SLASH AS GENRE

By

Erin Webb

Submitted to the

Faculty of the College of Arts and Science

of American University

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree

of Master of Arts

In

Literature

Chair:

Keith Leonard, Ph.D.

Michael Wenthe, Ph.D.

Jeffrey Middents, Ph.D.

Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

April 30, 2012
Date

2012

American University

Washington, D.C. 20016

DEDICATION

To Disa Wilson, cultist.

SLASH AS GENRE

BY

Erin Webb

ABSTRACT

This work applies the tools of genre analysis—specifically the models for genre analysis provided by Rick Altman in *The American Film Musical* (1989) and Maria Antónia Coutinho and Florencia Miranda in "To Describe Genres: Problems and Strategies" (2009)—to the recurring features of slash fanfiction in order to speculate on the concerns that have underlain its folk production and circulation since the mid-1970s. It offers a text-based interpretation of a frequently grossly over-simplified body of literature; it investigates not only a particular mode of pleasure, with all the anxieties that inhere to modes of pleasure, but also a particular mode of meta-narration and critical intervention.

# PREFACE

> Sheppard liked it rough. Sometimes. The words rolled around Rodney's brain like marbles, and made him fidgety, made him want to ask questions, made him want a nice clean testable hypothesis and a big big supercomputer to test it, and John went on dates on Atlantis, sometimes, now that the population was big enough that it wasn't too awkward, but he always dated girls, pretty, tiny girls, and Rodney knew you couldn't determine much about people from appearances, but somehow he didn't think Aubrey Tims from xenobiology, was holding John down and punching him while they were fucking. He didn't know, though. Rodney missed Google more than stovetop stuffing, more than sleeping in on Saturdays, more than getting to moderate panel discussions and takeout Indian food and cable television, and it wasn't like he couldn't understand that not everyone liked some comfortable semi-athletic sex on a soft bed, or maybe a desk chair, with snacks after, but he woke up from dreams about Googling rough sex and finding some freaks on the internet who were too into it and overly serious about it, wore stupid costumes and said stupid things, so he could just dismiss it as a pathetic waste of time. He woke up from dreams about other things, too.
>
> —Helen, "The Top of the List"

**Fanfiction** is fiction produced and circulated non-commercially that appropriates its salient features (characters, settings, concepts) from commercial fiction or celebrity media. The abbreviation **fic** refers in fan parlance to works of fanfiction (e.g., *my new fic*; *this great* Inception *fic*; or *an archive of slavefic*) or to fiction in general (e.g., *profic*). **Slash** is a subset of fanfiction that, in briefest terms, features characters from commercial fiction or celebrity media in homosexual contexts and is further delineated by generic pursuits that are the focus of this study. A *Harry Potter* fanfiction story in which copyrighted (and canonically heterosexual) characters Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy are the principal romantic pairing is a work of slash.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have happened without the help of Aja Romano, my colleague and friend, whose *lectio divina* devotion to slash has reliably translated to real love in the real world; my boy Daniel, sounding board and antagonist; my boy Matt and his mother Diana and his father Peter, who carried me through those final days; Gene Logan of the American University Financial Aid Office, who extended his grace when I needed it; Professor Jeffrey Middents, an extraordinary teacher who incidentally changed my whole game; and Professor Michael Wenthe, our great hero of erudition and my compassionate advisor.

I would also like to acknowledge my debt to the scholars and archivists who contribute ceaselessly to the Fanlore.org project of the Organization for Transformative Works, presumably without much in the way of compensation, who inspire a deep sense of continuity and pride in weirdos everyday.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration

# CHAPTER 1

## THE CAMEL WINS

"This book is the fruit of a blissfully squandered reading life—except for the exigencies of a formal education, I read only what I enjoyed."

—Betty Rosenberg, *Genreflecting*

In the early 1970s Richard Poirier lamented that literary criticism perpetually avoids those texts that would prove most vitally expressive of the cultures that produced them—and that criticism avoids them because they *are*, in fact, popular texts. Poirier explains this avoidance of popular literature in terms of fear—fear that as obscure, learnéd literature loses stock, so will its vanguard, the critic—but I suspect that resistance to pop culture has more to do with squeamishness. There's something grotesquely libidinal about popular fiction. It's too easy; it's derivative; there's too much of it. Its abundance results not from the dignified meditations of individuals but from the sucking gasps of the maw of a teeming polis. For all the anti-intellectualism and populism of American culture, there also exists, related to its atomistic individualism, a profound distrust of desire. To want something is a vulnerability; to want something that someone else profits from giving you is *abject*.

The resistance to popular literature is one instance of the attitude that the present work seeks most to rebuke: a false dichotomy of desire and critique. My study locates this same dichotomy in prevailing conceptions of the popular media fan as slavish and uncritical. It pushes against the divide by outlining the narrative desires that underlie the production and consumption of slash fanfiction (henceforth, "slash") and then explicating the texts that fulfill those desires in order to show the rhetorical critical interventions they contain. How do I attempt to “outline narrative desires” of a population of readers and writers without generalizing? I don’t—but by seeking meaning in the recurring deployment of signs, I hope to outline the gross landscape features of what is attempted by the slash writer; that is, what the practitioners *broadcast* in their hope, as genre writers, to connect through common signs with their readership. Unlike a work of psychoanalysis, this paper addresses consciousness and not sub-consciousness.

Adopting the models for genre analysis provided by Rick Altman in his book *The American Film Musical* (1989) and by Maria Antónia Coutinho and Florencia Miranda in their essay "To Describe Genres: Problems and Strategies" (2009), this thesis applies the tools of genre analysis to the recurring features of slash in order to discern what concerns have underlain its production and circulation since the mid-1970s. In Chapters 1 and 2, I set out expositions of genre theory and slash, providing a brief summary of structuralist to post-structuralist genre theory for the former and an index of fan theory and slash ethnographies for the latter. In Chapter 3, I survey the generic elements of slash and then propose a thematic continuity between those elements—a trajectory of inquisition toward identity, alienation and interpersonal contact.

While my goal is to offer a text-based interpretation of a frequently grossly over-simplified body of literature, this work is furthermore an investigation of how to read a people through its pleasures, its metanarratives about that pleasure and its critical interventions into that pleasure. Broadly, this work argues for generic repetition not as an opiate—dulling the strain of this or that cultural problematic through rote indulgence—but as a field of discourse in which common features isolate a communal concern and variables articulate a position.

## A Short History of Genre

In his seminal work *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye founds his theory of the archetype on a provocative supposition: "The fact that revision is possible, that the poet makes changes not because he likes them better but because they are better, means that poems, like poets, are born and not made" (97). That is, Frye argues, poets are internally guided by an external barometer of quality, where quality is understood to mean proximity to an ideal form. Moreover, Frye draws a telling connection between the ideal form and a reader's perception (however subliminal) of recurrence:

> [A] feeling that we have all had: that the study of mediocre works of art, however energetic, obstinately remains a random and peripheral form of critical experience, whereas the profound masterpiece seems to draw us to a point at which we can see an enormous number of converging patterns of significance. (100)

Frye concludes that the "converging patterns of significance" attached to aesthetic virtue rise from a system of universal symbols—a "network of psychological relationships" that,

in turn, results from the material conditions of the human animal and its physical environment (100). His attempt to assign absolute psychological value to objects in a schematic where "the individual and the universal forms of an image are identical" eventually meets the obstacles of plurality, plasticity and contingency (108)—but Frye's essay still presents several interesting questions: where *does* the internal/external scale of literary value come from? By what medium is that scale shared within a community? How is it that the scale is endemic to the community and yet encountered primarily through sensation, difficult to articulate or quantify? Where lies the tacit consensus that valorizes certain qualities in a text, and why do those qualities change contextually?

To answer these questions, theories of genre posit dynamic configurations of readerly desires and expectations and writerly interventions. A population shapes narrative forms to meet its needs, and within the repetition of those forms semiotic systems emerge. *Genre* names the narrative form, the semiotic system, the process by which such structures are created and maintained and the cultural discourses enabled by those structures. My own favorite succinct explanation of genre is offered by John Cawelti in his 1985 article "The Question of Popular Genres:"

> The essence of genre criticism is the construction of what, in contemporary critical jargon, might be called a macro- or supertext. The supertext (genre) claims to be an abstract of the most significant characteristics or family resemblances among many particular texts, which can accordingly be analyzed, evaluated, and otherwise related to each other by virtue of their connection with the supertext.... [T]he supertext can also be treated like an individual text: Its history can be constructed; its impact and influence can be explored; it can be compared with

> other texts; it can be used as a source for constructing histories and theories of art and culture. (56)

A concept as broad as genre invites innumerable points of critical entry and potentially implicates dozens of disciplines—sociology, linguistics, psychology, rhetoric, and so on. To a classically-trained literature scholar, *the lyric* is a genre; to a film critic, *the western* is a genre; to a linguist, *furniture assembly instruction pamphlet* is a genre. The word "genre" simply means "type"—as many ways as there are to categorize something, then, is the number of ways one can understand genre. For this reason, Rick Altman argues in his introduction to *Film/Genre* that "[o]f all concepts fundamental to literary theory, none has a longer and more distinguished lineage than the question of literary types or genres" (1). It will be evident in the present work that I draw modes of genre analysis almost exclusively from media studies and linguistics—and that is because I found little in the realm of traditional literary studies that met my needs for a poststructuralist semiotic reading of contemporary folk productions. Perhaps for the reasons of stodginess that Poirier suggests, literary studies has resisted a revaluation of its notions of genre, simultaneously devoted to old Aristotelian divisions of genre by form (the lyric, the epic, the dramatic and sometimes the novel) and uninterested in such parameters. The study of classical literary genres is useful for studying the work of artists acculturated to those formal discourses, but as literary criticism turns its eyes to the productions of popular culture, it finds divisions of genre by form of little help. At least, I found them of little help.

As the above suggests, the matters of genres is fraught. Genre analysis is a function of categorization, and to bind together diverse objects through common features

is always an act of violence; any such act is necessarily subjective, historical, political and culturally-inflected. In the words of Maria Antónia Coutinho and Florencia Miranda, "genre does not have ontological reality" (39). Generic systems are called upon to yield guidelines for assessing a work's value and interpreting its meaning—yet, because genres are dialectic, they are perpetually contingent on the communally- and dialogically-fed metaphoric associations of its participants. For purposes of study, the supertext remains fixed, while the texts and creators related to the supertext—possessing the ontological reality that genres lack—remain constantly in motion. Sign systems built on such contingencies can maintain a congealed state only so long as the social intercourse of metaphoric associations remains relatively stable. Subsequently, any system of genre analysis is vulnerable to collapse and re-schematization—the accusation of ideological bias can never really be deflected—and the hows and whys of categorization come under frequent debate. After all, these questions may lie at the bottom of all arts and sciences: how and why do we parse objects according to similarities and differences?

For the most part, the inclinations to investigate a people's ideological discourses through its narratives and to look for those narratives in popular culture arise from the discoveries of psychoanalysis. Just as an analyst can "read" the internal conflicts of the analysand through a psychic language composed of evasions and metonyms, a scholar may read the antagonisms within a culture by examining the fantasies that manage those antagonisms. Just as an analyst discovers psychic clues in the compulsions of the analysand, the scholar discovers fantasies in those texts for which a culture is hungriest. Just as the analyst seeks to evade the censoring superego in the consciousness of the analysand, the scholar looks for more authentic expressions of a culture in literature that

is *popular*. The crucial differences between the two systems are (1) that the former makes universalist claims and (2) the latter allows for consciousness, for deliberate engagement, where psychoanalysis primarily concerns itself with the individual's (i.e., the writer's, the producing culture's) *resistance* to conscious discourse. Where Lacanian critic Slavoj Žižek locates "the true secret" of the psyche in "the very distortion of the latent thought in the manifest content" of the producing body, genre theory finds this secret in the discursive mobility possible within that manifest content (16). In short, genre theory accepts the capacity of metonyms to manage truths, while in the psychoanalytic tradition metonyms produce only occlusions.

Since the 1960s, the bulk of genre studies since the 1960s has taken as one of its primary tasks a recovery from the embarrassments of structuralism. Where post-structuralist genre theories seek to accommodate the inexhaustible contingencies of meaning formation, structuralists like Northrop Frye and Kenneth Burke advertised the systematicity of a literary science. That approach to genre, behaving as though "the weight of numerous 'similar' texts were sufficient to locate the meaning of a text independently of a specific audience," writes Rick Altman, "blinded us to the discursive power of generic formations" (*AFM* 93). These theorists pursued systems of signification founded on static structures of the human body and its terrestrial environment. Postmodern genre theorists, on the other hand, look for human intervention, for the processes by which communities develop not an index of psychological artifacts but what Barry Keith Grant describes as "an economy of *expression*" (8, emphasis mine). As genre theory has evolved, membranes of form have become membranes of semiotic complicity;

genre analysis has become a malleable tool for reading cultural engagements within a society—not a roadmap to human thought.

## The Anatomy of Genre

In his 1925 essay "Psychology and Form," Kenneth Burke anticipates the importance of a text's flirtation with and evasion of readerly expectations in recurring narrative structures. The artfulness with which expectations are managed Burke terms *eloquence*, and he contrasts the aesthetic value of eloquence with that of *information*. The controlled resistance of a text to its form or formula reverberates like the plucked string of a harp, like a piece of music that "deals minutely in frustrations and fulfillments of desire" and "can bear repetition without loss" (36); conversely, texts that rely on suspense or surprise for effect can only be enjoyed for those merits once. In this essay, Burke hints tantalizingly at the appeal of genre fiction. He uses the advantages of eloquence over information to explain the longevity of ancient Greek drama and the plays of Shakespeare, being the eloquent rendering of "material which was more or less a matter of common knowledge so that the broad outlines of plot were known in advance (while it is the broad outlines which are usually exploited to secure surprise and suspense)" (37). Disappointingly, Burke's primary thesis is to describe the text/reader dynamic in terms of hypnosis and pacification, apparently without reproach, but in the process he points precisely to the site of meaning-production in the genre text:

> The contemporary audience hears the lines of a play or novel with the same equipment as it brings to reading the lines of its daily paper. It is content to have facts placed before it in some more or less adequate sequence. Eloquence is the

> minimizing of this interest in facts, *per se,* so that the "more or less adequate sequence" of their presentation must be relied on to a much greater extent. Thus, those elements of surprise and suspense are subtilized, carried down into the writing of a line or a sentence, until in all its smallest details the work bristles with disclosures, contrasts, restatements with a difference, ellipses, images, aphorism, volume, sound values, in short all that complex wealth of minutiae which in their line-for-line aspect we call style and in their broader outlines we call form. (37-8)

In Burke's formulation, the virtues of eloquence are all sensual; beyond the dilatory space of its variations, the eloquent text inspires "exaltation at the correctness of the procedure" through its "exercise of human propriety, the formulation of symbols which rigidify our sense of poise and rhythm" (37; 42). Yet Burke makes two profound observations about stories with recurring plots or subject matter: first, that the text's *deviations* from form are the site of readerly interest and pleasure; second, that a disinflection of plot development ("facts") demands a hermeneutics of meaning, an attention to nuance which "bristles with disclosures." In short, the pleasure of the genre text—far from rote conciliatory repetition of prescribed symbols—is that it requires *reading* rather than *being told*.

The controlled resistance in Burke's figuration—likewise, the semiotic torque illustrated by Buscombe's horse and camel race—is figured diversely by different theorists, but the schematic always involves an axis of sameness and an axis of difference: the salient markers that attach a text to a certain genre and a text's variations, whether stylistic or substantive (Burke's "restatements with a difference"); the supertext

and the individual texts that relate to it, with all their modifications, inflections and subtleties.

The function of post-structuralist genre analysis will be clearer with the following example from Rick Altman's explication of the American film musical. In this work, offers a reading of the genre of American film musicals and the cultural fantasy manifest there. He argues that the American film musical is fueled by a desire to harmoniously reconcile cultural constructs (such as class or gender) that are, in their contemporary actual manifestations, in irresolvable tension with each other. Such metonymic accretion is easy to imagine: from song-and-dance entertainment to a vision of complementary opposites (the good-looking female partner and the good-looking male partner) engaged in a ritualized expression of convex/concave harmony—and from there to the totem resolution of all the essentially unstable dualities of masculine/feminine, subject/other, freedom/oppression, etc., upon which societies are built. Diverse notes unified melodically in a story of true love is a daydream about democracy. Thus, the suggestion of utopian resolution of unstable dichotomies inheres to key elements of the American musical.

Understanding the thematic concerns of the American film musical, therefore, allows the critic to read what the producing/consumer culture understands to be in *dis*unity. In the 1942 musical *For Me and My Gal*, for example, a vaudeville performer played by Gene Kelly is drafted to serve in the War but intentionally damages his hand in order to pursue personal glory as a vaudevillian; when his fiancé (Judy Garland) learns what he's done, she leaves him in disgrace. Penitent but now permanently disqualified from serving as a soldier, Kelly's character joins the war effort by entertaining troops

until he redeems himself through an act of frontline bravery, and the film ends with Kelly and Garland reunited on stage, singing the title song "For Me and My Gal." This film belongs to the subgroup of *show musical*, which features narratives about performance and performers; according to Altman, the secondary opposition in a show musical (after the genre's primary opposition of feminine/masculine) is always between the individual as a subject with subjective desires and the individual as a uniform element of a cohesive unit. The narrative form of the show musical harmonizes the goals of the subject and the goals of the institution, eradicating the tension between them by subsuming the former into the latter; the particulars of *For Me and My Gal* name the subject as an American citizen invested in his own career and household and the institution as the Allied Forces of World War II. Noting a fantasy of reconciliation between American citizen and American Army in *For Me and My Gal* allows the critic to read its opposite: the growing alienation of the atomistic American individualist from an apparatus that demanded his loyalty and sacrifices, even after failing to protect him from the Depression. Like the lady who doth protest too much, the title song's insistence that wartime heroism is performed *for the subject himself and his household* indicates an anxiety about that motivation.

A familiarity with the generic language of musicals not only enables the critic to gaze in from the outside (as with the psychoanalyst) but also enables creators to articulate their own positions on generic themes, and this—the discursive component of genre—is what I hope most to emphasize as a counterweight to my emphasis on *appetite*.

The first half of the film *A Star Is Born* (1954), for example, follows the formula of the show musical, but the show musical's signature climax—a romantic union that concurs with the success of a theatrical performance—arrives too soon. The hero (James

Mason) discovers a struggling artist (Judy Garland) and coaches her to stardom, and the two marry. The second half of the film pushes past this resolution into Garland's overshadowing of her husband, Mason's alcoholism, the artifice of stardom and the messiness of human relations. *A Star Is Born* enters into the topos of harmony through the generic language of the musical in order to make a statement about the *transience* of perfect unity. "Just as their triumph represented a breakthrough into a new world of harmony and realizable ideals," writes Altman, "so the passage of time, the film seems to suggest, ever carries even the perfect moment forward to a new and different situation" (267).

This reading of *A Star Is Born* is broad and narratological, but genre also enables delicate semiotic play as the creator recasts or recombines signifiers and the consumer intercepts these myriad nuanced departures. In his seminal 1970 essay "The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema," Edward Buscombe offers this reading of the opening scene of the western *Ride the High Country*:

> Knowing the period and location, we expect at the beginning to find a familiar western town. In fact, the first minutes of the film brilliantly disturb our expectations. As the camera roves around the town we discover a policeman in uniform, a car, a camel, and Randolph Scott dressed up as Buffalo Bill. Each of these images performs a function. The figure of the policeman conveys that the law has become institutionalized; the rough and ready frontier days are over. The car suggests . . . that the West is no longer isolated from modern technology and its implications. Significantly, the camel is racing against a horse; such a grotesque juxtaposition is painful. A horse in a western is not just an animal but a

> symbol of dignity, grace, and power. These qualities are mocked by having it compete with a camel; and to add insult to injury, the camel wins. (23)

With its deft explication of images and symbols, Buscombe's reading of *Ride the High Country* has the look of psychoanalysis or structural anthropology; it bases its interpretation, however, on cultural literacies rather than on physiological fact. Moreover, it postulates a semiosis that is always open to modification or inflection, as with the modernized but still legible western town. And this is, I argue, the beauty of genre analysis in its current manifestation: it offers a method of symbolist reading without universalizing its insights, without the dreadful fatalism of Levi-Straussian mythèmes or Lacanian lack. It posits participants that are active in the production of meaning. The creators of genre texts are understood as iconographical adepts and not just fabulists. The appeal of genre fiction is understood not just as the pleasure of psychological resonance, not just the infantile pleasure of familiarity, but as the drive to enter critically, however subtly, into pressing cultural problematics again and again.

## Genre & Method in the Present Work

In their essay "To Describe Genres: Problems and Strategies," Maria Antónia Coutinho and Florencia Miranda cast the dynamic between sameness and difference in terms borrowed from the French linguist Jean-Michel Adam; the genre text functions, they suggest, by "a principle of identity (centripetal), oriented for the repetition and the reproduction, performing a normative role; and a principle of difference (centrifugal), oriented for the innovation and the variation" (40). Coutinho and Miranda delineate a genre's centripetal elements into *self-referential markers* and *inferential markers*. The

former are characteristics that explicitly advertise a text as belonging to a certain genre, and the latter are the salient but implicit recurring features of a genre.

Rick Altman's schematic in *The American Film Musical* offers two planes of sameness/difference: in the *semantic* plane, the axis of sameness is populated by what Altman describes as the "common traits" of a genre—cowboys in westerns, detectives in mysteries, songs in musicals—and the particulars of how those semantic elements are deployed are inscribed on the axis of difference; in the *syntactic* plane, the axis of sameness is occupied by the "certain constitutive relationships between undesignated and variable placeholders," with those placeholders occupying the axis of difference (*AFM* 95).

One notable variation on the torque between stability and modification is proposed by John Fiske in his 1987 work *Television Culture*, where he argues for the concept of "semiotic democracy" particular to the medium of serial drama. He suggests that the television serial provides "a text of contestation which contains forces of closure and of openness and which allows viewers to make meanings that are subculturally pertinent to them, but which are made in resistance to the ideological forces of homogenization" (241). Furthermore, he suggests that the *pleasure* of television is derived from navigating that resistance. Fiske is addressing audience research and not genre criticism, but I think Fiske's schematic is a useful addition to our understanding of genre—the genre's supertext should likewise be understood as a "text of contestation" and the iconographic capitulations and innovations as providing "forces of closure and openness." Not only does this conception of genre introduce the elements of pleasure and excitement to what is discussed primarily as a field of discourse in Chapter 1—but it also

suggests how naturally suited genre fiction and fanfiction are to each other—both as processes of identification, inflection, entrance and resistance.

In order to analyze slash fiction as a genre, the present work makes use of all of these terms—centripetal, centrifugal, self-referential, inferential, semantic, syntactic, openness and closure—with the end goal of reading cogently what Coutinho and Miranda call the "mechanisms of textual realization" (41). The first step is to identify the normative features of slash; the next step will focus on individual specimens and their centrifugal properties—that is, their explications, their utterances, their deviations from the posited supertext.

Running parallel to these narratological pursuits is an ethnographic one. If, as John Swales writes, "the work of genre is to mediate between social situations and the texts that respond strategically to the exigencies of those situations" (14), then I hope to comment compellingly on what mediation the slash genre provides to its participants, to the extent that its participants can be known. John Cawelti writes, "the meaning and significance of genres must be understood not only in formal or structural terms but through a better understanding of the way in which particular cultural groups interpret texts and supertexts in the process of making them a part of their everyday lives" (60). As such, I propose an intersection of the majority sociocultural conditions of the slash community and the concerns the slash supertext seems to address. However, I maintain the irresolution (or humility) that Cawelti puts forth in *The Six-Gun Mystique*, his treatment of the Western: "However simple the formula may be, the artistic, social and psychological implications it synthesizes are extremely complex" (qtd., Cawelti 60). I make broad claims about the people who consume slash and about the intentions of the

authors of works of slash—much as I would (and do) with dead authors and their dead audiences. But the remainder of this chapter is an index of the complexities, biases and necessary exclusions that comprise the present work's inaccuracies.

## Keeping It Real

In the world of fanfiction the matter of canon is fraught, and it is similarly fraught in the world of genre. What constitutes a genre? Do genres overlap? The salient features of a genre are distilled from a canon, but the membranes of a canon are formed along lines of salient features: who is the real hero? Because the lines of division between categories are so conditional, they conform to the projects of their handlers—only with the weight of the name of analyst—and this brings us to the weighty matter of bias. As Rick Altman soberly explains: "[G]enres are not neutral categories, as structuralist critics have too often implied; rather they are *ideological constructs masquerading as neutral categories* (*AFM* 5).

My intent is to draw conclusions about the genre of slash fiction through textual analysis and to lean away from anecdotal evidence (that is, evidence drawn from my own experience as a slasher or from the testimony of others) without seeming to deny my own bias—yet my selection of canonical texts for the distillation into recurring features has no defense; it is subjective in the extreme. As Altman warns, "All critics are users (and all users critics)" (7). I find slash to be a tremendously compelling object for study because it is a folk genre produced, consumed and circulated almost entirely by college-educated women—a genre almost always mischaracterized as merely eccentric or merely

masturbatory—but my scholarly interest is preceded by almost two decades of reading and writing slash because I just like it.[1]

Many of the same characteristics that make fanfiction—slash in particular—ripe for study also make that study difficult. Slash, like all participatory culture, is diffuse and multiple. One popular archive, Fanfiction.net, hosts ninety-two thousand slash stories in over thirty languages (that figure excludes any work *unlabeled* as slash), and it is joined by Livejournal, a blogging site repurposed for archiving, and Archive of Our Own (AO3), which, since its inception in 2008, has amassed nearly 170 thousand works in 23 languages. Each of these archives supports public feedback and instant user edits; a writer posts a story, someone posts a comment on that story, the writer edits the story's form code, and the previous version is gone forever. When one attempts to draw conclusions about slash—and many have—one is always in reference to a shifting, piecemeal, unsteady corpus. Its constituent works are essentially un-indexable—and while this decentralized nature of the slash corpus allows for freer tides of style and taste, it necessitates a gross intervention on the part of the scholar who wishes to collect any kind of manageable canon for study.

Where possible, I have relied on the publications of media scholars like Henry Jenkins and Constance Penley to help identify the inferential markers of the slash supertext; however, I am sensitive to the texts that even their works (*Textual Poachers*, *NASA/TREK*), addressing the broad phenomenon of slash, ignore. The texts that the

1. I use the label of *folk* conscientiously—not to make slash culture seem remote or precious, nor national, certainly, but to accentuate its deregulated, non-commercial features. Fanfiction is not *empty* of commerce—praise and attention are currencies; reciprocity is a currency—but it is less influenced than commercial literature by market forces.

current project attends are without exception first-time m/m slash fics drawn exclusively from fandoms with which I am familiar, regardless of their popularity; and although I suspect that the diverse sub-genres of slash—the *established relationship* stories (detailing the romantic exploits of a pairing after its inception), the *mpreg* (in which one male partner bears a child), the *PWP* (standing for *porn-without-plot* or *plot? what plot?*), etc.—all traffic in iconographic reference to the slash supertext, which follows the first-time formula, I do not explore the matter.

I also do not explore the matter of *femslash*, the example par excellence of the pitfalls of categorization. For over a decade, I have resisted the term *femslash* and watched resentfully as it appeared and reappeared on the Wikipedia entry for slash. If *femslash* is the name given to any slash that pairs female protagonists, then it's a shame that even in a literature dominated by female writers and readers the feminine is segregated—that the masculine is still default and the feminine still requires a prefix. If, however, the line that separates femslash is not gender but substance rising from the history of its self-referential marker—evolving narrative tropes within a specific community to address the concerns of that community—then it speaks to the heart of the problem of canon. When female/female (henceforth, "f/f") fic engages the generic concerns of male/male (henceforth, "m/m") fic, is it femslash? When m/m fic employs the narrative topoi of f/f fic, is *that* femslash? If a heterosexual male writes f/f fic, can we call that femslash? I raise these questions not to answer them but to articulate, hopefully, my awareness of diversity where my attendance to it lacks.

So having acknowledged the titanic and presently impossible task of amassing a decent survey of slash fiction, how to move forward?

The present work results from a preliminary survey of the recurring features of slash—a survey that has been taking place formally and informally since I was fourteen. This project began as a casual comparison of slash to Greek drama (drawing on the same characteristics that Kenneth Burke highlighted, a predetermined plot and attention to *emphasis* rather than information), and it gestated as I argued continually against configurations of slash as "porn for women."

Four years ago, I discovered that my adolescent sister had begun reading slash. I found myself worrying that she would encounter my work. It became crucially important for her to understand what I was doing, to not *misunderstand* it, as perhaps I had done when I was her age: I had come out of my late teens and early twenties with a distorted vision of sex and romance as the pinnacle of human contact, and I didn't want my name (that is, my pseudonym) to act as a seal of approval on those distortions. Thus, I began my study of slash with an attitude of complicity, of devoted interest, but also of reproach for my sister's sake. I attached this disclaimer to the slash I thenceforth published:

> This is an aside to my sister—Sex and romance are not depicted realistically in these stories. In most cases, they are symbolic of contact in general, while sexual climax is symbolic of catharsis in general. Character A is finally able to admit something to her/himself or to Character B, but this symbolizes the larger act of cracking open. In real life, you do crack open, but gradually and indeliberately, through the process of daily life, and not just with the person you're fucking.

While my project is to present a mode of analysis and, necessarily, to refute certain claims about slash, it will hopefully remain clear that I do not propose a closed, totalizing system. A reading of slash as a sustained, pluralistic meditation on intimacy

and alienation provides a compelling line of continuity through the 40-year-old corpus of slash—but that reading does not address any of its innumerable simultaneous projects of literature and aesthetic engagement. For example, I dispute Henry Jenkins' claim that slash is "about" reconfiguring male sexuality, but slash stories may easily have that effect, and to the extent that the effect is anticipated by participants, it may serve as an *inferential marker* of the genre. I have read stories with complicated plots that feature homosexual pairings whose development was either absent or not the primary emphasis of the work; these stories I anecdotally sort as being farther from the slash supertext, which is denotatively fascinated with the development of its pairing. Conversely, I have read stories that feature mystery plots but are clearly more interested in the engagement of their same-sex romantic leads; those stories are farther from the core of the mystery novel supertext and can thus be expected to say less in dialogue with that supertext.

Since composing the above disclaimer for my sister, my views on slash have changed. I began my study by understanding anecdotally the form of slash but *mis*understanding its content as static—as the dogged, consolatory repetition of a fantasy; the sad movie that makes us feel peaceful; or the invocation of a beautiful but purely poetical object for meditation. To me, the slasher was lonely. She was a dumpy, bookish woman built for catharsis but socially hobbled. (I was a slasher.) The project of slash circled around her loneliness.

While my fundamental thesis remains—my characterization of slash as a literature of alienation—I have come to appreciate that literature as active rather than passive, reflective rather than needy (or merely needy). Upon further engagement with its texts, I assessed its primary subject—gay sex—not as heterosexual sex coded for the gynophobic

but as a signifier of the penetrated impenetrable; its network not as a suture that substitutes for real social connections but as a socio-literary structure that replaces the broken one from which powerful, thoughtful female sci-fi/fantasy fans were excluded; and its circulation not as a medicine for loneliness but as a vivacious and tenacious interest in the possibilities of the heart.

# CHAPTER 2

## LUST IN THE LIBRARY

You must bring lust into the library (or it is hell)

—Lisa Robertson, "Debbie: an Epic"

If genre is a field of discourse within a given community—an implicitly codified semiotic system—then an integral part of any reading of genre is its cultural and historical context. As fan theorist Mafalda Stasi points out, “fanfic texts and communities are inseparable; performing textual analysis in isolation is impossible” (118). In the previous chapter, I presented a series of disclaimers about my ability to utter absolutes regarding the character of slash, and those disclaimers will hopefully stand as I exposit the character of the slash community. In his 1999 book *FILM/GENRE*, Rick Altman explores the twin systems of genre and community—and particularly their instability as continually reimagined entities. “The imagining of community,” he writes, “like the genrification process, always operates dialectically" (203).

The present chapter seeks to comment on the experience and component acts of slash by describing the way the literature refers to itself, outlining its history, listing its standard forms and indexing some responses of the mainstream media to slash.

## Self-Referential Markers

In the previous chapter, mention was made of the difficulty in drawing a definite border around what can be considered slash—but in general the constituent works of slash depict copyrighted, canonically heterosexual male characters considering or engaging in same-sex erotic intimacy. If a film such as *Love! Valour! Compassion!* depicts the lives of eight homosexual men, it is gay; if a film such as *Sherlock Holmes* includes ostensible erotic undertones between its two male leads, it is slashy. A program like *Torchwood*, in which the male bisexual protagonist sometimes French kisses his female and male co-workers, makes the whole thing confusing. My favorite characterizations of slash are offered by Constance Penley in her 1997 study *NASA/TREK* and David Plotz in a 2002 Salon.com article: respectively, "homoerotic, pornographic, utopian romances" (2) and "America's literature of obsession." The present work concerns slash as a subset of prose fanfiction, but slash can also refer to fanart, fanvids, songs and poetry.

As with all genres, the self-referential markers of slash include its labels and the sites of its activity and all those dialectic interstices that surround them. Whatever those features are which arouse in the reader generic expectations *previous* to any exposure to the work's content qualify as self-referential markers. In some cases, these markers serve as a perceptive filter: a story that doesn't concern itself with sex or romance (henceforth, "gen" for "general interest") but is written by an author known primarily for her slash may yet carry a subtle overlay of slashy possibilities that affects the reader's experience.

As will be seen, the sites of activity for slash fanfiction range from paper periodicals to mailing lists to website archives to online blogs; in all these cases, entities existed that were specifically marketed to slash audiences. In forums for mixed genres—slash, gen, and/or heterosexual fanfic (henceforth, "het")—one might rely on the table of contents (in a zine) or a header (in online publications). In the introduction to their collection of essays *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson provide this definition of the fannish *header*:

> The header appears on virtually all posted fan fiction. . . It is used by fic archivists to properly categorize and upload the story without having to read it, and it is used by readers to decide whether or not they want to read it. The header traditionally provides the title, author, e-mail address, romantic pairings (if applicable), and rating. . . . The header often includes the story's genre or story type (slash or action/adventure). . . acknowledgment to betas, who read the story and make suggestions before the author posts it; disclaimers. . . , and author's notes, where extra information relevant to the story is provided. (10)

Each of these header items can serve to establish readerly expectations and thus set a work pre-emptively into dialogue with the slash supertext. Going into an NSYNC story titled "JC Deflowers the Boy," you pretty much know what to expect.[2] The label providing the work's "genre or story type" is by far the most explicit self-referential marker, and in the case of slash fic, these labels include the terms *slash*, *f/f* or *m/m* (for

2. "JC Deflowers the Boy," a JC/Justin NSYNC story by fanwriter Alestar, published in 2002.

*female/female* or *male/male*) and the notation of a recognizably same-sex pairing (such as Cagney/Lacy or Data/Riker).

The term *slash* derives from the virgule that appears in the pairing notation for an individual fic or group of fics; the notation describes which characters are "paired" romantically or sexually within the story, such as Cagney/Lacy or Jon Stewart/Stephen Colbert. The virgule notation is also used to describe het, but due to the overall hegemony of heterosexual pairings, they didn't get a cool nickname. There is also a growing trend of portmanteau pairing labels in which the names of the paired characters are combined into a single word—e.g., Spirk for Spock/Kirk or Snarry for Snape/Harry. This system is most likely borrowed from *yaoi* or Japanese boy's love literature (and its fanfiction) but is almost certainly influenced by the Western media's embrace of relationship portmanteaus like Brangelina for Brad Pitt/Angelina Jolie.

In addition to these are terms denoting any of slash's innumerable and protean subcategories. In each fandom, lexicons arise. The term *puppies* to describe the members of pop group NYSNC originated in response to a 2001 NSYNC fic by Synchronik and became a signifier of the fandom as a whole. Also in 2001, the bizarre but popular subgenre of *wingfic* appeared within the NSYNC fandom—these stories, characterized by someone growing at least one wing, spread to other slash fandoms before dying away in 2003. Use of the terms *puppies* or *wingfic* within a story's header within that specific historical window would affiliate the story with slash and thus load it with those generic expectations. The term *puppies* is unlikely to have the same effect now because those cultural memories have faded. As with all elements of genre, self-referential markers operate in contingency; therefore, caution Busse and Hellekson, "such terminology

should be understood as provisional because terms continue to evolve, often depend on fandom, and are always in dispute" (9).

## Slash and Science Fiction

The history of the phenomenon of fanfiction is hotly contested,[3] but the timeline for what we now know as slash fiction is slightly less ambiguous. It begins in 1926 with the publication of the first science fiction pulp magazine *Amazing Stories* and the subsequent coining of the term "science fiction" by its editor, Hugo Gernsback (Westfahl 10). From the letters column of this serial grew a community of science fiction fans *aware* of each other as members of an enthusiastic niche—and from the addresses of these letter-writers, published by Gernsback, grew the network of amateur publications by and for science fiction fans (henceforth, "fanzines" or "zines") that flourished in the US during the Depression, when few resources went to the professional publication of science fiction (Westfahl 17; Coppa 42). "It was this interactive element," writes Francesca Coppa, "that allowed for the development of modern fandom" (42). From 1930 onward, science fiction fanzines circulated non-commercially among science fiction fans, featuring essays, commentaries, reviews and artistic fanworks. Though many of these science fiction fans were women, Camille Bacon-Smith notes that the production and traffic of science fiction fanzines "existed as a primarily male activity in the literary science fiction community" (112). Constance Penley suggests similarly that women writers have been historically drawn to science fiction because it provides "a freedom not

3. Fanfiction in its broadest sense being both the ancient artistic technique of appropriative or archontic fiction and the much-maligned practice of co-opting a published author's copyrighted material; see Abigail Derecho's essay "Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction."

available in mainstream writing"—that is, freedom to imagine new social relations rather than dissent or comply with extant ones—but that "science fiction has historically been a male preserve" (103).

Then, in the late 1960s, enthusiasm for two television shows, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (1964-68) and *Star Trek* (1966-69), led to the creation of *media fandom* within the science fiction womb. The members of media fandom were mostly female science fiction fans. Almost immediately, within the science fiction community media fandom was ghettoized not only as a feminine space but as an illiterate one: "While *Star Trek* fans were likely to be science fiction readers as well," writes Bacon-Smith, "the media fans came to the community through their interest in television, perceived as an inferior source of science fiction" (112). Francesca Coppa similarly reports, "many traditional fans, whose culture continued to be centered around professional science fiction magazines, dismissed *Star Trek* as science fiction for nonreaders" (45), most likely due to the privileging of character drama over technical speculation in TV programming. This contempt for the *accessibility* of media fandom mirrors, possibly, the traditional widespread disdain for the popular novel, also historically dominated by women (Driscoll 80). Paula Smith, a writer and organizer of conventions beginning in the early outset of media fandom, describes the climate throughout the '60s and '70s:

> Buck Coulson, an SF (and *U.N.C.L.E.)* writer, used to say, "There is no subtle discrimination against *Trek* fans in science fiction—it's blatant." And the women said, "The heck with this," and started making their own zines and organizing their own conventions. . . Trek fandom was the mirror image of science fiction fandom. I would say 90 percent of science fiction fandom at the time was men

> and 10 percent was women, and there was a reverse 10-to-90 men-to-women split in Trek fandom. The two groups quickly diverged; after a while, only about 5 to 10 percent would shuttle back and forth between the two fandoms. (Walker)

Nevertheless, media fandom grew, using the science fiction fandom community as its template, and *Star Trek* remained its principle interest into the 1990s. Media fandom zines featured many of the non-fictional components of their science fiction zine siblings—essays, commentaries, travel reports, book reviews—but placed much greater emphasis on creative involvements with the canon literature: “poems, songs, stories, drawings, teleplays” (Coppa 45). In 1967, two American women—Devra Langsam and Sherna Comerford—published the first *Star Trek* fanzine, *Spockanalia*, while the show was in its first season; it met such a thunderous response—fan materials flooding in at such a rate—that the one-shot project swelled into five issues over four years. In 1969, *Spockanalia* #4 ran the first erotic *Star Trek* fanfic, a mild 10-page piece by Lelamarie S. Kreidler called “Time Enough,” and the world of adult *ST* periodicals was off to the races.

The first all-adult fanzine was *Grup*, debuting in 1972, inspired by an aside in another zine’s call for stories: “One of the instructions was 'No Spock-goes-to-bed-with stories',” the zine’s editors recall. “We laughed at that, and I said that they were missing a good bet, and that someone ought to do an x-rated zine with nothing but that kind of story” (qtd. “Grup,” Fanlore). It was, in fact, a good bet. In the opening editorial of *Grup* #2 (February 1973), Steve Barnes writes, "It has been said that if you want to stir up controversy... write about sex. [But] the controversy failed to materialize. Oh, we had one or two poison pen efforts but they failed to compete with the letters of praise and

encouragement we got. We found the majority of our readers accept the 'adult' theme well" (qtd. Verba 13). Other adult fanzines followed. The literature in these publications ranged from merely suggestive to humorous to bizarre to raunchy. The fanzine *Obsc'zine: Entertainment for Humanoids* #1 (March 1977), for example, includes five Kirk/Spock slash (henceforth, "K/S") stories; a romantic but sex-free Vulcan fairy tale; Uhura's heterosexual bondage fantasy; a chemically-induced, mostly heterosexual ship-wide orgy; a vaguely homophobic *limerick* about Kirk dying from wounds received during anal intercourse; and line art of what seems to be Spock making love to a unicorn.

I mention these items because I hope to emphasize the surprising audacity and the breadth of experimentation occurring in media fandom from its outset. Many of the tropes of slash fanfiction seem to borrow from the saccharine standards of heterosexual romance, but those tropes weren't the only game in town, and they were far from the rule. Many slash theorists have figured slash, with all of its talking and weeping and kissing, as porn for women—but the pages of media fanzines suggest that in most cases *porn* was, in fact, the porn for women. Two other facts are manifest in the indices of *Obsc'zine* and other adult media fanzines: (1) that the writers' libidinal interest in the topic never precluded irreverence or meta-narrative considerations, and (2) that the prescriptive nature of formulaic fiction was not native to media fanzine culture, which emphasized at every turn exploration.

The first published instance of what we now know as slash fiction was printed in the *ST* fanzine *Grup* #3 in 1974. "A Fragment Out of Time" by Diane Marchant is a 2-page sex scene between one male character and another character identified only as "the other" who possesses "a strong pair of hands [that] turned him onto his stomach" and a

voice that “he was used to obeying. . .  implicitly.” No names were used, but the accompanying illustrations make it fairly clear that the characters in question are Captain Kirk and Spock. The most beautifully ironic component of this story is its opening line: “Shut up. . .  We’re by no means setting a precedent” (47).

The homosexual imagery of “Fragment Out of Time” was oblique enough that Marchant’s story had little impact until her essay—”Pandora's Box...Again: A Psychological Discussion of the Relationship Between Captain James T. Kirk and Commander Spock"—was published in *Grup* #4 the following year. Even this, notes fan historian Joan Marie Verba, was not terribly explicit: "At the time I thought Diane simply meant that Spock was not ready for marriage, and that he loved Kirk in a platonic sense. The article is so subtle—as were most hints of K/S at the time—that readers could interpret it however" (24).

Despite the subtlety, Marchant’s story and essay met with resistance. The first of countless debates about slash began. Niall Kitson writes in his fandom retrospective: “While fans had speculated there was something to the Kirk/Spock relationship that dare not speak its name, committing the idea to print caused a veritable riot of abuse and discussion impassioned enough to force a rift in fan culture” (Kitson).

Most of the disputes addressed the *credibility* of the concept, though many were explicitly anti-gay, such as that from fellow zine editor Winston Howlett:

> “According to some of the latest social mores, 'Gay is Good' (Sorry, friend, not in this part of the galaxy), so I guess this type of literary exploration coming aboveground is inevitable. In fact, I hear that other zine writers are working on

similar ideas. Fasten your seat belts and pass the Bromo; I think we are in for a rough literary season" (qtd. "Alternative," Fanlore).

One voice of outcry against the possibility of Kirk/Spock belonged to Gerry Downes, who wrote: "[O]ne of the nicest things in *ST* was its portrayal of a love relationship between two men without implying that they were gay. Make no mistake about it, friends, these two men love each other, and make no mistake,.. their feelings do not find expression in sex." The following year, Downes published a 50-page K/S novella called *Alternative: The Epilog to Orion* (Verba 23-24) and become one of the more prolific and well-known K/S authors of the '70s. The next chapter will speculate on what characteristics of the K/S narrative formulation could possibly have outweighed Downes' estimation of "the nicest things."

Throughout the next several decades, the phenomenon heralded by Marchant split into two projects. The first consisted of discussions about the feasibility and canonicity of K/S, a debate which came to be known in charmingly antebellum fashion as the Premise.[4] The second project was the fic. 1976 saw Downes' novella and a smattering of short stories, including a friendly parody of Marchant's fic called "A Time Out of Fragments." A K/S fic was published in the well-respected and primarily gen fanzine *Beyond Antares*, and Niall Kitson suggests that this inclusion acknowledged slash as a legitimate (if eccentric and possibly temporary) limb of the corpus of media fandom. In 1977, Downes published another K/S story in the *ST* fanzine *Mahko Root* #1, and one reviewer noted,

4. Fun science-fiction fact: the narrative arc of *Star Trek: The Original Series* took shape when Isaac Asimov advised Gene Roddenberry to foreground the developing friendship between Kirk and Spock, appeasing both William Shatner, the ostensible star of the show, and fans, who were by far more drawn to the character of Spock. This is one line of continuity between Asimov and gay kissing on the Internet.

"'Dust to Dust' by Downes is the only piece in the zine that hits at the K/S 'relationship' so famous in underground fandom at present" (qtd. "Mahko Root," Fanlore).

Shortly thereafter, the underground movement came up for air: SekWester Con held the first discussion panel on K/S (called "Kirk and Spock: Do They or Don't They?") in May of 1977, and in 1978 the fanzines *Naked Times* and *Thrust* debuted, both devoted entirely to K/S. In the opening editorial of *Naked Times* #1, Della Van Hise writes, "While *Naked Times* did not start out as primarily a K/S zine, that's certainly the way this first issue has turned out—mainly due to the fact that's the majority of material I received. Also, since K/S is still basically a new {and beautiful} trend in fan fiction, its exploration is practically endless" (i).

As it turns out, the exploration that Van Hise cites outlived its newness; it was *actually* endless. The K/S movement acquired ever greater gravity as its mass grew. "Over the past decade," wrote fan scholar Henry Jenkins in 1988, "K/S stories have emerged from the margins of fandom toward numerical dominance over Star Trek fan fiction." He adds, however, that this shift from K/S as one species of kooky adult *ST* fic (see above, re: unicorn) to K/S as an entirely new way of consuming and participating in *ST* fandom "has been met with considerable opposition from more traditional fans" (*FBG* 57). Constance Penley puts it less mildly in *NASA/TREK*: "When the history slash fandom is written... it will also have to be a history of the extreme hostility that many 'regular' *Star Trek* fans have shown toward slashers" (140).

Meanwhile, just as the K/S schism gestated in *ST* fandom—a culture often libidinal and always investigative (see Kitson's "fans had speculated" above)—to be born in 1974 and then spread outward from there, another schism was following the same

model: that between media fandom and science fiction fandom. The relationship had been fraught from the beginning, as discussed—but in 1974, Jacqueline Lichtenberg and Laura Basta, two media fans known only for their work in *Star Trek* fanzines, were nominated for Hugo Awards for best fan writer at the World Science Fiction Convention, a con occurring regularly since 1939. Many science fiction fans outside of media fandom were outraged by the usurpation of honors meant for serious writers. It was insulting enough when the intelligent, forward-thinking, utopian tropes of science fiction were co-opted for the easy and narrow-sighted tropes of domestic fiction—but for a sufficient bulk of voters at the SF world headquarters to celebrate that fiction signaled a dangerous shift in valors. "Some science fiction fans were aghast at the idea of fans writing stories for what they thought of as a second-rate TV show," recalls Joan Marie Verba. "Some were afraid that *Star Trek* fans would distract the World Science Fiction convention from honoring those who wrote original science fiction novels" (16). One can only imagine—with the sci-fi media explosion in the 1980s, William Shatner's *Saturday Night Live* "Get a Life!" sketch, the burgeoning slash presence, etc.—what an affront media fandom continued to be.

Despite the contentions within and without media fandom, it continued to grow into an ever-more vibrant and enthusiastic community. "People wanted to meet each other," Paula Smith recalls. "And oh my God, the telephone bills! I would have $400 and $600 telephone bills! You really had to pay a lot for long distance. You'd call after 11 PM to get the price break. When MCI came in—boom!—we signed up" (Walker). In 1975, Jacqueline Lichtenberg and Sondra Marshak—along with Joan Winston, organizer of the first *ST* convention in 1972—published *Star Trek Lives! Personal Notes and Anecdotes*

through Bantam Books, and "[f]or thousands upon thousands of fans, this was when they became aware that such activity existed, and that they could join in" (Verba xviii). Shortly thereafter, describes Smith, "we had the paper, we had the telephone, we had the go-to meetings, we had the county and statewide and regional meetings."

## Slash as We Know It

Throughout the '70s and '80s, media fandom grew to include other science fiction media—such as *Star Wars* and *Doctor Who*—as well as more mainstream media like *Starsky and Hutch* and *Wiseguy*. It was during this broadening that the term *slash* was coined as a way to refer to same-sex romantic or erotic fanfic in general. Jessica Ross recalls "a non-genre fandom explosion—everything became zineable." She cites *Warped Space* #50, printed in 1983, which featured stories from *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Hill Street Blues*, *Remington Steele*, *Knight Rider*, and *The Fantastic Four* (qtd. Coppa 50-1).

The great fandom Internet migration began in the early nineties, predating many other fandom migrations. "Fans, as a group, were technologically ahead of the curve," notes Francesca Coppa; "if media fandom had expanded its traditional base in science fiction fandom, it still depended on a core group of highly educated, science-oriented women" (53-4). This shift in medium wrought substantial changes—beyond merely the mode of transmission. Fanzines and traditional conventions continued (and continue today), but the membranes between individual fandoms grew elastic. People with access to fandom grew from the relatively exclusive population of women at universities (i.e., women with computers) and their largely homogenous circles of friends to the population of anyone with access to the Internet. As Coppa points out, "some media fans got

interested in comics, some anime fans started writing about celebrities, and some celebrity fan writers began to model their work on that done in media fandom" (56). This was literary diversity, national diversity, ethnic diversity, class diversity[5].

As technology advanced, fandom forums became both more specialized and yet more public and accessible; anyone who Googled "Tony Stark/Pepper Potts" could find a space devoted to that and was less likely (though schisms are plenty) to create her own space. With the increasing ease of publication, the volume of stories accessible to any given fan grew exponentially. This abundance plus its increased visibility led to the creation of centralized spaces; the diffuse mailing lists and fandom-specific websites that displaced zines in the '90s were themselves displaced by a blog format in which individuals, represented by their respective blogs (with each blog's respective title and avatar images), contribute to a community blog (with its own title and avatar images). These contributions are made through posts to which other blog users can reply, and they appear on a feed of posts that is continuously updated. These stories, having been circulated *via* the blog, are then often published to one of two pan-fandom Internet archives: Fanfiction.net and Archive of Our Own. There was a great melting. Everyone gravitates to her own fandoms of choice, and each fandom has participants of greater or lesser importance (important for the quality of her writing or her community-building; or sometimes just angrier and louder), but all the membranes are permeable; trends are cycled through, getting weirder and more experimental all the time; blog communities

5. This is not meant to imply any utopian heterogeneity within fandom, just a broader, messier interpretive community; as with every population, ethnic and class exclusions are enacted through cultural means; see the Fanlore entry on "RaceFail '09."

can be created (or deleted) in a matter of minutes. This is what Coppa calls the beginning of fandom's "postmodern era," continuing into the present (54).

Despite all these changes, some items have persisted. As discussed previously, I joined fandom in the mid-90s—*X-Men*, *X-Files*, *dueSouth*, no *Star Trek* until the 2009 re-envisioning. I never heard the terms "media fandom" or "premise" or read a fanzine until I began my research for the present work. I did, however, hear the term "slash"—and its majority tropes have remained constant in my experience over the last sixteen years, across a hundred fandoms, from TV to comics to anime to celebrities, and they correspond to the tropes, as characterized by fans and scholars alike, in texts from the infancy and adolescence of slash.

## Slash and the Mainstream

In her essay "Queering Popular Culture: Female Spectators and the Appeal of Writing Slash Fan Fiction," Susanne Jung draws together several indisputable points: that visibility of the continuum between homosocial and homosexual is deflected and suppressed in patriarchal society; that women writing about sex is troubling to a culture in which "sexual knowledge has... with the growing split between 'public' and 'domestic' spheres and the subordination of women under the companionate marriage ideal, been the prerogative of men;" that for women to write about sex *for* other women is therefore already transgressive; and that for women to write about gay sex between men for other women seems startling and pathological. Furthermore, the genre's necessary inclusiveness as a folk or amateur art form results in inconsistencies in quality. For all these reasons, the attention paid to slash has been primarily negative or sensational. Even

from scholars, attention has been sociological and not literary, supportive but not flattering.

In the Slate.com article quoted at the beginning of this chapter, David Plotz described fanfiction as "America's literature of obsession" and slash as "the most flamboyant genre and perhaps the weirdest prose in America today"—a literature born, he suggests, from an "obsession with emotional intensity." The language of *obsession* and *flamboyance* and *weirdness* provides some of the kinder commentary that slash fiction has received from mainstream media, and it furthermore points to that gross excess of desire with which fans in general are identified.

Henry Jenkins, a media studies professor at MIT, is one of the founding and primary voices in the field of fan studies, a field that takes as its subject the community of fandom, the practice of fandom and popular mainstream engagement with fandom. He distinguishes *fan* from *consumer* by the longevity of the individual's relationship with a text. For a fan, he suggests, "there's an emotional connection to the text that survives any generation of meaning from it" (*FBG* 25). He emphasizes the fan's ongoing critical participation in the text—but his "emotional connection to the text" gestures as precisely the overabundance of *attentiveness* that results in the stereotype of the pathological fan. The fan watches obsessively, consumes obsessively, attends obsessively. What, on the inside, might be exhaustive critical engagement may appear from the outside as "potentially deviant," "no solid, reliable orientation in the world," "absence of stable identity and connection" and "a perverse attachment that dominates his or her otherwise unrewarding existence" (Jenson 14-15).

Yet, the tropes of the weeping teenage girl at a Fall Out Boy concert and the overweight, costumed comic book nerd at DragonCon are *comfortable* to mainstream media. Rather than good-humored bemusement, the pathologizing of slashers tends far more to distaste, indignation and urgency. Slashers are alternately accused by detractors of maligning the intentions of a text's creators, often injecting filth into a text concerned with purer or higher things; of co-opting images of male homosexuality in exploitative ways without engaging the realities of gay life; of misogyny, due to the overwhelming prevalence of m/m slash and its narrative focus on male characters; and of laziness, relying indolently and greedily on not only structures that are formulaic in the extreme but on *someone else's* fictional creations. In her article "Taking Liberties with *Harry Potter*," published in the *Boston Globe* in 2003, Tracy Mayor offers a sparkling omnibus of these complaints. I quote at length to give a feel for the breadth of her complaints:

> On first read, it might seem illegal, futile, or just plain strange that people spend hours and often months writing stories and novels that appropriate another writer's characters, plot lines and settings.
>
> But fanfic practitioners, who cite as their antecedents everything from James Joyce's "Ulysses" to Michael Cunningham's "The Hours," say their writing pays tribute to Rowling even as they uphold the same kind of populist-editing values that have brought to the culture everything from rap music sampling to "Star Wars" bootleg DVDs that leave annoying characters like Jar-Jar Binks on the cutting-room floor.
>
> Scratch the surface of a few slash sites online, and it doesn't take long to find tales of bestiality, rape, sexual torture, and Weasley twins sodomizing one

> another. This is by no means mainstream fan fiction, it's not even mainstream slash fiction, but it is out there and available to anyone willing to click "yes" when a little warning box pops up on-screen saying, "I am old enough to read this."
>
> No one wants to put words in J.K. Rowling's mouth, but it's safe to assume that when Rowling hails her readers' creativity, she has in mind something other than tales wherein Professor Snape is fellated by the Sorting Hat.
>
> "Ulysses" this isn't. And when James Joyce wrote his 1922 master work, Homer had been dead for 27 centuries. Rowling is a living, breathing, solo artist in the midst of what she and her publishers, and many critics, consider a work of serious artistic merit.
>
> Fan fiction, then, is actually a kind of literary karaoke, with fans taking the words out of the author's mouth as she's still trying to writing them. Harmless, ultimately, but perhaps not the best of manners, either. (Mayor)

Mayor's write-up of slash fiction conveys the proprietary indignation that is perhaps natural for a professional writer to feel over anarchic "populist-editing values"—but more telling is the combination in Mayor's article of prudishness (why else lead with the extremes of sexual fringe) and condescension (the passage that begins with "sexual torture" swerves bitingly into "karaoke" and "harmless"). As a result of these mixed complaints, what is most vibrantly communicated is a powerful, amorphous dislike—a reaction to slash fiction shared by a majority of the mainstream media.

Cintra Wilson—author of "W4M4?," *Out Magazine*'s 2010 piece on slash and professional m/m fiction, a piece more sensitive and open-minded than Mayor's editorial

by orders of magnitude—explains her discomfort with the phenomenon by saying she finds "something self-assassinating and a little bit politically disturbing" in an erotic tradition by and for women that evacuates the female body. (Wilson ends her article by comparing the two slashers to drag queens and offering magnanimously, "If the courage of the gay man inside Alex Beecroft inspires her to live openly and proudly as a heterosexual Christian wife —who are we to judge?") In his essay "Uttering the Absurd, Revaluing the Abject: Femininity and the Disavowal of Homosexuality in Transnational Boys' Love Manga," Neal Akatsuka similarly hedges his unease; he defends slash fiction on the basis of its potential to disturb sexual binarisms, but he notes the troubling aspects of slash that replace the queer subject with what Neal Akatsuka calls "an aesthetic to be consumed... a commoditized sign" (172).

Even Constance Penley, eloquent ethnographer of the slash community, presents a slasher who is in some way broken, who responds critically and recuperatively to the society that has broken her but who, through no fault of her own, is unable to conceptualize of her own sexual self in terms of her biological sex. She asks, "Why are women fans so alienated from their own bodies that they can write erotic fantasies only in relation to a nonfemale body?" (125). Penley answers the question by suggesting that "the bodies from which these women are alienated are twentieth-century women's bodies: bodies that are a legal, moral, and religious battleground" (126). She later adds, "fans... feel a sense of solidarity with [gay men] insofar as gay men also inhabit bodies that are a

legal, moral, and religious battleground" (130).[6] And Penley's diagnosis of sexual dysfunction in the practice of slash fiction is not the most insulting reading of the slash supertext to come out of fan scholarship; Donald Symons—co-author with Catherine Salmon of *Warrior Lovers: Erotic Fiction, Evolution and Female Sexuality* (2003)—recalls his impressions of slash: "Considered strictly as fiction, I found them pretty tedious (although some were very well written). Considered as clues to women's mating psychology, however, I found them riveting" (3).

Aside from the aesthetic and political concerns that separate slash fandom from much of the mainstream, there are practical concerns of legality, gestured to by Tracy Mayor. As fan theorist Abigail Derecho explains, "Writing fan fiction is commonly regarded by copyright holders (the rights to films and television shows are held, in most cases, by large media corporations) as a violation of Title 17, and many moderators and administrators of fan fiction sites have received warnings or cease-and-desist letters from studio lawyers demanding that content be removed from the Internet" (72). To date, there has been no actual legal prosecution (rarely do the individuals within fandom have funds worth suing for), but the threat is usually enough. One of the slashers mentioned in the present work was outed to her employer and summarily fired—possibly because her employer presumed she was a pervert but possibly because it wasn't worth the risk of affiliating with a populist-editor.

Ultimately, the best refuge of members of slash fandom—for all the visibility of its practices—is in pseudonymous anonymity and secrecy. In an ethnography of *Star*

6. Both Wilson and Penley assume a process by which the slasher inhabits the subject position of gay man for erotic pleasure—even though, as is often reproachfully cited, the archetypical slash protagonist is not gay but is *gay for* the male protagonist with which he is paired.

*Trek* fandom conducted in the late 1980s, even before slash found its home in the ostensibly anonymous but wide-open spaces of the Internet, Camille Bacon-Smith explains:

> I have not included excerpts depicting the female writers' version of male-male sex because many community members have asked me to exercise discretion in quoting their material. Also, I must consider that the characters depicted do not belong to those writers but to commercial providers who practice an uneasy tolerance for the clandestine form at best, and then only as long as it remains hidden. (228-29)

Similarly, the Terms of Service page for Fanlore.org, a pan-fandom wiki affiliated with the Organization for Transformative Works, stipulates: "Our default assumption is that identity exposure is unwanted. If we discover that someone's identity has been exposed, the page will be reverted, and the history removed." Alex Beecroft, the slasher who granted an interview to Cintra Wilson of *OUT Magazine*, is an exception, affiliating her name in print with her literary proclivities—but even she doesn't reveal her slash pseudonym.

To all this, what can Beecroft reply? She tells Wilson: "There's quite a bit of controversy, because straight women 'shouldn't' write this stuff. If I don't write about women, I'm a 'misogynist.' If I'm writing gay porn, I'm oppressing gay men, because I'm doing to gay men what men do to lesbians. That's wrong. It's not like that." Beecroft is a religiously devout middle-aged Englishwoman with a husband and two children, a sci-fi/fantasy fan who studied Literature and Philosophy at Cambridge. She fits the slash demographic. She says, "It's complicated. People are complicated."

# CHAPTER 3

## "ULYSSES" THIS ISN'T

> And he'd shown him. Telepathic or not, he'd seen it. Mouth, hands, and body had done away with voices, words, and names. Nothing sacred, nothing elegant or artistic or magical. Want. Need. Enchanting? Hell no. . . . The body inside his was like his own, using every unconscious movement to feel more skin on skin, engorging in the moment. And the walls were dingy, and the fluorescent glow from the window across from their apartment made them dingier, and every night afterwards, they'd shared a smoke —and it had felt like love, of a sort.
>
> —Lise, "Nameless, Now and Then"

Regarding the film *The Perfect Storm* (2000) starring George Clooney, my friend and fellow fan Pebblin once remarked, "It's got, like, five guys in it, though. If it's not slashy. . . there's something wrong" (personal correspondence, April 2001). Her comment was in jest and pointed more to the excesses of her slash buddies (like me), but it presents the question: what *does* make something slashy? For the most part, this is not a question about canon—since one portion of the creative play of fanfiction is recasting characters in new roles, new lights—but certain media and character groups are certainly more attractive to slash fandom, and the question of which and why (why so much more Qui-Gon/Obi-Wan than Luke/Han?) is instructive.

This chapter intends to outline the inferential markers of the slash genre, breaking those markers into their semantic and syntactic operators. The semantic features will include the recurring character types and climates of slash, and the syntactic features will include the recurring narrative formations in which those types/climates are deployed.

This schematization of the slash supertext is both citation and conjecture; I pull from characterizations by fan scholars, individual slash texts and psychoanalytic theory, but I also dispute characterizations by fan scholars and present my own convictions drawn from own experiences as a slasher and from what I see as a continuum between the posited supertext and its original *Star Trek* source material.

This chapter furthermore gestures at a relationship between the slash supertext and the genre's producing/consuming community—though it is always dicey to propose that any person wants *x* for *y* reason, even reflexively. For reasons hinted at in the previous chapter, I am leery of seeming to recapitulate the offenses of previous fan scholars. In her 2006 essay "The Toy Soldiers from Leeds: the Slash Palimpsest"—the most valuable item of slash theory since Henry Jenkins' seminal (if flawed) treatment in *Textual Poachers*—Mafalda Stasi calls the slash text "a strong, valuable text" at odds with its popular reception as "a simple, formulaic, and naïve bunch of scribblings" (118; 129). Her essay (and her theory of slash as a virtual palimpsest) is scattered with a dozen half-formed lines of inquiry—but only due to the urgency that underlies the essay, the frustration with slash scholarship that mirrors mine. "Once individual slash texts are analyzed on their own terms and merits," she writes, "we can overcome aprioristic, limiting value judgments, and we can move beyond a binary, hierarchical view of texts toward a systemic, intertextual one" (118). The hope of the present chapter is to provide some guidance in identifying those terms and merits.

## Semantics

The site of complexity in the slash supertext is in character movement, so the relevant semantic objects that populate slash are the positions of characters relative to each other and the outside world. These include pairings of characters who are qualitatively opposed, at least one of whom is nearly always straight, and who are removed to varying degrees from a wider population.

The list of slash pairings of complementary opposites is endless: from *X-Men*, responsible and obedient Cyclops, violently independent Wolverine; from *Xena: Warrior Princess*, experienced and bellicose Xena, naïve and pacifistic Gabrielle; from *Inception*, analytical and reliable Arthur, imaginative and charismatic Eames. This last example will allow me to make the point that while pop literature in general tends to function through oppositional characters, slash is invested in drawing out and foregrounding these oppositions. Arthur and Eames share very little isolated screen time in the movie *Inception*, but the pairing inspired a massive following; Archive Of Our Own alone hosts 770 Arthur/Eames stories, and Fanfiction.net has over 500 more. The characters weren't co-protagonists written as foils to each other, whose proximity inspired fanfiction; it was the oppositional qualities themselves that made the characters attractive as a slash pairing.

Oppositional pairing is central to the slash syntax because it increases the *obstruction* of the sexual or romantic liaison, and the process of breaking through

obstruction is the meat and substance of the story.[7] In her essay "Intimatopia: Genre Intersections Between Slash and the Mainstream," Elizabeth Woledge cites the correlation between difference and the pay-off of intimate contact. "[F]ar from erasing difference," she writes, "fannish texts tend to highlight them. . . . The greater the divide, the more intense the intimacy that must transcend it" (109). Henry Jenkins notes similarly, "the barriers between men must be intensified to increase the drama of their shattering" (*TP* 205).

The importance of interstitial density is one reason, perhaps, why *heterosexuality* is so often the rule in slash pairings. It's true that fanfic must begin at its canon and that popular media is governed by normative heterosexuality, but it's also true, as Antonia Levi notes in her introduction to *Boys' Love Manga*, that "[d]espite its subject matter, slash tends to be far more explicitly heterosexual in its assumptions and in the world it portrays" (4). She points out that in Japan both commercial and amateur *yaoi*—male homosexual erotica written primarily by women—has "attracted a surprising number of gay male fans" (3), where slash remains almost entirely the realm of women; she suggests that "one significant difference may well be the greater lability [in *yaoi*] of gender and sex... That lability is an accepted part of Japanese fictional understandings and, in boys' love, this often leads to depictions of fictional worlds in which same-sex relationships and gender shifting are presented as givens without explanation or excuse" (3-4). The oft-maligned trope of slashing otherwise characters who are otherwise heterosexual (I'm not gay, I'm just gay for *you*) puts stress on the obstacles between the two figures, raising the

7. My position is that, although many slash fics are only sex scenes or snapshots, these operate citationally with respect to the process of breaking through obstruction, and that these citations are manifest in the language, imagery and self-referential markers of those works.

emotional stakes and making momentous the achievement of intimacy.[8] The "lability of sex and gender" is missing from slash because the resistance to or unfeasibility of the homosexual encounter is a key element of the rhetorical structure of slash; the cultural strictures against same-sex union provide dilatory space.

For this reason, Henry Jenkins suggests that homophobia is often an obstacle to intimacy in slash fic—and while it does occasionally appear as one of any number of reasons why either of the paired characters needs to *think for a long time* about what is happening (same-sex desire), homophobia is not a necessary component, nor a semantic object of the genre. Homophobia wasn't a given in the utopian spaces of science fiction, and now, two decades after Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* was published, it isn't a given in the mind of the slash protagonist. Often in lieu of homophobia there is a sort of cognitive dissonance—the violence and queasiness of transitioning from one sphere of possibilities, one relational mode, to another. In her book *Enterprising Women*, Camille Bacon-Smith makes a fascinating observation about the television medium that has been central to much of slash fandom:

> On television, characters move and interact in a space defined by the twelve- or nineteen- or twenty-five-inch diagonal of the television screen. Directors and editors focus the viewer's attention on the expressive code written on the body with the manipulation of close-up and long shot, and point of view of the camera....but setting a scene as simple as two or more characters in conversation so that viewers can correctly interpret it presents a problem in logistics. If the

8. It also has the effect of distancing the slash event from a standardized (thus potentially impersonal) genital desire—the larger project of intimacy requires that the desire between paired characters be specific and personal.

> figures are set far enough back in the scene to allow for representation of appropriate proxemics for friends who are not sexual intimates or engaged in aggressive power relationships, the viewer cannot see the emotions projected through the actors' facial gestures. When the actors are shot in sufficient close-up for the viewer to read facial expressions clearly, they cannot maneuver appropriate social distances and still look at each other while they are speaking. . . . So, actors portraying friends consistently break into each other's spheres of intimate space. (232-33)

That is, incongruous physical intimacy is a large component of the source texts that attracted many slashers throughout the ‘70s and ‘80s. Regardless of its intent, the technical work-around endemic to television produces in its visual effect a torque between the text of casual friendship (or enmity) and the *mise en scène* of physical desire. This is the same torque produced in the slash text when an erotic charge overlays the previous relational mode of buddy or nemesis. The distinction I hope to draw here—between the dissonance of co-stars invading each other’s intimate space and homophobia—is that the blockages to intimacy in the slash text are not generally ideological; they are blockages made of privacy. They are erected by presumptions of what does and doesn’t happen.

Another semantic feature of the slash text is the relationship of the paired characters to the wider society. Francesca Coppa observes that in the fandoms that joined *Star Trek* during the 1970s and onward, one common theme was a setting or situation that created distance between the paired characters and the larger population, usually for reasons of occupation. These characters “were as isolated from mainstream society and

dependent on each other as a result of their occupations as Kirk and Spock were—more so, in fact" (49). Woledge cites the slash text's habit of "isolating [paired] characters alone on alien planets or in historical or futuristic eras, thus creating an intimate bond between the two" (101). The degree of removal varies greatly—in *Stargate: Atlantis*, John and Rodney are stationed on a distant planet; in *Sports Night*, the distance between news anchors Dan and Casey and the people on the other side of the camera is only psychological space. This distance has a double effect—it creates intimacy, as Woledge suggests, and it also reveals that in the exigencies of the paired characters there is a sameness that hides beneath the oppositional qualities. This resting sameness lays the foundation for the burgeoning mutual knowledge between paired characters that is the action of the slash text.

Also fundamental to that action is the recurring theme of psychic connectivity. Depending on the fandom, this is literal psychic connection, and as Woledge notes, "slash fiction often borrows from sources such as *Star Trek*, *The Sentinel*, and *Highlander* where existing canonical material provides the possibility for psychic oneness" (103). (This is the answer, by the way, to the earlier question about why far more Qui-Gon/Obi-Wan exists than Han/Luke.) This semantic element deploys even outside of science fiction and fantasy fandoms. Camille Bacon-Smith observes, "Source products that do not offer a telepathic hero likewise receive the mind meld treatment, with references to 'almost telepathic' rapport" (231). That is, even in the absence of the diegetic machinery for actual psychic contact, emphasis is placed on extra-sensory insight between the paired characters. This manifests either poetically, as in the epigraph to this chapter, or literally, as a manifestation of the character's perceptiveness.

## Syntax

In “This Day to the Ending of the World,” a *Sherlock Holmes* story by Candle-Beck—far from the purview of Vulcan mindmelds and Pensieves and Jedi wavelengths—both Holmes and Watson are characterized as extremely *aware*. Holmes’ gift for observation is canonically essential to his character, but in Candle-Beck’s story the description of Holmes arrives after and mirrors an earlier description of Watson. Candle-Beck writes:

> [Watson] watched the fights with a clinical mien, sizing up each man like a labeled specimen: *bricklayer, two metres, fifteen stone*. He read old broken bones and torn muscles in limps, a folded arm kept protectively close to the chest. He could see damning fear as clear as a stripe of crimson paint on the man's face.

Several thousand words later, Watson observes:

> Holmes was possibly the smartest man who'd ever lived. Every riddle, every puzzle, every vanished soul in this big grey city--Holmes could solve them all. He could look at a man and at once see his sins and deceptions, the spidery black things that scratched inside his heart. There were some people who said Sherlock Holmes could read minds, but Watson knew that couldn't be true.

In their status as *distinctively* perceptive, Holmes and Watson are both like each other and unlike other people. Their superficial qualities are opposed—Holmes is manic, caustic, direct to the point of rudeness, and Watson is polite, compassionate and reserved. They are also isolated from the larger society in distinct ways. Holmes’ estrangement is out loud: he is estranged by his excessive qualities (excessive energy, excessive intelligence)

and his transgressive behavior. Watson, who is recovering—or trying to recover—from the trauma of his service in the Second Anglo-Afghan War, is quietly, secretly estranged:

> Times changed and moustaches came into vogue, and Watson dutifully followed the trend, found it rather suited him and determined to keep his face just so until prevailing winds stirred him elsewhere. He developed a way of smiling that made people stutter and lose their train of thought, blinking helplessly fast like fish on dry land. It was the strangest weapon Watson had ever employed.
>
> For the most part he managed well enough. It was perhaps still a role that he was playing, but it fit him like a second skin by now. There was still an unfathomable sadness in the amorphous thing commonly known as his soul, a sunken pit that infuriated him as much as it hurt because it wasn't *physical*, so how could he be expected to fix it? Merely keeping it off his face was a near-herculean task.
>
> Every aspect of his life appeared quite ideal from the outside. Watson marvelled at that, thinking it beyond credulity that other people might envy him.

For the first three thousand words of the story, there is no dialogue—only Watson's solemn, melodious inner monologue. The first line spoken by someone else is Holmes', and it's a shock. The narration changes from the long, formal, poetic lines of Watson's reflections to short, direct lines of immediate action dominated by dialogue. *Looking* is eroticized—Holmes "looked at Watson and it felt like a physical touch, making Watson shiver for the barest of moments." When Watson "glanced at Holmes and found the detective staring at him, frank and unashamedly dissecting. . . Watson's skin tightened, a hot scratchy feel in his stomach." There is, furthermore, a change in the power dynamic.

Watson, who in the first half of the story inhabits a position of power, remote over the earth, peddling his demeanor to all those folks who don't understand, is made to evade:

> Watson cleared his throat, and crossed to the bar, the liquor shining like muted firelight, a beacon. Holmes was still watching him, studying, and it made Watson overly conscious of his movements, the angle at which he held his shoulders.
>
> They drank to the queen, and then Holmes said, "Tell me your name."
>
> Watson went still, watchful. "John Watson."
>
> "Rather pedestrian, if I may be frank," Holmes said, but Watson didn't feel its sting.
>
> "Is there some benefit to ostentation?"
>
> Holmes flashed a smile. "I've never found it so. Why do you use that cane?"
>
> "It. It is the style-"
>
> "Nonsense. It's your back, yes? You sit in a manner particular to men who have been shot from behind, a federation in whose ranks I'll surely join you before long, but no matter--what is the story you do not tell people?"
>
> Watson was taken aback, his hand throttled around his glass, throat feeling slick. "That part of my life is behind me, sir. I do not squander my time in unhappy remembrance."
>
> Holmes snorted. "A valiant effort, I'm sure."

"It is as it is," Watson said, stiff wires running through his voice and bones. He yawned suddenly, his face stretching out. "Pray forgive me, Mister Holmes, I am not fit company at this hour."

"Yes, well, no man is without flaw." Holmes kept looking at him. It made Watson aware of every centimeter of visible skin. "You haven't answered my question, sir."

"No," Watson agreed. "It was nothing that concerns you, if I'm recollecting accurately."

"My dear Doctor Watson," Holmes said, leaning forward with a conspiratorial grin playing at the corners of his mouth again. "I ought to be the judge of that, don't you think?"

They were not friends at the end of that night, but they were far away from strangers. An amiable tension grew between them as they waited together, sitting a dozen paces apart in slippery silk chairs, and they exchanged quick barbs on the state of Watson's wrinkled coat, the quality of Holmes's tobacco. Holmes deftly extracted Watson's general opinion on politics and religion and Watson recognised what he was doing, acceded to it without remark. It felt like a small concession, something he could easily afford to give the man. Watson rubbed his knuckles across his chin, watching Holmes watching him.

The story's resolution places equal emphasis on the sexual tension between the two protagonists and the extent to which Watson has shuttered himself from the world. The twin tensions in Candle-Beck's story are the physical attraction between the paired

characters and Watson's alienation: and they are both resolved through sexual intimacy with Sherlock Holmes.

> "You are a great deal more clever than you let on," Holmes told him. "You are faultlessly polite because you do not respect most of the people by whom you are surrounded. You travel confidently at every level of society. You make money off the nobility and the scrabbling masses with equal dexterity. You have put twenty perfect stitches into my head, which I did not even feel. And when I wished to find you, I found that you had been looking for me."
>
> The air was gone from Watson's lungs, and for a moment he could only stare. Holmes watched him with expert attention, and Watson thought how easily he could reach out, put a hand on Holmes's side, the smallest drag to bring their bodies together. He understood with painful clarity that Holmes would allow it; Holmes wanted it too.

At the end of the story, deep perception converges with erotic awareness, and once the sexual excitement is narratively explicit (not just "amiable tension" or a sensation in the skin but a directly sexual image: "to bring their bodies together"), the deep knowledge becomes mutual: Watson's "painful clarity" and Holmes' "expert attention."

"This Day to the Ending of the World" employs all the semantic features of the slash supertext—complementary opposites, alienation, sexual tension, non-vocal understanding and a heavy emphasis on the senses. It is populated by beautiful prose, startling imagery, things to be considered regarding war and citizenship ("This was his life for the moment. This was the duty a man owed to his country, his own heart.")—but it also follows the generic syntactical formula of denial, evasion, invasion and release. So

doing, it offers a mimetic experience of the movement from Watson's nihilistic lostness to a position of open, active desire.

Henry Jenkins breaks the syntactical formula of the slash supertext into four steps:

1. The exposition of "an ideal partnership" that is "impeded by certain barriers to full communication" (*TP* 206). Id est, the world as it is. The configuration is workable but not satisfying. The alienation is manifest.
2. What Jenkins calls the "moment of maximum distrust" (211). Something has appeared or changed which challenges the status quo, which is bleak but familiar. Reacting against risk, the subject withdraws.
3. The "moment of confession" when "either verbally or physically one man finds a way to communicate to the other the 'unspeakable' desires" (214). Intrusion—this is the moment of shock.
4. The purified contact of "physical release" (215). Communication has moved beyond the verbal, and "the barriers between self and other can readily be transcended." In these scenes, Jenkins points out, "descriptions create a sense of absolute revelation through sexual sharing" (217).

Jenkins frames this movement in terms of communication, as does Constance Penley, who writes, "Many slash stories relegate the 'action' to the background to ensure the tightest possible focus on the two men undergoing this painful yet liberatory process of self-discovery and learning to communicate their feelings" (129). Neither of these readings, however, really addresses the fact that the supposed "crisis in communication" central to the slash supertext is resolved through a *loss* of communication (*TP* 206). If the line of this utopic fantasy begins with business as usual, then moves with dissatisfaction

*away* from it toward danger, “psychic oneness” and “absolute revelation,” it would seem to express not a concern with the resuscitation of communication—the social mores that prevent communication and thereby block intimacy—but an anxiety about what communication can accomplish. As chatty as Holmes is, our hero Watson is not capable of breaking through his shellshock verbally; what he says out loud is filtered through a self that is not *capable of articulating* his trauma. Non-verbally, however, he can make contact.

> "I think that you and I might do very well together, Watson," Holmes confided, almost a whisper. "And, as it happens, I am never wrong."
>
> Without thought, Watson wrapped his fingers around Holmes's arm, saw Holmes's eyes widen, his lips curving on a smile. Watson swayed forward, lowering his eyes and breathing shallowly through his mouth. Holmes's hands came up to curl in the fabric of Watson's dressing gown.
>
> "Ah, yes," Holmes said. "There was one other thing." . . . .
>
> Holmes twisted under Watson's hands, climbed into his lap and bore him down to the rug, leaned over him like an angel made of coal and snow. Holmes touched his thumb to Watson's mouth, told him with something strangely akin to sorrow, "You will not leave my mind, Doctor."
>
> Watson bent his head up and kissed him, a simpler way to say, *yes i know*.
>
> Holmes sank down into him, pressed Watson down so heavily he could not tell which pounding heart was his.

The syntax of the slash supertext can be read as a crisis of communication, as Jenkins and Penley suggest, but the crisis ends not with the recuperation of communication but with

its annulment. The centrality of psychic connectivity in slash enables a fantasy of human contact that doesn't rely on verbal impurities.

We find this fantasy recapitulated at the end of a *Star Trek XI* story by Screamlet propitiously titled "Communication:"

> There were no soft parts on Spock's torso, not really, so Kirk settled for one hand on his spine and one above the heart, significantly warmer to the touch.
>
> "You're disappointed," Kirk said... "For fuck's sake, I thought you were good with languages." Kirk slid up Spock's body and talked directly into his face. "Read between the lines, Spock. We can talk to each other whenever we want. That's what this is, isn't it? And it won't be fucked up by your perfect syntax and my filthy mouth. An open connection, am I right?"
>
> Kirk saw Spock swallow and nod, and then saw a hand approach. He thought it would be for a mind meld and closed his eyes, bracing himself, but opened them when Spock's thumb and forefinger began tracing over the curves of his lips and the faint stubble framing his upper lip.
>
> "You think my mouth is perfect —you fucking sap," he grinned. "What am I thinking?"
>
> Spock's free hand went to the back of Kirk's neck and pulled him in for a kiss that shut Kirk's verbal thoughts down completely. They noted the same emotion in themselves and in the other: relief.

The relief that Kirk and Spock feel in "Communication" is for having followed the formulaic movement from the antagonism of opposing characteristics (Spock as formal, anti-social and laconic; Kirk as informal, sociable and manically chatty) through secret

affinities to the "open connection" that "won't be fucked up by your perfect syntax and my filthy mouth"—a post-lingual, post-signifier, post-*miscommunication* communication.

## Slash and the Enigmatic Signifier

In Screamlet's story, as in Candle-Beck's, the focus is on making contact—not, as Constance Penley argues, "learning to overcome the conditioning that prevents them from expressing their feelings," and certainly not, as Henry Jenkins suggests, "an explicit critique of traditional masculinity" (Penley 129; *TP* 219). And if we roll the clock back 35 years in Screamlet's fandom, to the first of its kind, we see much the same theme playing out in the semiotics of the hand-drawn illustration that accompanied Diane Marchant's "A Fragment Out of Time" (Figure 1).

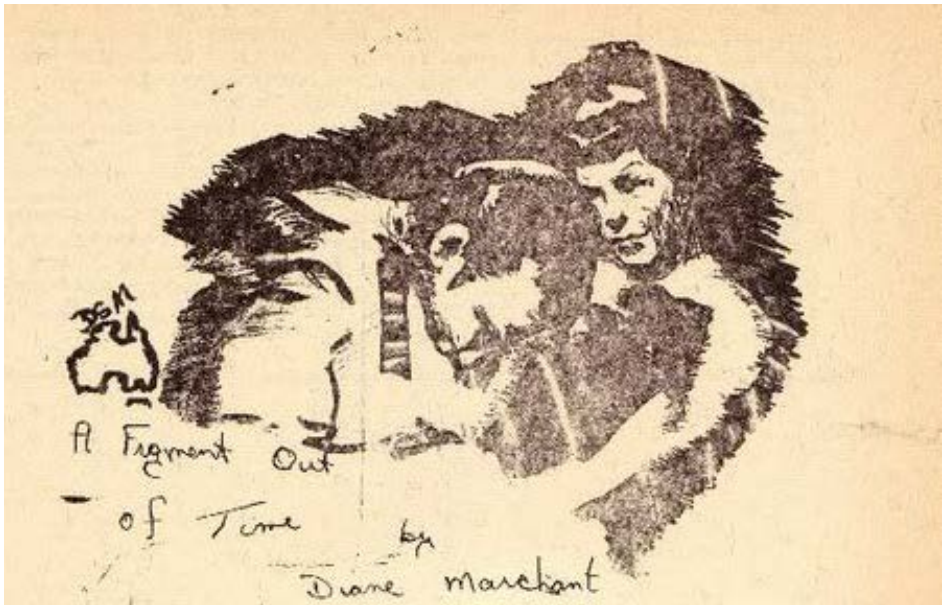


Figure 1: "A Fragment Out of Time," Diane Marchant, Kirk/Spock: University of Iowa, Hoover Collection (2010)

In the black-and-white sketch, Spock, in the background, looks out from within a jagged, shadowy heart shape at Captain Kirk, whose contiguity with the white space on the page places him in front of or outside of the heart. Kirk bows forward, chin tucked, eyes lowered, forehead overlapping with Spock's chest and cheek. Their positions relative to the heart place them in exile from each other, but the white space of Spock's arm leads obscurely into the undifferentiated white space of Kirk's middle. Kirk's is a posture of vulnerability and embarrassment, while Spock's is a posture of attentiveness and acceptance. Marchant's illustration contains the features that continue to dominate slash fiction: the theatre of the heart, the isolation that is the primary cause for concern, the blending into one another, the obstacles to intimacy in the averted gaze, and the compensatory *being seen*.

I suggested in the previous chapter that we consider the question of Gerry Downes. She denounced K/S in 1975 and shortly thereafter produced the first slash novella. What imaginative space did she find there that caused her to change her mind? In the penning of "Alternative: Epilog to Orion," Downes seems to have found a vision of the limits of subjectivity finally overcome: "Their touching brought them closer here than any kisses of the flesh could ever hope to bring them, for they were truly blending now, merging soft and changing as each unique and separate mind became also the other, repatterned, linked, bonded in completed knowing" (qtd. *TP* 216).

In all these constituent works, the inferential markers of slash tell a story about getting through or around the boundaries of the self. If genres operate through gravity toward certain concerns, then the genre of slash betrays anxiety about the difficulty or impossibility of making contact. In the Lacanian psychoanalytic account of coming into

being, this anxiety is intimately tied to verbal communication. As we surface from primordial pre-linguistic egos into the world of other people, we become aware of the insufficiency of language to contain the self—think of trying to touch two spheres together at more than a single point. Since identity is relational, this inexpressibility is felt as an inability to achieve cohesion and self-knowledge, which in turn is felt as incompleteness. “Relationality,” Leo Bersani argues, "is grounded in antagonism and misapprehension" and the protagonist self is featured "as alienated and/or unrecognizable" (110). The subject transposes the sum of its supposedly absent parts onto other persons, who become the "enigmatic signifier imagined to be in possession of, and to be willfully withholding, the secret of our being." The desire for intimacy that is central to the slash supertext arises from the "fascination with the secrets of the other as *our* secrets" (92). The goal is "a private, exclusionary oval" in which the self can be transmitted and, in the process, felt; the orgasm towards which the slash fic works is that "fantasied fullness of being from which our entry into language severed us" (33; 54). The movement in this account follows Jenkins’ breakdown of the slash syntax: “in a climate of distrust, “barriers to full communication” are broken through by a protagonist who finds a way “either verbally or physically. . . to communicate to the other the ‘unspeakable’ desires,” an act which leads to “absolute revelation.” This is the fantasy played out in the slash supertext, but has been reiterated thousands of thousands of times since 1974.

I argued in the first chapter, however, that genre theory is in general more useful than psychoanalytic theory precisely because genre allows for intervention and variation. In the systems of genre theory, the supertext is a critical tool and not a drug.

## Love, of a Sort

In order to explore the possibilities within the slash supertext and the slash community, it is useful to draw from the concept of *psychological visibility*, a concept employed—and introduced to me—by Jacqueline Lichtenberg, the primary author of the *ST* fandom manifesto *Star Trek Lives!*, published in 1975, the year after Machant's story, the year before Downes' story. I quote Lichtenberg's explication of psychological visibility at length here because our reading of the slash supertext—our explication of the genre, our whole mission—depends entirely on understanding this concept, which is its heart. Lichtenberg writes:

> The concept of "psychological visibility" is the idea that each of us needs the pleasure of seeing and being seen, understanding and being understood—being mentally visible and correctly perceived by someone—and capable of perceiving someone else—on as many levels and as deeply as possible.
>
> We enjoy psychological visibility even when it is partial—some quick, correct insight into our behavior even by a stranger, or some insight of our own even into a stranger.
>
> But what we crave is a deeper, more profound seeing and being seen. We long to be known for what we really are, underneath the faces behind which we sometimes try to hide from the world—and even from ourselves. We frequently fear being known too well, but also we want it, and even need it.
>
> Being perceived on the deepest level is like looking into a mirror which reflects not one's surface but one's soul—the core essence of the self which even the self can't normally view directly. It is the face of the soul, the inner,

> psychological face, which becomes visible in the mirror of another person's reactions to one's self. (73-74)

A few pages later, the description of the subject's position toward this visibility takes on distinctly sexual overtones. Lichtenberg's mention of Spock is due to the fact that the entire concept arises in her explication of the appeal of Spock to *ST* fandom.[9]

> Our most intensely felt reactions are buried deep inside, where nobody is allowed to see: our moments of excruciating embarrassment, our flashes of illicit desire, our inner battles, both won and lost, in the privacy of our own minds—these we might even be willing to reveal to Spock, but even if we were not entirely willing, he might be able to see them. That might be terrifying. But it would also be a pleasure (76).

Lichtenberg's description of the desire for psychological visibility resonates loudly with Bersani's. The incompleteness felt by the subject as the absence of its phantasmatic "what we really are" becomes a desire to make contact, ultimately so that the subject can know itself. Contact leads to absolute revelation—the deep knowing of the slash fanfiction climax—and that revelation is a consolidation, at last, of "the core essence of the self which even the self can't normally view." The great manifest different between Bersani's description and Lichtenberg's, however, is that where Bersani focuses entirely on the appetitive intensity inside that "private, exclusionary oval," Lichtenberg emphasizes gradients of visibility and exchange.

---

9. The whole history of slash is hidden here, I suspect. Lichtenberg recalls: "The devastating, unprecedented response to the character of Spock went beyond all bounds, beyond anything anyone could have expected, almost beyond anything anyone could be expected to explain" (71).

What we crave, Lichtenberg suggest, is “deeper” contact—the height of which is contact on “the deepest level”—but she also suggests that we enjoy “some quick, correct insight into our behavior even by a stranger, or some insight of our own even into a stranger.” Furthermore, there is satisfaction—proximal to that ultimate consolidation and transmission of the self—in being “correctly perceived by someone—and capable of perceiving someone else—on as many levels and as deeply *as possible*” (emphasis mine). Bersani’s is a picture of bleak hunger forever, where Lichtenberg’s is a wistful picture of what comes in piecemeal, from a variety of sources, even strangers, to whatever extent we can attain it.

Through the painful process outline in the previous chapter, science fiction fandom produced an enclave of exploratory, communal, non-commercial literature far from the purview of the male-dominated mainstream; within this enclave of zine-writers, pathologized as fans and amateurs rather than creators, slash fiction was born. In short, slash is an extension of science fiction—or a genre arising from science fiction. "K/S was the first slash pairing,” writes Constance Penley, “and it dominated the field for many years.... [T]he popularity and success of SF slash are due to the range and complexity of discourses that are possible in a genre that could be described as romantic pornography radically shaped and reworked by the themes and tropes of science fiction" (102). She posits the question: "because this discourse is so imbued with utopian longings, it also begs a reconsideration of the role and value of utopian thinking, especially when this form of popular argument is carried out in and through a mass-culture product, and by the relatively disempowered" (124-5).

Penley doesn't specify what those discourses might be or what the nature of pornography "radically shaped" by science fiction is, but when we dial in on the themes of the parent literatures, the generic concerns of slash begin to take shape. The slash supertext emerges when a genre as intensely concerned with subject-other configurations as erotica combines with the sociological and utopian concerns of science fiction. It may be that the orientation toward *process* in Jacqueline Lichtenberg's configuration is central to the undertaking of the slash genre. The primacy of the sex act in slash emphasizes the transience of absolute unity between bodies—the *jouissance* of orgasm—but the hunger toward breaking into someone, being broken into, remains and is reanimated with every telling of the supertext. Slash tells the same story of obstacles and completeness with thousands of different characters and different pairings, and it does so *via* an erotic exchange between the individual author and thousands of different anonymous consumers. Perfect contact is a strawman, but the mimetic experience of perfect contact—the desire for that experience which is the motive force of the genre—is an opportunity to register ourselves on that sliding scale of being "correctly perceived by someone—and capable of perceiving someone else." Multiple and temporary but abundant—inexhaustible.

In his book *Film/Genre*, Rick Altman notes many difficulties inherent to a study of discourse—several of which I have summarized—but he also emphasizes that the worth of such a study is precisely the site of difficulty. As with genre in general and slash fiction specifically, the pleasure comes from *tension*. He observes, "Where the theory of generic reception requires texts whose genres are immediately and transparently recognizable, the most interesting texts . . . are complex, mobile and mysterious. Where

Linnaeus' scientific binomial nomenclature model assumes pure specimens, genre history offers crossbreeds and mutants" (16). In the present work, I have allowed myself the acts of force necessary to draw together the semantic and syntactic generic features of slash because I know that the genre's constituent works interact dialectically with the genre (which is not to suggest that all those works are progressive or even well done). My favorite example of Altman's "crossbreeds and mutants" is the work of Helen, whose John/Rodney *Stargate Atlantis* fic "The Top of the List" provides a preface to the present work.

Helen's *Harry Potter* fic "Close Enough" is a post-series Ron/Harry story set after the war with Voldemort. This story follows the narrative concerns of the slash supertext: Harry is in love with Ron, but he can't tell Ron, so he just has sex with men who *look* like Ron while continuing to be platonic best friends with Ron; this works fine until Ron figures it out. In "Close Enough," however, the contact comes from familiarity, with sex playing one private component of that familiarity. In Helen's work, sex always *precedes* intimacy, rearranging the order of Henry Jenkins' steps into 1, 4, 2 and 3; the perfect contact happens in the form of conversation, later. Sex occurs as a piecemeal utterance that is different from and therefore supplementary to everyday exchange, which is also comprised of piecemeal utterances. It never occurs as a wholesale alternative to verbal communication. Like all paired characters in the slash supertext, Helen's characters are shut away from their colleagues in ways that *only* physical intimacy can address; like Spock, they are alienated by desires that fail to corroborate their public personas, but unlike the rhapsodic post-verbal melding of many slash stories, the physical intimacy in

Helen's work is (initially) the exposition of those desires and (ultimately) the ritual that follows an articulated acceptance of those desires.

Throughout “Close Enough,” Ron and Harry have been fucking but were unable to talk about it, neither wanting to put too much on the line. Ron and Harry are all grown up; they are veterans. In this scene, they have finally talked, after a brush with death drove home the abiding urgency of the present. She writes:

> "No, I—" Harry smiled, a little crookedly. "I was going to apologize. I waited for you, after, and I was going to take you out to dinner and—"
>
> "Someplace nice—"
>
> "Right—"
>
> "Fucking liar," Ron said, cheerfully, as Harry brushed a careful kiss against his jaw. "You were going to cheap out and take me for fish and chips—"
>
> "No, I wasn't," Harry protested, and then his eyes met Ron's and he laughed, a little shamefacedly. "I'm uh. I know it's not how you would have wanted it to be. I'm not exactly—"
>
> "No," Ron said. "You are. It is. It's just right."
>
> Harry was watching him intently, half smiling, and Ron felt his throat tighten a little, wished he could say something that would let Harry know the secret, strange, unfathomable contents of his heart, but in the end he could only touch Harry's face with one hand and repeat, "It's just right."

# REFERENCES

Akatsuka, Neal. “Uttering the Absurd, Revaluing the Abject: Femininity and the Disavowal of Homosexuality in Transnational Boys’ Love Manga.” *Boys’ Love Manga*. Ed. Antonia Levi, Mark McHarry and Dru Pagliassotti. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2009. 159-176. Print.

“Alternative: Epilog to Orion.” Fanlore. Organization for Transformative Works. http://fanlore.org/wiki/Alternative:_The_Epilog_to_Orion. Online.

Altman, Rick. *The American Film Musical*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. Print

Altman, Rick. *Film/Genre*. London: British Film Institute, 1999. Print.

Bacon-Smith, Camille. *Enterprising Women*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991. Print

Bersani, Leo. *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. Print.

Buscombe, Edward. "The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema." *Film Genre Reader III*. Ed. Grant, Barry Keith. 3rd ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003. 12-26. Print.

Burke, Kenneth. *Counter-Statement*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968. Print.

Busse, Kristina and Karen Helleckson. “Introduction: Work in Progress.” *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*. Ed. Kristina Busse and Karen Helleckson. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers. 2006. 5-32. Print.

Candle-Beck. “This Day to the Ending of the World.” Archive of Our Own. http://archiveofourown.org/works/178032. Online.

Cawelti, John G. “The Question of Popular Genres.” *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 13:2 (Summer 1985). 55-61. Print.

Coppa, Francesca. “A Brief History of Media Fandom.” *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*. Ed. Kristina Busse and Karen Helleckson. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers. 2006. 41-59. Print.

Coppa, Francesca. "Women, Star Trek, and the early development of fannish vidding." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, Vol. 1 (2008). http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/44. Online.

Coutinho, Maria Antónia and Florencia Miranda. "To Describe Genres: Problems and Strategies." *Genre in a Changing World*. Ed. Charles Bazerman, Adair Bonini, Debora Figueiredo. West Lafayette: Parlor Press, LLC, 2009. 35-55. Print.

Derecho, Abigail. “Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction.” *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*. Ed. Kristina Busse and Karen Helleckson. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers. 2006. 61-78. Print

Driscoll, Catherine. “One True Pairing: The Romance of Pornography and the Pornography of Romance.” *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*. Ed. Kristina Busse and Karen Helleckson. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers. 2006. 79-96. Print

Fiske, John. *Television Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.

Frye, Northrop. "The Archetypes of Literature." *The Kenyon Review* 13.1 (Winter 1951): 92-110. Print.

Grant, Barry Keith. *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*. London: Wallflower Press, 2007. Print.

"Grup (Star Trek: TOS zine)." Fanlore. Organization for Transformative Works. http://fanlore.org/wiki/Grup_%28Star_Trek:_TOS_zine%29. Online.

Helen. “Close Enough.” Oh, the humanity: Stories. http://helenish.talkoncorners.net/closeenough.shtml. Online.

Helen. “The Top of the List.” Oh, the humanity: Stories. http://helenish.talkoncorners.net/top.html. Online.

Jenkins, Henry. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2006. Print.

Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture.* New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.

Jenson, Joli. "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization." *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. Ed. Lisa A. Lewis. Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2001. Online.

Jung, Susanne. "Queering Popular Culture: Female Spectators and the Appeal of Writing Slash Fan Fiction." *Gender Forum* 8 (2004). http://www.genderforum.org/issues/gender-queeries/queering-popular-culture-female-spectators-and-the-appeal-of-writing-slash-fan-fiction/. Online.

Kitson, Niall. "Day Six: Slashing the Ties That Bind." *Burn Index* (March 2, 2009). http://www.niallkitson.ie/2009/03/02/day-six-slashing-the-ties-that-bind/. Online.

Levi, Antonia. "Introduction." *Boys' Love Manga*. Ed. Antonia Levi, Mark McHarry and Dru Pagliassotti. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2009. 1-10. Print.

Lichtenberg, Jacquieline, Sondra Marshak, and Joan Winston. *Star Trek Lives!* New York: Bantam Books, 1975. Print.

Lise, "Nameless, Now and Then." *Nameless*. Do Your Thing. http://www.doyourthing.org/lise/other/nameless/nameless.htm. Online.

"Mahko Root." Fanlore. Organization for Transformative Works. http://fanlore.org/wiki/Mahko_Root. Online.

Major, Tracy. "Taking Liberties with Harry Potter." *Boston Globe Magazine.* (June 23, 2003). http://www.tracymayor.com/index.php/site/articles/taking_liberties_with_harry_potter. Online.

Marchant, Diane. "A Fragment Out of Time." *Grup*, Vol. 3 (1974). 47-48. Print.

Penley, Constance. *NASA/TREK: Popular Science and Sex in America*. London: Verso, 1997. Print.

Plotz, David. "Luke Skywalker Is Gay? Fan fiction is America's literature of obsession." *Slate* (April 14, 2000). Online.

Poirier, Richard. *The Performing Self: Compositions and Decompositions in the Languages of Contemporary Life*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992. Print.

Rosenberg, Betty. *Genreflecting: A Guide to Reading Interests in Genre Fiction*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982. Print.

Salmons, Catherine and Donald Symons. *Warrior Lovers: Erotic Fiction, Evolution and Female Sexuality*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. Print.

Screamlet. "Communication." *Communication*. Archive of Our Own. http://archiveofourown.org/works/31724. Online.

Stasi, Mafalda. "The Toy Soldiers from Leeds: The Slash Palimpsest." *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*. Ed. Kristina Busse and Karen Helleckson. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers. 2006. 115-133. Print.

Swales, John M. "Worlds of Genre-- Metaphors of Genre." *Genre in a Changing World*. Ed. Charles Bazerman, Adair Bonini, Debora Figueiredo. West Lafayette: Parlor Press, LLC, 2009. 3-16. Print.

Thrupkaew, Noy. "Fan/tastic Voyage: A Journey Into the Wide, Wild World of Slash Fiction." *Bitch Magazine* (2003). http://bitchmagazine.org/article/fan-tastic-voyage. Online.

Van Hise, Della. "Editorial." *Naked Times*, Vol. 1 (1978). i-ii. Print.

Verba, Joan Marie. *Boldly Writing: A Trekker Fan and Zine History, 1967-1987*. 2nd Ed. Minnetonka: FTL Publications, 2003. Print.

Walker, Cynthia W. "A Conversation with Paula Smith." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, Vol. 6 (2011). http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/243/205. Online.

Wilson, Cintra. "W4M4M?" *Out Magazine* (August 17, 2010). http://www.out.com/detail.asp?page=1&id=27242. Online.

Woledge, Elizabeth. "Intimatopia: Genre Intersections Between Slash and the Mainstream." *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*. Ed. Kristina Busse and Karen Helleckson. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers. 2006. 97-114. Print.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Plague of Fantasies.* 2nd Ed. Brooklyn: Verso, 2008. Print.