

The Slash Factor: Characteristics and Varieties of Slash Fan Fiction

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In July 2011, I had the pleasure of reviewing the Bc. thesis of the author of this Mgr. thesis. At that time I wrote “Fan fiction is a topic that deserves exploration and further exploration – Cupalová could, and maybe should, continue her research for another thesis for a higher degree.” This is indeed what happened, and here we are.

This Mgr. thesis both builds on the promise of that Bc. thesis and refines its scope: from fan fiction in general to slash fan fiction (fan fiction that deals with homosexual relationships).

In my 2011 review I also wrote “It (Cupalová’s Bc. thesis) is everything a thesis should be – original, well thought-out and well-presented.” That holds true for this thesis as well – and as a result I actually have no real criticisms (besides language use) of the thesis. The work, at least to this reviewer, is a clear 1 (výborně).

I will only lay out some stray observations (for further thought – or things in the thesis that made *me* think).

What is fan fiction and what is it not? Is writing on characters/motifs in Coleridge, Donne, etc. fan fiction? (Page 10). Is *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* not fan fiction because Stoppard says it isn’t?

Is it copyright law that divides fan fiction from original fiction? Legitimate (i.e., traditional) publishing could be problematic from a legal perspective if one wants to distribute the work.

On page 14: What was the Supreme Court ruling exactly?

Why do people write slash and not their own, original fiction? This question was not asked in Cupalová’s questionnaire but it bothered me. However, Cupalová answers it nicely by explaining how the authors feel about the issue (information gleaned from her questionnaire). The authors feel that fan fiction is a dialogue with the text, characters, and author, and feel that they are members of a community. Fan fiction is a sociological phenomenon as much as it is a literary one.

The Internet + Community. If Barthes wrote of the “Death of the Author”... The Internet is the “Death of Traditional Publication”. Whereas fan fiction was ghettoized to fanzines in the 1960s-90s – the Internet has made slash a mere Google search (and then maybe archive search) away.

In the old days niche-hobby communities (not just fan fiction readers/authors but any niche hobby) were marginalized. The only way to meet like-minded people would have been fanzines, conventions, classified ads, and putting up index cards on bulletin boards in supermarkets and community centres!

If an author didn’t write it in his/her work, is it canon? Page 31: J.K. Rowling only said in an interview that Dumbledore was gay. Is it *true* then, if she did not include it in her books?

Star Trek. *Star Trek* is indeed action-driven as Cupalová writes (page 23) if the meaning is in the sense that the plot is more important than character. Maybe plot-driven would be a better way to describe the series though as each episode was a small morality play that included dealing with the socio-political issues of the day (capitalism/communism, racism, etc.) Interestingly however, *Star Trek* with its utopian United Federation of Planets always shied away from the issue of homosexuality. See Jonathan Kay’s article in *Salon*: http://www.salon.com/2001/06/30/gay_trek/

(continued)

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* was not really a science-fiction series (page 17, 22) but rather an espionage series in the vein of *James Bond*. An interesting coincidence (intertextuality? Ha.) is that the actors who played Mr. Spock and Captain Kirk in *Star Trek*, Leonard Nimoy and William Shatner respectively, act together in one episode of the first season of *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, two or so years before they work together in *Star Trek*.

Bechdel Test. Cupolva writes: “women are thoroughly absent from the shows or they play minor and mostly episodic characters...” (Page 22). Indeed, two of the works Cupalová focuses on (*Sherlock*, and *Star Trek*) have a very hard time passing the Bechdel Test (i.e., a work of fiction that has at least two women in it, who talk to each other, about something other than a man). Cupalová points out that this could be one reason why female writers wish to write slash – to fill the void of feeling in a cold logical (it is hard to get more cold and logical than Mr. Spock and Sherlock Holmes) male world.

An interesting finding. Page 53: Cupolvá discovered through her research that the assertion (by. E.g., Pugh, and Glocarová and Symons) that slash fiction is mainly written by heterosexual women is false.

Language Use (my only criticism): Missed definite articles or articles where they shouldn't be, *lead* for *led* (page 8), commas for decimals (!), and the language is too informal at times. Words/expressions like: *a lot*, *That's why*, and *big*, should not be used in academic writing.

Recommended Grade: 1 (Výborně)

Mark Farrell, May 2014