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This paper describes a study of two fan-based periodicals devoted to the study of girls' series books. The study was designed to evaluate the usefulness of these publications as secondary research resources for research collections that focus on historical children's literature or girls' series books in particular.

The periodicals studied were *Susabella Passengers and Friends* and *The Whispered Watchword*, each produced by a group of amateur writers and editors dedicated to collecting girls' series books. A total of 537 articles from 33 issues were examined, using a set of ten criteria developed to ascertain the emphasis on research quality or fan-oriented material.

Headings:

Children's Literature -- Series

Archives -- Collection Development

Fanzines -- Bibliography

Amateur research

“ONCE A SLEUTH, ALWAYS A SLEUTH”: A STUDY OF FAN PUBLICATIONS
AS SECONDARY MATERIALS FOR RESEARCH IN GIRLS’ SERIES BOOKS

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Introduction

“Any literary genre that can last over a century and continue to thrive deserves critical attention, I believe. Because it is clearly accomplishing important cultural work.” (Inness, 1997. p. 2) Girls’ series books like Nancy Drew, Judy Bolton, and Cherry Ames have been historically reviled by teachers and librarians for their formulaic structure and lack of literary merit. Despite their shortcomings as literature, they can provide an illuminating look at the social realities of a particular era. In *Mirrors of American Culture: Children’s Fiction Series in the Twentieth Century*, Paul Deane says

That there is little change or variation in the books is quite understandable: attention has been and is being given to the production of books that will satisfy the perceived wishes, need, and attitudes of young readers. In this way, they are excellent indicators of what the mind of America is like at any given period. (p. 15)

The characteristics that make series books predictable as literature make them an interesting social and historical record. They are produced with the purpose of reinforcing values for children, and guiding their development; the books are valuable historical records, not only of the field of children’s literature and publishing, but of the way adults described the world to their children.

Where in the past only the devoted fan and collector of Judy Bolton or Cherry Ames was interested in these books, now serious researchers are looking for ways to study the picture of American life—both of children and adults—they provide. Scholarly interest in these books has grown: juvenile fiction serves an important cultural function,

and in the study of series books scholars can find great insight into the social or cultural mores of the past generations. “[S]cholars have begun to move the study of these books toward questions about their cultural significance and the personal engagement of readers with them. In the process, they are beginning to confer academic respectability on the interest in the books” (Dyer and Romalov, 1995. p. 146)

As scholarly attention paid to the series book genre increases, some academic libraries and archives have begun to collect materials to facilitate this research. As this interest grows, the scholars are helping create momentum in favor of the collection of series books and related materials by serious research facilities and archives: as Dyer and Romalov (1995) point out, “they have joined the collectors in their search for material to inform their interests. Together they have made the collection of children’s series books and manuscripts in libraries and archives newly important.” (p. 146) Collections like the Miriam Snow Mathes Historical Children's Literature Collection at the University at Albany, which makes a concentrated effort to preserve the obscure or neglected works of children’s literature, recognize the value of these materials to inform the study of social and cultural history, gender, literacy, publishing, education, and child development, among other fields.

That the collection of these materials is even possible is largely due to the fans who have collected these books over the years; since few libraries allowed series books for children in their collections, these enormously popular materials were not conserved. Collecting out of print series books is a difficult task, however, since “Several lifetimes would be required to cover them all, even if the second problem, that of availability, were not present: virtually all of them are no longer in print and most have been discarded or

turned to dust.” (Deane, 1991. p. viii) Libraries are seeking to provide access to these materials, but for decades the preservation of these books was left to nostalgic fans who remembered them from childhood. Simply put: “Because these mass-produced products have been disparaged by book people from librarians to teacher and fine booksellers, the books that have been sold by the millions would be lost for future study if not for the collectors.” (Dyer and Romalov, 2005. p. 145)

These collectors are dedicated to their field: “they have formed organizations of like-minded collectors of old series books, developed newsletters and fanzines, and held conventions and informal meetings to buy, sell, and trade books and to exchange information about them. (Dyer and Romalov, p. 145) In *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, Dyer and Romalov (1995) show that “Most of the factual information that we have about Nancy Drew’s history, like other aspects of popular culture, has been painstakingly unearthed by the tireless digging of ardent fans and collectors of series books.” (p. 145)

What is it about these books that causes adults to spend time and money tracking down that hard to find title (with dust jacket, please)? Is it something special about the books themselves, or about the effect they had on their fans at a young age? Bobbie Ann Mason (1975) describes the adult fan of these types of books thus: “Once a sleuth, always a sleuth. The peculiar thing is the impulse at odds: the intellectual curiosity and suspicion of the detective on the one hand, and the diligence of the fan following the rules on the other.” (p. 78) Readers who grew up tackling puzzles with Nancy Drew or tracking down criminals with Judy Bolton seem to have been trained in some sense by their early reading to become sleuths and imitate their heroines in pursuing an interest in these books: they seek out missing copies, crack the secret of the archived manuscripts, or

bring to justice the greedy publisher. Just as the actual physical preservation of these books was largely the work of nostalgic fans, much of the information we have about the series, their authors, and their genre as a whole is derived from their dedicated ‘sleuthing’.

In order to develop the most comprehensive research collections on this topic, I believe that librarians should not only attempt to track down the rare copies of disappearing girls’ series, but should also pay particular attention to finding useful secondary sources. Since collectors and fans have been researching, writing, and publishing about these books for decades, this paper will study the materials produced by fan groups on the topic of girls’ series books with the intent of determining their value as research materials. I will evaluate the content of two publications in particular: *Susabella Passengers and Friends*, a bimonthly magazine with “a positive slant” on the series book, and *The Whispered Watchword*, the semi-monthly newsletter of the Society of Phantom Friends (a fan club devoted to the Judy Bolton mystery series), with the intent of examining the depth, range, and variety of material published.

Literature Review

Being a fan

I believe what it means to be a fan should be explored in relation to the larger question of what it means to desire, cherish, seek, long, admire, envy, celebrate, protect, ally with others. (Lewis, 1992. p.27)

What is a fan? Popular texts are read, watched, or otherwise consumed by many people.

What is it that defines a reader, viewer, or collector as a fan? The term is a loaded one: it evokes an immediate image, most likely not a flattering one, of a person with an inappropriate emotional investment in the object of their fandom. In *Soap Fans:*

Pursuing Pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life, C. C. Harrington (1995)

describes the dedication shown by a pair of women who have just attended an official fan club event:

on the way back to the airport they examine their goods. Between them they have snapped more than four rolls of photos and collected twenty-five autographs. Was it worth the sixty-five dollars per ticket? You bet. Will they be back again next year? You bet. (p.10)

This in part illuminates the line between a fan and a casual reader: someone who travels across the country for a hotel luncheon simply to be closer to the object of their interest clearly feels a strong connection with that object. To be a fan of a popular work, whether a soap opera, a juvenile series book, or another popular text, implies a deeper identification with to the work; a sense of ownership. This ownership is described eloquently by Ken Gelder (2004) in *Popular Fiction: the Logics and Practices of a Literary Field*: “In other words, popular fiction has *fans* – readerships which live through

their genres, inhabiting them and claiming them – we might even say, territorializing them.” (p. 81) The development of this sense of ownership also helps define the fan’s own identity as well.

Just as the association with the text helps the fan construct his or her identity, the text itself is imbued with greater meaning in the process. “People are constantly struggling, not merely to figure out what a text means, but to make it mean something that connects to their own lives, experiences, needs and desires.” (Lewis 1992. p.52) Aden (1999) describes this creation of meaning as a type of ‘symbolic pilgrimage,’ suggesting that “[T]he places I continued to write about were not so much metaphorical as they were imaginatively real; they were places I—and others—traveled to when we engaged popular stories as fans.” (p. 52)

So what is it about fans’ readings that allows this special relationship to develop? Simply put: “Fans are people who attend to a text more closely than other types of audience members.” (Harris, 1998. p. 136) The fan engages actively with his or her object of fandom, even if it was designed to be consumed passively. But which came first, the fan or the text? It is tempting to assign a special quality to the object of fandom, some essential power that the text holds over helpless readers, creating fans with sheer magnetism. This is not really the case, though. “Fandom celebrates not exceptional texts but rather exceptional readings (though its interpretive practices make it impossible to maintain a clear or precise distinction between the two).” (Jenkins, 1991. p. 284)

It is not the nature of the text but the behavior of the fan is essential to the relationship. Jenkins (1991) elaborates:

If Star Trek fan writing existed in such isolation, one would be tempted to look for an explanation in the qualities and properties of the primary text When

we see fan publishing sparked by everything from ‘Lost in Space’ to ‘Max Headroom’ . . . explanations must consider the fan community and its particular relationship to the media as well as the properties of the original series. (p. 158)

Whatever the intrinsic value of the cultural item, fan behavior can both create and derive new value from it: “Fans possess not simply borrowed remnants snatched from mass culture, but their own culture built from the semiotic raw materials the media provides.”

(Jenkins, 1991. p. 49) This is an important point: the value is not simply derived from the object but from the behaviors, interpretations, and interactions of the fan with the object.

As the fan’s behavior has the power to impart new value to their object, the relationship increases the importance of both the fan and the text: the fan becomes, in some sense, an arbiter of taste:

The value of mass-reproduced cultural artifacts such as comic books is determined by the consumers of such artifacts, who are able to recognize what is unique from what is . . . uniform. This capacity to see value where others see repetition and banality, for many, describes an essential component of fandom. (Harris, 1998. p. 58)

This ability to impart value to an otherwise inconsequential item is the essence of the fan as collector. In *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture, and Identity* (1998), C. Harris depicts the fan/collector’s behavior as more than simple consumption, pointing out that

Publishers, distributors, and retailers offer their product at a set price, but the valuation of the product over time is determined by the collector [both] in terms of psychological value and . . . in terms of resale/exchange within the networks of other collectors. (p. 58)

He coins the term “curatorial consumption” to describe this emotionally loaded practice, further explaining that

Although the objects of acquisition are products of mass-produced culture, they are simultaneously the basis for this curatorial consumption. By this, we mean the process by which individuals invest artifacts with social and psychological value and the behaviors that determine and preserve those values. (p. 66-7)

This “curatorial behavior” illustrates the investment in and connection made with items that have limited value outside of the fan community. It is a way to engage personally with what is essentially an industrial product: “curatorial consumption and fandom permit the individual, alone and in community, to find pleasure and satisfaction from the products of mass culture.” (Harris, 1998. p. 67)

The empowerment of the fan to create value beyond the original content of the object is illustrated by other situations as well:

Similarly, the vagaries of commercial broadcasting and filmmaking often mean that series stop abruptly or conclude unsatisfactorily, failing to realize their full potentials . . . the destruction of old narrative situations opens room to explore possibilities that fall beyond the parameters of the original series. (Jenkins, 1991. p. 164-5)

The active relationship must be prolonged, even in the case of a finite text: “Fans thrive on debate and differences in opinion must be perpetuated so that the process of interpreting an otherwise completed narrative (a completed series, an individual film,) may be prolonged.” (Jenkins, 1991. p. 88)

The active relationship between fans and the text can lead to misinterpretation. The unusual investment in a fictional world can be seen as an unhealthy or irrational over-involvement, with the fan pictured as nearly delusional in her inability to differentiate between fiction and reality. This is certainly not the typical experience, however: most fans, even when they are deeply emotionally invested in their fictional world, are immersing themselves in fiction as a conscious choice. Jenkins (1991) describes the resulting state as “textual proximity” saying that:

The fan, while recognizing the story’s constructedness, treats it as if its narrative world were a real place that can be inhabited and explored and as if the characters maintained a life beyond what was represented on the screen; fans draw close to that world in order to enjoy more fully the pleasures it offers them. (p. 115)

This proximity is a valuable tool; it provides not only further and richer insight into the text but also in the real world:

If . . . the reader can strike a balance between personal experience and fictional narrative, personal ideology and authorial authority, without collapsing one into the other, then . . . productive interaction may lead the reader toward new insights about both the world of the text and the realm of their own experience. (Jenkins, 1991. p. 115)

But despite—or more likely because of—this emotional power and sense of identification, to identify as a fan bears a stigma of obsession or irrationality. “To speak as a fan is to accept what has been labeled a subordinated position within the cultural hierarchy, to accept an identity constantly belittled or criticized by institutional authorities.” (Jenkins, 1991. p. 23) To read as a fan, rather than a disengaged viewer or objective critic is to enter into an inappropriate emotional commitment: as Lewis (1992) says “The division between worthy and unworthy is based in an assumed dichotomy between reason and emotion.” (p. 21)

Those who comment on popular culture may also conflate the nature of the fan with their own biases and prejudices about their field of study: “scholars with little direct knowledge or emotional investment within the fan community have transformed fandom into a projection of their personal fears, anxieties, and fantasies about the dangers of mass culture.” (Jenkins, 1991. p. 6) The superior observer holds him or herself apart from these cultural dangers, as Lewis (1992) explains: “the commentator on fandom is protected by reason or education or critical insight: thanks to these special traits, ‘we’ don’t succumb to whatever it is we believe applies to ‘them.’” (p. 25)

The fan community

While of course the object of fandom holds appeal in and of itself, the motivation to identify as a fan is often more complex than a simple affection for or identification with the object. Although the presence of a fan community may appear to be the result of a group of fans coming together, for some the group itself can be the motivating force: fans may follow a cultural text in order to join an appealing community. Aden (1999) describes this as “. . . the lure of finding common ground with other individuals in interpretive communities.” (p.63) Jenkins (1991) cites “ a desire for further interaction with a larger social and cultural community” (p. 76) as central to the fan experience, quoting an interviewee as saying “While I enjoyed fandom . . . it was a case of finding that I liked fans and wanting to join in their activities; the TV viewing itself was more like homework” (p. 90) In addition to the appeal of the social group, entering into the fan community provides a sense of solidarity in the face of the stigma and misperception of the fan in popular media and scholarship. To identify as a fan is “to speak from a position of collective identity, to forge an alliance with a community of others in defense of tasks which, as a result, cannot be read as totally aberrant or idiosyncratic.” (Jenkins, 1991. p. 23)

Some fans find that to participate in a fandom of their choice they require the vocabulary of a wider field, perhaps across a genre (sci-fi television rather than just Star Trek, girls series books rather than just Judy Bolton, etc.) in order to fully discuss their particular interest with like-minded people. As Jenkins (1991) says, “Fans often find it difficult to discuss single programs except through references and comparisons to this broader network” (p.40) This can also lead the fan to new interests, perhaps as the

original interest begins to pall: “fans may also drift from one series commitment to another through an extended period of involvement within ‘fandom.’” (Jenkins, 1991. p. 40) Others also discuss the movement from commitment to one focus to a genre at large, saying that “popular fiction often enjoys a particular kind of reader loyalty, one that can build itself around not just a writer and body of work . . . but the entire genre and the culture that imbues it.” (Gelder, 2004. p.81)

Greater meaning is derived from an experience that is shared: “In other words, the individual fan’s experience cannot be a symbolic pilgrimage unless s/he symbolically visits a sacred place in the company of others.” (Aden, 1999. p.90) And through this deeper experience, fans on shared pilgrimages find “nourishment of the spirit” in their communion via popular story. (Aden, 1999. p. 96) It is important to note that Aden (1999) believes that this communion may be achieved without reference to a direct connection between fans:

Even individuals reading a book or watching television alone can participate in interpretive communities, I believe, as long as they engage in communication about the story after the fact *or* even imagine themselves to be connected to other fans of the story. (p.63)

The direct connections made between fans are of course also important to consider when evaluating the nature of fan community, whether the fans meet in person or simply communicate at a distance. One traditional form of expressing fan community is the convention, conference, or other semi-public gathering. Harrington (1995) describes a gathering of soap opera fans as follows:

[The] event is akin to an extended family reunion. The participants have a symbolically intimate but geographically distant relationship to each other; they come together on a Sunday afternoon to share a meal, exchange gossip, catch up on old time, and take pictures; and finally they part, exhausted, knowing that the same thing will happen next year. (p10)

Another important means of bringing together fan groups who are dispersed geographically is through the media, both print and digital:

Certainly, fans already have an established record of using printed materials to build their communities over great distances. Beginning with the printing of the first fan letter to the editor in a 1926 edition of *Amazing Stories*, publications have served as vehicles for fans to build “communities based upon the exchange of ideas and recounting of events instead of immediately shared experience and pressing of the flesh.” (Smith, 1999. p. 88)

Modern technology has of course lent a hand to this type of long-distance connection, through email, listservs, and the internet. Harris (1998) says

Most impressively, fans need no longer commit themselves to fandom physically – just virtually. Virtual fandom broadens participation, allowing those too shy to admit to their fandom to “lurk” in the background of a computer network, no one the wiser; but unlike shy, non-networked fans, a computer-networked fan is an informed fan. (p. 150)

Networked fans who also participate in real-life events have a duty to their virtual community: “[they] are expected to add to the electronic conversation snippets of their experiences, for they are more of a fan than those who just express their fandom by participating in computer-mediated exchanges.” (Harris, 1998. p. 139)

These fans who participate at several levels of fandom earn enhanced status within the community. Those who are more committed and better informed about their topic achieve increased status, for “. . . fan knowledge helps to distinguish a particular fan community (those who possess it) from others (those who do not): like the official culture, its work is finally one of social distinction.” (Lewis, 1992. p. 43) Harris (1998) goes into great detail about the intricacies of hierarchy within fan communities: the importance is not simply to establish power within the group, but also to identify those who will represent the fans to the outside world, as “outsiders to fan discourse (such as

journalists and academics) will usually be directed either by fans or by production people to fans who have achieved a certain level of recognition or authority.” (p. 139)

Harris (1998) also breaks down the types of status one can achieve, like “fandom level or quality, [which] separates fans by amount of fan participation – those who attend conventions and other organized events versus those who do not,” access to the creators or producers of the prized text, or simply natural leadership: “a natural dynamic of these smaller groups is that some people are viewed as “leaders” of the group and others are not.” (p. 137-8)

Active and Productive

The simplistic view of a fan (whether of a book, a TV show, a sports team, an actor etc.) is that of the consumer: fans absorb, reflect, cherish, or even obsess over the object of their fandom. But the relationship between a fan and their text is by its nature more active than passive. The emotional investment in the object as well as the personal identification with their status as a fan requires an active relationship. More obviously, fans who write and/or publish material on their topic of interest exemplify a particularly clear type of active relationship between fan and text. Some argue that fans who publicly interact with their texts are the only ones who develop a true sense of ownership: “The commercial narratives only become one’s own when they take a form that can be shared with others, while the act of retelling, like the act of rereading, helps sustain the emotional immediacy that initially attracted the fan’s interest. “ (Jenkins, 1991. p. 77) In addition,

the ongoing process of fan rereading results in a progressive elaboration of the series ‘universe’ through inference and speculations that push well beyond its explicit information; the fans meta-text, whether perpetuated through gossip or

embodied within written criticism, already constitutes a form of rewriting. (Jenkins, 1991. p. 155)

Just as retelling the narratives reinforces community and personal bonds, a sense of empowerment results from this behavior: “. . . consuming popular culture offers us the opportunity to whip up our own fulfilling promised lands.” (Aden, 1999. p. 77)

As well as providing autonomy of production, “fan publishing constitutes an alternative source of status, unacknowledged by the dominant social and economic systems but personally rewarding nevertheless.” (Jenkins, 1991. p. 159) After the initial infatuation with a particular text ceases to be fulfilling, creative interaction with the text or its ‘universe’ helps satisfy the emotional needs the object itself once met. Jenkins (1991) says “watching the films seems a progressively less sufficient means of satisfying the desires that draw them back. This vague dissatisfaction often pushes them toward other ways of recreating the experience of the text.” (p. 75)

The boundary between fan-as-observer or consumer and fan-as-producer or participant begins to blur: discussing the connection between fan production and fan community, Jenkins (1991) says “[It is] striking how writing becomes a social activity . . . functioning simultaneously as a form of personal expression and as a source of collective identity (part of what it means to be a ‘fan’).” (p. 154) This close relationship and vague differentiation between producer and consumer yields a bonus for amateur over commercial media: “Precisely because the boundary between writer and reader is so flimsy, fanzine editors and writers remain more responsive than commercial producers to the desires and interests of their readership.” (p. 159) Within the fan publishing community, most readers are also writers, or at least will share a similar level of interest

or even expertise on the topic. The sharing of roles within the community leads to a tradition of discussion and interaction which greatly enriches the publications.

An important distinction between the commercial and amateur media is that of scope: fan texts can afford to focus closely on esoteric topics, while mass-produced media must attempt to lure as broad an audience as possible: “Because fan texts are not produced for profit, they do not need to be mass-marketed, so unlike official culture, fan culture makes no attempt to circulate its texts outside its own community. They are ‘narrowcast,’ not broadcast, texts.” (Lewis, 1992. p. 39) While commercially produced materials respond first and foremost to market forces and show their profitability, independent, fan-run publications have the luxury of unprofitability. They are free to focus solely on their own particular market, with the goal of covering their costs as not so much a requirement as an appealing possibility. This remains valid even as the fan production industry grows: “despite the recent development of larger fan publishing houses and zine distributors, fan zines continue to be a mode of amateur, nonprofit publication.” (Jenkins, 1991. p. 158)

A drawback to independent media production is the challenge of filling the pages of these publications. Jenkins (1991) points out that “any fan who writes stories has a good chance at publication, since most zine editors struggles to find enough acceptable material to fill their zines and take pride in their receptiveness to new contributors.” (p. 159) This can take its toll on the overall quality of the publication: “push comes to shove, professionalization gives way to acceptance; even the most polished zines occasionally include work that falls outside their overall standards but represents the fledgling efforts of new fans.” (p. 159)

Scholarship, Expertise, and Fandom

The approach of the fan to the text is based in the assumption that the text is as worthy of careful evaluation as high culture: “Fan culture muddies those boundaries treating popular texts as if they merited the same degree of attention and appreciation as canonical texts.” (Jenkins, 1991. p. 17) Lewis (1992) describes this behavior as similar to traditional scholarship though without official recognition or respect, comparing “the fan’s obsession with popular media figures and the scholar’s devotion to a specific research interest in order to demonstrate a system of bias which debases fans and elevates scholars,” (p. 2) illuminating the presupposition that scholar’s work is essentially different and more important than that of a fan who invests in a topic for personal rather than professional reasons. Some recognize the value of fans’ unsanctioned scholarship: as Jenkins (1991) says “the intimate knowledge and cultural competency of the popular reader also promotes critical evaluation and interpretation, the exercise of a popular “expertise” that mirrors in interesting ways the knowledge-production that occupies the academy.” (p. 86)

Despite this valuable knowledge, the fan or devotee to popular culture continues to hold limited status in the eyes of mainstream academics: “the editors of these e-zines possess the qualities of a “powerless elite” whose expert status remains unrecognized by society at large They constitute a competing educational elite, albeit one without official recognition or social power.” (Smith, 1999. p. 90)

Even within the academic study of popular culture, there are careful boundaries drawn between the official and the unofficial experts. It isn’t enough to merely act from an appropriate scholarly distance—the fan must be made ‘other’ to reaffirm the

distinction: “‘We’ get to be thoughtful, educated and discriminating, if we assume that ‘they’ are obsessed, uneducated and indiscriminate.” (Lewis, 1992. p. 24)

Even when such critics accept some popular culture as worthy of serious attention, they typically read popular works as if they were materials of elite culture, introducing ‘a distance, a gap’ between themselves and the text; the intellectual reader focuses less on their emotional qualities or narrative interests than upon those aspects which ‘are only appreciated rationally through a comparison with other works,’ (upon evaluative notions of authorship, for example). (Jenkins, 1991. p. 60-1)

In the field of series books, this bias is discussed by Carolyn Dyer and Nancy Romalov (1995), who point out that “the sort of passion that drives collectors is suspect in scholars, so scholars have, with some exceptions, done their work without using or acknowledging the work of the collectors.” (p. 146)

There is a need for compensation to address this arms-length approach to popular culture, one that is partially satisfied by the kind of publication that can “pitch itself against neglect elsewhere, especially in academia, replacing it with a much fuller, para-academic knowledge of the field: giving itself the amateur’s time and space to fill in the gaps.” (Gelder, 2004. p. 88) There is therefore an important gap in the study of popular materials, which the fan’s “cultural capital” can alleviate.

Cultural capital gives the genre magazines what I have called a para-academic identity: deploying their scholarship outside of the university, outside of official educational apparatuses. Excavation . . . is central to their identity. Genre magazines must show that they know more about their genres than anybody else. [. . .] Genre magazines provide a corrective to the things academics leave out and they can often relish this task. (Gelder, 2004. p. 92-3)

Jenkins (1991) describes this inverted status thusly: “Within the realm of popular culture, fans are the true experts; they constitute a competing educational elite, albeit one without official recognition or social power.” (p. 86)

Amateurs and Professionals

So what can we expect from the independent, unofficial fan/researcher? It seems unlikely that this ‘expertise’ could ever be acknowledged by the guardians of academia, but this is not as unusual a possibility as it might seem. Academic fields like paleontology and anthropology in their infancy often relied upon the contributions of ordinary people who had no credentials beyond their interest in the field: “During the nineteenth century, it was amateurs who provided the foundations for the eventual professionalization of a discipline.” (Roff, 2005. p. 49) And even once a field is well established, there is a great deal that the non-professional can do: as Roff (2005) points out, “The amateur has always played a role in contributing to scholarship. Even if they are not schooled in the rigors of research, their contributions over the years have been significant.” (p. 55)

Indeed, Taylor (1995) argues that the personal commitment to a field can serve as a replacement for formal training, pointing out that “. . . some neo-academic disciplines observe their origins as owed to the practices of amateurs . . . whose enthusiasm is supplanted by the organized scientificity of middle-class professionals.” (p. 502) Even though the amateur may have a great deal more to share, Taylor also warns that as a new field strives for recognition, the non-professional may be forced out in the process: “It is a short step from being ‘confined to the fringes’ to being defined as a ‘mere amateur’ or unscientific ‘dabbler’, but that process of definition is more one of legitimating the professional than of supplanting the amateur.” (p. 506)

This definition of the amateur as a practitioner is further explored by Robert Stebbins in *Amateurs, Professional, and Serious Leisure* (1992), which explores the

distinctions between the professional, the serious amateur, and the dilettante or dabbler in a field of study. Amateurs are those who deserve “the distinctive label of *avocation*; that is, a subordinate occupation pursued in addition to one’s regular work,” while “the *dabblers* [are] those whose active involvement, technique, and knowledge are so meager as barely to distinguish them from the public of which they are actually a part.”

(Stebbins, 2005. p. 42) His theory proposes a definition of the amateur not in opposition with the professional, but as another practitioner with a different set of motivations.

Stebbins also points out that the lack of institutional pressure can allow the amateur greater freedom to explore the nuances of a field, or to make new connections which may or may not be an accepted part of the official scope of a practice, and thereby expand upon accepted norms. Due to official pressures, a professional may not have the freedom to explore as broadly as the independent amateur. This ability to expand upon a field of interest without regard to professional or commercial commitments is also discussed by Roff (2005) as she outlines the professionalization of the social sciences: “This ‘democratization’ of research is reminiscent of the early amateur social scientist . . . who studied what was of interest to him and did not need credentials to present his findings.” (p. 50)

Methodology

Although intended for children and long-reviled for formulaic plots, variable quality, and an almost inevitable reliance on coincidence and luck to resolve conflicts, girls' series books can provide insight into a great deal of the American social, cultural, and political experience. As scholarly interest has increased, it has become more important for librarians who serve those academic populations to consider how best to develop collections to support this work. Several research libraries have developed special collections with a focus related to this field, including those that mandate the collection of children's literature in all forms, those that focus on the series book or other types of ephemeral and non-literary books, and those that specifically seek to collect girls' series books in particular.

As these institutions look to develop a research collection of the hard to find series books of the last century, they must also consider what types of secondary material are appropriate to include. Since much of the preservation of these series can be attributed to the private collector, the most valuable resources are found in that community. The expertise of the amateur and the fan is particularly dominant in the more esoteric pop culture fields, and for the lesser-known series, secondary materials are very limited aside from what is produced by the fan community. Considering this inspired me to look more closely at the publications created by fans and

collecting groups, with the intent of establishing the value these works could have for serious researchers and research libraries.

To evaluate fan publications that focus on girls' series books, I selected two popular publications: *Susabella Passengers and Friends*, a bimonthly magazine self-described as all about series books "with a positive slant," and *The Whispered Watchword*, a semi-monthly (10 issues per year) magazine that covers "girls' fiction, both old and new [with a] primary focus on girls' series books." Other publications with a similar focus, like *Dime Novel Round-up* and *The Yellowback Library* were also started by fans with a similar purpose, but I wanted to study publications that do not appear to be collected by any major library (according to WorldCat, neither *Susabella* or *The Whispered Watchword* is collected and cataloged by any library beyond a few scattered copies of *TWW* and a sole issue of *Susabella*, while *Yellowback* and *Dime Novel* are each held by over thirty academic libraries). Although these four publications have similar backgrounds, *Susabella* and *The Whispered Watchword* remain almost exclusively the domain of fans and collectors, with little or no official attention from the academic community.

The sample included 17 issues of *The Whispered Watchword* and 16 of *Susabella* with a total of 537 articles, ranging in publication date from June 1998 to October 2005. In order to give structure to my evaluation, I developed a list of criteria to look for in each article (see Appendix A for the full list). The categories were not exclusive; a single article could be coded in multiple categories (such as an article that gave both a detailed plot synopsis as well as a personal reflection on the first time the author read it).

With the first four questions I looked for the qualities that would be closest to “scholarly” work or most useful to someone studying a series: does the article use original research? Does it give a critical analysis? Does it summarize a work completely, or compare a variety of titles on a particular topic? In particular, I was looking for material that would help a scholar by providing information on hard-to-find titles, thereby allowing a better understanding of a particular series even if the books themselves could not be accessed. I also looked for material that illuminated the series or title either through a thoughtful analysis of the content or investigation of the history of an author or book.

So how is ‘original research’ into old series books is possible (and worthwhile), and what caused these fans to undertake it? Several series have inspired independent research into the ‘real life’ of the books, but most notable of these is the Judy Bolton series of books by Margaret Sutton. Part of the original marketing of this series was the promise that every book was based on a real event, place or item, with advertisements on dust jackets promising that:

Judy’s adventures, every one of them, have been based on something that actually happened. The flood, the house with the round attic windows, the hiding place of the invisible chimes, the school fire, the camp in the Thousand Islands—all of them are real! (Axe, 2000. p. 68)

Confirmed by the author in interviews and personal correspondence, this promise of a ‘real story’ behind the books inspired several adult fans of the series to begin tracking down real life sites from the series, starting in the author’s hometown of Coudersport, Pennsylvania, the model for Judy’s city of Farringdon in the series. Dedicated fans identified the homes and businesses that served as models for fictional locations by researching local records and corresponding with the author, and much of their work was

collected and published in *A Guide to Judy Bolton Country* (Society of Phantom Friends, 1997). Similar work identifying or speculating on the real settings of these stories continues, and often the results are published or reprinted in articles in *Susabella* or *The Whispered Watchword*.

Another type of original research found in these publications is that which is based on examination of manuscripts, correspondence, and other materials held in the archives that hold author's and publisher's papers. A great deal of interesting information was found in Margaret Sutton's personal papers, which are held by the University of Minnesota's Kerlan-Hess collection, and still more in the New York Public Library's collection of Stratemeyer Syndicate papers. For example, a fan who traveled to read through the Sutton papers later wrote about the working relationship between Sutton and her various editors, and another who read through a box of invoices from the offices of the Stratemeyer Syndicate, detailing payments to authors.

For the 'critical analysis' criteria, I looked for articles that discussed either the literary merit of a book or series (at a deeper level than personal preference or general review) or used another type of scholarly analysis to examine the work. For example, some articles discussed the depiction of social values in the books, comparing the ideal of 'justice' in different series to show the differences between a girl sleuth who seeks to restore stolen jewels to an heiress and one who fights to bring a crooked mill owner to justice for endangering his employees. Alternately, the articles could compare the treatment different books give to serious topics like family relationships, prejudice, or even war to give insight into the value of these books as social or political commentary.

The second group of questions was intended to cover the more traditionally fan-oriented material: did the article recommend reading or avoiding a particular title or series? Did it report on fan events or other gatherings? Did it talk more about personal impressions than objective evaluations? Did it speculate on things after the series ended or entirely invent a new story? Did it talk about topics of interest to a collector, like printing formats, illustrations, sales, or reprints? It is important to examine these articles that are aimed more particularly at a fan's interests, since this orientation is often used as an argument against the seriousness or value of these types of publications.

It is interesting to note that even other fan writing can show a bias against their peers' work: in David Farah and Ilana Nash's *Series Books and the Media, or This Isn't All!: an annotated bibliography of secondary sources* (1996) is a reference guide that compiles over 70 years' worth of media references to series books and authors, and the authors are both fans and collectors who have completed this work as private individuals, not professional researchers. Despite their own amateur status, they declare in the introduction that they have chosen to "omit 'fanzines' or newsletters [because] they are so often casual in nature that few of their articles are substantially informative." (Farah and Nash, 1996. p. iii) Interestingly, they also suggest that another reason to not include fan-created periodicals in their index is that since those works are exclusively devoted to the same topic as their reference book, "[they] contain relevant material in every single issue." (Farah and Nash, 1996. p. iii) This paradox perfectly illustrates my motivation for studying these works closer: they are somehow too close to the topic to be generally acceptable, even when a close look is what is desired. Even though they are written and

published by those who are truly dedicated to this topic, that dedication to the material makes the producers suspect—even to their fellow fan-researchers.

Results

The analysis showed that while the articles varied widely in content and quality, both publications frequently included material of interest to students of girls' series books. A summary of the results of the study are printed in table 1 below. (Please see Appendix B for the complete results by issue.) In total, I examined 218 articles in *The Whispered Watchword* and 319 in *Susabella Passengers and Friends*.

For *The Whispered Watchword*, the most consistent emphasis was on material that informed about collecting with a total of 47 articles. These usually listed purchase prices, recommended vendors, or offered books for sale. Second to this was the emphasis on personal reflections (41 articles), which was largely due to a long-running column that solicited brief comments from the readers on various topics. Of their more research-oriented material, the strongest emphasis was on the comparison of multiple titles or series, with a total of 39 articles.

For *Susabella Passengers and Friends*, the strongest emphasis was on providing a detailed synopsis of a plot or series, with a total of 76 articles. Second to this was articles that inform about collecting, with 65 articles which often provided detailed information about the formats and values of the books themselves. Also of note was their commitment to original research, with a total of 59 articles, including several that drew on archival research or interviews.

Table 1: Results of content analysis

Title/Criteria	Total articles	Average per issue
<i>Susabella Passengers and Friends</i>	319	19.94
Does it include original research?	59	3.69
Does it give critical analysis?	32	2.00
Does it provide a detailed synopsis?	76	4.75
Does it compare multiple titles/series?	58	3.63
Does it promote or review fan events?	51	3.19
Does it review titles or series?	48	3.00
Does it give personal reflections?	34	2.13
Does it make speculations?	2	0.13
Is it fiction or a review of fan fiction?	8	0.50
Does it discuss or inform about collecting?	65	4.06
<i>The Whispered Watchword</i>	218	12.82
Does it include original research?	26	1.53
Does it give critical analysis?	26	1.53
Does it provide a detailed synopsis?	34	2.00
Does it compare multiple titles/series?	39	2.29
Does it promote or review fan events?	18	1.06
Does it review titles or series?	22	1.29
Does it give personal reflections?	41	2.41
Does it make speculations?	3	0.18
Is it fiction or a review of fan fiction?	3	0.18
Does it discuss or inform about collecting?	47	2.76

General findings

Overall, *Susabella Passengers and Friends* tended to have more articles that fit my criteria, but this may be explained by the different format of that publication—it is generally longer than *The Whispered Watchword*, and includes more articles of shorter length, while *The Whispered Watchword* usually had fewer pages and longer articles, leading to fewer total articles per issue. *The Whispered Watchword* offered fewer regular features than *Susabella* as well, except for a few recurring sections: one that solicited brief opinions from readers, one that introduced a different subscriber every month, and one that listed current eBay sales prices for series book titles. Although it includes fewer in-depth articles, those articles often took a stronger position than the ones from *Susabella*, offering more critical perspective.

One feature of *Susabella* that increases its value to the researcher is their commitment to access within the publication: each issue is indexed by article title, and all include on the back cover a complete index of the articles in recent back issues by subject. While older issues included full article indexes for the past ten issues, since January 2005 only the three most recent editions are indexed by article and an index of back issues by theme only is included for the past several years. Additionally, each issue includes a “Call for Papers” that outlines the themes of the upcoming three issues, and sometimes gives brief synopses of selected articles also.

Research quality material

Many of the most interesting examples I found in the process of evaluation fit into the first category, original research. Some of the most surprising and fascinating work from this category represented archival research on the part of the author. In the July

2003 issue of *Susabella*, there is an interesting article on material found in the Stratemeyer Syndicate archives at the New York Public Library in a box marked “Dana Girls 1938-1980.” The invoices, correspondence, and notes within give information about the true authorship of the Dana Girls series, the fees paid to ghostwriters, and the process of plotting and planning the illustrations for the series. (Lothe, 2003)

Other examples of independent research include interviews with contemporary authors of series books, descriptions of ‘real life’ sites, and several series of articles by book collecting experts on formats, preservation, and other issues important to the amateur collector. In the September 2005 issue of *Susabella Passengers and Friends*, for example, there is an interview with one of Margaret Sutton’s daughters, discussing her memories of her mother’s writing and detailing family stories that later became plots for Judy Bolton mysteries. (Kratzat, 2005.) Several issues of *The Whispered Watchword* include interviews with working authors as well, such as the March 2005 interview with Susan Sloate, co-author of the popular *Forward to Camelot* series, that discusses her influences and favorite authors as well as her own work.

While I found *Susabella Passengers and Friends* to have a stronger emphasis on original research, *The Whispered Watchword* tended to focus more on critical analysis of series books. A good example of this is Melanie Knight’s article titled “Protesters!” that appears in the May 2005 issue. She gives a brief historical background of protesting within the civil rights and peace movements in the 1960’s and 70’s , and goes on to describe and critically evaluate the treatment of these issues in series books of that time period. (Knight, 2005) This is an excellent example of how series books can be used to examine the social history of a given time period—although they were not originally

intended to serve as a record of the political climate, Knight's article describes and compares books that take very different positions on the benefits and drawbacks of non-violent protest as a political tool. Some authors clearly hoped to provide a cautionary tale, and to discourage young readers from identifying with student political movements, while others were writing positively about activism and young people.

Susabella Passengers and Friends also had a strong emphasis on detailed synopses, both of individual titles in the more popular series and also overviews of entire series of less commonly known books. A good example of the latter is Janet DeVries' November 2004 article that outlines the *Ginnie and Geneva* books, discussing the entire scope of the series plus providing brief plot summaries of each title in the ten-volume series. In addition, each issue I studied included at least one extensive description of an individual book, with additional entries often made as well. There is of course some variation in the usefulness of these synopses, since some deal with rare, hard to find books and others describe readily available titles that have remained in print for seventy years or more (like Nancy Drew's *Mystery of the Tolling Bell*, continuously available since 1946 or The Hardy Boys' *Secret of the Old Mill*, still in print since being published in 1927).

Another helpful type of article is that which compares various titles within a series. One particularly good example of this was in *The Whispered Watchword's* June/July 2004 issue, when Betsy Caprio Hedburg published an article comparing the three different settings of the Grace Harlowe series: her adventures at boarding school in World War One, and in the American West. She compares the changes in the series over

time, the variations created by character developments, and also the changes in literary value of each part of the series.

Fan-oriented material

Of course, both publications provided a great deal of material which was more specifically fan-oriented as well. Both titles included information about series book conventions and other fan events, in the form of advertisement for upcoming gatherings and also in discussions and descriptions of past events. But the most prevalent form of fan-oriented article was certainly the personal reflection or opinion piece. *The Whispered Watchword* in particular had as one of its few recurring columns a series called “Phantom Voices,” that solicited opinions from readers on topics related to series books and reading, like ‘Which character would you like to help you investigate a crime?’ or ‘Should Nancy Drew marry Ned Nickerson?’. While some questions were more interesting than others, the format of the responses (a short paragraph or two from each reader) means that the content is never particularly deep.

Based on my literature review, I had developed the assumption that fan publications would be likely to include a large amount of fan writing, both pure fiction and speculative pieces on events outside the series ‘canon.’ Before beginning my analysis, therefore, I established two separate categories for this type of material. In particular, I assumed that speculation about the Judy Bolton series would be popular, as that series followed Judy’s growth as a young woman but was abruptly cancelled by the publisher, with a final book (advertised in the last volume) never written or published. I was surprised to find that these two categories were only minimally represented, with ‘Phantom Voices’ column accounting for most of the speculation printed.

Only a few pieces of fiction were printed as well, most notably Kate Emburg's "Series Book Survivor" serial, which placed 16 series book characters in a parody of the Survivor reality show 'hosted' by Mildred Wirt Benson, ghostwriter of many early Nancy Drew titles. The story is a cautionary tale: even though the final two contestants are secondary characters from different series, Nancy Drew is unanimously voted the winner due to all other series having been out of print. The author advises that to avoid this fate, readers should "spend every minute and every dime you have on preserving our series book heritage . . . History has revealed the ultimate Survivor—but she doesn't have to stand alone! Won't you help *every* series survive?" (Emburg, 2001. p. 9, 17-20)

Finally, both publications made a serious emphasis on articles that inform about or otherwise discuss collecting series books. While some were little more than advertisements listing books available for sale, many provided substantial information for the collector, either about market prices or comparative rarity of particular titles or series, or giving detailed information about the formats, illustrations, and printings of series books. Of particular (if specialized) interest was the intermittent appearance of regional "book-hunting" guides to antique malls, used bookstores, and other sources for series book purchases in *Susabella Passengers and Friends* (see Kathy Ursich's "Book-hunting in the Pacific Northwest," November 2003, pages 34-36 as a good representative example). Also worth noting is the eBay watch column in *The Whispered Watchword*, which gives a listing of recent sale prices from eBay auctions of series books, such as the August 2005 reporting of a copy of Nancy Drew's *Sign of the Twisted Candles* which sold for \$450.

One of the most valuable sources of collecting information was an ongoing series in *Susabella Passengers and Friends*. John Axe, author of popular guides to collecting both boys and girls series books, wrote this series of articles providing a very thorough look at a different obscure series each issue. A good example of this is from the March 2005 issue, where he writes extensively about the Dave Dawson war adventure series, describing and providing examples of artwork for the books, giving brief synopses of the plots, listing the different formats in which they were published, and finally giving an estimated value for the various formats and titles by condition. (Axe, 2005) This treatment is given to several other series, with a two-page display of cover art reproductions included for most.

Discussion

There was a great deal of variation in the content types of the articles in both publications. For example, each issue of *Susabella* I evaluated included at least one lengthy synopsis and review of a series book, but most issues also included short trivia quizzes as well. The quizzes, of course, are purely entertainment for the reader who is already well-versed in the minutiae of the series book world, but the synopses are a valuable resource, particularly when they focus on unusual, unfamiliar, or hard-to-find books. Even the best written, most detailed and carefully analyzed description of, say, *The Secret in the Old Clock* (the first Nancy Drew mystery, readily available in several formats) will be of less interest to the researcher than information on the rare titles from more obscure series, that few people are able to access.

As noted in the literature review, the challenge of filling the pages of each issue of a fan periodical can become overwhelming. The editor's letter in the August 1998 issue of *The Whispered Watchword* acknowledges this difficulty in a humorous note: "All of [the contributors] asked if this issue had a theme—I said it was a very important theme . . . NO BLANK PAGES!" It does appear that occasionally the need to fill pages leads to drastic variation in the quality of individual articles in an issue. The content of fan publications certainly varies a great deal, but I believe that in the literature on fandom we have seen a strong argument for valuing the contribution of the enthusiastic, devoted amateur. In *Rediscovering Nancy Drew* (1995), Nancy Romalov and Carolyn Dyer argue

that compared to series book fans, scholarship in the field has “contributed . . . relatively little so far to the store of factual knowledge about Nancy Drew books that the collectors had already accumulated.” (p. 146) Even more importantly, “since they overlook the work of collectors, they often get the facts wrong.” (p. 146) In my readings of scholarly work on series books, I found several mistakes and omissions that could easily have been corrected by any fan familiar with the content of a series, or by consulting a relevant fan publication.

For example, in Arthur Prager’s *Rascals at Large*, the author concludes that “Politically Judy [Bolton] stood rather far to the right of Nancy [Drew].” (p. 92) He continues on to discuss Judy’s reliance on wealthy friends and disregard for the poor and underprivileged. To anyone who has read the series, though, this is surprisingly inaccurate: much of Judy’s characterization revolves around her sense of social justice and her determination to break down barriers between classes in her small Pennsylvania town. Prager only provides citations for one title in the series, so perhaps his exposure was limited to that title alone. In any case, almost any issue of either *The Whispered Watchword* or *Susabella Passengers and Friends* would have given him enough information about other books in Judy’s series to realize his error.

In another example, in *Mirrors of American Culture: Children’s Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (1991), states plainly that “except for the fiction series, war, for practical purposes, does not exist in children’s literature.” (p. 158) In his description of the treatment of World War One and Two in series books, though, he discusses only a few series of boys’ books that specifically focus on the Army. He neglects to mention the popular Cherry Ames series, which details the adventures of an Army nurse who

serves in several theatres of war, or the experiences of Ruth Fielding or Grace Harlowe in World War One, instead concluding that “the most prominent feature in books about military action is violence.” (p. 159) The March 2004 issue of *Susabella*, which covers series books with themes of war, would have been a valuable research if only to suggest other titles and series to consider.

While the fan-based periodicals researched did vary somewhat in content, I believe that the particular dedication to all aspects of the series books they discuss makes them a valuable resource for any library that collects and maintains juvenile historical books in general or girls’ series in particular. Since very few libraries or archives can boast a collection that is even close to complete on even the major series, having these secondary sources filled with useful information on both major and minor series would be really valuable to the serious researcher. This is not to say that the fan magazines could replace the collection of the original books; the purpose of a good secondary source is to provide a new way of looking at a topic, or to expose the researcher to previously hidden ideas or lines of inquiry, not replace the primary materials. In this capacity, I believe that *Susabella Passengers and Friends* and *The Whispered Watchword* are easily equal to any other secondary source on girls’ series books.

In libraries and archives that collect girls’ series books, there is already a certain precedent set for the collection of fan publications. Reference works like *The Secret of Collecting Girls’ Series Books*, *The Guide to Judy Bolton Country*, and *Farah’s Guide* are widely held, and all of these are the work of dedicated fans and collectors of series books. In addition, a 1997 study of librarians in the United Kingdom on the topic of collecting football fanzines reports that “All responding to the survey felt strongly that

fanzines should be treated as formal information sources.” (Hall and Smith, p. 192)

Based on the consistent emphasis on in-depth analysis I found in *The Whispered Watchword* and on detailed description in *Susabella Passengers and Friends*, I believe that these sources deserve serious consideration for collection as an enriching secondary resource for collections focused on series books.

Perhaps it is only the lack of publicity outside of the fan community that prevents the wider acceptance of these materials as valuable secondary sources for researchers in this field. Or maybe it is the self-published style and home-made format that prevents them from being taken seriously. In an article advocating greater inclusion of “grey literature” in libraries, Dieter Schmidmaier argues that

“Grey literature is literature which appears outside conventional channels and is, therefore, removed from direct view. It is . . . often intended for a small circle of interested persons and many others know nothing of it; it only appears in small issues; it is not publicized at all; and often it is not sufficiently standardized,” (p. 99)

He points out that despite the challenges in collecting unusual materials, the only valid criteria of selection is the quality of the item itself: “The basic criteria for librarians must be the content and the usefulness to society – not the method of procurement, the efforts involved in cataloguing, the peculiarities of storage.” (p. 105) These arguments apply equally well to the collection of the materials I assessed in this study. Although they are not published in a traditional scholarly format, the content of each publication is a unique and valuable resource for the student of these works that is not replicated by any formal sources.

Early in my research, I was able to attend a gathering sponsored by *Susabella Passengers and Friends*, the sixth annual Judy Bolton Weekend, held in Coudersport,

Pennsylvania. Having the opportunity to observe some of the readers, writers, and editors of this publication gave me a new level of insight into the community that surrounds this work. Many of the concepts I discussed in the literature review were evident, from the culture of openness which welcomes new fans (as both readers and writers), to the sense of elevated status for those who had conducted the earliest research into the real-life sources for the series. Observing the dedication many of the attendees had to the series helped me realize how valuable their contribution to the scholarship on girls' series books is: to study a series without this kind of emotional investment could not possibly do justice to the kind of effect the books have had on their readers. To uncover the full effect of a children's series, it is important to consider the actual readers, and to explore the experiences they have had with the books themselves. Studying the publications produced by these fans is an excellent method of exploring these personal and emotional effects.

Conclusions and Further Research

Although these two publications do include material which is of limited value to a researcher, they represent a significant source of highly useful secondary material. As a tool to help explore the less accessible areas of this popular culture field, they would be a good addition to any collection seeking to provide access to the girls' series books of the twentieth century.

As Roff (2005) and Taylor (1995) each discussed, when new fields of study are first gaining status in academia, they often rely upon the contributions of amateurs to develop their knowledge base. Like Roff's and Taylor's examples of the 19th century amateur archaeologist or paleontologist, scholarship in cultural studies or other popular culture fields today owes a debt to the expertise of the fan of popular media. While fans of popular culture genres from science fiction to soap operas have true expertise in their field, their knowledge and insight is often disregarded due to a perception of over-investment (or indeed obsession) with their object of interest. It is foolish to ignore the valuable insights that dedicated fans can provide into popular culture, particularly in a field such as series books, where usually even serious scholars who choose to study it professionally are motivated by personal interest, emotion, and nostalgia.

For a variety of reasons, the fan culture surrounding girls' series books includes a dynamic tradition of independent research, writing, and publication. It is worthwhile to collect all forms of material produced by these fans, in particular to fill in the information

gaps surrounding many hard-to-find series that may otherwise be totally inaccessible to the research community. Although these publications did include material that clearly would only be of interest to the fan community, the consistent presence of research-quality material, whether in the form of plot summaries, interviews, original research, or critical analysis, makes these a good addition to the collection of secondary materials for research archives in children's series books.

The passion which informs the fan's research on writing on this and other topics has a value which cannot be easily replicated. Even if scholarly equivalents to this material existed (and they do not for the more esoteric series), I believe that the materials created by devoted fans provides an important counterpoint to the more official scholarly approach. In reading these works, I found that the fans' dedication to and investment in their interest provided a richer portrait of the works than a purely detached and objective scholarly analysis ever could. In particular, using a fan-written article to explore a children's series allows the researcher to partially experience the sense of immersion in another world that the best children's literature provides.

Having studied the materials in question in some detail, I believe that the next useful step in this research would be to study the major special collections of girls' series books and their users. Further examination of the collection policy of archives like the Children's Literature Research Collections at the University of Minnesota, the Miriam Snow Mathes Historical Children's Literature Collection at the University at Albany, and the Girls Books in Series collection at University of North Carolina at Greensboro would help establish what level of commitment they have made to providing access to secondary materials relating to the primary resources they have gathered. Additionally

useful would be a study of the users of these collections: what type of work is being informed by the preservation of these materials? Are historians or social scientists making use of these artifacts of generations past? Or is the insight they provide primarily being used by students of juvenile literature or publishing alone? Finally, a thorough study of the writers, readers, and publishers of the fan periodicals would provide valuable insights into the nature of fan attention to Judy Bolton and her vanishing sisters.

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Appendix A

Content Analysis Form

1. Is the article based in original research, such as an interview, a visit to a real-life setting, or archival research?
2. Does the article give a critical analysis of a series or title?
3. Does the article describe a series or title in detail, including either a full synopsis of plot (for a title) or a summary of the entire series' progression?
4. Does the article compare multiple series or titles?
5. Does the article report on or promote upcoming fan events?
6. Is it a review of a title or series, including a recommendation for or against the title?
7. Does the article provide personal reflections, such as memories, favorites, etc.?
8. Does the article include speculation, such as thoughts on what happens outside of the published series?
9. Is it a work of fiction, or a review or recommendation of another fan-written work of fiction?
10. Does the article discuss or provide information on collecting series books?

Appendix B

The Whispered Watchword

Issue	Oct-05	Sep-05	Aug-05	May-05	Apr-05	Mar-05
Independent research	1	1	0	2	3	2
Critical analysis	0	0	1	3	1	0
detailed synopsis	1	1	0	0	2	3
compare multiple titles/series	2	4	3	4	3	1
promote/review fan events	0	1	3	1	1	0
review titles/series	2	0	4	1	1	1
personal reflections	2	3	3	1	4	2
speculations	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fiction	0	0	0	0	0	0
collecting	3	1	3	2	2	2
Total articles	8	11	14	13	19	12
Issue	Feb-05	Nov-04	Jun-04	Dec-01	Sep-01	Apr-00
Independent research	0	1	1	0	2	2
Critical analysis	1	3	3	2	1	2
detailed synopsis	5	2	5	2	3	0
compare multiple titles/series	1	2	4	3	1	1
promote/review fan events	1	0	0	1	0	1
review titles/series	3	3	2	0	3	1
personal reflections	6	1	2	5	0	4
speculations	1	0	1	0	0	0
Fiction	0	0	0	1	1	0
collecting	2	0	1	1	3	6
Total articles	13	11	14	15	12	14
Issue	Nov-99	Mar-99	Nov-98	Aug-98	Jun-98	average
Independent research	1	4	2	2	2	1.53
Critical analysis	1	1	1	2	4	1.53
detailed synopsis	1	2	4	2	1	2.00
compare multiple titles/series	4	1	1	1	3	2.29
promote/review fan events	1	2	3	0	3	1.06
review titles/series	0	0	1	0	0	1.29
personal reflections	1	4	1	2	0	2.41
speculations	0	1	0	0	0	0.18
fiction	0	0	0	1	0	0.18
collecting	3	6	0	9	3	2.76
Total articles	10	15	10	15	12	12.82

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Issue	Sep-05	Jul-05	May-05	Mar-05	Jan-05	Nov-04
Independent research	4	5	2	5	4	4
Critical analysis	0	3	1	4	2	1
detailed synopsis	5	10	3	6	3	5
compare multiple titles/series	8	4	6	5	4	2
promote/review fan events	3	5	2	3	1	1
review titles/series	1	2	1	3	2	2
personal reflections	2	2	4	1	1	2
speculations	0	0	0	0	0	1
fiction	0	1	0	0	0	1
collecting	6	4	1	2	2	2
Total articles	24	25	19	23	19	18
Issue	Sep-04	Mar-04	Nov-03	Jul-03	May-03	Mar-03
Independent research	5	2	4	3	2	3
Critical analysis	0	4	3	2	2	3
detailed synopsis	6	4	5	6	3	4
compare multiple titles/series	1	4	3	2	3	2
promote/review fan events	5	3	3	1	1	4
review titles/series	0	4	3	4	5	4
personal reflections	2	0	0	4	1	0
Speculations	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fiction	0	0	1	0	0	1
Collecting	4	4	4	3	1	2
Total articles	19	17	21	20	19	18
Issue	Jan-03	Nov-02	Sep-02	Jul-01	average	
Independent research	2	2	6	6	3.69	
Critical analysis	2	1	2	2	2.00	
detailed synopsis	3	3	6	4	4.75	
compare multiple titles/series	3	2	5	4	3.63	
promote/review fan events	2	5	8	4	3.19	
review titles/series	4	6	4	3	3.00	
personal reflections	2	2	4	7	2.13	
Speculations	0	0	0	1	0.13	
Fiction	0	3	1	0	0.50	
Collecting	3	7	14	6	4.06	
Total articles	20	23	19	15	19.94	