline in fan fiction writing is that, now that all of the books are out, there is no need to voice theories about what might happen in upcoming books. Fans voicing theories on message boards or forums were routinely ignored, but fan fiction was much more likely to be read. Zachary mentioned a story that sounds like the fandom equivalent of an urban legend: J. K. Rowling herself visited the MuggleNet forums anonymously and proposed a theory that was, of course, the way the books were going to turn out. She was brushed off as fans struggled to voice their own opinions. The implication seems to be that even the most developed theory could be ignored when presented in bullet points on the forums, but written into a story, as Rowling did, the theory comes alive, making it more engaging and attractive to read.

Zachary’s conclusions about the decline in the *Harry Potter* fandom articulate a way of thinking that illuminates the aesthetic of fan fiction. Compared to the bullet points of a theory that can be posted on a forum, writing theories into fan fiction
requires full development of ideas and articulation of detail. A multi-chaptered story demands careful planning in order to be a coherent argument, revealing potential depths or implications to both the writer and the reader. In *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks argues that narrative plots are the syntax of a certain way of understanding the world. For Erin and Celeste, fan fiction is an application of this principle. Fan fiction promotes variations on a similar plot, calling attention to the subtle or dramatic differences that can be affected by manipulating parts of a narrative. For Zachary, his fixation on the character of Remus Lupin motivated him to fill in the details: creating narratives through social networking profiles and roleplaying with others gave him deeper understanding of the character and, ultimately, himself.

Just as these fans pursue fan fiction for a range of reasons and interests, writers use the format to propose and explore a variety of ideas. Not all of them are interested in predicting the canon or preserving the sanctity of Hogwarts. The next chapter will investigate two stories that narrativize the act of writing, providing insight into the writers’ motivations and aesthetic priorities.
CHAPTER THREE:

Writing About Writing About Sex

One aspect of Harry Potter fan fiction that remains inert in most stories is the blurring of the line between author and reader. While conflating the two roles is implicit in the very act of writing a story based on the established literary universe, often the characters in a fan fiction do not interact with text themselves. This is not particularly surprising, as in the canonical books these characters have negative or suppressive interactions with the written word. Some stories, though, fully realize the subversion of the very act of writing fan fiction through establishing a world in which the characters are doing the same.

One character in the Harry Potter series who has a particularly interesting relationship with text is Potions Master Severus Snape. Snape is one of the most controversial characters in Rowling’s canon. His use of the killing curse on Albus Dumbledore, the central figure of good in the series, at the end of Half-Blood Prince sent fans into a frenzy. For the two years between this cliffhanger ending and the 2007 release of Deathly Hallows, a debate raged over Snape’s intentions: was the double-agent spy truly serving Voldemort as a Death eater, or had he been loyal to Dumbledore and his organization for the side of light, the Order of the Phoenix? Some questioned if Dumbledore was truly dead, hoping that it was an elaborate ruse. Many celebrated Snape as the most complex and ambiguous character in the series as he straddles the line between dark and light.

While the ending of the sixth book left fans conflicted as to Snape’s true loyalties, the bulk of Half-Blood Prince reveals more about him as a character than
any book before. Severus Snape is the eponymous Half-Blood Prince, a play on his mother’s maiden name of Prince. At the beginning of the book, Harry finds himself in need of a potions textbook and accidentally ends up with Snape’s copy from his time as a student. Harry is unaware of the owner’s identity, and knows him only as the “Half-Blood Prince” as per the inscription on the book’s cover. Severus has heavily annotated the book, correcting formulas and scribbling snide remarks about the author’s incompetence in the margins. Though Hermione warns him against the danger of following hand-written instructions, citing the incident with Tom Riddle’s diary in *Chamber of Secrets*, Harry follows these annotations and finds great academic success in potions class, now being taught by a different professor.

This experience with an annotated text is unique in the *Harry Potter* canon. Other authors create “official” narratives (Rita Skeeter’s newspaper articles, Gilderoy Lockhart’s popular novels) that are, ultimately, inadequate and untrue. By annotating his potions textbook, adding instructions that provide better results and creating particularly potent spells that affect the bodies of others, Severus succeeds in correcting a sanctioned text to reflect reality. Harry’s success in potions class frustrates Hermione, who radically adheres to the inadequate “canonical” textbook simply because it is approved by the academic bureaucracy. In this case, just as Severus exists in the grey area between the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters, his textual and academic position in the books is ambiguous. As a professor he represents academic authority, but as a student he created a work of academic subversion.
Severus’s status as a morally ambiguous fan favorite character and a successful editor of text makes him an excellent subject for fan fiction. In this chapter, I will consider two stories that feature Severus as a romantic lead, one pairing him with Harry and the other with Hermione. Both stories focus on the eroticization of the act of writing and the breakdown of a reader/writer dichotomy. By featuring characters who engage in radical acts of writing that redefine their relationships to text and through text, these fan fiction authors provide an opportunity to study the motivations behind writing.

“Something to Write On,” by author Cybele, focuses on a sexual relationship between Harry Potter and Severus Snape that develops through written communication. The story was first published to the author’s personal website some time before October of 2002; the website is no longer active. Its sequel was also published on the same website, before December 2002. It can still be found on a number of archives and recommendation lists. The story begins with Harry finishing his final exam for potions class, taught by Professor Snape: “Harry put down his quill.” The first words describe a young man finished with the act of writing, not only with the test but also, as it turns out, finished with writing an erotic commentary on the teacher. Both of these texts have been completed outside the boundaries of the story, indicating a focus on the reading of existing works over the creation of new ones.
Harry has written sexual fantasies about the professor in his potions journal all year without realizing that the notebook must be turned in at the end of term. He reluctantly hands the journal over to his professor, mortified that Snape might read his intimations aloud to the class. Harry’s panicked plan to claim that he has forgotten the book, and then bowdlerize his journal before handing it in is reminiscent of the scene in *Half-Blood Prince* in which Snape, aware that Harry is using Snape’s old potions textbook, asks Harry to see the book. In *Half-Blood Prince*, Harry hides his annotated edition and passes off Ron’s unmarked copy as his own; in this story, Snape does not allow Harry to edit his writing before turning in the journal.

Professor Snape reads the journal and finds himself disturbed but aroused. Harry is confused when Snape makes no mention of the journal in the following days, but eventually Professor Snape assigns Harry a detention. Harry has done nothing to provoke such punishment, but he thinks the way Snape brushes a feather across the back of his neck and whispers throatily indicates that the detention will involve more than just fetching parchment. When he shows up in the dungeons, Harry finds that rather than the sexualized role-play implied by Snape’s manner, he is assigned the task of moving heavy boxes. The story ends on this unsatisfactory note, Harry’s frustration mirroring an abrupt end to the reader’s expectations.

Though no explicitly sexual contact between the characters in the story, but the reader is privy to written erotica through the passages from Harry’s journal that are included in the story. On the level of the plot, a moment of intense physical proximity, and arousal on Harry’s part, occurs when Snape brushes the feather quill
down Harry’s cheek and neck. Snape’s quill and Harry’s journal are the focalizations of erotic significance in the story, but they serve as more than objects of sexual expression. As implements of writing within an academic setting, the quill and journal exist at the intersection of the three major themes that run through the story: writing, pedagogy, and sexuality. They also represent the dichotomy of reading and writing that will be broken down by the story. At the beginning, they seem representative in untraditional ways: the journal represents Harry, the writer, while the quill is associated with Snape, the reader. Through the sexual interaction that is the focus of the story’s sequel, these roles are clarified: Snape becomes the writer with his quill, while Harry becomes the written-on, just like his journal.

Harry begins as a writer in the piece, but his writing is private. The reader is introduced to Harry as he exists in a vacuum: while writing his potions exam, he is encased in a magical bubble of obscurity and silence. Professor Snape has imposed these separations as a manifestation of academic expectation: a safeguard against cheating. This guarantees that the act of writing the exam is private, a text detailing the knowledge of the student writer for the benefit of the reading professor, forcefully limited to an audience of one. This blending of writing and pedagogy sets the stage for an intimate relationship. The exam foreshadows the revelation of Harry’s desire as written in an academic form.

Harry has written his desire in an academic form: his fantasies intermix with notes from class, and ultimately only his professor reads it. Harry briefly imagines that his unplanned confession will spark a physical relationship, but largely he remains fixated on the possibility of public humiliation. Harry imagines the worst-
case scenario as Snape reading his journal aloud to the class; the revelation of his writing is a humiliating, non-sexual, public activity. The image of a professor reading aloud to class shows that Harry’s conception of the book has turned completely from private to public. These are the two sides of the writing/pedagogy theme. Public reading from the journal, indeed a lecture to the class, shows the inverse of the academic model presented by the compartmentalized exam. While each student focuses academically on the professor as a singular entity, the professor views the students as a collective. When it comes to teaching, they are a group, yet they are individualized for evaluation. The communicator is singular, the communicated anonymous. Harry upsets this model by appealing to Snape on a personal level, breaking down social distance inserted between student and professor.

The professor’s introduction into the story is focused on reading: “Snape pored thoughtfully over a stack of scrolls, absently caressing his chin with the eagle feather of his quill.” The adverbs here introduce the erotic connection between language and sensation. “Thoughtfully” indicates full mental engagement, an active reading of the scrolls; “absently” describes a physical response unconnected with the content, but perhaps associated with the act of reading. If the act of stroking a feather is not erotic in itself, Harry’s reaction makes it so: “Harry swallowed hard and looked away.” While Harry’s introduction illuminates the intersection of writing and pedagogy, this presentation of Snape sets up the relationship between writing and sexuality.
Later scenes show Snape experiencing an instinctual and physical sexual response to reading Harry’s journal. If the feather proposes a connection between sensuality and reading, the journal cements it. Snape’s initial reaction is to be “startled into laughter,” but a few paragraphs later he is faced with “a rising problem in [his] trousers.” His involuntary reaction to the texts continues, but stops far short of any sort of gratification: “I put down the book when I realize that I’m touching myself.” The causality here implies that Snape dissociates the act of reading from conscious sexual activity; there is a distinction between arousal and contact. A few lines later Snape extends his separation of text and physicality: “I think the boy has found his calling as a professional smut writer. He’s certainly inspiring enough. But no. It would be a shame for him to waste that firm Seeker’s body.” Achievements of body and mind are incongruous, and the body takes primacy. Snape asserts that Harry would do better to pursue a career suited to his physicality than one suited to his mind.

The third intersection, between pedagogy and sexuality, is not introduced by either character, but rather presupposed. The journal, main site of both academic and erotic tension, has been composed before the start of the story. Ultimately, it is a tension unfulfilled: the mediocre grade that Harry receives on his obviously poor assignment is reflective of Snape’s forceful passivity in response to their mutual attraction. In Harry’s journal, there is no separation between his notes from class and his fantasies: “Penalty for dragon poaching 10 year minimum I’m so fucking hard.” In his imagination, he extends Snape’s disdainful treatment of him in the classroom
into a scene of sexual domination. The quill figures considerably here, as the foreplay consists of Snape marking Harry’s body, like a potions essay, with scathing remarks written in red ink. In his fantasy, Harry imagines Snape to take the dominant role of writer, with himself assuming not the position of reader, but the subordinate written-on. A separation between academic and erotic is unacknowledged by Harry, but forcefully affirmed by Snape.

When Snape assigns detention, he plays up the erotic association, exploiting details of Harry’s fantasy: “I seem to be running short on parchment, Mr. Potter.” Harry, unable or unwilling to separate the academic and erotic, has high hopes for the detention: “‘P-p-parchment?’ Harry’s heart leapt in anticipation. Other parts were leaping as well.” During the actual detention, not only is there no sexual contact between the men, but Snape even goes so far as to physically separate them: Harry is tasked with carrying boxes of parchment from the third floor of the castle.

Through his teasing and denial of realization of sexual contact, Snape acknowledges and manipulates the cultural narrative of erotic student/teacher relations. From Socrates to the fetishization of Catholic schoolgirl uniforms to tabloid reports of teachers charged with statutory rape, the “forbidden” dalliance between authoritative professor and naïve student manifests repeatedly. Society’s simultaneous perpetuation and stigmatization of these narratives is reflected in Snape’s behavior around the detention. Though the invitation was salacious, it involves manual labor and physical distance. Snape has summoned and denied Harry’s sexual pleasure in similar ways to the *Harry Potter* novels’ dismissal of
Gothic fears. Fortunately for the slash fan, “Something to Write On” has a sequel that resolves the sexual tension.

The story, “Quill and Ink,” begins the morning after Harry’s detention. He is woken by an owl, which delivers his journal, Snape’s quill, and an unsigned note chiding Harry for leaving such lurid material behind at the end of his detention. Harry is able to identify the author by his handwriting, as well as the contents of the package. He sends a short thank you note to Snape, but is unsure how to interpret the mysterious Professor’s gift. He gets dressed and continues with his day, which happens to be his graduation for Hogwarts. After all of the emotional goodbyes that graduation entails, Harry moves into a flat in nearby Hogsmeade village. When he enters the empty apartment, he finds a bottle of ink on the floor, but thinks little of it.

The next evening, he gets another unsigned note from Snape, again identified by his handwriting (“Snape’s smirking cursive”). The note is a series of instructions ordering Harry to draw a triangle on his abdomen with Snape’s quill, which is now enchanted to induce pleasure. When the triangle is completed, Harry climaxes. The text of the note is interspersed with descriptions of Harry’s reactions; it is unclear whether the note has been previously written or magically producing text in response to Harry’s actions.

The next morning, Harry is awoken by Ron. His torso is covered in Snape’s handwriting: “Last night served to prove once and for all that you wouldn't know a dark spell if it were emblazoned across your chest in red ink.” Harry discovers that
the writing cannot be washed off and that the letter from Snape has disappeared. He explains the story thus far to Ron. Harry writes a letter to Snape admitting his trust of Snape, thanking him for the experience, and returning the quill.

That evening, Snape appears in Harry’s apartment. Harry is surprised, having thought Snape’s scornful words were a rejection of his advances. Snape explains that he was attempting to fulfill Harry’s fantasy of being written on, marked in red ink like a potions essay.

The encounter quickly turns sexual, with Snape taking a dominant role. The quill figures prominently in their foreplay. Snape runs the feather along Harry’s spine and writes on his back. Harry cannot make out the words. After responding strongly to the feather, Harry responds even more to the ministrations by Snape’s tongue. Snape has been dominant from the start, but soon Harry takes control, kissing and then fellating the older man, acts that he had denied when Harry attempted them earlier. Snape reasserts dominance and penetrates Harry; after orgasm, Snape writes a spell on Harry’s back using his own semen. Harry can distinguish the words this time: “ephemeris corpus.”

After intercourse, the two discuss their relationship. Snape explains that he did not want to consummate their relationship until after graduation. He also grants Harry permission to call him by his given name, Severus, fully completing the transformation from formal academic relationship to privacy and intimacy. When Harry wakes up, Snape has left but Ron and Hermione are in his flat, shocked to again find him naked and covered in Snape’s handwriting. It is an erotic diatribe on the previous night’s activities. Ron and Hermione take turns reading the text aloud,
but it is interspersed with interjections: “Wow. Er…” Hermione cleared her throat before continuing breathlessly.” Harry finds a note signed “-S.” inviting him to Snape’s home that evening and implying the establishment of a long-term relationship.

The opening scene of story emphasizes the writer/reader roles of Harry and Snape. Harry receives both his journal and Snape’s quill. Harry’s fantasy of being written on asserted his desire to experience Snape as the writer, but Snape’s gift of the quill, along with the journal, either denies Snape’s desire to write or exhibits his approval at Harry’s writing so far. Even so, there are indications of Snape’s prowess as a writer. Included in the package is a note, and Harry can “practically see the smirk in the man’s sharp, angular script. The glare in the punctuation.” The personification of handwriting, which continues throughout the story, makes authorship an integral part of the produced text. Such a pervasive identifier makes the content inseparable from the producer.

Though they are clearly established as a dichotomy of reader and writer in “Something to Write On,” in “Quill and Ink” these roles become more tangled. Harry’s first piece of writing in the second story is a thank you note to Severus; it is only seven words long. He assumes that these are his last words to Snape. His ability to write starts to become limited in respect to Snape, especially when it is conscious communication. The other examples of Harry’s writing are the exam, purely academic, and the journal, a mix of academic and erotic. With an opportunity to communicate something erotic without the framework of the classroom, Harry finds
himself at a loss. He adheres strictly to polite social convention: “Dear Professor Snape, Thank you. Sincerely, Harry.” As a new graduate of Hogwarts, Harry’s sudden inability to communicate reflects his unfamiliar position in the world outside the school. Harry’s excuse to himself is that he cannot “think of a way to extend the invitation without sounding foolish”: the awareness of an audience has made him self-conscious, in contrast to the journal written privately with no expectation of being read by another. When a note is delivered to him that evening, he immediately recognizes “the wicked script of his former professor.” Written communication becomes more than the sum of its parts as the handwriting serves as identifier: the script communicates beyond the literal content of the note.

Through reading this note, Harry bridges the gap between writing and reading. For the first time he follows written instructions from Snape, dramatically different from his initial ignorance of the Potions course syllabus. The story intersperses quotes from the letter with narration of Harry’s reaction, constructing it like a conversation. It is unclear whether the note is predetermined or if it is magically reacting to Harry’s interaction with it. Either way, there is an integration of action and the written word, particularly erotic action. Harry is instructed to take the quill and make marks upon his body. Though Harry is holding the quill, Snape is definitively the writer here: he has composed the letter containing instructions and he is guiding Harry’s hand. Just as the written notes are able to convey facial expressions or tones of voice, this particular note is able to dictate a series of actions and elicit particular physical responses, like the hands of a skilled lover. As the enchanted quill provokes responses from Harry’s body, he must periodically pause his ministrations to return to the letter
and read the next set of instructions. Harry’s role as a reader is emphasized by this back-and-forth. He and the reader are repeatedly taken out of the physical experience and left to wonder at the origin of the text.

Authorial intent and the act of writing are emphasized as integral parts of the text as a whole. The words cannot be dissociated from their author and the specific circumstances of composition: “Reading the word ‘cock’ in Snape’s hand, imagining what the word would sound like in that sardonic drawl, sent a new wave of shivering through the boy.” The word is eroticized, but predicated on the writer or speaker. Authorial intent is given primacy over content, to the extent that handwriting becomes akin to voice.

When Harry completes the act of marking a triangle on his abdomen he experiences orgasm, but this does not coincide with the end of the letter. This may mark the transition for Harry from writer, an experience that began in sexual frustration at his attraction to his professor and ended with sexual release facilitated by his own writing, to reader, who must return to the text even after climax.

This return to text is not limited only to the last section of the letter. Upon waking up the next morning, Harry discovers that “his torso was covered in red writing. Harry could see, despite his blurred vision, that the script was unmistakably that of Snape.” Still unwilling to become the reader, Harry makes Ron read the message aloud. It is a counterpoint to the detention scene. In detention, a private setting involving only Harry and Snape, Harry is tasked with moving boxes of parchment, an assumedly public medium for the composition of an academic text.
The writing on Harry’s skin is intimate and the message therein is personal, specific to the relationship between the two men. But it is read aloud by Ron, forcing it into the public sphere. Harry makes an effort to conceal “the humiliation that was swelling in his boxer shorts” from his friend, but also insists that Ron look at the language emblazoned across his chest. The red ink on Harry’s body performs socially like a hickey, visible and public evidence of a private sexual encounter.

This pattern of marking only escalates in their next encounter, as Snape marks Harry’s body with both ink and his own bodily fluids. Harry has developed as something to be written on, at first himself performing the writing at Snape’s instruction, then graduating to the text appearing while he sleeps, and eventually being able to distinguish the words “ephemeris corpus” as Snape inscribes them onto his back. These acts become progressively more intimate as well.

Writing and the mouth are the chief sites of sexual pleasure in the story, articulating the power of language and the importance of communication. The titles of the stories reinforce this emphasis: “Something to Write On” describes Harry’s journal, the only site of erotic writing in the story; “Quill and Ink” focuses the reader on the non-bodily tools that are integral to erotic experience in the story, literally erotic writing. While in these stories the communication is direct, as Harry writes explicitly about his professor, “His Infamous Red Quill” is a Hermione/Severus story that showcases indirect erotic communication.
“His Infamous Red Quill” by Anogete is a romance between Hermione Granger and Severus Snape. The story was published to multiple online archives in a series of installments over the summer of 2007. The epilogue was posted to the Petulant Poetess on 15 July, days before the release of Deathly Hallows and the definitive proof of Snape’s loyalties. The author prefaces the story with a warning: “If you’re looking for loads of character development or any plot beyond entangling Hermione and Severus in a relationship, then you’re looking in the wrong place.” This is exactly the place as the story is plotted along the lines of a romance novel or romantic comedy film. The author reveals the structure at the beginning, emphasizing the pleasure to be gained by following the journey. This is an integral part of romantic fan fiction: the reader is fully aware of the relationship that is being developed, and the multiplicity of texts emphasizes enjoying the various paths that different authors take to get the same characters from point A to point B.

The story begins after the great wizarding war. In this case, Harry and Ron have both met their demise defeating Voldemort, leaving Hermione to struggle with nightmares and general listlessness. She has taken the Charms teaching position at Hogwarts to pass the time. Professor Severus Snape takes a particular interest in Hermione after encountering her late at night. Unable to sleep, she is reading a romance novel on the castle grounds. Severus jokingly confiscates the book and, upon returning to his chambers, reads a short passage. He finds himself aroused not only by the text, but also by the idea that he stumbled across Hermione while she was reading it. Hermione is mortified at the idea that the imposing man has uncovered her secret.
The two exchange witty banter over the course of a few weeks, until Severus jokingly suggests that Hermione compose her own lurid romance novel and offers to serve as editor. She refuses, but is pleased by his attention. After being treated as if she is delicate and damaged for so long by the other professors, she is pleased to find a colleague who is able to tease her and treat her normally. With little sexual history, Hermione is reluctant to identify his actions towards her as flirting, but she does begin to indulge sexual fantasies about the potions professor. She is inspired to write by the idea of casting Severus (or a thinly veiled version of him) as the lead in her novel.

Publicly, she denies her intention to write such a text, but eventually Severus finds her working on it in the library. After another period of witty banter and possible flirting, Hermione slips the first two chapters under his office door. The characters starring in her Gothic-inspired novel are obviously based on Hermione and Severus, but he fails to notice. They even share the same initials: Haley Garten is a young girl visiting the estate of imposing nobleman Sebastian Sandor. The plot is a mystery, with Haley trying to catch a thief in the Victorian mansion. He is disappointed at the lack of erotic content, but marks up the manuscript and returns it, continuing to develop both sexual and romantic feelings for her.

Shortly thereafter, Hermione sends him a third chapter that has upped the comparison and contains a graphic scene of oral sex. Haley has been sneaking around the house in a white nightgown when she encounters Sebastian. He chides her for teasing him with her choice of attire, and their relationship quickly turns sexual.
Severus is driven to distraction by fantasies of Hermione and himself imitating the characters in her novel and is compelled to masturbate before finishing his reading.

The flirting escalates and Hermione sends another chapter, relieved that her burgeoning sexual attraction and romantic feelings provide a distraction from her nightmares. Again, Severus is aroused by the text and relieves himself to thoughts of its author. On another late night encounter, Severus admits his response to the novel in progress and proposes a sexual relationship. He whispers raspingly into her ear, quoting her own words from the novel. Hermione is paralyzed by the intensity of her feelings and unable to respond. After a few days, she slips a note admitting her attraction under his door. He opens the door to find her there and they consummate the relationship. In post-coital bliss they discuss long-term romantic prospects. Cut to the epilogue, a scene of marital bliss.

“His Infamous Red Quill” is a story-within-a-story, presenting a narrativization of the act of writing an erotic text. In the story, authorial intent and identity are integral to the motivations behind creating and reading the text that Hermione creates. The story presents a cohesive understanding of literature that is in line with fan fiction’s ideal of intertextuality. Already the story is subordinate to its source material, and often directly influenced by other fan fiction stories. In the story, Hermione uses narrative texts to communicate explicitly with another individual, presenting her text as an intimate, individualized, and utilitarian object. Her text communicates the desires of the author and impacts the mind and body of her reader. It is only through this narrative presentation that Severus changes his view of
Hermione as an individual. The text has importance to the extent that Severus is affected by it.

In many ways, Hermione writes something not dissimilar to fan fiction. Hermione adapts Severus into a character in her novel, just as Anogete has co-opted them both into her story. Severus finds this acceptable, even arousing. After Hermione admits the source of her inspiration he intimates, “I hardly think, as a man, I should be distressed that a young lady has chosen to use me in such a way.”\textsuperscript{10} This conversation takes place in a torch-lit hallway, full of breathy murmurs and meaningful pauses. The relationship between the eroticized character of Sebastian and the real person of Severus established in this story offers one explanation of the author’s attitudes towards \textit{Harry Potter} characters. Just as Sebastian is the explicit and forward complement to sexually adventurous Haley in Hermione’s novel, Anogete writes a sexually charged Severus attracted to the author-Hermione. Though Sebastian and Haley have no source text or canon to complicate their characterizations, the implication of Anogete’s insertion of herself into a fantasy is clear. Sebastian is to Severus as Hermione is to Anogete. Given the tropes and expectations of fan fiction, this may be a particularly crude and overly simplistic reading, but it does suggest itself through the structure of the story and its preoccupation with matters of authorship. Again, it is a question that the text raises but does not sufficiently answer. The likelihood of a female reader of a romantic text identifying with the bookish Hermione is strong, even more so if that reader is also a

\textsuperscript{10} Chapter 7.
writer of fan fiction. Hermione’s characterization blurs the line between reader and writer, a microcosm of the fan fiction community.

Oddly for a story intended for a digital format, “His Infamous Red Quill” makes much of the physical experience of reading. The characters’ inner feelings are revealed through physical interactions with books and sheets of parchment, their character traits are shown through their choice of books, and the physical exchange of books offers an excuse for meetings.

Upon their first late-night encounter, much of the new information that Severus learns about Hermione comes from the tactile experience of the paperback she is reading. Even before the nature of the book is revealed, her interaction with it is an insight into her feelings: “Hermione shrugged and nervously ruffled the pages of her paperback novel.”\(^1\) The moment is incongruous in the middle of their gentle conversation. The two seem at ease with each other, him displaying “a small smirk pulling at the edges of his mouth” and her vocalizing a soft chuckle. Hermione’s behavior shifts to nervous ruffling when he directly asks why she is wandering the grounds instead of asleep in her chambers. Her physical expression of nerves continues to center around the book: when he begins asking questions about her reading material, her behavior becomes flustered and she attempts to hide the book. After she eventually hands it over, Snape shifts from considerations of Hermione’s body language to contemplation of the book itself. “He could feel several rough creases along the spine that proved she had read it more than once.” While before the

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\(^1\) Chapter 1.
reader was left to draw their own conclusions from neutral descriptions of
Hermione’s bashful behavior, the book itself proves her history with it.

Hermione also recognizes that the condition of her book is just as revealing as
its contents. While contemplating their encounter the next morning, Hermione
ponders both the contents and the condition: “The dog-eared romance novel was
certainly not the best way to make a lasting impression on a colleague whom she
admired and respected.”

It is as if the book has betrayed her, revealing a side of
herself heretofore kept private. An admired and respected colleague belongs to a
different sphere than the worn-out paperback and their intersection has left her
mortified. Her embarrassment focuses largely on the content of the book, but the
content is continually betrayed by the packaging. Snape discovers a small cache of
romance novels on her bookshelf by spotting the characteristic façade: “bold red
writing along the stark white spine of the novel.” The titles are succinct in their
revelation of the contents: Sex Slave, Hot Bodies, Passion’s Embrace. Even without
knowledge of the book’s contents, Severus is able to apply his knowledge of generic
tropes and stereotypes to guess what Hermione might be reading.

Apart from this correlation between form and content, there is something
innately special about physical books themselves. The tactile experience of reading a
book, and the presence of books, is celebrated in this story, regardless of content.
Hermione’s two places of refuge are the library and the bookstore. This is apparently
common knowledge, as Snape often goes looking for her in these locations. A reader
of Harry Potter is presumably acquainted with Hermione’s affinity for books;

\[12\] Chapter 2.
Anogete emphasizes the connection and establishes the trait in Severus as well (and, in the epilogue, their child). Hermione reveals her late-night reading choice immediately after Snape acknowledges this similarity: “From one book enthusiast to another.” 13 There is no specification of content and when the characters’ bookcases are shown they are full of all sorts of books. When Hermione turns to books to distract from her nightmares, it is not only the stories within that comfort her, but also the tactile experience. “The musty scent of old books always made Hermione feel better.” 14 The musty scent of old a book is extremely far removed from the experience of reading this story on a computer screen. Some aspects are preserved: the communal nature of used or library books, the genre fiction structure and the familiarity that comes with it. Others are lost: the tactile experience of touching and smelling, the ability of an onlooker to distinguish contents from the book’s cover, those telltale creases in the spine that indicate familiarity, and the phenomenon of display on a bookshelf. While all fan fiction theoretically celebrates reading and writing, the sharing of stories, this story gives precedence to stories that are published and printed. It is almost nostalgic, in the same way that wizards use parchment and quill and light their halls with torches.

Severus is also able to glean information about Hermione’s feelings from her choice of books. When he encounters her at Flourish and Blott’s, he finds her in the self-help section. The fact that she has turned to this kind of reading informs him of the extent of the depression that she is experiencing after the death of her friends. This gives more weight to Severus’s assumptions about her reaction to reading

13 Chapter 1.
14 Chapter 3.
romance novels, but also begins to give clues as to her affinity for them in the first place. These fluffy tales of romance are far removed from the reality of her loneliness and eventually the development of her relationship with Severus pulls her out of the depression.

All of these texts exist physically in the world of the story, unlike the digital fan fiction itself. In addition to providing a tactile reading experience, the erotic stories manifest on the bodies of their readers. Both Severus and Hermione find themselves aroused by written material.

At the beginning of the story, neither Hermione nor Severus considers the other romantically or sexually. Texts, specifically romance novels, are the catalyst for their change of opinion. After Severus discovers Hermione’s choice of late-night reading material, he becomes fixated on her possible sexual response to the text: “His mind continued to return to Miss Granger and what her reaction to the novel might have been. Severus couldn’t help but wonder if the words affected her as they did him.”15 He finds his own response “almost painful,” insistent and unable to be willed away. His arousal is discussed in inescapably physical terms, focused more on his erection than on his thoughts. His erection is a communication of desire, to himself and the reader. At first it is described as an “obvious tent on the front of his trousers,” almost external to himself. After he emerges from the trance-like state of reading the book, he recognizes and acknowledges his arousal through sight rather than feeling. After another period of reading his erection is “pressed insistently against the fabric

15 Chapter 1.
of his trousers in an almost painful way,” bringing the site of arousal back within the tactile experience. At this point he puts aside the book, even going so far as to turn it over to avoid looking at the cover. While touching himself he is not thinking about the characters in the book but instead “his mind continued to return to Miss Granger and what her reaction to the novel might have been.” The book is the impetus, but the woman is the focus of his thoughts. He has completely set aside the visual experience of reading and seeing, focusing on the outside world, and instead turns to inner thoughts and tactile sensation.

Hermione experiences similarly external and visible signs of arousal when considering Severus through the lens of the romance novel, but her experience is more internal. She has no text to read, no outside motivation, and instead focuses on the idea of production of a text. Instead of wondering at his reaction to the text, she considers how he might fit into the archetypical character role of the romantic hero. “Severus Snape would make a wonderful leading man in a romance novel. Just the thought of him taking her against one of the walls in his dungeon quarters was enough to soak her undergarments.”16 Her scene of masturbation to fantasies of Severus playing this part is the complement to Severus’s earlier scene. While Severus is jolted from his reading by the emergence of fantasies of Hermione, she shifts from revisiting their actual interactions to a masturbatory fantasy through the lens of the romantic hero. Her arousal is painful as well, described as an ache. The inclusion of pain seems to explain both characters’ inability to go without resolving the arousal; at no point does either of them remain frustrated, instead they indulge in masturbatory

16 Chapter 4.
fantasies and reach orgasm. Just as Severus does not consider the characters while
masturbating, she focuses on the real Snape behaving as a character, not on the act of
writing or reading. After she reaches climax she returns to considerations of text,
deciding that Severus is “a leading man worth writing about” and thus determining to
actively pursue the writing of a romance novel.

These two scenes demonstrate Anogete’s insistence on the conflation of high
intellectual and low bodily pleasure. While the reading mind manages to exist
independently, the erotic body is only fully realized with the encouragement of a
literary text. Considering the author presents an erotic story about the composition
and performance of an erotic story, the interest lies less in romantic relationships in
general, but in romantic and sexual relationships as catalyzed through writing. Sexual
desire in the story is mediated through literary expression on every level, from the
Gothic tropes that consume Hermione’s novel to the written communications between
Severus and Hermione to Anogete’s own writing of the story.

The plot directly addresses issues particular to fan fiction, especially the
romantic aspects. The treatment of romance genre fiction is in line with Radway’s
account: Hermione admits to owning a few dozen of the novels. But in becoming an
author she takes the step that Radway’s average reader does not, propelling herself
into a position more akin to the writer of romance fan fiction. Hermione transitions
from a reader of romance novels to an author; she finds inspiration from re-reading
the source material rather than following Severus’s salacious suggestion that she
research through more physical endeavors There is even a brief discussion of
romance writing in chapter 5: Severus insists that “they throw two characters together and, in one way or another, force them into having sexual relations. They certainly don’t have lofty notions of actual plot.” Hermione protests, citing his lack of knowledge but offering no substantial argument of her own. Considering Anogete’s denial of character development at the beginning of the piece but delay of sexual interaction until the final chapter, it seems the question is raised for the reader’s consideration but left unanswered in the story. Anogete makes arguments for the appeal of both erotically charged, explicit descriptions of sex and the string of “small touches and thoughtful gestures” that describe “kindness and intimacy between the two characters.” Ultimately, it seems that Hermione’s novel is little more than a plot device that brings about both aspects; she abandons the work after the first few chapters result in a sexual encounter and the subsequent development of a romantic relationship.

In writing the novel, Hermione takes the opportunity to “let her fantasies play out on paper.” She creates something external to herself and presents it to Severus. The text that she produces serves as the catalyst for their relationship. Hermione communicates her sexual desires in the guise of a manuscript, and they discover their sexual attraction through the lens of the romance novel. The story does not limit the power of language to written words, though. Verbalization in oral and written forms is portrayed as the primary form of sexual interaction in “His Infamous Red Quill.”

Severus has a strong physical reaction to reading Hermione’s written words, predicted by the “surge of excitement” he feels at the idea of her “relating sexual

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17 Chapter 4.
18 Chapter 6.
encounters in her own words.” The author and text are linked in this instance, an idea heightened by the handwritten format of Hermione’s manuscript. The published romance novels aggressively advertise their contents through bawdy titles, “torrid” fonts, and clichéd imagery: naked muscled torsos and roses imply both romantic and erotic contents. Hermione’s attempt at a novel, on the other hand, is presented to Severus in an innocuous white envelope. Severus’s only indication of the pages’ content is Hermione’s handwriting. “A quick glance” at the tale “confirmed his suspicions” of its content, suspicions only aroused by the revelation of her handwriting. A character’s handwriting seems to be tied to the words it forms in much the same way as their voice. It is immediately recognizable and very personal. When Hermione sends him a brief note in response to his proposition of a romantic relationship, she neglects to sign her name. The note says, simply, “I want you,” but Severus does not respond to the contents; rather, “his heart jumped into his throat when he recognized her handwriting.” The causality implies that the identity or intent of the author is perhaps more important than the words themselves, a theme explored further through descriptions of the voice as a sexualized feature.

Exploration of the voice as a sexual tool is largely driven by Hermione’s musings and writings. When considering Severus’s sexual history, she discards the idea that he spends much time pursuing sexual encounters because he spends so much time at the castle. Despite his lack of realized encounters, she does not dismiss his

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19 Chapter 3.
20 Chapter 4.
21 Chapter 8.
potential as a seducer: “Not that she thought he’d have any problem with it when he had that silky voice at his disposal.” His voice is given more consideration and sexual power in her fantasies of him than his body. Going against the romance novel cliché of rather overdone jargon to describe genitalia, Hermione instead focuses her descriptive powers on his voice. At the moment of penetration in her fantasy, she remains focused on his verbalization: “She thought he would also whisper things in her ear with that delicious voice of his, detailing how much he wanted to fuck her before he pushed inside without warning.” She does not imagine a particular dialogue from him, nor does she focus on the tactile sensation. Her fantasy is centered on the verbal aspects of the sex act, vague as they are in her imagination. This manifests in her romance manuscript. Sebastian’s voice has great sexual power, even when he is not actually saying words. “‘Mmm…’ Sebastian murmured, his silky voice turning Haley’s knees to jelly.” His utterance of a single syllable almost completely devoid of communicative content is enough to cause an involuntary reaction in the romantic heroine. In this fictional world, more importance is ascribed to the voice than the words. This echoes the importance of authorial intent and reader interpretation in Hermione’s writing.

Hermione and Severus’s relationship is a mutual education about the inseparability of writer and text, and of communication and physicality. At the start, they are each concerned with written material. Hermione expresses a preference for reading romance novels to actual physical experiences when discussing her research.
methods for the novel. Severus is an absorbed academic, cynically disdainful of poor writing after years of exposure to students’ essays. They each educate the other in new uses and forms for texts, from creation to reading. The inclusion of sexual desire as brought about by the creative act of mutually producing a text improves both their lives greatly. From the beginning, Hermione uses texts as a treatment for nightmares; it is only when she starts writing that the nightmares actually disappear. The epilogue directly acknowledges the half-formed romance novel as the root of the happy sexual and emotional relationship that Hermione and Severus share. Producing and exchanging personal, intimate writings leads directly to the development of a meaningful relationship; the story narrativizes and glorifies the acts of writing and reading fan fiction.

Anogete and Cybele are both engaged in the advancement of a particular literary aesthetic. Though the two stories were written years apart and feature different characters, both plots center on the act of writing. Communication, authorial intent, and the effect of the written word on the bodies of the reader and writer are all key themes that are present in the canon of *Harry Potter*. They may not be casting spells, but these authors express their belief in the ability of their words to manifest influence on the physical world.

Inspired by a world where magic words and the flick of a wand can have lasting impact, these authors have created a community where anyone with an
Internet connection can voice their vision of the world to an attentive audience. *Harry Potter* is popular as a subject for many reasons: genre fluency, participation in the Gothic tradition, archetypal characters, the limitations of focalized narration, elegant world building, and widespread popularity are just a few. But *Harry Potter’s* particular attention to the power of language has made it extremely fertile ground for exploration of the relationship between a reader and a writer.

*Harry Potter* fan fiction is an egalitarian literary society where authors are distinguished by their awareness of a distinct set of aesthetic values. Informed readers use these stories to further their understanding of the *Harry Potter* series, themselves, and the world around them. Far from narcissistic retooling of a popular text, these authors are using the established world of *Harry Potter* as a springboard from which to explore themes, ideas, and values that are not prevalent in mainstream published literature.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of many. To the anonymous masses who promoted and responded to my survey, the five fans who graciously and articulately answered my personal questions, my siblings who proofread, and my roommates who tolerated long nights and short tempers, I owe a debt of gratitude.

A flurry of thanks to Professor Sean McCann, without whom this would not exist. Through this project I have learned so much more than I ever thought I would, all thanks to enlightened book recommendations and pointed questions.

I would also like to thank a number of influential professors. Bob Steele, Matthew Garrett, Will Eggers, Indira Karamcheti, and Stephanie Weiner have each had a profound impact on my identity as a student and introduced me to the ideas that shaped this thesis. Sally Bachner, Ruth Nisse, and Natasha Korda all deserve praise for advising me on the intricacies of the English department.

Arin Dineen, Jessica Jordan, and Peggy Nelling are also owed particular acknowledgement for enlightening discussions about *Harry Potter*, the fandom, and fan fiction.
APPENDIX:

Survey Questions and Responses

How old are you now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Count</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>15-17</td>
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<tr>
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<td>21-25</td>
<td>78</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;40</td>
<td>4</td>
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With which gender do you identify?
Regardless of your biological sex.

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<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>158</td>
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<td>Other/Neither</td>
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What is your sexual orientation?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<td>Heterosexual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pansexual</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asexual</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

Which *Harry Potter* books have you read? *
Select all that apply

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<th>Book</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sorcerer’s/Philosopher’s Stone</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamber of Secrets</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoner of Azkaban</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goblet of Fire</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order of the Phoenix</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-Blood Prince</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deathly Hallows</td>
<td>167</td>
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<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
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At what age did you first read a *Harry Potter* book?

<table>
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<th>Count</th>
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<td>12-14</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>15-17</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
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Are you still involved in the *Harry Potter* fandom?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Answer</th>
<th>Count</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, kinda.</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, not really.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, not at all.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
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Did you ever attend/dress up for midnight *Harry Potter* book or movie releases?

*Who did you dress up as?*

Have you ever read *Harry Potter* fan fiction? *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>126</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>57</td>
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</table>

Have you ever read fan fiction about another fandom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>122</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>61</td>
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At what age did you first read fan fiction?

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<td>26-30</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt;30</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>

How did you start reading fan fiction?

*What was your first experience?*

Where do you read fan fiction?

*Select all that apply*

<table>
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<td>Print</td>
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<tr>
<td>General sites (like Fanfiction.net)</td>
<td>103</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fandom-specific sites (like harrypotterfanfiction.com)</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pairing-specific sites</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>Other:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

How do you choose which stories to read?
**Select all that apply**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
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<td>Recommendation websites</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommendations from friends</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments/ratings</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randomly</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By pairing/genre/warning</td>
<td>99</td>
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<tr>
<td>By length</td>
<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
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**What type of stories do you read?**

**Select all that apply**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
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<td>Crime</td>
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<td>Drama</td>
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<td>Friendship</td>
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<td>Humor</td>
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<td>Hurt/Comfort</td>
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<td>Mystery</td>
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<td>Slash/Erotica</td>
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**Have you ever written *Harry Potter* fan fiction?**

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<th></th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>132</td>
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**Have you ever written fan fiction about another fandom?**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
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<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>111</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**If you do write fan fiction, do you use a beta reader?**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Do you rate/comment/beta others’ stories?**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, frequently</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, sometimes</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yes, rarely 29
No, never 85

What type of stories do you write?
Select all that apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angst</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurt/Comfort</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parody</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romance</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slash/Erotica</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspense</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tragedy</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who is your favorite *Harry Potter* character?

What is a romantic pairing that you like?
*(within the Potter fandom)*

What is a romantic pairing that you dislike?
*(within the Potter fandom)*

What do you find most satisfying about reading or writing fan fiction?

What is your favorite work of *Harry Potter* fan fiction?
*And why?*

How long was the longest fan fiction story you have ever read?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drabble (&lt;100 words)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short story</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 chapters</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-10 chapters</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novel/epic length</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you feel that reviews and comments accurately reflect the quality of a story?
Explain

Do your friends and/or family know that you read/write fan fiction?

Select all that apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My friends know that I read</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends know that I write</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family knows that I read</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family knows that I write</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one knows!</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is there anything that you feel passionately moved to say about your experience with fan fiction?

If you would be willing to talk more, please provide your email address:

*Totally optional, but potentially super helpful.*
WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED:


Harris, MG. "We're All Writing Fan Fiction Now." *The MG Harris Blog*. 14 Aug. 2012. <http://www.mgharris.net/2012/08/14/were-all-writing-fanfic-now/>.


**Works of Fan Fiction**


**Fan Websites and Fan Fiction Archives**

Ashwinder: To Bewitch the Mind and Ensnare the Senses <http://ashwinder.sycophanthex.com/>.


FictionAlley: Creativity is Magic <http://fictionalley.blogspot.com/>.


SugarQuill.net: Dumbledore’s Army <http://sugarquill.net/>.

Sycophant Hex: All That’s Best of Dark and Bright <http://www.sycophanthex.com/>.


The Leaky Cauldron: The Most Trusted Name in Potter <http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org/>.

Walking the Plank: Port of the Snape/Harry Ship <

http://www.walkingtheplank.org/archive/>. 