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**The Slash Factor: Characteristics and Varieties
of Slash Fan Fiction**

Master's Thesis

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I hereby declare that I carried out this bachelor thesis independently, and only with the cited sources and literature.

In:

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I would like to thank my supervisor, PhDr. Petr Chalupský, Ph.D., for his help and all fan fiction readers and writers for putting up with my questionnaire and/or for their stories. Special thanks go to Kleio, Amy, Alion, Danae, Lace, the tiger, and the walrus.

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Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to discuss specific characteristics of slash fan fiction, both as a subgenre of fan fiction and as a literary and social phenomenon. These characteristics are summarised as the “slash factor” of “slash texts”.

The beginning of the theoretical part focuses on the history and development of (slash) fan fiction, its various definitions and its role as a specific genre in literature. It summarises the basic premises and principles of fan fiction and explains them on slash fan fiction in particular. Sedgwick’s homosocial – homosexual continuum in society is discussed, as well as its understanding and application on same-sex interactions, and several reasons for the reading and writing of slash fan fiction and its appeal are suggested.

The main part of the thesis analyses actual slash fan fiction in three different fandoms: Harry Potter, Sherlock (Holmes), and Nightrunners. Each of them offers a different set of characters and slash tropes. Similarities and differences are sought in the stories written in different fandoms. Moreover, the Nightrunner series is analysed as an example of professionally published “slash text” which already features a gay couple as the main characters.

The second half of the main part is a questionnaire analysis conducted among English-speaking readers and writers of slash fan fiction. It confirmed the motives for reading and writing slash fan fiction, the tendencies to slash particular type of characters, and the different appeals of slash fan fiction that were suggested and shown in the previous parts. Moreover, it showed that the community of slash fans and their creations are as diverse as they are consistent.

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce pojednává o specifických vlastnostech slashové fanfikce jakožto subžánru fanfikce, zároveň se zabývá fanfikcí coby literárním a společenským fenoménem. Všechny tyto vlastnosti tvoří tzv. „faktor slash“, jež je typický pro „slashové texty.“

Začátek teoretické části je věnován historii a vývoji (slashové) fanfikce, jejím rozličným definicím a její roli specifického literárního žánru. Tato pasáž rovněž shrnuje základní premisy a principy fanfikce, které následně aplikuje na slashové fanfikci. Zabývá se škálou interakcí (teorie Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick) homosociálních a homosexuálních vztahů. V teoretické části jsou rovněž postihnuty důvody pro čtení a psaní slashové fanfikce.

Hlavní část diplomové práce analyzuje konkrétní slashové fanfikce ve třech různých fandomech: Harry Potter, Sherlock (Holmes) a Nightrunners. Každý z těchto fandomů poskytuje jiné postavy a je založen na jiných slashových tropech. Porovnávají a analyzovány jsou podobnosti a rozdíly mezi těmito povídkami z různých fandomů. Zcela specifické postavení má knižní série Nightrunners, v níž figurují dvě hlavní mužské postavy jako pár. Tato série byla analyzována jako profesionálně publikovaný „slashový text“.

Druhá polovina hlavní části diplomové práce je tvořena analýzou dotazníku, který byl rozeslán anglicky hovořícím čtenářům a autorům slashové fanfikce. Jeho hlavním úkolem bylo potvrzení motivace ke čtení a psaní slashové fanfikce, dále postihl autorské tendence párovat konkrétní typy postav a zhodnotil i přitažlivost slashové fanfikce. Tyto body byly navrženy a zpracovány v předchozí části práce. Kromě jiného analýza dotazníku ukázala, že komunita fanoušků slashe a jejich výtvorů je tak rozdílná, jako je konzistentní.

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Introduction

Fan fiction is not merely a literary phenomenon; it is predominantly a social one. During its longer than fifty year development, it has, in its capacity as a social platform, masterfully combined two seemingly opposite realms, the underground and the pop culture. In this way, it helped us see that the mainstream and minority cultures are closer to each other than one may imagine.

To define fan fiction, for those who are unsure of its meaning, it is a genre of fiction, written by fans of a work (a book, a TV series, a movie...), which uses the original work's characters, setting, and other phenomena, while the original work is, in most cases, still copyrighted. Thus, it is an unofficial literature which is published mainly on the Internet.

Although there are many types of fan fiction, the three main categories that serve as the first signpost for fan fiction readers are gen (fan fiction for general audience, without romantic relationships), het (fan fiction with heterosexual relationships), and slash (fan fiction with homosexual relationships). The thesis focuses on the latter and specifies its typical aspects, both from the point of view of its writers and readers.

The theoretical part outlines the history and development of fan fiction and its slash variation. Several different approaches to fan fiction are presented; the broadest one considers fan fiction and its writing techniques as a part of the mainstream literary tradition, the other extreme narrows it down to a literary practice only maintained by a specific group of people. Each approach changes the understanding of fan fiction in general, including slash fan fiction. In this part, the crucial role of the Internet is analyzed. It is argued that due to the influence of dynamic community formation and anonymous sharing ground, the Internet shaped fan fiction – its reading and writing as well as the communication between fans – into what we consider today to be the working definition of fan fiction. Slash fan fiction, which is a constitutive part of fan fiction in general, especially flourishes in the anonymous and slash-friendly cyberworld. The history and development of slash is presented in connection with possible motives behind its writing. The literary and the social are inseparable, as one is projected into the other. Written and read mostly by women but based on mainstream works containing male main characters, it reveals gaps in the original work, which fan fiction writers want to fill in and/or play with, as well as it informs about a different perception of social relationships between men and between women.

The main body of the thesis is divided into two parts: the comparison of different literary works and a questionnaire analysis. Differences and similarities are sought between slash fan fiction and its particular canon (the original work that the particular fan fiction is based on). Popular pairings in each fandom (a community of fans of a work and their fannish culture) are analysed and compared with their canon counterparts, as well as different strategies are mentioned that fan fiction authors use to make a particular pairing work. Another part deals with differences and similarities between slash fan fiction and professionally published works that contain gay characters and relationships. The last part of the thesis is an analysis of a questionnaire which was distributed among English-speaking readers and writers of slash fan fiction across different fandoms. It maps today's fans' idea of what fan fiction in general and slash in particular are and how they work, as well as their reading and writing preferences.

The aim of the thesis is to analyse the characteristic traits of slash fan fiction in different fandoms and to find out if they share a common core despite their foundations in vastly different source works. Throughout the thesis, I will use the term "slash factor" to refer to the typical characteristics and the slashing techniques of slash fan fiction. I will compare slash fan fiction with published professional fiction with gay characters and/or relationships in order to determine if the slash factor is only a fannish creation or if it can be found in professional literature as well. The aim of the questionnaire is to give a voice to fan fiction readers and writers themselves, and to find out whether fandoms and their practices in 2014 differ in any way from the established theory within the respective fandoms or across different fandoms.

1. Theoretical Part

1.1 The Understanding of Fan Fiction, Its Origins, History, and Postmodern Theoretical Background

Fan fiction is a kind of interpretative mycelium, which exists below the surface of the published books (or aired TV series etc). All readers interpret what they read in a specific way. Some may imagine what happened after they finished reading, some may wonder what lead the characters to the events as described in the book, some may fantasise about things that they felt hinted at in the book but which were never elaborated upon.

Generally, fan fiction is defined as a fiction written by fans of a work, usually a book, TV series or a movie, peopled with characters from the canon¹ and set in the setting from the canon, that is – written in a given universe. Upon closer inspection, however, this short explanation of fan fiction becomes insufficient, sometimes even counterproductive to what fan fiction really is. Moreover, if fan fiction is confronted with the “traditional” or professional literature, which means that published by established publishing houses, the borderlines of what is and what is not fan fiction become blurred.

Derecho (62) explains that even among fans themselves the term is not clear. She describes a fan meta-discussion in a Livejournal.com community whether a published book based on Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is or is not fan fiction. The opinions are not unified, different fans view fan fiction differently, as no fan terms are scientifically defined. The broadest understanding of fan fiction can be summarised as follows: “fan fiction originated several millennia ago, with myth stories, and continues today, encompassing works both by authors who identify themselves as fans and those who do not write from within fandoms (one commenter gave Tom Stoppard’s 1967 *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, a speculation on minor characters from *Hamlet*, as an example of the latter” (Derecho, 62). She also summarises the narrowest description recognised worldwide as follows: “fan fiction should be understood as a product of fan cultures, which

¹ “Canon” in this context means the original work upon which fan fiction is based. However, questions may be raised as to what exactly can be counted as canon (which book/s, movie/s, additional authorised information etc.) and it depends on the fans of each canon what they count in.

began either in the late 1960s, with *Star Trek* fanzines², or, at the earliest, in the 1920s with Austen and Holmes societies”.

The broadest definition would claim that all literature is, in fact, fan fiction, beginning in the Ancient Greece and Rome and their plays and poems inspired by their mythology. Some of the fans support this idea and, in fact, a fan wrote as a reply to my question *What would you say to someone who dismissed slash as spoiling the characters and/or considered fan fiction in general as derivative, as “poaching” in the original work?*: “... the New Testament is a derivation of the Old Testament,” and another one wrote: “I’d show them the list of sources Shakespeare ripped off in his writing. Copying or being inspired by other works is nothing new” (in an unarchived discussion). Pugh (13-19) gives a list of literary works in history that function as fan fiction: for example Robert Henryson’s *The Testament of Cresseid* (15th century), a sequel to Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* (1380s), or later, J. M. Barrie’s *The Adventure of Two Collaborators* (1893), “a Holmes pastiche”. Herzing (2) assumes that the origins of fan fiction can date up to 1421 when John Lydgate wrote *The Siege of Thebes*, a continuation to Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (1387 – 1400).

The narrowest definition assumes that fan fiction springs out of a certain fandom. It excludes those who do not feel as a member of a larger community (because they do not want to or they are not aware of its existence). In addition, it does not count in authors and their stories who write fan fiction on works that have no fan base at all.

Evans (12) points out the interplay between fan fiction and formal education – some homework assignments in literature classes are in their nature fan fictions. She cites an author’s note³ before a story posted on fanfiction.net as a Romeo and Juliet fan fiction. The

² Fan magazines published by fans for fans, containing articles, fan fiction, fan art (fan illustrations). The authors were not paid for their work; all money made by sale covered the printing expenses. Fanzines were published semi-officially and irregularly. Some are still published today; however, the Internet reduced the necessity of their existence and their significance in the fan culture. Perkins claims that the first fanzine according to “the general consensus amongst science fiction writers” came out in 1930 and was called *The Comet*. They flourished mainly in the 1970s and 1980s.

³ A note written by a fan fiction author containing relevant information to their story, which is placed before the actual story starts.

author was not a member of a Romeo and Juliet fandom, yet she wrote a sequel to it and published it on the biggest website dedicated to fan fiction of all kinds.

This practice is not unknown in the Czech education either. Being a fan fiction reader and writer myself, I found out what fan fiction is ten years ago, when I was 14 years old, and that marked the beginning of my fan creating. Looking back, however, I could trace some fan fiction traits in my writing to the fifth grade when a few of my classmates and I wrote a handful of versions of Karel Jaromír Erben's *Kytice*. On the other hand, though, many years later, in 2010, I was given an essay assignment to write a sequel to "A Respectable Woman" by Kate Chopin. There is absolutely no fan fiction written on this particular piece of writing and yet, the sequel had all the characteristics of fan fiction (work with the characters and in the setting but offer another point of view and interpretation of the original story, to point out the basics). It was written with the aim of it being a piece of fan fiction. Moreover, I write fan fiction to anything that inspires me and I may be the only person in the world doing so (these include fan fiction on poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Donne, *Beowulf*, *Dorian* by Will Self (2002), *Máj* by Karel Hynek Mácha (1836) and many others, some written in English, some in Czech).

Nevertheless, the term fan fiction appeared in the 1960s (Derecho 63, Pugh 19) with the appearance of stories based on two science fiction TV series, *Star Trek* and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (Coppa 44). At the same time, such works as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) by Tom Stoppard or *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys were published. Considering fan fiction to be a genre, Pugh (11) opens a dialogue as to what the difference in genre between fan fiction stories and postmodern works is. She unites all fan work but ignores its differences. Fan fiction includes not only prose but also poetry, there are short stories, novellas, novels, plays, poems written by fans, which they are further specified (some of the categories are not widely spread in official literature, for example songfics⁴). Moreover, fan fiction is divided into comedies, satires, tragedies, drama, romances and many others, even though they intersect more often than not, and they may but may not correspond with the canon. One distinction between fan fiction and professional fiction suggested by Pugh is that the authors mentioned above (and many

⁴ Stories inspired by a particular song. The lyrics may be a part of the story, not only as a quotation at the beginning but as dividers of paragraphs as well.

others) get paid for their work whereas fan fiction is unpaid, written for love. Another may be in the quality of the works (there are, however, fan fictions exceedingly good, mediocre and bad, as well as brilliant, mediocre and bad original fiction). None of these can answer simply if there is any difference in genre, though.

The affiliation of a fan fiction writer to a certain fandom might be helpful, even though not necessarily as illustrated above. The intertextuality in fan fiction is very much important and the communication is held not only between the canon and the fan fiction, but among other writers of fan fiction and their works, be it fan fiction, fan art or other fan activities. Busse and Hellekson (5) illustrate it as follows:

It starts like this. Somewhere in cyberspace, someone complains: “I had a lousy day! Need some cheering up.” Soon after, a friend posts a story dedicating this piece: “This is for you, hon – your favourite pairing and lots of schmoopy sex. Hope it’ll cheer you up!” A third person chimes in: “I can’t believe it! What a great fic! I mean, who would have thought of gay penguin sex? It totally works! I love it!” “Gay penguin sex?” someone else adds, finding it hilarious, and in response, she posts a poem she knocked off in five minutes flat. ... “I’m taking two lines of that to add to my signature,” someone informs her in a comment and goes on to write a three-paragraph snippet of fiction based on the poem, which in turn results in – well, you get the idea.

Speaking of prototypical fan fictions, this is certainly valid. The quote above opens the authors’ introduction to the topic and they named the chapter “Work in Progress”. Work in progress (or WIP) describes fan fiction that is published in instalments and it is not yet complete. Busse and Hellekson draw a parallel between this common phenomenon in the fan fiction world and fan fiction and fandom in general. It is always open, communicating, unfinished, in motion. Even those stories that are already published can be edited (or deleted) but their first version/their mere existence may have already influenced their readers, who may have consequently created something new, inspiring others. They create a never-ending dialogue. However, before 1998 and the use of the Internet by fans, this dialogue, or better these dialogues, were not so thickly interconnected and instant; and yet, the term and the interconnection of fans and their work were nothing new. Another aspect of fan fiction is that majority of it has been, since the emergence of the term, written on

works that are still copyrighted. This, again, may serve as an indication of fan fiction, though it does not explain all of it.

Fan fiction is a fannish interpretation of a particular canon. Fans think about possible continuations of the work, or what happened before it even started, they investigate the characters' motivations for what they did or did not do, and they notice hints that the author did not elaborate upon enough.

Compare Fish and the reader-response criticism (2-3):

If meaning is embedded in the text, the reader's responsibilities are limited to the job of getting it out. ... In practice, this resulted in the replacing of one question – what does this mean? – by another – what does this do? – with “do” equivocating between a reference to the action of the text *on* a reader and the actions performed *by* a reader as he negotiates (and, in some sense, actualizes) the text.

Some readers, however, write down what they imagine. They interpret the canon through their stories, thus shifting the attention from the canon to the newly created text. Not only can they interpret a scene in the canon, for example, in many different ways, in many different fan fictions, they interpret other people's (fan fiction authors') interpretations (fan fictions). The world of fan fiction is a labyrinthine cobweb never leading straight to its source (canon).

The author that is often referred to is Roland Barthes and his theory of texts and intertextuality (Busse and Hellekson, 6, 31; Derecho, 65; Willis, 156-8). Coppa (242) quotes his famous essay “The Death of the Author” (1968): “as soon as a fact is narrated ... the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins”, which is certainly true about the readers of the canon and the writers and/or readers of fan fiction (the majority of fan fiction readers write it as well – see Q).

Willis (157) quotes Barthes's “Writing Reading” (1986, 31): “‘only the text’ does not exist,’ since the logic of reading ‘is not deductive but associative: it associates with the material text ... *other* ideas, *other* images, *other* significations””. She further argues that:

A reading which attempts to follow a deductive, rather than associative, logic – one concerned to eliminate “impossible” readings and to attain the final remaining truth (however improbable) of a text – is only a special (‘thick’) case of associative reading, one which obediently selects the

associations by which the text will be rendered legible according to 'obvious' and transparent codes smuggled in by the culture's abusive logic of continuity.

Fan fiction in general is based on these "associative readings". These associations result in interplay with the canon and the fandom which enriches the possible readings of the canon and the fandom and fanon⁵. Fan fiction draws inspiration not only from the canon but from other fan's fan fiction, comments and other communication (the fandom and the fanon).

In her essay "Archontic Literature" (61-78), Derecho builds on the ideas of Jacques Derrida (*Archive Fever*, 1995/1996) that every "archive" is always incomplete and open to new entries. She calls fan fiction and, in fact, every fan fiction-like literature (stressing the texts from the 17th century onwards) "archontic literature". She rejects the names of "derivative" and "appropriative" literature to fan fiction, claiming that the word "derivative" "indicates a poor imitation or even corruption of an original, pure work" and the other one, "appropriative", "connotes 'taking' and can easily be inflected to mean 'thieving' and 'stealing'" (64).⁶ It is true that these words may have such negative connotations among non-fans and in contexts other than literary. The word "archontic" is not used by fans, though. When they use the expressions "derivative" or "appropriative", they usually do not feel any negative connotations with it; they even take pride in the fact that their work is based on something, that it is a part of a larger whole. Others prefer the word "transformative".

The non-profit Organisation for Transformative Works, an organisation created by fans and for fans, defines "transformative" works, which include fan fiction, as follows:

⁵ Facts and/or clichés that were never explicitly stated in the canon but which many fans take for granted. Fannish inventions and interpretations that create a "fannish canon".

⁶ In this respect, Henry Jenkins's groundbreaking work on fans, fandom and their fan work *Textual Poachers (Television Fans and Participatory Culture (Studies in Culture and Communication))* (1992) has a little intimidating title, even though he expands and builds on Michel De Certeau's notion of readers being either "poachers" or "nomads", which was expressed in "Reading as Poaching" in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) (Jenkins 1992, 23).

Transformative works are creative works about characters or settings created by fans of the original work, rather than by the original creators. Transformative works include but are not limited to fanfiction, real person fiction, fan vids, and graphics. A transformative use is one that, in the words of the U.S. Supreme Court, “adds something new, with a further purpose or different character, altering the [source] with new expression, meaning, or message.” A story from Voldemort’s perspective is transformative, so is a story about a pop star that illustrates something about current attitudes toward celebrity or sexuality.⁷

To sum up, fan fiction is a 20th century term for literary practices that are common for the literature back to its origins. However, it is based on the concept of a fan and fandom and related to the consciousness of being a fan and writing a transformative work based on a canon. As a self-conscious genre with a name it appeared in the 1960s, not limiting itself only to the date, though. Prototypical fan fiction published in the cyberworld, which means mostly after 1998, is inspired not only by the canon but also by the fandom and their works, leading a never-ending and ever-changing dialogue. It is an interpretation but it is also a play.

⁷ <http://transformativeworks.org/glossary/13#term441>, accessed 19 February 2014

1.2 The Categories of Fan Fiction

In the wide world of fan fiction, as in published fiction, it is necessary to distinguish categories, genres, which fans can search in order to find exactly what they want to read. The term “genre” can be a little confusing at times, as it mainly presupposes that genres are specific bookshelves in the library of literature. In fan fiction, however, the word “genre” usually refers to three areas of content.

The first one serves the purpose of demarcating the borderlines between fan fiction as unofficial fan literature and official published literature. An example may be Sheenagh Pugh who named her book on fan fiction *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context* (2005). In this respect, fan fiction is considered to be a genre of fiction in general. This categorisation can serve the purpose as an introductory term when someone needs an explanation of what fan fiction is or when all fan fiction needs a term that sums it up.

The second area of genres of fan fiction takes over terms as usually known: comedy, drama, romance, thriller, horror etc. Readers can browse fan fiction archives and search for stories in these genres; many have their favourite(s) which they read almost exclusively. For example, FictionAlley⁸, an umbrella site hosting Harry Potter fan fiction and other Harry Potter fan work, maintains four interconnected but visually clearly different websites archiving fan fiction: Schnoogle⁹ with novel-length fan fiction, Astronomy Tower¹⁰ with romance fan fiction, Riddikulus¹¹ with humorous fan fiction, and The Dark Arts¹² with “dramatic, angsty, horror and other” fan fiction. As a fan (Q) pointed out, FictionAlley is an old archive, founded in 2001¹³, which still maintains these categories, as opposed to, for

⁸ Available at <http://fictionalley.org/>

⁹ Available at <http://www.schnoogle.com/>

¹⁰ Available at <http://www.astronomytower.org/>

¹¹ Available at <http://www.riddikulus.org/>

¹² Available at <http://www.thedarkarts.org/>

¹³ More information is available at <http://www.fictionalley.org/press.html> (accessed 22 February 2014). Many internet fan fiction archives were founded between 1998 – 2001/2, which relates to the general move of fans to the Internet. Within the Harry Potter fandom (FictionAlley hosts Harry Potter-related fan fiction), it also corresponds with the time gap between the fourth and the fifth book, which resulted in the fact that more fans started to write and read fan fiction.

example, The Archive of Our Own¹⁴, a multi-fandom modern archive launched in 2008¹⁵, which does not highlight these categories anymore. Moreover, fan fiction expands on the already established terms in published fiction and adds a few other ones, such as angst¹⁶ or hurt/comfort¹⁷.

On the other hand, the third division into specific categories, or (sub)genres of fan fiction is quite unique for fan fiction. They are those of gen, het and slash. Gen are stories targeted at general audience and include no romantic relationship; het are stories which deal with heterosexual relationships; slash are stories with homosexual relationships. Opinions differ as to the number, or better the percentage, of stories written within each category. Pugh (90) says that “gen is still by far the greatest category of fanfic”, whereas Driscoll (84) claims that “the vast majority of fan fiction is het or slash ... marginalizing gen as something outside of the dominant concerns of fan fiction”. Pugh’s work was published in 2005 and Driscoll’s in 2006, which eliminates the question of time or sudden fashion in fan fiction writing. The difference can be found in fandoms in which each of the authors read fan fiction. Each canon is different and it has specific audience who may look for and write about different topics.

However numerous each category may be, this division is most important when a fan fiction reader searches for a story. The Archive of Our Own (mentioned above), one of the present day’s most popular and growing archives of fan fiction and other fan work, introduced four pictographs beside the title of each story. The first one indicates the rating which spans from “general audiences”, “teen and up audiences”, “mature” to “explicit”. The second one stands for the main pairing category – slash, femslash¹⁸, het, gen or multi (combination of several pairings). The third one marks any warnings for the reader that

¹⁴ Available at <http://archiveofourowg.org>, accessed 22 February 2014

¹⁵ More information available at <http://transformativeworks.org/projects/archive> (accessed 22 February 2014).

¹⁶ Stories based on strong and/or extreme emotional tensions.

¹⁷ A character is strongly tested physically and/or emotionally, at the end being comforted by another.

¹⁸ Stories with two women romantically involved. The term slash is sometimes seen as the broadest term, including both male/male as well as female/female relationships; however, some fans use the term slash for referring to only male/male relationships and femslash (or femmeslash) for female/female relationships. Labelling the stories as slash or femslash makes it easier for anyone who is looking for a particular pairing.

were pre-defined by the site and that the writer might use in case they apply; such warnings are as follows: graphic depiction of violence, major character death, rape/non-con and underage. The fourth one informs whether the work is complete or still in progress. Apart from the rating, perhaps, the first categories that fan fiction readers see when they look for something to read are not those that readers of published books encounter in libraries and bookshops.

1.2.1 The Beginning of Slash: An Upgraded Punctuation Mark

With the advent of fan fiction in the 1960s, written on science fiction TV series, mainly *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* and *Star Trek* (Coppa 44), the first stories resembled the canon (Pugh 90). Gradually, fans started to write about their favourite characters in a different way than the episodes were originally presented. The characters and their inner lives and relationships became one of the leading themes in fan fiction. In order to ease the orientation in what the story may include, a list of main characters was put before the text itself. If the story dealt with Kirk and Spock and their friendship, for example, the story would be marked Kirk-Spock (K-S). If the story included a sexual relationship between two characters (of the opposite sex), for example Kirk and Uhura, the story would be labelled as Kirk/Uhura (K/U) (Pugh 91).

“Shut up... we’re by no means setting a precedent,” was, ironically, the first line of the first fan fiction (Sinclair; Pugh 91) which set perhaps the most influencing precedent in fan fiction. Titled “A Fragment Out of Time” and written by Diane Marchant, it was published in September 1974 in the *Grup III* fanzine¹⁹. The story was short, more of a fragment as

¹⁹ A scan of the story as it was first published in the fanzine is available at http://s299.photobucket.com/user/Lord_Chamberlains_Men/media/Nothing%20to%20see%20here/Grup3p2.jpg.html and http://s299.photobucket.com/user/Lord_Chamberlains_Men/media/Nothing%20to%20see%20here/Grup3p3.jpg.html; or it is re-typed and available at <http://bigmamag.tumblr.com/post/22030045493/a-fragment-out-of-time-by-diane-marchant>; all accessed 20 February 2014.

was suggested by the title, depicting a sex scene between two characters, not explicitly named but recognisable as Kirk and Spock.

The next published slash story had to wait until 1976 (Sinclair). However, the subgenre already existed and it must have been given some attention. Slash as the punctuation mark has been used until today to indicate the relationship between two characters of any gender. As a name, it started to refer to stories describing relationship between characters of the same sex. The term “adult” used to refer to heterosexual relationships (Pugh 91).

“Slash” is in use; “adult” has vanished, replaced by the term “het”. There may be only questions and theories as to why this happened. One may be that the term “adult” does not specify the gender of the protagonists and assuming that “adult plots” mean “heterosexual relationships” would be biased and short-sighted. Moreover, gay romances are not aimed at children as the distinction may imply. Another idea behind this change may refer to the fact that the word “adult” connotes a content not suitable for children, which is, speaking of relationships, not only violence but mainly intercourse. Slash, on the other hand, includes stories of any rating, and so does het today. Both slash and het span from two characters only looking at each other and their hearts changing, holding hands, or shopping as a couple to hardcore sex, to give a few examples of the extremes.

1.3 How and Why (Slash) Fan Fiction Works

1.3.1 Canon Is Not Dogmatic: The Premises of Fan Fiction

In order to think of fan fiction as a possible genre, it is necessary to look at its canon in a different way than that of a given text for given audience. One can imagine it as, for example, a 3D sculpture that can be walked around, lit from different angles and with different coloured lights, casting thus different shadows, put in different spaces and looked at by different viewers who may like completely different aspects of it. One way of presentation to the public may be preferred in the gallery, but once people have it at home, they put it wherever they feel fit.

Pugh (222) summarised the two main premises of fan fiction as follows: “(a) fictional characters and universes can transcend both their original context and their creator and (b) the said creator cannot claim to know everything about them” (compare with the theories of Barthes, Fish and Derrida mentioned above).

That transcendence can be seen not only in the way what the text does to its readers but, importantly in the world of fan fiction, in other ways such as who the readers are, for example. No fan fiction writers or readers are limited by age and it is not unusual to encounter a 50-year old fan of Harry Potter, usually a woman, married, with children, writing romance fan fiction about Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy when still at school²⁰, even though fandoms in general are flooded by younger fans²¹.

The universe created by a canon is often complex, even though not all aspects of it may be portrayed in it. That is why a canon aimed at teenagers may inspire its fans to write in the same tone and about the same topics, but mostly fans pick up themes that were not the main ones in the canon – they were not fully explored or they were not mentioned at all. Fan fiction writers of any age can choose what they want to elaborate on and adult topics

²⁰ A famous author in the Harry Potter universe is Frances Potter; her website available at <http://dragon-charmer.livejournal.com>, accessed 21 February 2014.

²¹ Compare with Jenkins, 2006, 178: “A decade ago, published fan fiction mostly came from women in their twenties, thirties, and beyond. Today, these older writers have been joined by a generation of new contributors, who found fan fiction surfing the Internet and decided to see what they could produce. ‘Harry Potter’ in particular has encouraged many young people to write and share their first stories.”

or dark themes are not an exception in fan fiction based on a children's book. The range of topics varies, they may include: complex relationships, manipulation, religion, sex, social issues, death, abuse, social conditions etc. The appeal of similar themes in fan fiction based on a canon that does not deal with them may be the sudden clash between the tones. It makes the reader think that every time they read something the world they see is not the only one there is. Moreover, it shows the writers' love of the canon, as they take the effort and expand it in a way it itself cannot do.

1.3.2 The Major Principles of Fan Fiction

Having described the premises of fan fiction, it is possible to further explore the two major principles of how fan fiction is written. Many fans are aware of them (see Q); Pugh (42-43) describes them as well. They are the "more of" and "more from" principles.

When a canon is written in such an intriguing way that its readers do not want it to stop and they want to read further about their favourite characters and the whole universe in general, they mostly read or write the "more of" type of stories. They may prefer the canon but for some reasons its continuation is not possible: the author is already dead and/or the work is finished as the author meant it to be ("closed canon", Pugh 26), or only a few parts of the whole has been published ("open canon", *ibid*).

An example of the former may be the present-day fan fiction on Jane Austen's work. To quote "the mission statement" of The Derbyshire Writers' Guild²²: "... because we all wish that she [Jane Austen] had lived longer and written more, we feel the need to expand on the world, the characters and the stories that Miss Austen created" (in Pugh 43 as the original text is no longer available online). Sequels are an excellent example of the nature of stories based on the "more of" principle. The main part of the Derbyshire Writers Guild archive today is called "Epilogue Abbey"²³ and it hosts stories that "take place in the same time period as Jane Austen's novels and stay relatively true to her work". The "abbey" refers to the work of Jane Austen (*Northanger Abbey*, 1817) and the "epilogue" confirms the link between the canon and its "more of" fan fiction.

²² Available at <http://www.dwiggie.com/>; accessed 22 February 2014

²³ Available at <http://www.dwiggie.com/toc/index.php>; accessed 22 February 2014

An example of the latter, an open canon, may be the gap between the fourth and fifth book of the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* being published in 2000 and the next part, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, in 2003. The popularity of the series grew, as did its fans' impatience and frustration, which resulted in fan fiction versions of the next years at Hogwarts. A more recent example may be the gap between the second and third season of *Sherlock* TV series by BBC. The second season finished with the episode "The Reichenbach Fall" aired on 15 January 2012, ending with Sherlock Holmes being dead for most of the characters but alive for the viewers, leaving them with only one question: *how*. The next season was aired no sooner than on 1 January 2014 and as with Harry Potter a decade earlier, the Internet was flooded with sequels and theories of how it could possibly happen and continue (considering the fact that the question was not answered in the third season, it is not likely that similar theory-based fan fiction will stop being written).

The second principle, "more from", is probably more interesting. As Pugh (43) explains:

And then there is canon material which, though it draws its readers or viewers in, strikes them as being far from perfect or fully realised; they see possibilities in it which were never explored as they might have been. They want "more from" their canon, and again, who else will give them that if not themselves? Sometimes, indeed, there is something they cannot accept about the canon as it stands and want to "fix" by finding an explanation for it which, for them, makes it fit the canon better.

This principle explains fans' second motive for writing fan fiction. The canon is not merely extended in quantity but it is built upon and explored from other angles, extending it in a quality that the canon is incapable of (because of the mere fact that there are different things that the canon explores, different themes and/or target audience and other factors).

After 17 years of the existence of The Derbyshire Writers' Guild, their "mission statement" as quoted above changed into: "... Our stories expand on the universe created in

Jane Austen's novels and explore the possibilities she left out,"²⁴ thus embracing both the "more of" and "more from" principles equally. Although the "more of" principle might be the main reason why fans start to read and write fan fiction, the "more from" becomes more influential as they make their way through the universe, testing what else it can do.

1.3.3 Homosocial Desires, Men Locked Up, and Women Watching

Putting the minority of action-driven fan fiction aside, the majority of fan fiction centres on relationships. They do not have to be romantic, as non-romantic relationships in gen fan fiction proves, or they are, in which case they are either het, or slash. Fan fiction emerged as fan stories based on science fiction TV series (*Star Trek*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*), closely followed by 1970s and 1980s "buddy" police shows such as *The Professionals* or *Starsky & Hutch* (Pugh 19, Evans 20). When looking for romantic relationships of any kind in these shows, there are none to be found or if any, they are of episodic nature. Women are thoroughly absent from the shows or they play minor and mostly episodic characters, without proper characterisation and usually ending up dead at the end of the episode.

Another "imperfection" the shows had was the lack of character development. As Pugh (92-93) summed up: "You could have watched the episodes of the *Star Trek* series completely out of order and made very little difference to the experience." The characters were more or less flat and the series was action-driven and not relationship-driven. Usually, characters and/or their relationships formed the background for a story and any action was the main point. Some fans, mostly female, wanted the series, however, to slow down a little and to explore the characters. In fan fiction, the action can be put aside and characters can be analysed, tested and experimented upon.

In order to write about relationships between the characters, fan fiction writers had a few possibilities. First, they could write about an already existing relationship. The problem was that there were not any or they did not last long. The number of female characters was very limited and/or they were not interesting enough to be written about.

²⁴ The foundation date, 3 February 1997, and the whole welcome and about text available at <http://www.dwiggie.com/>, accessed 22 February 2014.

Second, they could invent their own female character and incorporate her into the story. This practice has not been uncommon until today; it is, however, not favoured by many fans as it often leads to the creation of “Mary Sue”²⁵. Writing Mary Sue characters is considered immature, as they often make other characters OOC (out of character) and degrade the universe without a proper reason. According to many fans, writing fan fiction shows a certain amount of respect to the canon. Each Mary Sue usually deforms the canon since she is an unrealistic character and makes the canon dysfunctional (see the story “A Trekkie’s Tale” mentioned in the note 25 above). OC (original characters), and especially FOC (female original characters), must be written with care, they should not become the main characters (as a substitute for the original main characters), and even in these cases some fans avoid reading stories with any OC in them.

Third, fans are left with those characters that stay for most time in the show and are more or less the main ones: the leading male duo. Writing about their close friendship and explaining some of their behaviour is not far from thinking of them as lovers.

Sedgwick (in Evans, 20) refers to any homoerotic tensions that emerge in any all-male social environments as “homosocial desires”. They range from boarding schools, sports teams, to armed forces. In “Between Men” (696-697), she discusses different perceptions of the continuum between the “homosocial” and “homosexual”, which ranges from the social bonds to the erotic, when it is applied to male-male or female-female relationships. It is quite unbroken when female-female relationships are considered, which results in different stages of female intimacy. Friends, best friends or inseparable sisters, lovers – the

²⁵ “Mary Sue” is young (the youngest), beautiful (the most beautiful), skilful (the most skilful); she possesses special powers, has a secret and mostly upper-class heritage, and is half non-human if possible. She overshadows the original characters in everything she does and they let her and love her. She is considered to be an idealistic self-insertion of the author. Mary Sue has her male counterpart as well, named Gary Stu or Marty Stu. The term “Mary Sue” was coined by Paula Smith in her short parody of such characters, “A Trekkie’s Tale”, originally published in *Menagerie 2* fanzine (December 1973), now available online at <http://www.wiccananime.com/amsl/amsltrekkiestale> (accessed 22 February 2014) and reprinted in *Boldly Writing: A Trekker Fan and Zine History 1967-1987* by Joan Marie Verba (15). Her Mary Sue sums up all traits that such characters have in a really compressed story (of only 4 paragraphs), which makes their characteristics even more striking.

borderlines between the degrees of intimate contact in each stage are not so strict. On the other hand, male world is dominated by the dread of seeing this phenomenon as an unbroken continuum and relationships between men are either social and rational, or erotic, with nothing in between. There is a gap which is not allowed to be transgressed, and men watch it cautiously.

The appeal of slashing the male characters has several reasons. One of them is that female slashers (and slashers are mostly women) find slash erotically appealing. In his article “Why are Japanese Girls’ Comics Full of Boys Bonking?”, Mark McLelland summarised the amazement of the public in a question: “Why shouldn’t Japanese women’s comics be full of boys bonking? ... Why should men’s interest in ‘lesbianism’ be taken for granted whereas women’s interest in male homosexuality somehow be in need of interpretation?” Some fans regard this reason as the main one for their slashing, as reading and/or writing fan fiction is mainly done for fun.

Slashers enjoy the fact that they can read/write about a male character who they find attractive. Unlike any het pairing, slash pairings have a few advantages that are usually mentioned by slashers. They read/write about two male characters they like at the same time. They do not need to identify with the female character. Some slashers’ inability to identify with the female character leads to disliking her, a half of the main pair, or even to jealousy. Matching two men leaves the women out of the relationship and lets them voyeuristically enjoy all aspects of it.

Another reason is testing the characters. The slashers are given a male pair, somehow locked up in the canon and not developing, which they take, put it into different situations and see how the characters react. This testing of the characters is typical for fan fiction in general, yet in slash, they collide with challenging the society’s assumptions and attitudes, which adds to the emotional tensions.

If there is a man and a woman in a book (or elsewhere in fiction, as well as in real life), they are often considered to be a possible couple. It is not a question of *if* they end up together but of *how*. The mainstream society searches for hints that could reveal any tension between them. Romance novels are based on this type of certainty. The heroine must overcome obstacles to marry her chosen one but it is clear that it is going to happen. Moreover, the final marriage is the goal of the story and further events are not usually taken into account.

In slash, on the other hand, they are the slashers who look for hints between the two male characters. They search for clues *if* it is possible and the *how* is only a means of the *if*. Once they start thinking that way, it is not difficult to find the hints. In Star Trek or in any “buddy” shows with only two male main characters, they are usually the only ones with a deeper characterisation and they show more emotions to each other than to anyone else. Slashers usually do not invent anything that is not a part of the canon. They take what is there and ask *what if* – a question that is characteristic for all of fan fiction.

Another aspect of the appeal of slash fan fiction might be the equality of gender in the pair. Despite many attempts in today’s society to equalise both genders (assuming there are only two now), there are still stereotypes (however mild) connected with each of them. A given hierarchy might be perceived in heterosexual couples and when it is not there, people tend to comment on their equality or they highlight the woman’s dominance (both in a positive or negative way). In slash couples (two men or two women), any hierarchy based on gender stereotypes becomes groundless. Thus, any dominance is formed by their characteristics and/or social status alone without any gender-specific connotations.

The characters’ influence on each other may become an emotional issue for both of them as they have to deal with themselves and their, as well as the society’s, anticipations and assumptions about themselves. The fact that slash is not only about erotica is supported by a comment by J J McGee in Pugh (94):

I know it’s an oxymoron but I’ve always felt that you can have something like “het slash” in situations where both characters are highly walled off and afraid of being vulnerable. “Slashy” to me has always implied more an emotional style of genre than the actual mechanics of getting two guys into bed. ... Usually, of course, women aren’t the ones with the intimacy issues, which is what makes it more fun to get guys to fall for each other.

This vulnerability is often projected in the sub-categories of slash²⁶, such as hurt/comfort or angst. It touches upon Sedgwick’s theory about the homosocial desires. The characters are made cross the gap to the other side and they have to deal with whatever happens, without any possibility to control at which side of the broken continuum they

²⁶ These categories function as sub-categories of fan fiction in general, too, as discussed above.

stand. The purpose of slashing the characters is, in this respect, not to fix the suggested continuum. First, it only shows that there is a gap. Second, it forces the characters to realise that crossing the gap will make their inner life richer (for slashers at least). This enriching of the range of the characters' emotions, the implicit intimacy issues which are made explicit, the realisation that they have to deal with their emotions and the exploration of their lives when they are forced to deal with it are probably the reason for many today's slashers who slash characters from canons that include enough good-quality female characters as well.

2. The Main Part

2.1 Slash Fan Fiction and the Canon

There are many popular works on which fan fiction is written, ranging from books, TV series, and movies to PC games. Fanfiction.net, the biggest fan fiction archive, hosts thousands and thousands of stories written by fans. The most popular work there is the Harry Potter series with more than 675 000 fan fictions. Other fandoms in which fans are usually engaged, such as The Lord of The Rings (51 000) or Sherlock (43 600), do not reach the aforementioned number at all.²⁷ This fact together with my ten-year-old first-hand experience is the reason why the main focus of the analysis of slash fan fiction and its canon is on the Harry Potter slash fan fiction and the Harry Potter canon. Other slash fan fiction is presented in the following canons: Sherlock Holmes, both the original works by Arthur Conan Doyle as well as the popular BBC TV series, and the Nightrunner series by Lynn Flewelling.

When fans “slash” certain characters, it is usually understood as a change of the characters’ sexuality in fan fiction. They are either presented as heterosexual and/or their sexuality is not mentioned, in which case heterosexuality is regarded as the default setting by the mainstream society. Often, the term “slash” refers to stories which contain a gay relationship regardless of the characters’ sexuality in the canon. Some fans do not consider this kind of slash to be the proper one; however, the fan terminology does not provide a suitable term for it and slash is the only term available (as such stories are not het or gen).

2.1.1 Slash fan fiction in the Harry Potter fandom

There are many slash stories of both kinds as well as many pairings (fanonical, canonical) to be found in the Harry Potter fandom. In fact, any characters of any characteristics, age, time or species can be slashed and, most probably, they already have been. It is possible to search the Internet for random names from the series and find uncommon pairings such as

²⁷ Available at <https://www.fanfiction.net/book> and <https://www.fanfiction.net/tv/>, both accessed 26 February 2014.

Dobby/Hagrid (a tiny house-elf and a half-giant game keeper, both working at Hogwarts), which even has its own Livejournal community²⁸. Some pairings, however, are more common and more favoured than others, numbering a huge amount of stories. Such pairings gradually become taken for granted in specific fan groups.

Focusing on the main character, Harry Potter, he is often slashed with one of the following three persons: Draco Malfoy, his rival and teenage enemy from the house of Slytherin, Severus Snape, his unpopular potions teacher and the head teacher of Slytherin, and Ron Weasley, Harry's best friend.

Pairing Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy has been immensely popular since the beginning of the Harry Potter fan fiction. Even stories that did not include slash hinted at the closeness of the two characters. In 2000, Cassandra Claire (now the published author Cassandra Clare) wrote the first part of her "Draco Trilogy"²⁹, "Draco Dormiens"; the other two parts, "Draco Sinister" and "Draco Veritas", soon followed but the saga was not complete until 2006³⁰. The story develops from a humorous and seemingly unimportant event, as Harry and Draco switch their bodies in Potions class and cannot reverse it, to a Draco-centred epic, which includes other places outside Hogwarts, the mysteries of magical inheritance and the myths of the past and the Founders of Hogwarts. Its popularity rose with each published instalment and some of today's fan fiction clichés or fanon tropes come from this work. One of the most common ones is the notion of Draco as an elegant young man with long silky hair, the ideal aristocrat, with only a streak of mischief, which is often represented as "Draco in leather pants". This shift from being a bony and unpleasant spoilt little boy, which is sometimes taken for granted and/or discovered by Harry, is the basis of many Harry/Draco stories.

Even though the Draco Trilogy started as het, it gradually became more complex to be labelled as that. It explored the tensions and rivalry between Harry and Draco who,

²⁸ Available at <http://dobbyluvhagrid.livejournal.com/>, accessed 28 February 2014.

²⁹ The story was originally published at fanfiction.net but it was banned from the site because of a few plagiarism issues. Its popularity has not faded since, though, and it has been re-published at several other sites by its fans.

³⁰ The word count of all three parts is 896 762 words and it is one of the longest fan fictions ever written (Pokey1984).

eventually, became friends in the fan fiction, and it hinted at many possibilities where they might cross the line of only being friends. It never happened in the story as it was published. However, Cassandra Claire herself claimed that she considered her fan fiction being slash because it contained gay characters³¹. Moreover, she wrote a missing scene to “Draco Veritas”, in which Draco boldly states that he could be gay if he wanted and kisses Harry to prove that, and she considered the scene a part of the “Draco Trilogy” canon³² (Cassandra Claire as epicyclical, *ficlet*).

Cassandra Claire was not the only one who shifted the perception of the Harry Potter canon. Her friend Rhysenn published a pure Harry/Draco fan fiction, “Irresistible Poison”, in 2001 – 2003. It starts as a cliché – Draco falls in love with Harry because of a love potion – but the plot develops into a more complex one. It is considered to be one of the fan fiction classics³³ and it has inspired many fans to find Harry/Draco pairing plausible.

Harry and Draco are presented as completely different personas in the canon, even though they are constantly compared. They compete with each other; they are rivals and enemies (as seen by Harry). This makes many fans think of them as two sides of the same coin, in which case crossing the borderline and slash them feels possible or even convincing. It does not happen out of the blue, though. In long fan fictions (unlike short one-shot stories or drabbles, 100-word stories, which may build on an already established relationship), there is always an unexpected and at first unpleasant situation that draws the two characters together and that they have to endure. There is usually a problem that must be solved and they must work together. In “Irresistible Poison”, it is the love potion. In “Transfigurations” by Resonant, it is the unusual strength of their ability to combine magical skills; that is the reason why they must work together to cleanse Hogwarts from hidden magical mines that were left there after the war against Voldemort. In “Resolution” by Frances Potter, Draco almost freezes while skiing and finally finds a remote hut at

³¹ “But that’s regarding my definition of slash, which is: stories with gay characters in them. That would include *After the End*, my Trilogy, ...” (Cassandra Claire as epicyclical, **gloom**)

³² A legitimate part of her story and not an author’s joke.

³³ Random fan fiction recommendations state that “If you haven’t read it, you haven’t read H/D (Switchknife) or “Sure, it’s the whole ‘love-potion-cliche’ but it’s so much more than that. It’s like, the epitomy [*sic*] of the whole category. It’s that good” (ficrecdump).

Hogwarts where Harry rescues him. Harry tries to shut himself out from the society in the hut as he is tired of being the chosen hero and wants a quiet time during his last year at Hogwarts. He is struck by Draco's sudden helplessness and both are discombobulated by the unusual intimacy they must share.

Rhysenn even mentions the aim of this tactic in her summary of the story: "...Written by a remorseless slash girl *g*, this story explores the intricate relationship between Harry and Draco." The appeal of that particular pairing can be expressed in a simple slash trope: make the good one and the bad one fall for each other and see what happens. They are forced to think about their relationship and develop it instead of blindly disliking each other. They are usually confronted with the outer world, which they must fit into (Harry as the chosen hero, Draco as a future Death Eater), and so they also have to re-evaluate their opinions, past, present or future. It allows for deep characterisation from different points of view and exploration of more mature or different themes, both of which the canon could not provide for different but justifiable reason.

A similar tension and similar issues can be expressed in other pairings without Harry, too. Some fans want to explore other characters, other places of the wizarding world and not only focus on Harry Potter. An example of such story is "I See Monsters (That's When I Reach for my Revolver)" by Hackthis with the pairing of Neville/Theodore. Neville is mostly presented as a good-for-nothing in the series; however, he is connected with Harry in many ways. He and Harry could both have been "the chosen one" and it was only Voldemort's choice what decided who was to be the hero. Moreover, Neville's character grows in the canon and he is the leading person at Hogwarts at the end of the books as Harry is not attending the school during the seventh year. He also studies in the same House. Theodore, on the other hand, is a mild version of Draco – a Slytherin, son of a Death Eater, with his future decided by his birth and parents. The general issues of the good and the bad stay the same.

They are not only shadows of a more popular pairing, though. Hackthis highlights what they and the main characters have in common as well as shows them as characters of their own. Again, the new situation Neville and Theodore get into allows for a completely different point of view, not only emotionally but physically, too, as the whole world is seen through minor characters' eyes. The story takes place simultaneously with the sixth book, *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince*, and can be thus classified as a "missing scene"

type of story (because of the point of view) as well as a “filling the gaps” type (because of the shift in themes).

Since the Harry Potter series include a canonically gay character, Albus Dumbledore, and his love affair with Gellert Grindewald at the end of the 19th century, it is possible to write a canonical slash in this fandom as well³⁴. Albus was generally regarded as the main good and wise wizard (by the majority of the wizarding society and Harry at least), whereas Gellert grew into the darkest wizard of the 20th century before Voldemort. A popular era for writing slash prequels with this pairing is the summer of 1899 when they had the canonical affair (and broke up eventually).

An example of the pairing is “Theatre of War” by Oudeteron. It takes place on two days, 16 September 1940 and 31 October 1976, yet it takes the summer of 1899 into account, which influences the upcoming events. In the 1930s and 1940s, Gellert Grindewald became a powerful dark wizard and was finally defeated in 1945 by Albus Dumbledore. The story begins with their encounter before the end of the World War II, revealing that Gellert is the one who is responsible for the war. The second day is set in the wizarding prison, Nurmengard, where Gellert has been put.

Although Harry and the majority of wizards consider Dumbledore to be a great, calm and wise wizard, it is a fact that he was not a stranger to the dark arts and manipulation (which is also canon³⁵). The story plays with his inner insecurity and touches upon his soft spot for power – and Gellert. The dilemmas he has to solve and the mental weaknesses he has to deal with are deeper and they bare both the characters in such a way that could not be possible had they not been romantically involved before.

This story can be definitely classified as angst. Again, it features two enemies. However, the initial (still canonical) situation is not the same as with the pairs mentioned

³⁴ However, this fact was not mentioned in the books but Rowling revealed it in an interview, which can be found online in the article “J. K. Rowling at Carnegie Hall Reveals Dumbledore is Gay; Neville Marries Hannah Abbott, and Much More”, available at <http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org/2007/10/20/j-k-rowling-at-carnegie-hall-reveals-dumbledore-is-gay-neville-marries-hannah-abbott-and-scores-more>, accessed 3 March 2014.

³⁵ “Be canon” means “be part of the canonical information”; it is either stated in the canon or confirmed by its author.

above. Albus and Gellert met as friends and, consequently, became lovers. It was not until the end of the summer in 1899 that they argued and Albus' sister was accidentally killed which resulted in their breakup. It is a variation on the "enemies that fall for each other" slash trope, only with their feelings drawn from the past which they have to overcome.

Falling in love with the best friend, another popular type of slash fan fiction, is not always easy, either. Harry/Ron fan fiction may have a lot of angst traits as well. Their romantic relationship may be a logical step after having been best friends for many years but this stepping over to another stage brings much insecurity with itself as well. As in the previous type, they have to deal with the change in their relationship.

"Waterworld" by rhoddlet is a one-shot story written from Ron's point of view. It was written in the time gap between the fourth and the fifth book and it takes place in their upcoming years at Hogwarts. It is therefore a sequel, which explains the little shifted characterisation of Harry who has developed a darker side to his character. Ron is sure Harry teases him and gives hints, yet he does not know if he understands them clearly. Moreover, Harry seems to have a self-destructing relationship with Draco as well. Ron finds himself being the last chain of manipulation, with Draco dominating on Harry and Harry on Ron. Yet, Ron becomes aware of it and tries to set it right again. The story develops Harry's predisposition to being mentally unstable after having been neglected for so many years by the Dursleys and after the sudden fame in the wizarding world. It also plays with other fanon tropes of addiction and manipulation in the Harry/Draco relationship³⁶ and explores Ron's position as always being the last and unimportant one – the youngest son, the sidekick of the famous Harry Potter and the last lover.

"Looking on Darkness" by Sophie Richard is a missing scene from the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003). Harry and Ron are fifteen years old and the school is tyrannised by Dolores Umbridge, an unscrupulous employee of the Ministry of Magic. Ron finds out about the cruel detentions Harry has to serve with Umbridge and their relationship becomes a twisted refuge where they can hide from the rest of the world. "One Week in the Summer" by Mad Martha, on the other hand, presents their relationship as emotionally challenging because of the fact that they have to face their families and the

³⁶ There are many parallel fanon tropes which may but may not contradict each other.

rest of the world in 1998, but Harry's insecurity could be similar if he had dated a girl. The relationship with Ron is seen as a logical continuation of their intense friendship in the story.

The last Harry Potter pairing discussed in this thesis is Remus Lupin/Sirius Black. It is considered to be semi-canonical by some fans, especially those who appreciate this particular pairing. However, Rowling has never explicitly stated that Remus and Sirius were lovers even though she does have gay characters in the series (Albus Dumbledore and Gellert Grindelwald) and, in addition, Remus married Nymphadora Tonks in the last book (Rowling 2007, 44).

After the marriage some fans, for example Nistelle, considered the canonical Remus/Tonks implausible and even hated the character of Tonks for spoiling the popular slash pairing. They argued that characters in the Harry Potter universe are only allowed one relationship in their lifetime and matching Remus and Tonks rules out any previous relationships. They believe in Remus/Sirius being purely fanon. On the other hand others, for example Selega's Harp, allow the characters to have more relationships and they consider Remus to be bisexual. Both theories work as fanon in fan fiction. Considering them canon may cause problems, though.

The Remus/Sirius pairing is often based on their intense friendship. They were part of a group of friends which also included James Potter (Harry's father) and Peter Pettigrew, but the two of them were always presented as best friends. Again, fan fiction writers search for hints that may be hidden in the books and that might reveal that Sirius and Remus are lovers as well. One of the most influential quotations from the canon is Dumbledore's instruction to Sirius at the end of the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), to "lie low at Lupin's" (Rowling 2000, 618), which is often interpreted as Dumbledore's suggestion for them to live together again, talk to each other (and more), and restore their relationship before the war with Voldemort begins anew.

"Five Ways Sirius Black Didn't Lie Low at Lupin's (And One Way He Did)" is a story by Sam Starbuck composed of six drabbles (100-word stories). They present the same situation – Sirius appears at Remus's flat – in six completely different ways. The last one, named "Reality", is the most peaceful and ordinary presentation of their meeting, which is in stark contrast to the previous five. It has not been stated anywhere in the story or in the author's note but the first five drabbles might represent fantasies about how the situation

could happen. Moreover, it is up to each reader to decide whose fantasies they are. Two possible answers are suggested in the comments to the story and these are Remus', or Sirius' fantasies. Given the fact that it was Sirius who was ordered to hide at Remus' and that the only thing that changes is the situation in which he comes to his home, it is more probable that they are Sirius' fantasies. However, it is also possible that the fantasies, if they are believed to be fantasies, are neither Sirius' nor Remus'. The first five drabbles may represent fans' ideas; they may stand for many fanonical representations of this "missing scene". The drabbles depict a) Sirius making himself comfortable before Remus comes home, b) Sirius ruining Remus' date, c) Sirius suddenly following Remus' in his magical shape as a dog, d) their meeting arranged by Dumbledore and involving strong emotions, and e) a slash version in which they confess their love to each other. Each works with different fanon interpretations and perceptions of the characters; only the sixth one seems to be simple and, as Sam mentions in the last sentence, "anticlimactic, really". In this respect, the story laughs at and honours both fan fiction and the canon at the same time. It might present five popular fanon ideas and contrast them with a restrained canon-like scene; however, the whole story including the sixth drabble is nothing but fan fiction. On the other hand, the canon-like scene is so unspecific that it creates its own gaps, as the real canon does, and it gradually gives way to fans and their imagination, justifying the previous five drabbles.

The possible slash pairings in the Harry Potter fandom are almost unlimited. There are two major tendencies to ship³⁷ particular characters. They are either enemies, or best friends. The appeal and topic of many fan fictions is the sense of a forbidden love which is connected with the characters' notion of themselves, other characters and the world they live in. The stories turn the world upside down and explore what the characters do to find their place in it again. In the Harry Potter fandom in particular, the characters and the universe in general is presented in quite a black and white way. Since the slashed enemies are usually obsessed with each other, the remarkably one-sided presentation of the world allows for challenging the given mechanisms of it and making the emotions of love and

³⁷ In fan fiction, the word "ship" is used both as a noun, which means "relationship" or pairing, and as a verb, which means "be a fan of a particular pairing and write and/or read stories with the particular pairing".

hate even closer to each other. Best friends are usually slashed in such a way that they are made cross the gap between friendship and romantic relationship. It is considered to be a logical continuation of their friendship but the characters have to deal with their intimacy issues as well. The most popular pairings explore the extremes, the best friends or the worst enemies; the insecurity of the characters and the necessity to slow down, realise their emotions and act upon them are common for both types of slash fan fiction. Both types of pairings also range from stories depicting true love to pathological addition.

2.1.2 Slash Fan Fiction in the Sherlock (Holmes) Fandom

Although Sherlock Holmes as created by Arthur Conan Doyle has been a popular source text that inspired many fan fictions up to 2010, its popularity mainly rose after that date. In 2009, the American film “Sherlock Holmes”, directed by Guy Ritchie, raised the general audience’s awareness that such work existed and should not be forgotten. However, it was not until 2010, when the “Sherlock” TV series by BBC was first aired, that the number of fans who write fan fiction rose rapidly. The Archive of Our Own lists several Sherlock Holmes fandoms which are divided according to the difference in media (books and literature, TV shows, movies...). The most popular ones are Sherlock Holmes and Related Fandoms and Sherlock (TV)³⁸. Fans often tag their stories with both fandoms, which confirms the connection between the canon by Arthur Conan Doyle and the TV series.

The most popular pairing in the whole Sherlock Holmes universe is Sherlock Holmes/John Watson. No other pairing reaches the number of stories this pairing has. At The Archive of Our Own, there are 28156 works listed as Sherlock Holmes/John Watson slash³⁹, compared to 7237 works depicting Sherlock and John as friends⁴⁰. The canonical

³⁸ The list of fandoms is available at <http://archiveofourown.org/media>, accessed 16 March 2014. “Sherlock” lists 50759 works, “Sherlock Holmes and Related Fandoms” 55220 works, whereas the “Sherlock Holmes (Downey films)” only 1263. There are three other fandoms in Sherlock Holmes films which list 9 works when combined.

³⁹ Available at http://archiveofourown.org/tags/Sherlock%20Holmes*s*John%20Watson/works, accessed 16 March 2014.

het pairing of Mary Morstan/John Watson counts only 2004 stories⁴¹ and Sherlock Holmes/Jim Moriarty, which could follow the trope of enemies falling for each other, has only 741 works⁴².

Some fans consider Holmes/Watson canonical, even though it was not explicitly stated in the original stories because of its publication between 1887 (“A Study in Scarlet”) and 1927 (“The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place”). They sometimes argue that the absence of explicit confirmation that they are paired together does not rule out the possibility or even probability that they are. The TV series builds upon this ambiguity about their relationships. Although they are presented as friends, other characters repeatedly mistake them for a couple. A few examples of the hints incorporated in the series are as follows: in the first episode, John and Sherlock are sitting in a café; John asks if Sherlock is gay and even though he denies to be possibly attracted to women, he does not deny the possibility to be attracted to men; Sherlock is convinced that John is gay and making advances to him; the waiter in the café obviously knows Sherlock and assumes that John is Sherlock’s date. Mrs Hudson wonders if they would like to share a bedroom as John is obviously Sherlock’s boyfriend. She is told otherwise but she keeps making remarks throughout the whole series. In the first episode of the second season, Irene Adler insists that they are a couple, as well as John’s girlfriend comments that it looks like he is in relationship with Sherlock and not with her. In the second episode of the second season, two innkeepers (a gay couple) mistake them for being boyfriends as well. Moreover, in the third episode of the second season, there are newspaper articles claiming that Sherlock has been “frequently seen in the company of confirmed bachelor John Watson”, with “confirmed bachelor” being a Victorian euphemism for “a gay man”. However indicative of their relationship the series might be, it never crosses the line and stays more or less canonical. It does not rule out other understandings of close friendships which might not be common

⁴⁰ Available at http://archiveofourown.org/tags/Sherlock%20Holmes%20*a%*%20John%20Watson/works, accessed 16 March 2014.

⁴¹ Available at http://archiveofourown.org/tags/Mary%20Morstan*s*John%20Watson/works, accessed 16 March 2014.

⁴² Available at http://archiveofourown.org/tags/Sherlock%20Holmes*s*Jim%20Moriarty/works, accessed 16 March 2014.

in the mainstream society, though, and many fan fictions deal with different stages of their relationships.

The most popular plot in slash Sherlock Holmes fan fiction is making them a couple and their discovery of their feelings. This theme and several popular tropes how to achieve it are common to fan fiction of all subfandoms (the books, the TV series...). That is the reason why stories based on the books and stories based on the TV series are not going to be presented separately.

The easiest way to slash Sherlock Holmes and John Watson is let them realise their own feelings. At the beginning of the story, one of them, mostly Sherlock, is usually aware of his feelings and the other one is not. In order to explain Sherlock's ability to have emotions even though he is presented as unable to relate to other people, the stories are often written in Sherlock's point of view.

"Devil's Calling" by Janeturenne is an exemplary story based on the original Holmes stories. The author rewrote "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton" by Doyle from Holmes' point of view. The original story contains a lot of deliberate touching between Holmes and Watson as they are breaking into Milverton's house. It is explained by Janeturenne as not only tactics of moving in the dark and hiding behind a curtain but of making advances that Sherlock hopes will make John realise his feelings. The story follows the canon but adds a few dialogues, and omits others, and reveals the true motives behind the murder of Milverton who was shot by a lady. She talks about love and about the woman she loves as she is killing him so that he could not blackmail her any further, all with Holmes and Watson listening. The story is as close to the canon as it could be given the fact that the original was a subjective account of the events written by Watson, who could have known and remembered different things as well as deliberately withheld others. It reads as if a plastic film with additional information was put on the original text, showing explicitly what was hidden between the lines. Again, it works with the hints that slashers see in the canon and elaborate upon them in their fan fiction.

The discovery of their feelings is often accelerated by a popular trope of Sherlock conducting an experiment. His liking of unusual experiments is widely known from the canon and it offers countless of possibilities how to slash Sherlock and John. The experiments are usually of a sexual nature or they require touching and they play with the general sentiment that Sherlock discovers the human nature in a purely scientific way.

Another popular trope, drawn from the canon, is Sherlock's disguises, and especially crossdressing. Both of these were used in "The Maiden Voyage of the Tiresias" by Astolat (Shalott). Again, it is based on the written work by Doyle and not any TV adaptation. Having depressions during a bleak spring in London, Holmes is persuaded by Watson to go on a month-long boat trip to Cairo and back, all under one condition: they will travel separately, Holmes will be in disguise and Watson must penetrate it in two weeks until they reach Cairo. However, Watson sees Holmes' open trunk filled with female dresses as he returns home because he forgot some instruments, and Holmes realises Watson knows because he noticed that Watson left without them and they were not there when he came back. What they do not know until the end of story is that the other one knows. During the boat trip, Watson makes an acquaintance of a particular lady who begins to openly flirt with him. It takes seven days during which they try to make the other one confess to know, Holmes by flirtation and Watson by pressing the matter further, but none of them will surrender even though Holmes invites Watson into his room for a night. The story is written in Watson's point of view as the majority of the canonical texts and he keeps most canonical voice throughout the whole story. It employs devices which were introduced in the canon and it makes use of Holmes' and Watson's personalities, only to shift them a little sidewise and a little further.

Another popular type of fan fiction, which is especially common in the Sherlock TV series fandom, is pre-slash or friendship stories. Pre-slash may be considered as a subcategory of slash and, as the term already indicates, they are stories which depict an unusual friendship and emotional tensions between two characters but they do not become what is commonly understood as a romantic (as well as sexual) relationship. Some pre-slash fan fiction does not develop into slash at all; other stories make it clear that slash may be a possible development in the future but they do not elaborate on it; yet other stories, or better series of stories, include pre-slash chapters or pre-slash stories (which function as one-shot stories and work on their own), but the following stories in the series are already slash.

A story which is pre-slash and works on its own, but it is also a part of a greater work, is "Time Signature" by Nikoshinigami, a second part of "The Circle of Fifths" series. It takes place after the last episode of the second season of "Sherlock", "The Reichenbach Fall", at the end of which the whole world including John Watson thinks that Sherlock Holmes is

dead (but the viewers know he is alive). It is an epistolary story, written as a series of e-mails exchanged between John Watson and James Sigerson, who is obviously Sherlock Holmes, yet John does not recognise the cipher. As they write about themselves and the situation they are in, John finally realises that he loved Sherlock, because, as James [Sherlock] himself suggests, "Love is a far more intellectual thing [than sexuality]. Love broken down to its simplest elements is understanding, acceptance, and respect. ... Most people are too fascinated by sex to see beyond the carnal aspects of humanity." This challenges the common understanding of friendship and love in today's society. Their relationship is not slash yet but it floats somewhere in the middle, somewhere above the gap that society creates. It may stay where it is or it may shift itself in whichever direction without being pushed one way or another.

Another pre-slash or friendship-Sherlock/John is "Seven Ways to Fall Asleep" by Tartanfics. This story is purely a one-shot and does not belong to any series of stories. After John and Sherlock moved together, Sherlock cannot focus on work at night and he cannot sleep either. This is the reason why he waits until John falls asleep and sneaks into John's bed to work and later sleep. They share a bed and cuddle, which is another common trope in Sherlock/John fan fiction. Neither of them considers their situation peculiar even though they realise that society would like to label them somehow. Again, by this asexual romance or really intense friendship, their relationship cannot be labelled easily.

Not all Sherlock Holmes/John Watson fan fiction is peaceful, though, and there are a few complications that arise repeatedly in fan fiction and they have already become a part of the fanon. These are as follows: Sherlock Holmes is a purely intellectual being, asexual, but John Watson is not; John is straight and therefore marries happily, whereas Sherlock is interested in John; or their relationship is complicated by Sherlock's miscellaneous fetishes. "Homo Ex Machina" by Toft presents one of Holmes' unusual preferences. Watson, secretly in love with Holmes, writes second-rate porn which he accidentally publishes and he is blackmailed. Holmes, who guessed the identity of the author and tortures him by investigating the matter, turns out to be a fraud. He has never been a consulting detective but a custom-built hysteria machines creator and he invented his profession as a detective because he needed a cover-up story for Watson, whom he liked as a roommate (at first). As absurd as it may sound, Watson's point of view stays in character despite the content. Apart from a few lines, the story is written in a serious tone which

leaves it oscillating somewhere between a humorous parody and a shocking alternative universe. The author herself describes the story as “crack.” Crack in fan fiction describes a story which starts with a ludicrous premise and employs incredible or silly elements, and it implies that the author must have been on drugs when they were writing the story. Such fan fiction may be a parody in itself or it might satirize a common phenomenon. “Homo Ex Machina” can be seen as both, a work written for pure fun as well as an exaggeration of Holmes’ secrets and fetishes in fanon (which are, however parodied, not degraded).

Slash in the Sherlock (Holmes) fandom is fundamentally based on only one pairing of Holmes/Watson. Other slash pairings are an exception that proves the rule, and the slashing of enemies, for example Holmes/Moriarty, is almost nonexistent in this particular fandom. However, there are two types of slash which are popular among slashers.

First, they build on the hints of their relationship in the canon, by Doyle or otherwise, and bring them together in fan fiction. It may be one of the pair who realises his feelings sooner and waits until the other one comes to his senses, or manipulates and in a way seduces the other one. Another possibility is that Sherlock Holmes conducts an experiment (sexual or somehow intimate) which has unexpected results, or they find themselves in a situation which makes them think again about their relationship.

Second, the fan fiction is classified as slash but the characters are not in a traditional relationship. These stories relate to the ambiguous canon but do not claim that Holmes and Watson are only friends. They challenge both the understanding of friendship and of romantic relationship at the same time. They cannot be labelled as one or the other and they include elements of both. With slash being accepted or expected, especially in the modern day Sherlock TV series, slashers take another step further. Probably unconsciously, they try to bridge Sedgwick’s gap between the homosocial and homosexual, stopping in the middle, unafraid of the position and of the possibility of shifting itself on the continuum, which may make it not understandable to anyone who prefers the extreme sides of the homosocial-homosexual continuum.

The Sherlock Holmes fandom is also a proof of the connection between the “more of” and “more from” principles of fan fiction. However “alternative universe” they may be or however uncanonical situation Holmes and Watson may find themselves in, the tone of the fan fiction usually stays as close to the canon as possible. If they are written on the texts by

Doyle, they usually follow the first-person narration and the structure of the stories, even though the points of view may change – they are either Watson’s or Holmes’. Fan fiction written on the TV series is not as unanimous in the type of narration in the same way which the TV series cannot manage, but a first-person narration from whoever’s point of view are not exceptional either. In the Sherlock Holmes fan fiction, the characters’ canonical voice is as important as any challenges to the canon.

2.2 Slash Canon and Fan Fiction

Although the phenomenon of (slash) fan fiction may be still unheard of in the mainstream society and, in the past, some academics regarded slash fan fiction as unique⁴³ or almost subversive to the mainstream literature, this part of the thesis tries to show these types of text are not as original and minor when compared to (professionally published) literature. There are certainly aspects of fan fiction that are not common in professional contexts. These are mainly the freedom to write whatever a fan wants to write about and the community which surrounds (almost) each canon on which fan fiction is written. Despite the existence of fan fiction archives whose members have to follow certain rules in order to publish fan fiction there (such rules may include the ban of AU [alternative universe] stories or stories with explicit sexual content etc.)⁴⁴, fans are free to choose the website they want to publish on. Despite any possible readers' rating systems on several archives⁴⁵, even the least read stories are published and they are not censored by the publisher's idea of what might or might not sell. The communication between fans and the fact that they work with a shared background are not a prototypical image of today's writer in today's society. Their collaboration in the creating process and the fact that the majority of fan fiction readers are its writers result in intersections between the individual and the collective. Nevertheless, it is not as unique when seen in the context of postmodernist literature which was presented in the theoretical part of the thesis. Moreover, the text of the stories, the fan fiction itself, does not differ from the professionally published literature in style and tone either.

Speaking of slash fan fiction only, it certainly does possess characteristics that were not present (enough) in the canon. Such differences between the concept of the canon and its fan fiction were shown through the examples of slash fan fiction in the previous chapter. However, the specific characteristics of slash fan fiction, the "slash factor" of the texts in

⁴³ Henry Jenkins claimed that it is "original contribution to popular literature" (1992).

⁴⁴ SugarQuill.net is an example of a selective archive which only accepts high-quality, purely canonical stories by authors that have previously published there. Available at <http://www.sugarquill.net/>, accessed 19 March 2014. FanFiction.net does not allow authors to publish works rated as "mature" or "NC-17".

⁴⁵ The Archive of Our Own allows readers to leave "kudos" on works they liked, for example.

general, are not confined to fan fiction only. This chapter presents professionally published works and shows that even though the “slash factor” may be prevalent in fan fiction, it is not exclusively a characteristic of unofficial literature, and it does exist in professional literature as well. Moreover, slash fan fiction on the already “slashed” canon is presented. This challenges the concept of slash fan fiction being the “more from” type of fan fiction and shows how the “more of” and “more from” principles are not exclusive to each other.

2.2.1 “Slash” in Professional Fiction and Its Slash “Author’s Fan Fiction”

The “slash” canon may sound as an oxymoron. In the conventional understanding of it, slash is a fannish creation, which changes (or eventually defines) the sexuality of the characters and deals with romantic relationships between the characters of the same sex. There are, however, many types of slash as illustrated in the previous chapter, and it ranges from asexual/friendship-like to explicit, almost pornographic slash. Upon closer inspection, the focus of slash is not sexuality but intimacy, the psychological tensions, and connections between the characters of the same sex. This can be seen in the professional fiction, too, and it is going to be presented at the Nightrunner series by Lynn Flewelling.

“Nightrunners” is a fantasy series composed of seven novels: *Luck in the Shadows* (1996), *Stalking Darkness* (1997), *Traitor’s Moon* (1999), *Shadows Return* (2008), *The White Road* (2010), *Casket of Souls* (2010), and *Shards of Time* (2014). There is also a collection of Nightrunner short stories, *Glimpses* (2010), and the “Tamir Triad”, a prequel trilogy to Nightrunners which is set in the past and deals with the life of the most famous and important queen in the Nightrunner universe (*The Bone Doll’s Twin*, 2001; *Hidden Warrior*, 2003; *Oracle’s Queen*, 2006).

The two main protagonists of the Nightrunner series, Seregil and Alec, meet as they are both imprisoned by a Nightrunner-universe “mafia”. Seregil is a professional spy and thief, as well as a member of Scalan aristocracy (a country in the south), and Alec is a recently-orphaned teenager. They escape and travel together for some time. Apart from a few hints, which sensitive slashers might immediately recognise, the relationship between the characters is that of acquaintance (Alec gradually becomes Seregil’s protégé and apprentice), and later of friendship and professional partnership. It takes two books for

them to finally become lovers as well, which they remain for the rest of the series since then.

In the first book, Seregil confronts an oracle in order to solve a secret. Instead of the expected answer, Seregil is given a prophecy unrelated to his question and it is clear that the oracle is speaking of Alec when uttering: “father, brother, friend, and lover” (Flewelling 1996, 271). All four words refer to four stages of their relationship, the former two only figuratively, the latter two literally. However, it does not refer to their social or sexual closeness, but to the level of trust and intimacy between them. Should Sedgwick’s homosocial-homosexual continuum be mentioned again, the Nightrunner universe does not separate it into two distinct realms but different stages of the continuum are blended, the borderlines between them become blurred and it creates the possibility of a fluent transfer from one stage to another.

An indication that the change from being friends to lovers is more psychological than carnal is the use of the term “talí” in the series. In Aurënfaie, Seregil’s mother tongue, the word is a “ term of endearment, rather old-fashioned, like beloved” (Flewelling 1997, 119). However possible it is to address close relatives, for example, as “talí”, there is another term that is used exclusively to describe the psychological and intimate bond between two people: “talímenios”. In *Traitor’s Moon*, Flewelling (20) writes:

When they’d finally become lovers, it had done much more than deepen their friendship. The Aurënfaie word for the bond between them was *talímenios*. Even Seregil couldn’t fully interpret it, but by then there’d been no need for words.

For Alec, it was a unity of souls forged in spirit and flesh. Seregil had been able to read him like a tavern slate since the day they’d met; now his own intuition was such that at times he almost knew his friend’s thoughts.

There is certainly a distinction between a romantic couple and “talímenios” in the Nightrunner universe. Being lovers (both hetero- and homosexual), or even married, does not necessarily mean that the couple reaches the stage of being “talímenios”, even if they love each other. In another scene, Ales is watching two men dancing (Flewelling 1999, 236-237):

One pair of men held Alec’s attention for dance after dance. It was not simply their skill that moved him but the way they seemed to hold each

other with their gaze, trusting, anticipating, working in perfect unison. His throat tightened as he watched them during one particularly sensual dance; he knew without being told that they were talimenios and that they had lived this dance, this mingling of souls, together most of their lives.

This “mingling of souls”, the shared intimacy, is the basis of slash relationships. There are several ways to enhance this intimacy which are widely used in “slash” texts and they are usually of an extreme nature, they are situations that require the couple’s absolute trust in each other. One of the examples of such a situation is the dance mentioned in the extract above. However, they range from peaceful scenes, like the previous one, through sexual scenes to thriller-like situations of mortal danger.

The Nightrunner series is not fan fiction, it is not transformative of any previous work, and the readers share no common knowledge of the world upon their first opening of the books. Therefore, it is necessary for it have a strong plot sufficient to fill so many volumes. They are adventurous books, and as such they draw the action further and the plot is not only about revelling in the character’s psychological states and thoughts. However, apart from the majority of adventurous fantasy, the books do slow down when it is plausible and they do not make gaps when the character’s thoughts or relationship are concerned. The fact that it is not common in mainstream literature (as far as homosexual relationships are concerned, at least) is illustrated by the author’s own statement in her Livejournal entry “The Problem of Sex Literature”:

I’ve read so many books in which two men get together, but it’s all about sex and power. They don’t like each other. I tried to do something different there, too, because I know gay couples who do like each other.

But hey, you can’t please everyone. I tried to so [*sic*] something different having a gay hero who’s really gay (or bi) on screen, not just hinted at and tap danced around. Lost some readers there. I had the two characters actually get together, on screen, not just hinted at or tap danced around. Lost some readers there. I have two action heroes who happen to be in a relationship that works. I’m losing readers there.

Written between 1996 and 2014, the Nightrunner series is as old as it is new and present; the Livejournal entry quoted above was published in 2010. It is certainly not the first work with homosexual characters and slash elements at the same time. Examples of

relatively well-known books which include both are the historical novels by Mary Renault, such as *The Charioteer* (1953) or *The Persian Boy* (1972). However, the general audience might still be surprised at seeing action and “slash” combined.

A fanfiction-like atmosphere can be found in the collection of Nightrunner short stories, *Glimpses*. It includes four stories; three of them are prequels to the series and one is a missing scene. The prequels deal with Seregil’s past before the first book of the series (“Misfit”, “By the River”) and with the history of Alec’s parents (“The Wild”). All explore relationships that are in a way relevant to the series, they have consequences which explain some of the character’s behaviour and attitudes. Similarly to fan fiction, they work in an already established universe. Although they might present new characters or some of the characters are considerably younger than in the series, they are still framed by the particular context of the world. They are not meant as an introduction to the world of Nightrunners but rather as a bonus for those who are already well aware of the events from the series.

This particular freedom to focus on individual aspects of a larger world allows the author to revel in interpersonal relationships and include action as well as scenes of more intimate nature in the stories. Again, the sex depicted there, as well as in slash fan fiction, reveals something about the characters. This is most visible in the missing scene type of story, “The Bond”. It takes place at the very end of *Stalking Darkness*, the second book, in which Seregil and Alec become talímenios. The book skips two days after they become a couple, whereas the story takes account of what happened during these two days. What the author considered redundant in the original book is now presented as a separate story. It directly follows what was said in the book, some parts were copied to highlight the continuity, but it takes its time and place to show the events of the days without any censorship (personal – the author’s, conceptual – regarding the book, or other). Since the events in the second half of the book were personally and emotionally devastating for Seregil (the loss of a close character who was more of a father to Seregil, guilt, confusion, Alec being kidnapped), and since the third book begins after a two-year gap in the story, the missing scene offers additional information of *how* the book really ended and *how* the characters dealt with each other and the situation they happened to be in instead of only saying *that* it happened.

The impression of *Glimpses* being an “(author’s) fan fiction” collection is even highlighted by the presence of fan art (fan illustration) in the book. Even though the author does not support fan fiction written on her books, she gratefully accepts fan art and other fan work. The collaboration between the author and her fans on the collection is distinct, the notion of slash and fan fiction in general and their principles are a fundamental part of the universe and the fan base Lynn Flewelling created. Yet, all of it was published professionally and all the stories are canon.

2.2.2 Slash Fan Fiction in the Nightrunner Fandom

The Nightrunner fandom is one of the smallest ones, which is in stark contrast to the fandoms of Harry Potter and Sherlock Holmes mentioned in the previous chapter. Even though the Nightrunner books are not a widely known series, it is not a completely marginal work in the fantasy genre. However, the number of fan fiction written on it is really low⁴⁶. There might be several reasons why fan fiction on the Nightrunner series scarcely exists.

First, Lynn Flewelling, the author, did not publicly approve of fan fiction written on her work in 2004⁴⁷, even though she supports other fan work, especially fan art and fan songs, inspired by her books. She advised fans to share their fan fiction in private and there are places on the Internet, for example Livejournal.com communities, which allow only their members to see the published content. Fans may respect her wish and not publish fan fiction in the biggest fan fiction archives. Second, regarding the fact that the series is not a mainstream work, the number of its fans is limited and only some fans write fan fiction. Consequently, fan fiction readers are not constantly flooded by new stories which would inspire them to create something of their own and/or which would be fashionable at a particular time. Third, the world is relatively well thought through. There are many details

⁴⁶ There are only 33 stories published at The Archive of Our Own and 8 stories at Fanfiction.net, available at <http://archiveofourown.org/tags/Nightrunner%20Series%20-%20Lynn%20Flewelling/works> and <https://www.fanfiction.net/book/Nightrunner-series>, both accessed 23 March 2014.

⁴⁷ Available at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Flewelling/conversations/topics/15148>, accessed 23 March 2014.

in the books but they are mentioned for a reason and they do not stay uncared for, waiting for fans to pick them up and write about them, which is a frequent motive for fans to write fan fiction in other fandoms.

However, some Nightrunner fan fiction exists and it is mostly slash between the main two characters, Seregil and Alec. Most of them are missing scenes and “more of” types of fan fiction. The slash is canonical and fan fiction writers do not need to get out of line with the canon. The stories are usually short (about 2 000 to 3 000 words, rarely about 10 000 words) and they depict another of Seregil’s and Alec’s jobs as spies and thieves. They do not follow a particular scene in the canon, they are more or less timeless. There are almost no sequels or prequels.

One of the missing scenes is “Night Work” by Wolfling. It is a perfect example of Seregil and Alec on another Nightrunner mission. The author plays with their usual life, being aristocrats as well as spies and thieves, and she creates an interesting “more of” scene. It does not want to extend the canon plot-wise, but it tries to present another day of the life of Seregil and Alec which their fans already know. A similar story is “A Virtuous Woman” by Corialis. In contrast to “Night Work”, “A Virtuous Woman” has a higher rating and it shows a more personal and not everyday scene – it works with the canonical theme of Seregil being disguised as a woman during some of their commissions. However, both of them are fans’ treats for other fans who want to read about something they already know from the canon.

There are two stories in the archives which try to fill in a particular gap in the books. These are “Opening the Gates” by Quasar and “Back on the Horse” by Novembersmith which both deal with the time gap of two days at the end of book two, *Stalking Darkness*. It is the same gap which Lynn Flewelling herself noticed and which she filled with her story “The Bond” in *Glimpses*. All three stories follow a similar plotline because it was clear what happened at the end of the book but no details were canon before “The Bond”.

It is peculiar that “Back on the Horse” was written in 2013, three years after the publication of *Glimpses* and the canonical story. However, it is obvious that Novembersmith did not read *Glimpses* before writing her own version of the story because if she had known it, she would not have had a motive for writing it at all, and at the same time, it is clear that she is not trying to copy “The Bond”, as she presents her own conception of the characters and of the two days.

Another type of fan fiction is “Collide” by InventingWorlds. It is an AU (alternative universe), which gives the author freedom to explore the universe without trying to be in line with the canon. A magic trick goes wrong, Seregil finds himself in 2010 and meets a present day Alec and other characters who have no idea of their canon counterparts. Such an AU lets the author create a story of 35 500 words, play with the characters and their development, and invent an interesting plot without duplicating the canon or moving away from the canonical characterisation and/or the main characters.

All in all, it is both easy and difficult to write slash fan fiction on works which already contain a gay relationship if the fan fiction writer wants to write about the canonically established relationship. It is possible to write all types of fan fiction, sequels, prequels, missing scenes, and filling the gaps, as well canonical and alternative universe fan fiction, but the usual technique which slashers use, finding hints in the canon and speculating about the characters in their own creative way, are not always applicable. That is why slashers usually write short “more of” stories through which they share their liking of the canon but do not aspire to writing a story of more importance. It would certainly be possible to write more intricate “more of” stories and long sequels, but the Nightrunner fandom still has to wait until such fan fiction emerges. “More from” fan fiction is probably difficult to write because of the fans’ approval of the canon and only alternative universes provide them with the freedom to digress from the canon and not distort it at the same time. However, if the writers of Nightrunner fan fiction decided to write about other characters than the established gay couple, they would have the same opportunities of working with the canonical material as with any other canons.

2.3 The Questionnaire Analysis

A questionnaire (see Appendix) was sent to English-speaking slash fan fiction readers and writers. It maps their idea of what fan fiction in general and slash fan fiction in particular are and how they work, as well as their reading and writing preferences. It allows today's slash fans to express their views and comment on their involvement within slash fandoms, which can be contrasted with the theory of (slash) fan fiction and the slash fan fiction analysis as presented in the thesis.

The sample of slash fan fiction readers and writers was mostly chosen at random. The questionnaire was sent to 250 slash fans who are active at Fanfiction.net, The Archive of Our Own, Livejournal.com, and Dreamwidth.org, and who posted and/or recommended slash fan fiction there. The search on these websites was conducted completely at random without any focus on particular fandoms, pairings, ratings, length of the stories and their popularity, the nationality, age or any other determining factor of the respondents. Out of the 250 slash fans, I have read at least one story by 22 of them and 10 of them know my online identity. The questionnaire was anonymous and apart from asking for their country of origin, age, gender, and sexual orientation, which may help to classify them as belonging to a particular stratum of society, the majority of questions were aimed at their involvement in fandom.

The slash fans were contacted from 17th to 20th February 2014. The questionnaire was created online (with access only to those with a link) and it was accepting responses from 17th February to 22nd March 2014. The respondents filled it in from 17th February to 16th March 2014. Out of 250 slash fans, 56 of them responded to the questionnaire which makes the response rate of 22,4%.

The respondents come from 13 countries. 24 of them (42,86%) come from the USA, 9 (16,07%) from the Czech Republic, 8 (14,29%) from the UK, 4 (7,14%) from Canada, 2,5 (4,46%) from Australia (one respondent claimed to come from both Australia and France and did not specify their preferences or current location), 1 (1,79%) come from Finland, Poland, Brazil, Israel, Russia, the Netherlands, and Norway, 0,5 (0,89%) comes from France (see above).

The highest number of English-speaking slash fans comes from the English-speaking countries: 39, 70%. The exceptionally high amount of Czech slash fans is surprising but

the reasons for such a result may be simple: a) some of the respondents from the Czech Republic know me, b) my location was specified in the description of the questionnaire, both of which may have persuaded Czech slash fans to respond, or even send it to their friends (since the questionnaire is anonymous, these are only guesses). There are many fan fiction readers and writers as well as fan fiction archives in the Czech Republic, fan fiction is relatively widespread in here and, according to my 10-year long experience, many Czech fans read fan fiction not only in Czech, but in English, too, because the English-speaking fandom is considerably bigger than the Czech (and Slovak) one. However, it is unlikely that the Czech Republic would be the second country in which most slash fans read and/or write slash fan fiction and some of the reasons mentioned above must be involved.

The average age of the respondents is 27,5 years; the modal age is 24; the median age is 26. The oldest respondent claimed to be 58 years old, the youngest 14 years old. Most of them, 4 (7%) each and 16 (29%) in total, claimed to be 18, 24, 26, and 28 years old.

However, the average age at which they started reading and writing slash fan fiction is 18 years; the modal age is 17; the median age is 16. Apart from 17 being the most frequent age of their first involvement in slash fandom, which was given by 8 (14%) respondents, the same number of respondents started reading and writing slash fan fiction at the age of 13, 6 (11%) of them started at the age of 14, and 5 (9%) of them each (10 respondents, 18%, in total) at the age of 12 and 16. The youngest slash fan started to read and/or write it when they were 10 years old (2 respondents, 4%) and the oldest one was 47 (2%).

The average time for which the respondents have read/written slash fan fiction is 9 years; the modal time is 10 years; the median time is 9 years. The longest time is 38 years, the shortest is 1 day (answered by 1 respondent, 2%, each). When asked if they see themselves reading/writing slash fan fiction in 10 years time, 45 respondents (80%) answered yes, 6 respondents (11%) were not sure, and 5 respondents (9%) did not answer the question.

In 2006, Jenkins (178) claimed that fan fiction was dominated by women in their 20s and 30s in the 1990s, and that younger generation of fans joined them in the 2000s. In the same year, Evans (64) conducted a survey on fan fiction writing among writers at Fanfiction.net and in her sample, the average age was 18,9 years, the modal age 15, and the median age 17. It is remarkable that 8 years after Evan's survey, the average age is 8 years

higher, the modal and median age 9 years higher. The prototypical fan of my survey joined the fandom 10 years ago, which is in 2004, and she was 14 years old (or on average: 17,5 years) at that time. It seems as if the population of fans have become stable. There are new and young fans joining fandom each year but the influx of still younger fans does not reach such rapid numbers as a decade ago. However, there are differences in the sample of fans. Both Jenkins and Evans questioned fan fiction writers in general (interested in gen, het, and slash). This questionnaire, on the other hand, focuses only on slash fans. It is possible that a) younger fans do not read and write slash so often, b) young slash fans are not so involved in slash even though they write/read it, and/or c) they may have been more reluctant to fill in the questionnaire which mostly tends to require long and detailed answers.

91% (51 respondents) identify themselves as female (3 respondents clarified their gender to be cis female⁴⁸), 7% (4 respondents) as male (1 respondent clarified their gender to be FTM male⁴⁹), and 2% (1 respondent) as other. These results are in no way surprising. Jenkins (2006, 178), Pugh (7), Evans (64) all show that the majority of fan fiction writers/readers are women. In Evans' survey, the percentage of female fans was a little lower, 82%; however, she focused on writers/readers of not only slash, but het and gen, too. In her much smaller slash survey, all slash fan fiction writers/readers were women.

39% (22 respondents) identify themselves as bisexual (or its variations: "pansexual", "everything", "potentially attracted to any and all things", "no label", "biromantic demisexual" (Q), which were all for the sake of clarity moved to the "bisexual" label).

36% (20 respondents) identify themselves as heterosexual (or its variations: "mostly straight" – 2 respondents, "basically heterosexual", "heteroflexible", "straight, but hypothetically demi-pansexual", "straight but open-minded" (Q)). However, if all respondents who do not identify themselves as 100% heterosexual were put into the "bisexual" category, 50% of slash fans would be classified as bisexual and only 25% as heterosexual.

⁴⁸ Female by birth and identity.

⁴⁹ Female-to-male transgender.

16% (9 respondents) identify themselves as homosexual.

7% (4 respondents) identify themselves as asexual (1 respondent clarified is as “aromantic asexual” (Q)).

2% (1 respondent) refused to say.

Out of the four male slash fans, two are gay, one is bisexual, and one is heterosexual. However, the heterosexual man says he writes stories with gay characters in them but he does not consider it slash in any way because he has “never thought about them as ‘gay characters’, it was just part of who they are” (Q).

This result breaks the myth which is still common (expressed explicitly or only implied) that slash fan fiction is mainly written by *heterosexual* women (Pugh 2005, 92; Glocarová and Symons in Glocarová, 2011, 39-40) and shows that the notion of their own sexuality is more varied.

85% (45 respondents out of 53 who answered this question) both read and write in English. 37 of out the 45 respondents come from English speaking countries (the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia); 4 come from the Czech Republic; 1 comes from Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, and Israel. 13% (7 respondents) only read in English and if they write (6 of them, 11%), they prefer writing in their mother tongues (Czech – 4 respondents, Polish – 1 respondent, Russian – 1 respondent). Apart from English, the respondents also mention reading in Czech (native), Hebrew (native), Dutch (native), Russian (native), Polish (native), Brazilian Portuguese (native), French (native), German (non-native; 2 respondents), Japanese (non-native; 2 respondents), Spanish (non-native), and Italian (non-native). 1 respondent claimed that she reads and write exclusively in Czech.

These results support the claim that majority of fan fiction readers write it as well – 98% of the respondents both read and write fan fiction regardless of the languages. They also confirm that slash fan fiction is a global phenomenon which transgresses geographical borders. The English-speaking fandom is the biggest one and this survey focuses on the English-speaking slash fandom but it is obvious that fans of different mother tongues are engaged in the English-speaking fandom, as well as not all fans with English as their mother tongue exclusively read in English. The slash fan from Norway writes: “I mostly read in English because that’s what most fic is written in, but I like reading fics in other languages as well. I write fic in English because I like the anonymity it gives me, but I

keep wanting to write fic in my first language as well, though it will inevitably lead to fewer readers” (Q). The fan from Finland comments: “[English] is my language of choice because after my native language (Finnish) it was the one I’m most fluent at, and also because I knew I would get a wider reader base using English” (Q).

The non-native speakers of English usually prefer reading and/or writing in English because of the number of stories from which they can choose as well as the number of their prospective readers which is considerably higher than in their mother tongue-speaking fandoms. The native speakers of English usually read and write only in English but some of them read fan fiction in other languages as well (see above) if they are fluent enough in them.

89,5% (50 respondents) answered that they both read and write slash fan fiction. 3 respondents claimed that they read and write slash exclusively (ignoring het and gen fan fiction). 3 respondents commented that they do write slash (apart from reading it) but 1 fan writes it only when they have “an idea that doesn’t exist” (Q). 1 fan “avoid[s] high rating”, and 1 fan mostly writes slash and femslash and she only writes het if it is “incestuous ‘straight’ slash” (Q). “Straight slash” may sound as an oxymoron, as was expressed by a quote above (in chapter “2.3.3 Homosocial Desired, Men Locked Up, and Women Watching”, a comment by J J McGee in Pugh, 94) but it relates to the fan’s understanding of what exactly slash is, if it is defined rather by the gender of the protagonists or by the psychological tensions in romantic relationships that may be somehow suppressed by the mainstream society. The fact that this fan only writes het (and she does not label it as het) between siblings shows that slashed characters must overcome particular views that are prevalent in society in which the story is set. Apart from that, 1 fan comments that “Not only can it be fun, but it’s very important in my mind. I know of a lot of people are against homosexuality, and I think that I need to stand up for those who are gay and let them know that at least I am supporting it” (Q). Regardless of other people’s reaction to such statements, the notion of slash and/or gay relationship in general being marginal and looked down upon in society is brought up again.

1 fan specifically writes that she writes both m/m slash as well as f/f femslash. The need to specify this comes from the ambiguity of the term “slash”, which is mostly understood as male/male fan fiction, with its sister term “femslash” describing female/female fan

fiction. However, “slash” is also understood as an umbrella term for both m/m and f/f fan fiction and “femslash” may be only a special subcategory of “slash”.

1 respondent comments that she “suck[s] at writing straight relationships” (Q), which implies that there are different dynamics in heterosexual and slash pairing, different issues that fan fiction writers decide to focus on.

5 respondents (9%) only read slash fan fiction. 1 respondent replied that she does not necessarily need any romantic relationship in fan fiction. 2 respondents admit that they tried to write (slash) fan fiction, but they were not good at it and they stopped. This shows that it is not only the canon that inspires fans to write but the community of fans and their communication plays an important role, too.

What is the main reason for your reading and writing fan fiction? was the first question that I asked. I did not mention slash in particular and some fans revealed their motives for fan fiction in general but some of them felt more inclined to describe their liking of slash fan fiction. The fans usually stress their “love of the characters”, “fandoms I [/they] love”, “love [of] the original world/canon” (Q). More than half of them explicitly stated that they love the characters and that it is “fun” to work with them further when there is no more canon available.

Almost all of the fans had the need to comment further on the canon/characters and all of them who did so were not fully satisfied with the canon. “I would say that it's to fill gaps or fix problems that exist in canon”, “I feel like there are interesting stories to be told beyond what canon gives us, for instance in the form of backstory for characters I'm interested in, fix-its for characters or pairings that don't get a happy ending in canon, or missing scenes that fill out the gaps in canon”, “Sometimes I'm happy with everything about the piece but I still want to spend more time with its characters; sometimes I want to write or read a “fix-it” for something I didn't like in that piece of media” (Q). These are examples of answers that emerge over and over again.

Fans want to read about something that was “hard to find in the canon”, what was only “hinted at” and “to make what is subtext just plain text” (Q). These answers and “relationships” are common (Q). However, another fan stresses that “if it's [relationships are] spelled out onscreen for me, I'm not really into it - why do I need fanfic if I can just watch it happen that way?” (Q). On the one hand, fans are dissatisfied with the way the

canon treats some of the characters and the possibilities of their relationships; on the other hand, this dissatisfaction allows them to create and engage in a world they love and enjoy exploring.

About half of the respondents want to “rediscover their favourite characters” (Q). Reading and writing fan fiction “allows me to explore incredibly interesting, complex emotional situations about characters I love and find intriguing” (Q). Many fans mention their interest in “what if”s, “how it could have happened” and “the direction things might have gone if the canon was aimed at a different group” (Q). A really common answer is also the possibility of “new perspectives” (Q). The potential alternatives are too alluring to be left alone. For another fan, fan fiction “expands the worlds and the characters [of] the shows far beyond the imagination of their original inventors” (Q). Generally, fans want to explore both what could be possible in the canon as the source text but what did not happen for some reason, as well as what would happen if the context of the book were different. Expressing it in different words, the fans quote Pugh’s premises of fan fiction: the author’s inability to know their world perfectly and the possibility of the work to transcend its creator and original context. They are aware of what they do, how they do it and why.

Half of the respondents like the “dialogue with the canon, fanon, fandom” and the fact that they can “share [their] feelings and thoughts” with the community of other fans, “as opposed to original fiction, which sometimes makes me feel like I was writing in a void” (Q). The fannish community and their shared knowledge are one of the attractions of fan fiction. Another fan writes: “Fanfic to me is more interesting because it's a conversation that grows and evolves over time: any story I read is based on ten, or twenty, or a hundred that came before it. The same is true of published fiction, of course -- no one writes in a vacuum -- but only in fanfic do I get the sense that *I* am participating in the conversation. Published authors may be talking to each other, but the readers are only watching from the sidelines. In fanfic, the reader gets to turn around and write his or her response and receive equal attention from the community” (Q). Fan fiction readers and writers are members of the same community and even if not all of them read as well as write fan fiction, there are still other means to express their ideas and be active participators in the fannish world. They may create other fan work (fan art, fan songs, fan theatre etc.), they may organise writing challenges, they may post fan fic

recommendations, comment on stories, work as a “beta” (a fannish editor) for the authors etc. Even though there are fans of different age and experience in the fandom and some authors are BNFs (big name fans – famous, respected and influential authors in the community), the overall character of the fannish world of writers and readers diminishes any sense of hierarchy to an absolute minimum, which the fans find “relaxing” (Q) both as writers as well as readers of fan fiction.

The question *Which fandoms are you favourite? Why?* tried to cover the fans’ various fannish backgrounds and ascertain that the sample of fans comes from different fandoms. It is common to be part of several fandoms at the same, or fans change fandoms in time, which means that 56 respondents named 87 different fandoms in which they read/write fan fiction. The most popular fandom is Harry Potter, 21 fans (38%) named it. The reason for it are mostly the “characters”, “the world”, and the fact that it leaves “so much room for fan fiction” and “an enormous canvas of blank spaces left by Rowling”, which leads to “quality, long fics”, which are “inventive” and sometimes “much better than the original” (Q). An important reason was the huge community of fans in the Harry Potter fandom; they found friends in it.

The second most frequent fandom (mentioned by 17 fans, 30%) is Sherlock (Holmes), mostly the series by BBC but some fans have mentioned the original Sherlock Holmes by Arthur Conan Doyle, too. The characters and the still open canon (TV series) are the main attractions of this particular canon.

Popular fandoms are also the Marvel comics (and related works) (12 fans, 21%), Supernatural (11 fans, 20%), Star Trek (7 fans, 13%), and Stargate (5 fans, 9%). Sci-fi elements are one of the reasons for the fans’ engagement in the fandom but mostly it is the characters that is highlighted.

It is interesting that some fans specifically enjoy reading and writing fan fiction in huge fandoms because of a wide range of different stories which they can choose from, whereas others prefer small fandoms because of the family-like community with similar tastes. Some fans specifically like particular fandoms because of their canonically gay (especially female) characters and/or strong female characters and the more or less canonical possibility of (fem)slash.

Apart from the present day literature, TV series, and films, which make the majority of fandoms, some fans prefer writing RPF/RPS (real person fiction/real person slash) about famous athletes, band members, and actors (WWE wrestling, figure skating, the Beatles, the cast of Supernatural etc.). Some fans are interested in fandoms with a historical background (Saiyuki – it has “older, more sophisticated writing base” (Q) and themes such as Buddhism, Ancient Chinese art and poetry) or in those which were not written in the 20th/21st century (history in general and historical RPF; Shakespeare’s work; the Bible).

Fan fiction on books and TV series is the most common but the range of the existing and possible fandoms is almost limitless. Even “reality” and its variations (history, future, existing religions etc.) can be a fandom. This is one of the reasons why it is so difficult to define fan fiction in a satisfactory way because the borderlines between what is still fan fiction and what is not (or better: what the authors consider to be fan fiction) are blurred and hazy (a historical novel can be considered as fan fiction on history etc). One of the prevalent reasons for fans’ engagement in fandom and their need to express themselves in stories are, however, the characters. They are usually complex or with the possibility to become complex in fan fiction, they are different and interesting for the fans and they interact with other characters in a way the canon does not allow them to at all or enough.

Which genres of fan fiction do you read the most? was a complicated question which encouraged the respondents to reply exactly as I expected them to reply. It is still not clear what is and what is not a genre in fan fiction. As it was presented in the theoretical part of the thesis, fan fiction itself is seen as a genre, the three main categories/genres of fan fiction are het, slash, and gen, some fans operate with traditional notion of what genres are, and fan fiction has its own, special genres as well. This question inspired replies such as: “That depends what you mean by “genre”! If you mean het/slash/gen, I prefer slash and gen. If you mean fanfic-specific genres like hurt/comfort or other fanfic story conventions, I’m not very picky -- I like a wide range. The only things I can think of that I dislike are AUs and non-con⁵⁰. If you mean mainstream-style genres like action/adventure, mystery,

⁵⁰ Stories including non-consensual sex.

erotica, etc., I pretty much like them all. I do have a preference for character studies” and “Do you mean like, for example, fluff⁵¹ or angst?” (= fan fiction genres) (Q).

Mostly, the respondents mentioned “romance” (24 out of 56, 43%), “slash” (15; even though 55 out of 56 respondents do read slash fan fiction), “angst” (15, 27%). Common answers were also “gen” (10, 18%), “humour” (10, 18%), “hurt/comfort” (9, 16%), “adventure” (5, 9%), “erotica”/“PWP⁵²”/“porn”/“smut”⁵³ (5, 9%), “sci-fi and fantasy” (4, 7%), “femslash” (3, 5%), “friendship” (3, 5%), “AUs/what ifs” (3, 5%), “fluff” (3, 5%) (Q). 6 fans (11%) did not like to specify a genre but offered an alternative view of “common tropes” in fan fiction, such as: “The tropier, the better! Werewolves or A/B/O or soulbonds or time travel or coffeeshop AUs. To go back to my original comment, I love the tropes because they grow and evolve over time. An author writes a story, people comment on it and discuss it on Twitter and Tumblr, it inspires fanart and fanvids, and then another author is inspired to write another story in response to it. As the months pass, the tropes become more well-defined and specific, or spin off and become new tropes, or get inverted and turned upside-down, as the fandom converges and diverges and builds communities around them. The tropes are a decades-long conversation between me and ten thousand of my closest friends” (Q).

There are different levels of what could be considered a genre in fan fiction. They are not equal to each other and they create a particular hierarchy. However, it depends on the point of view of the one who tries to define the genre. The category of slash has its subcategories such as hurt/comfort, angst, darkfic⁵⁴, humour and many others, as well as the category of darkfic, for example, can be slash, het, and gen. That is the reason I decided to use the term “category” rather than “genre” in the thesis but I asked about “genres” in the questionnaire. Whatever term one may choose, the net of the categories is always complex and not definite.

⁵¹ Meaning happy, sweet, romantic stories.

⁵² Meaning “Plot? What plot?” or “porn without plot”. This term used to describe stories with no action in them and later become synonymous with stories in which nothing much but sex happens.

⁵³ Stories which include sexually explicit scenes. Some of them may be PWP, some of them only have sex scenes incorporated in them.

⁵⁴ A story with dark, challenging, dystopian themes.

What exactly is slash in your mind? What is its appeal? were questions through which I tried to summarise how fans understand the term slash and why they personally find it so appealing in order to read/write it.

38 respondents (68%) stated that slash is relationship/story featuring a relationship of two (or more – 1 respondent) people of the same gender (others did not need to specify this as they considered it obvious and only commented on specific characteristics of slash fan fiction). Some of them added that the relationships range from being only emotional to sexual and that they consider all of them to be slash. A few fans commented that the characters must not be gay in the canon, otherwise it is not slash even though there is not a better term for that, and about the same number of fans commented that they consider any same-sex relationships to be slash, regardless of them being canonical or fanonical, or even regardless of them being fan fiction, original fiction or real life. 1 respondent thinks that slash are only “usually” (Q) same-sex relationships, and five of them claim that slash is a relationship between any characters (regardless of their gender, even though they may prefer male/male relationships). 1 fan considers slash to be “fan’s interpretation of two characters, any characters” (Q). 4 respondents see slash purely as male/male relationships, with femslash being the term for female/female relationship. 1 respondent considers slash to be only female/female (and not male/male) because she only reads female/female stories. 1 fan thinks that slash is “a romantic relationship between two male characters that doesn't necessarily carry the power dynamics of yaoi⁵⁵ (which tends to be very masculine!dom/feminine!sub)” (Q) and she distinguishes the “Western” and fannish term of fan fiction (= slash) from the official term of a specific genre of Japanese manga and anime (= yaoi). These terms are sometimes used interchangeably, even if there are major

⁵⁵ Yaoi is a relationship category in Japanese anime and manga which features a romantic male/male relationship including sex scenes. However, it is a matter of debate whether the sex scenes must take place onscreen or whether it is sufficient that the reader/viewer knows that they are going to happen. If an anime/manga features only platonic/emotional/pre-romantic male/male relationships, it is called shounen-ai. Kisses and established relationships without any sexual scenes onscreen are sometimes considered as shounen-ai, sometimes as yaoi. Corresponding categories for female/female relationships are yuri and shoujo-ai.

differences in the portrayal of the characters. In yaoi, there is a tendency to make one character extremely dominant, he is drawn higher and more masculine, and the other one submissive, drawn much smaller and sometimes extremely feminine in appearance. These clear-cut differences and hierarchy, and the allusion to traditional male and female roles is absent in the majority of slash fan fiction.

The appeal of slash can be summarised into the following categories:

- The lack of similar representation in real life. Crossing the line between “soulmate friends” or “antagonists” whose “relationships with one another is so deep and profound that it's hard to imagine there isn't a level of attraction between the two” (Q). Another fan adds that if there is a particular level of interaction between a female and a male character in the canon, they usually end up together; however, if the same level of interaction happens to be between two men, it leads to nothing and “that's why slash fanfiction is necessary” (Q). Two fans responded that they like to write about complex and interesting characters who mostly happen to be all males which leads them to writing slash.
- 8 respondents complained about the heteronormativity of today's mainstream media and 3 of them consider slash to be a way to “get around expected gender roles”. A fan writes: “As a woman, I get more pleasure out of romances that don't have to negotiate 'strong woman', 'feisty woman', 'traditional woman', 'maternal woman' or whatever, but can focus on interaction between two people. Much as I deplore it, women are not people, narratively speaking, they are women. Slash is romance between two people. It operates outside of the freighted world of gender relationships and at the same time differs substantially from real world gay experience too. It is a fantasy of a gender-neutral society” (Q). Another two fans express their want of “gender-neutral society” (Q) and the possibility of “exploring love” (Q) without any boundaries, even though 4 fans do not see any difference between het and slash relationship if they are all about love.
- However, the appeal of slash for some fans is the fact that it is suppressed in the mainstream. They like its “subversive nature” (Q), that it is a kind of “taboo” (Q). A fan sums it up: “I find slash does this better than het fic - it spends more time justifying itself. In het fic, there is an assumption that boy+girl=love, and you don't

have to SHOW it because it can be assumed to be the status quo. You don't need to know WHY the[y] love each other. And if a boy and a girl love each other, there are hardly any societal barriers to them being together. On the other hand, slash fic has to justify the relationship (or at least, GOOD slash fic does), and there are often real barriers to their relationship” (Q). Similarly, the appeal of slash fan fiction on canons that already feature gay relationships is smaller if this is the main reason for the particular slasher to read and write slash fan fiction, and the need to explain the relationship is widespread among slashers.

- Apart from “justifying itself” (see above), slash fan fiction focuses on relationships that are “emotional/romantic/sexual” (Q) and this is more important than the characters’ sexual orientation. Many fans enjoy reading angst, which is more plausible in slash relationships which are usually emotionally loaded and the characters must deal with their inner issues. For a fan, slash allows her an “explanation of the characters’ personalities” (Q); another finds it interesting to set characters in an unprecedented situation and explore their “reaction” (Q).
- Some fans prefer slash fan fiction to het because of their own sexuality. They want to identify with the characters better, they consider slash fan fiction as a kind of “fixing” (Q) the canon and/or the mainstream representation of gay characters and it allows them to write “plausible queer characterizations in stories that I [/they] already like” (Q). In this case, gay women usually write femslash and gay men write slash but gay women write slash as well and they like to explore themes that are more or less universal for both male/male as well as female/female relationships.
- On the other hand, other fans read and write slash because they do not want to identify with either of the characters. They are usually heterosexual or asexual women who have difficulties to identify with female characters as they are represented in the media and they choose to read about characters that they do not need to identify with. A fan admits: “As a divorced mother with body issues, I hate reading stories or watching movies about beautiful women. Let's face it, most women are not what would qualify as beautiful by entertainment standards. When

one reads the story, it is inevitable that you identify with someone in the story. I find it hard to relate to petite beautiful young things. I hate thinking that I would never stand a chance in a similar situation. Reading m/m lets me enjoy a story without putting myself into one of the characters” (Q). Another fan finds het stories “uncomfortable to read” (Q) because “there is such much baggage associated with male/female relationships throughout history (issues of consent, dominance and submission, rape) that I'd rather not intrude on my fantasy time, or would at least rather put at a remove from myself” (Q) or they feel “competitive of the female leads” (Q). This view of slash shifts it into a world of fantasy, again to a gender-neutral, ideal world.

- The last category is the fact that it is “fun”, “hot”, and “perfectly natural that a story with two interesting/charismatic/lovable/etc male leads instead of one would be more interesting” (Q). The majority of respondents named several appeals of slash fan fiction but they almost always added comments such as “finally, on the most shallow level, I find same-sex relationships hot, sexually speaking” (Q). Apart from other motives for writing slash fan fiction, it is a hobby for most slashers. Slashing the characters would not be half as “fun” if they created relationships (sometimes with very explicit sex scenes) without any level of emotional engagement and without finding it sexually appealing at the same time.

Do you care about pairings? Do you prefer canonical or fanonical pairings? are questions through which I sought to find out whether fan fiction readers and writers have their personal favourite pairings instead of individual characters and whether they prefer them to be canon (in the source text) or fanon (only in fan fiction). 46 respondents (82%) do care about pairings in fan fiction and they are mainly fanonical. Only 12 respondents have their favourite canonical pairings, too. However, only one of the canonical pairing was “slash” (Seregil/Alec from the Nightrunner series, mentioned by 2 respondents). 1 fan mentioned the character of Jack Harkness from Doctor Who/Torchwood TV series who likes to ship himself with literally whatever but they did not specify any canonical pairing with him. Other canonical pairings that were named were only het pairings (such as Harry/Ginny, Mulder/Scully) as the fans enjoy reading and writing both slash and het.

The listed fanonical pairings were very diverse. The most common ones were pairings from more popular fandoms, such as Harry/Draco (Harry Potter), Sherlock/John (Sherlock Holmes), Kirk/Spock (Star Trek), Arthur/Merlin (Merlin BBC TV series). To illustrate the variety of possible pairings, examples of less common pairings are Jesus/Judas/Mary Magdalene love triangle and Putin/Medvedev.

The main reasons for their preference of fanonical pairings in slash fan fiction can be summarised as follows:

- Fanonical pairings are more diverse. Fans are interested in alternatives. Canonical pairings are “usually dull”, “worn out” and “boring” (Q). Fanonical pairings are “canonically plausible”, they have “chemistry on the screen” and potential that is left “unexplored” (Q). Women in canonical het pairings are usually Mary Sues. Canonical pairings have already “had their day” (Q) in the canon and that is the reason why fan fiction written about them is not so interesting for some fans. 2 fans like the level of “uncertainty”, “taboo”, and “tension” in fanonical pairings as well as the fan fiction authors’ need to “put more imagination” into them (Q). These fans state that they would not like their favourite pairings to be canonical.
- Other fans “love it when they [fanonical pairings] become canon” (Q). They are usually interested in the “dynamics” (Q) of the characters regardless of their being canon or fanon. They like the pairings to be “meaningful” (Q), which they are when “best friends, enemies or rivals” (Q) become slashed.
- 5 respondents do not care about pairings at all and they read fan fiction regardless of the pairings featuring in it.
- 3 fans complain about the lack of gay canonical pairings. They would prefer canon but they are only left with fanon.

It is obvious that the majority of fans write and read fan fiction with particular pairings which they find plausible and interesting. Again, they ship characters which have a specific gap in their relationship in the canon and which the slashers want to fill in order to make the characters more complex. However, not all fans wish their fan fiction fantasies to become canon whereas others would like to see more of slash canonical pairings in the mainstream media.

What makes a good slash fan fiction? What makes the worst? are questions through which I wanted to find out if there are any characteristics that slash fan fiction has to possess in order to be considered good by its readers and what is not acceptable in slash fan fiction.

30 respondents need the story to be well written, especially without any grammatical errors, 22 respondents stress good characterisation and character development as a characteristic of a well written (slash) fan fiction, and 19 respondents want it to have a gripping story. They say that this is not different from their requirements on any other fiction. However, 14 respondents stress the necessity of the characters to stay “in character”, they have to be “recognisable” throughout the story even though they develop. This is a characteristic of only fan fiction that the characters must be true to themselves not only in the story itself but their characteristics must be retained and transferred from the canon to fan fiction. In slash fan fiction, it is even more important as the characters are put in situations which they never experienced in the canon.

According to 22 respondents, good slash fan fiction is characterised by relationships which are satisfactorily “justified”, “made probable” and “believable” (Q) even though they may not be believable in the canon. 13 respondents like them to be “detailed”, even though not “too much”, “loaded with emotion” and they like the stories to include “good sex scenes”, “non-graphic” and not “stereotypical” (Q).

The characteristics of the worst slash fan fiction are the reverse of the best one: they are poorly written, with bad characterisation and OOC (out of character) characters. 15 respondents stressed that some of the worst slash fan fiction are stories which include “pure sex”, especially when it is “without emotion” and “far-fetched” (Q). Some fans do not mind sex-driven stories but they have to reveal something about the characters and the main purpose of the content must not be the content itself. This is one of the reasons why the characters have to stay in character. Moreover, they should be “two people who can stand up for themselves and still be vulnerable”, the author should not “cast one character as Male Dominant and [the other as] Female Submissive in an old-fashioned mold” (Q). Similarly, the pace of the story must not be too fast and the relationship must be explained. A few fans do not appreciate original characters in slash fan fiction as they are usually a self-insertion of the author (Mary Sue/Gary Stu).

Apart from the characteristics that good fiction and good fan fiction in general should possess, such as good writing, characterisation and plot, in character characters and the author's "love" and "respect" (Q) for the them, it should explore possible relationship alternatives and slow down the pace to explain and justify them.

Is feedback important? Does it influence your writing in any way? These questions try to find out how much fan fiction writers communicate with their readers and how much the readers can change and influence what the writers write about.

36 respondents describe feedback as encouraging. They are more motivated to write if they know that they have readers who enjoy what they create. They do not like to write in a "void" (Q) and they like positive comments as persons as well as members of a fannish community. 7 respondents especially stressed the importance of feedback being the essential part of fandom where writers and readers mix and no one is put above the other. Only 1 reader admits that they do not post comments because they find the "fan interaction" "scary" (Q).

18 writers appreciate feedback and especially constructive criticism because they find it "helpful" when trying to become better writers.

5 writers have changed a chaptered story because of some comments they received or they have written something which their fans wished to read about. However, 2 writers consider these readers' wishes to be "dangerous" if they "let [them] influence a WiP⁵⁶" (Q).

6 writers do not change their stories according their readers' wishes but they appreciate them because they give them "new ideas".

In fandom, feedback does not only fulfil the writers' need for appreciation and/or helps them to become better writers. The fans are aware of its function of creating the sense of a community, a bond between fans who support each other's ideas, and this bond is not only one way, from a writer to a reader, but it strengthens their bond of "partners in crime".

⁵⁶ Work in progress, an unfinished story that is published in instalments.

Do you read books/watch movies etc. with gay characters? is a question which maps the slashers' interest in canons that already include gay characters. 30 respondents (54%) say that they do watch movies and/or TV shows even though they are sometimes hard to find. 21 (38%) respondents read books with gay characters and they repeatedly listed authors such as Sarah Waters, Mary Renault, and Lynn Flewelling. 2 of them (4%) read "slash" webcomics, especially *Teahouse*⁵⁷, *Starfighter*⁵⁸, and *Artifice*^{59, 60}. Only 4 respondents (7%) do not read and/or watch canons with gay characters in them at all and 9 of them (16%) do not find this criterion relevant in any way. The majority of slash fans do not only read slash fan fiction but they read/watch canons with gay characters as well. However, they also admit that they are hard to find.

Do you think there is a difference between slash fan fiction and books with gay characters (or even – gay books/porn) – in the portrayal of the characters, style of writing, their readers etc.? This question directly follows the previous one. I seek to find out whether slashers see any differences between slash fan fiction and canons with gay characters. The majority of respondents do read both but they may look for different issues in them.

12 respondents (21%) did not feel competent to answer this question and 12 respondents (21%) do not see any differences between them. However, 32 respondents (57%) do think that they are different. The differences are summarised as follows:

- Slash fan fiction focuses more on characters and their exploration. The slash pairings are not usually "judged" (Q) even though they are justified. Slash fan fiction usually has more complex characters because in original (gay) fiction, the authors use all of their time and freedom to create a whole new world.

⁵⁷ Available at teahousecomic.com.

⁵⁸ Available at starfightercomic.com.

⁵⁹ Available at <http://webcomics.yaoi911.com/archive/artifice-title-page>.

⁶⁰ The webcomics are published online, the authors sometimes use nicknames instead of real names, and the communication and creator-reader relationship is similar to fan fiction. Even though they are eventually published on paper, it is usually seen as the creators' treat for their fans, not the main purpose of the work, and they are not edited for the mainstream market. As in *Teahouse*, for example, the published volumes even have higher rating than the online version, and they include "authors' 'fan' art" and bonuses.

- Slash fan fiction is more romantic and “tropey” (Q). Slash stories are only variations of how it could have happened, they are “less opinionated” (Q) and they allow the writer to indulge in all possible ideas because no story is more canon than another.
- Slash fan fiction usually has happy endings.
- Slash fan fiction is more emotional. It includes less “porn” (Q) even though there is erotica.
- Slash fan fiction is better written (3 respondents, 5%) as opposed to the opinion that professional gay literature is better written than slash fan fiction (2 respondents, 4%).
- Gay fiction is written by and for gay men, which makes them different in “tone” and “quality” (Q), whereas slash fan fiction is written mostly by women for women.
- This is connected to a lack of sci-fi and fantasy which features gay characters because these genres are mostly “aimed at men” and men tend to be “scared, intimidated by gay males” (Q).

The survey, conducted among English-speaking slash fans (both native and non-native), confirmed the diversity as well as common features of the community of slash fans and their creations. The majority of fans who are interested in slash fan fiction are women. Even though teenagers regularly join the fandom, most slash fans are already in their 20s and 30s, and some of them stay active in fandom for many years, which is in slight contrast with surveys conducted a decade ago in which fan fiction readers and writers were, in average, younger. For the fans, slash is not only a fashionable subgenre of fan fiction but they feel strongly attached to it and they are aware of their reasons for writing and reading slash fan fiction, regardless of their own sexual orientation.

They are interested in hints in the canon, in emotional connections and tensions between the characters, they set them in situations which they did not experience in the canon at all and explore their reactions. Regardless of the nature and context of the canon, two major tendencies to slash particular characters were confirmed by the fans – they prefer to slash either best friends or enemies and rivals. These characters usually get enough space in the canon but slashers feel that their psychological potential is not explored enough.

However, the relationships in slash fan fiction must be believable even though they would not be believable in the canon, they have to be explained, developed, and justified. It is preferable if the relationships are only a part of a greater story – slashers enjoy gripping stories, but they want them to slow down sometimes and indulge in the psychology of the characters. Similarly, slashers do not like stories which consist only of sex scenes which do not reveal anything about the inner life of the characters even though good slash fan fiction does include a few well-written, not too graphic sex scenes.

Unlike slash fan fiction which was written in the beginnings of fan fiction, today's slash fan fiction is written on canons which feature enough complex characters of both sexes. However, one of the appeals of slash is a sense of crossing an established borderline, dealing with a taboo (as perceived by the characters at least) and overcoming societal barriers. The writers of slash fan fiction work in a world which they do not consider gender-neutral, as far as possible pairings are concerned, and even if it is gay-friendly the very term reveals a hidden hierarchy. However, slash fan fiction writers admit that if there were no such barriers they would not write slash fan fiction. Only a small percentage of slash fan fiction writers write it because they want to realistically expand the texts which feature gay characters (these fans – both genders – mostly identify themselves as gay, but not all of gay slash fans consider this to be the main purpose of their writing/reading slash).

The majority of slashers do read or watch books or TV series/movies with gay characters, too, but they also claim that they see a difference between gay canons and slash fan fiction. Either it is similar to slash fan fiction in style and tone – and these works do not inspire much slash fan fiction – or they are works with a different target audience than slash. Slash fan fiction is fan fiction which mostly focuses on the characters – therefore it can be more relationship-driven. Hardly all fan fiction has happy endings but if a fan wishes they may write as many alternatives as they please.

The slashers confirmed the theoretical assumptions that they wish to subvert the understanding of sexuality in society, the implicit hierarchy between sexes, prejudices and men's intimacy issues and fear of crossing the homosocial – homosexual continuum, but they also see slash as a convenient means to challenge the characters. However, they write slash fan fiction because of these barriers. Only a small percentage of slashers would write it if they were content with the canon but this is a rule of fan fiction. Some of it is the “more of” type of fan fiction but a substantial part, especially slash, is the “more from”.

Conclusion

The universe of fan fiction is a literary and social world built on paradoxes. It challenges the traditional view of an author and their readers; readers and viewers of mostly mainstream literature and TV shows have become so devoted to the canon that they continue writing it themselves. The more they respect the canon and, at the same time, the more they feel there is something missing in it, the more thought out and interpretative of the canon the fan fiction is. The more canonical a story is and, at the same time, the more alternatives there are, the better.

The vast majority of fan fiction is centred about particular characters and their relationships and apart from the category of gen, which does not contain romantic relationships, most of the stories focus on either heterosexual relationships – het – or homosexual relationships (male/male mostly) – slash. Mainly in the beginnings of fan fiction, slash was a logical conclusion for some fans if they wanted to write about the main characters. They were the most complex characters in the work, they had the closest and most intimate relationship with each other and not with anyone else, and they were all male. Moreover, the fast, action-driven works did not slow down to explore the characters in detail unless it was necessary, and some fans had the need to discover their potential themselves.

Today, slash fan fiction is a part of every fan fiction written on any canon, regardless of the number of male or female characters and their complexity in the canon. Slash fan fiction is very diverse but there are several tendencies to slash particular characters across different fandoms. Generally, they are either best friends, or enemies and rivals. As best friends, they work with each other, understand each other and it is only a matter of a few short steps for them to become lovers. As enemies, they constantly watch each other, think of each other and may also be addicted to each other, which lets fan fiction writers explore the love/hate dynamics of their relationship. However original and well-written particular stories may be, the general choice of which characters to slash is the same across different fandoms and in each fandom, specific tropes of how to slash the characters have become popular.

As in professionally published fiction, there are different genres in fan fiction such as romance, horror, comedy etc., as well as short stories, poems, novellas or even novels. In addition, fans created their own generic categories which mix with the traditional ones. These are for example angst, fluff, darkfic, and hurt/comfort. All of them can be slash, het, or gen, and slash can be as diverse as the above mentioned categories. Moreover, the genre,

the rating, the target audience, and the context of a particular fan fiction may be completely different from those of the canon.

The majority of fan fiction in general, and especially slash fan fiction, is written by women for women, their fellow fans and fan fiction readers and writers at the same time. They are usually in their 20s, even though younger and older fans are not an exception, and their sexual orientation covers all possibilities, they do not limit themselves to the heterosexual – homosexual or heterosexual – bisexual – homosexual categories. In slash fan fiction, they either try to create a gender-neutral setting or they want to expand on the queer literature. However, slash fan fiction is scarcely written on fandoms which already feature gay characters; some fans do not consider it “slash” at all, others do not feel the urge to slash characters which were already slashed. The appeal of slash for most slashers is taking advantage of slash hints in the canon and the fans’ need to put the characters into different situations, explore their reaction, deal with their intimacy issues and societal barriers, and justify their relationship. If this is already covered in the canon in a satisfying way, slashers do not usually feel the urge to create long and complex stories about the characters’ relationship.

However scarce they may be, there are already canons which contain gay characters and are written in a similar style as slash fan fiction. Usually, their authors and readers are mostly women, too. Their pairings are based on similar tropes as in slash fan fiction and they contain as much plot as they slow down at the right places and explore the characters instead of action only. Slashers know these works, read them and usually appreciate them, but they do not inspire much slash fan fiction.

The universe of fan fiction is a world of interpretation and collaboration. Fan fiction writers are not inspired only by the canon but also by other fans, their fan fiction, comments, ideas, the writers inspire the readers and vice versa, as they are usually both. Through fan fiction, they offer their own interpretation as well as extensions of the canon. They love the work and especially the characters but they write about what they felt hinted at in the canon but never explored, the roads they wish the canon took but did not, they change a specific feature of the canon they did not like. All fan fiction is thus driven simultaneously by love and particular frustration. Slash fan fiction even more so because without the frustration and the need to overcome it the stories would lose its tension and a feeling of uncertainty that create the “slash factor” of slash texts.

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Appendix – The Questionnaire

1. What is the main reason for your reading and writing fan fiction?
2. Which fandoms are your favourite? Why?
3. Which genres of fan fiction do you read the most? Why?
4. Do you read/write slash?
5. What exactly is slash in your mind? What is its appeal?
6. Do you care about pairings? Do you prefer canonical or fanonical pairings? Which ones are your favourite?
7. What makes a good slash fan fiction? What makes the worst?
8. Is feedback important? Does it influence your writing in any way?
9. Do you read books/watch movies etc. with gay characters?
10. Do you think there is a difference between slash fan fiction and books with gay characters (or even - gay books/porn) – in the portrayal of the characters, style of writing, their readers etc.?
11. How long have you read/written slash ff/books/stories with gay characters? Do you see yourself doing so in ten year's time?
12. Which language(s) do you read/write in?
13. Where do you come from? (country)
14. How old are you?
15. Are you female/male/other?
16. What is your sexual orientation?