

Changing Discursive Formations from *Supernatural*: Fanfic and The Legitimation Paradox.

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## Abstract

### Changing Discursive Formations from *Supernatural*: Fanfic and the Legitimation Paradox

This thesis argues that fanfic operates through a paradox of legitimation. Using the current cult text *Supernatural* (CW, 2006-) as a case study, discourse theory adapted from Foucault is utilized to establish that discursive formations from the source text can be de- and re-constructed, sometimes consolidating canon's constructions, but at other times, altering Othered characterizations and criticising statements from canon. Paradoxically, however, this process utilizes and functions through the capital of the already-empowered: the White male Author (Jenkins 1995; Hills 2002; 2010a; Wexelblat 2002; Gray 2010; Kompare 2011; Scott 2011), and/or the White male protagonists of the series (c.f. Dyer 1992).

The discursive formations studied are identified from the researcher's situated position as fan-insider and academic (c.f. Hills 2002; Hodgkinson 2005). They are judged to be of significance in the canon and fandom, and pertinent to the questions of power and Authority this study addresses. The methodology utilizes some techniques from network analysis (Park and Thelwall 2003) to chart the impact of fan-statements in an innovative fashion, using both quantitative and qualitative measures, whilst retaining insights from discourse theory to account for the specificity of fiction as a particular form of writing. In this way, the strength of statements, discursive boundaries, and techniques for alteration can be observed. The study concludes that, though the legitimation paradox cannot be unproblematically escaped or overcome, fanfic has begun to compromise it via deconstruction of the *concepts* of originality and authorship; and

thus, from a postmodern perspective, the terms of the legitimation paradox can begin to be questioned.

Statements of Declaration

I declare that

- a) except where sources are explicitly acknowledged, this thesis is the result of my own investigation and the views expressed are my own;

and

- b) no portion of this thesis has been submitted or is under consideration for any other degree or award at any university or place of learning.

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## Changing Discursive Formations from *Supernatural*: Fanfic and the Legitimation Paradox

### Introduction

Contemporary understandings of fanfic eschew the utopian pronouncements of what Gray et. al called the ‘Fandom is Beautiful’ phase of academia (2007, 1). It is generally now accepted that, contra Jenkins (1992) and Bacon-Smith (1992), fanfic is neither automatically transformative of media texts, nor a peacefully democratic and supportive community. It is a complex and contested arena of textual production with its own hierarchies, norms and disciplining practices (Scodari 2003; Thomas 2005; Hills 2013, 149). Moreover, despite and because of the laissez-faire attitudes to or outright affirmation of fanwork by TV auteurs like Joss Whedon and Eric Kripke, fanfic still negotiates a subordinated relationship to its canons (Scott 2011).

This thesis uses Foucauldian discourse theory to analyse how fanfic generates new statements that alter formations from the cult TV show *Supernatural*. The practice is far from unregulated. Through the tools of discourse theory and network analysis, I hope to provide one answer to Giovanni Boccia Artieri’s timely call for investigation ‘*whether* and in *what ways*’ fannish textual production can take ‘forms that allow us to experience media contents differently as well as generate different interpretative categories of our society’ (2012, 463). Scott (2011) sets an important precedent, identifying a gendered divide between legitimated and culturally approved fannish production (primarily coded masculine, e.g. vid creation from licensed material) and

fanwork that is scorned and devalued (primarily coded feminine, e.g. slash). Building on her recognition of the 'fanboy-auteur', who performs acceptance and legitimation of fannish production para-textually whilst retaining a position of economic and industrial power, this thesis argues that fanwork is pervaded by and functions through what I call the *legitimation paradox*. Here, the legitimation and revaluation of the Other, be it racial; sexual; or gendered, is enabled and enacted via the cultural capital of the White male. The clearest example is the fan's writing legitimated by the TV-auteur, simultaneously empowered and contained as showrunners grant metatextual acknowledgment and paratextual permission of fanfic. Derivative writing is legitimated and empowered - because and so far as the author says so. Yet the paradox also functions to reevaluate aspects of race and sexuality that are typically denigrated and Othered through the capital of the White male protagonists utilized in fanfic. Othered properties *are* actively reevaluated, but the process by which this operates ironically reaffirms the primacy of the White Male (author).

*Supernatural* both incites and disciplines fanfic, in accordance with Foucault's theories of the productive capacities of discourse ([1976] 1998). I pay specific attention to how boundaries are formed and policed; how and if they can be crossed; and how statements differ at the peripheries of formations. *Supernatural* is an apropos case study due to its current cult status, its fanboy-auteur in the persona of Eric Kripke, and active involvement with and representation of its own fan cultures. The current coinage for this practice is 'fan-tagonism' (Johnson 2007a), which I retain, but supplement with the concept of *textual provocation*. Fulfilling the discursive function of incitement, the textual inclusion of fans can be provocative in the sense of baiting, but it also provokes the production of more text, which is always in excess of that provocation and can alter

the discourse construction. 'Fan-tagonism' describes the practices of producers and content of the official text, but *textual provocation* works two ways: it references both provocation *in* the source text, such as fan-tagonism, and the texts provoked into existence in response to that, like fanfic.

Firstly, will I situate this work in the context of Foucauldian approaches to text. I explain my choice to give central place to discourse theory in a study of fanfic, over the more typical primacy of Bourdieu. I argue that whilst Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital remain important, a discourse analysis based on Foucault's theories of power as an 'open and capillary network' (Callewaert 2006, 87) better accommodates the online context of fanfic today. Moreover, Foucault's (1991) theory of the Author-function and the ability of discourse theory to account for statements from fictional genres, traditions and contexts provides appropriate tools for treating fanfic *as fiction*: something which previous commentators on fanfic have either elided (e.g. Jenkins 1992, Black 2010), or bracketed to the exclusion of social context (e.g. Busse 2006; Kaplan 2006). Following Radford et al.'s insight that alternative library archives combine 'existing statements with other statements in new and unique ways' that are 'generative of knowledge' (2012, 264; see also Lothian 2013), I argue that the varied provenance of fanfic allows for statements of differing provenance to collide and create new possibilities as they enter the discursive formations established by canon, thus reinvigorating Penley's early understanding of fanwork as *bricolage* with transformative potential (1992). Therefore, as I go on to summarize previous work on fandom and fanfic, I locate the contribution of this research as a discourse analysis that accommodates the networked context and fictional orientation of fic.

Chapter 2, the methodology, explains in detail the processes by which I selected, coded, and analysed the relevant fic. This project pays specific and rigorous attention to the means by which fandom hierarchizes, silences and disciplines its own texts via feedback, including praise and recommendation, trolling and mockery. It is the first extended project to thoroughly analyse the receptive, interactive, networked context of fanfic in web 2.0. Network analysis seeks to chart and analyse connections between nodes not simply in their functional capacity, but the capital and de/legitimation they confer (see Beaulieu 2005; Rebaza 2010), and the affiliations they represent (Hale 2012). A node in this sense simply means a definable point on a network, ‘such as people, organizations, web pages, or nation states’ (Hogan 2008, 143). Unsurprisingly it has been frequently applied to studies of blogs, websites and social media (Park and Thelwall 2003, Adamic and Glance, 2005; Beaulieu 2005; Hargittai et al., 2007; Rebaza 2010; Hale 2012; Morrison 2013). Yet it has not been applied to fanfic before now. I address this gap, for as Thomas wrote in a stimulating article whose implications deserve more follow-up, these ‘new modes of user involvement for online narratives [...] mean that we cannot [properly] analyse *what* is produced without analysing *how* it is produced and made available to others’ and ‘fanfiction cannot be understood in isolation from the network culture’ (2011, 206-07) facilitated by the structures of Web 2.0. Likewise, Elea (2012) argues that the ‘architecture of participation’ online today allows the reader to ‘intervene in both the form and content’ of a story. Morrison (2013) argues that the recommendation and linking of blogs from respected hubs is a strong sign of and factor in the establishment of impact on the web, and I take specific note of link and recommendation networks.



Chapters 3-5 present the results of the research, treating the discursive formations in turn. The formations studied, Race, Incest and the Author and the Fan, are chosen for their importance to the source text; to the fandom; and for their relevance to the questions of power, subversion, and authorship which are integral to this study. In chapters 3 and 4 I argue that via the legitimization paradox, the Othered properties of Race and Incest, which Fielder recognised as the primary feared themes underlying American Gothicism (1967), are revalued. This revaluation is enacted via the capital of the White male in the form of *Supernatural's* primary characters. Then in Chapter 5, the paradox is realized most literally, when the textual production of the feminized fan is legitimated via the figure of the White male author both paratextually and as a metatextual insertion into the text itself (*Supernatural* 5x01; 5x09; 5x22).

Thus far attention to race has been lacking in fan studies, and horror and Gothicism have a problematic history in the construction of Black characters (Fiedler 1967; Brantlinger 1988; Halberstam 1995; Goddu 1999; Carroll 2000; Townshend 2007). I demonstrate that *Supernatural's* construction – and destruction - of the Black secondary character Gordon Walker perpetuates the discourse of ‘Othellophillia’ which Daileader has identified in popular culture: essentially, the supposedly colour-neutral casting of a Black man in a role chronicling his inevitable reversion to barbarism: his essential ‘darkness’ will out (Daileader 2005). I argue that fanfic alters this formation by revaluating darkness as a metaphysical property, exploiting its Romantic literary heritage and transferring it to the White male protagonists. However, the legitimization is shown as problematic and paradoxical: by virtue of their Whiteness (Dyer 1992), and the conflation of darkness of the skin with metaphorical darkness of the soul, the White

characters are able to perform and cast off darkness in a way Black characters can never access Whiteness. Legitimation remains on the terms of the already-powerful.

Chapter 4 addresses the discursive formation of incest. This might seem an odd choice, for Tosenberger (2008) has argued that incest is already celebrated rather than Othered in *Supernatural* via the discourse of Romanticism. However, as I demonstrate, what the show actually does is construct a division between incest as a property of Others (the savage, inbred monstrosities Fiedler discusses as a terror of American Gothicism; see also Duvall 2002; Hughes 2013, 144-45) and the unspoken, sacred bond between its sibling-protagonists. This is not named, and the possibility of incest between them is categorically denied as ‘sick’ (4x18) despite rampant textual provocation. Fanfic, I will demonstrate, deconstructs the divide, constructing incest both in heroic Romantic terms, and as a painful social aberration with great costs to all involved. So whilst the traditional property of the Other *is* legitimated in many cases, this chapter demonstrates that the paradox does not operate automatically but must generally meet standards of morality from the discourse of broader culture. I often found these to be Liberal and neoliberal values, hinging on individual consent, responsibility and free choice and stopping short of direct harm to others (Kendall 2003; Kelly 2005; G. C. Gray 2009). In some ways, then, fanfic is more conservative than canon in its addition of statements to the incest formation.

The final research chapter demonstrates the paradox most explicitly. Here, fanfic as a practice is legitimated yet contained by its presence in the show. By inclusion of fanfic about the show’s own characters (*Supernatural* 5x01), this writing has been sanctioned by the fanboy-auteur, and paratextually, Kripke professes to ‘love’ and ‘welcome’ fan production (Zubernis and Larsen

2012, 214). However, the manner in which fanfic is presented, as the work of the silly, obsessed, nymphomaniac fangirl, is a powerful discursive gesture of containment. Moreover, as a contrast, the author appears as a character in the text (*Supernatural* 5x01, 5x09, 5x22), either a prophet or, it is audaciously implied, God Himself. Though he is constructed bathetically and humorously, when one considers where the industrial power and control over the canonical text lies, it is far more problematic for producers to mock fans than to mock themselves (Cherry 2011, 211). Thus the show's construction of the fan-author relationship, whilst legitimating of fanfic in some ways, can be read as 'a reminder to *Supernatural* fandom, delivered with a smile, of who exactly is in charge' (Felschow 2010, 6.6). Fanfic's reconstruction of the author/fan relationship produces the most radical change to a discursive formation. Much of the time, the primacy of the Author and his text is affirmed. However, some fic, combining statements from the discourses of academia, literature and fandom to produce new knowledge, here begin to deconstruct the terms of the paradox in which the fic is only legitimated through the author. Assertions of a primary or original discrete text, a text that exists apart from the reader and/or fanfic writer, begin to be deconstructed. This, I suggest, is the means by which can compromise the paradox of legitimation. Fanfic can thus be understood in postmodern terms, not only as a response or tactical counter to originary predecessors, but as deconstructive of the *concept* of original, essentialist texts authored by God and White men. Other postmodern art forms, especially the postcolonial, are already understood as deconstructive of this concept (see e.g. Kraus 1985; Hutcheon 1988; Bhaba 1994; Anyinefa 2000; Bannet 2011), even as they may problematically reaffirm it through citation, reference or the stance of tactically opposing a great predecessor (Caminero-Santangelo 2005; Jacziminski 2009; Singh 2012). We will see hints of this deconstruction at work in the race formation, but less so in that of incest.

Chapter 6 concludes with a summary, a discussion of the limitations of this study, and implications for further research. I suggest that the legitimation paradox could be utilized to study how other kinds of text negotiate their reference to an author-ized predecessor, and the points where through deconstruction of that concept, they might compromise the paradox. For the construction of the author is powerful; but it is still a discourse formation. As the alteration of discursive formations by powerful new statements from fanfic will demonstrate, discourse formations are always malleable and subject to change.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

### I. The Use of Foucault in the Study of Fanfic

Bourdieu's theories of art and culture exert such powerful influence on the field of fan studies that my choice to depart, by and large, from this grounding requires context and explanation. Fiske introduced Bourdieu to the field, arguing that like those agents Bourdieu analyzed in the official sphere of culture, fans invest time and effort to accumulate the expertise that is the cultural capital of their field, elevating their position in relation to other fans (1992). For Bourdieu, participation in culture is a matter of distinction and habitus: in demonstrating appreciation of those works to which our upbringing and social position inclines and equips us to interpret, we gain position in relation to other social agents, contrary to artistic ideologies of disinterest and self-sacrifice ([1979] 1986; [1992] 1996; 1993). We learn our habitus, our literal and metaphorical place, in childhood, conditioned by family and reinforced by education. Often below the level of consciousness, we take up the cultural positions we are structured to perceive as both possible and beneficial at discrete moments on our life trajectories. For Bourdieu, even supposedly 'pure pleasure' is a matter of 'playing the cultural game well, of playing on one's skill at playing, at cultivating a pleasure which "cultivates"' (Bourdieu 1986, 498). In his formulation, 'taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier' (6). The double application of this insight, which allows a deconstruction of dominant culture's derogation of fandom in terms of devalued emotionalism (Jenson 1992), and an understanding of inter-fan struggle and bids for distinction over the capital of particular subcultures (Thornton 1995), has influenced a wide

range of scholars: see Bacon-Smith (1992); Jenkins (1992); Bolin (1994); Ganz-Blättler (1999); Tulloch and Jenkins (1995); Thornton (1995); Brown (1997); Baym (2000); Hills (2002; 2005a); Jancovich (2002); Thomas (2002); Shefrin (2004); Williamson (2005); Whiteman (2007; 2009); Bennett (2010); Chin (2010); Williams (2010); and Milner (2011). The theory of cultural capital is useful and easily combined with a discursive approach. However, by reviewing the pertinent work of both theorists, this section presents the reasons that, in my study of *Supernatural* and its fan fiction, I eschew Bourdieu as my primary theorist in favour of Foucault's theories of discourse, power and knowledge.

First, I show that Bourdieu and Foucault bear certain similarities of epistemology. I do not claim that the application of Bourdieu to fan studies is a mistake, as my frequent invocation of capital demonstrates, but that Foucault's work generally provides more precise and appropriate tools for my project. Next, I indicate some limitations of Bourdieu's theories of capital, habitus and the strategies of agents as they would apply here, and suggest how Foucault's work can mitigate these in the study of fan fiction. Finally, and most importantly, I demonstrate that Foucault's perspectives on language and fiction can be drawn on to create an approach that is sensitive to the cultural, legal and technological structures that influence fan fiction production, yet does not eschew the particular properties of fiction which even in his work on literature, Bourdieu fails to address. As I argue, this need not return us to a mystification of art (and certainly not of the *auteur*), but will account for the fact that fiction is a distinctive form of writing with particular relations to its own cultures and to external reality: a stage of theorization that previous commentators on fan fiction have rather tended to elide. To begin, then, I compare how Foucault and Bourdieu address the pertinent topics of power and language.

a) Power.

Writing in the same university culture of France in the 1960s-80s, it is unsurprising that both Foucault and Bourdieu were concerned with agency, power, language, and sociality (Johnson 1993, 1). Both considered how the individual is constructed by cultural forces more pervasive and flexible than law; and how, if, and where the individual might fashion him or herself within or in opposition to such forces. Both argued for the ubiquity of power and its non-equivalence with repression.

For Foucault, power is to be understood as a ‘polymorphous technology’ which can ‘reach the most tenuous and individual forms of behaviour, [taking] paths that give it access to the rare or scarcely perceivable forms of desire [...] all this entailing effects that may be those of refusal, blockage, and invalidation, but also incitement and intensification’ ([1976] 1998, 11). For Bourdieu, power exists in three ways (Swartz 2008): in accumulated capitals, be they economic, social, cultural or symbolic; in the force relations of ‘fields’, through which agents struggle and wield capital against each other; and in symbolic violence: those strategies of legitimation by which the consent of the dominated is secured. For both thinkers, power is not something that is imposed on the masses from some central point of rule, but a condition of social existence that benefits some agents and penalizes others based primarily on class standing. As Hoy observes, they both argue that ‘domination functions more effectively when the arbitrariness of the asymmetrical relations remains invisible’ (Hoy 1999, 18). Masking and legitimation of power is crucial to its successful operation. It follows that both thinkers rejected the valorizations of the

autonomous subject associated with the humanist tradition, and the related myth of the artistic creator (Bourdieu 1996, especially 167-70; Foucault [1969]1991). Indeed, regarding power, their main difference is not of perspective but of application: ‘in contrast to Bourdieu, Foucault focuses not on the questions “Who has power and how they get it and use it?”, but rather on “How does power function in society?”’ (Geçer 2002, 119). If ‘society’ is replaced by ‘text-focused subculture’, it is clearly the latter question that this study addresses.

Bourdieu’s perspective of power has been criticised for a tendency towards universalism (Harker et al. 1990, 200). This universalism is often a result of the ambiguity of his concepts, which are too vague to be empirically testable (Robbins 2000a, 106). What exactly *is* a field of power relations? How can it be defined in such a way that the concept is proven or disproven? Bourdieu tends to speak of it in metaphorical terms or as an already-established reality (1993, 29-141). He states that ‘a field is a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy’, with ‘specific relations of force’ that refract outside influences in accordance with those laws (1993, 162-64). But how could one establish where the boundaries of such a field lay? And on the other side, how many of these fields might a work of fan fiction exist in at once – literary, economic, televisual, technological, pornographic, photographic, some kind of autonomous field called ‘the field of fan fiction’? Couldry (2003) notes that the problem of field boundaries and the relationships between fields has concerned many critics following Bourdieu (658-59; see Champagne 1990, Swartz 1997, 128-29; Chalaby 1998; Marlière 1998). The model as it stands is confused and may become deterministic (c.f. Whiteman 2009, 394). Swartz and Eastwood agree that the concept can ‘become too ambiguous, with “an extremely generous application,” an instance of “conceptual inflation” that perhaps



“leads to its devaluation” (Eastwood 2007, 152; citing Swartz 1997, 122). Couldry (2003) and Hills (2005) have usefully refined the concept with the term ‘inter-fields’ when relating it to fiction, suggesting that texts might exist at points of intersection between networks of influence like genre and tradition, economy and law. Nonetheless, Foucault’s more flexible conception of power as an ‘open and capillary network’ is a more appropriate image to apply to Web 2.0. It captures the way cultural productions can branch off, replicate, become memes, expand indefinitely, and does not impose an already-extant boundary between fields. If boundaries exist, the task of a discursive theory is to map them and discover their limits. This is a key difference between Foucault and Bourdieu (Callewaert 2006, 87, quoting Bourdieu 2002, 245 on the discrepancy between these images of power).

Other commentators critique Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, his ‘structuring structure(s)’ (1986, 170) which order our tastes and perceptions. Usually, by habitus, Bourdieu refers to class, though his later work also addresses gender ([1998] 2001). Thomas (2002) finds Bourdieu’s class tastes too monolithic, for tastes are ‘complex and contradictory’ (14), involving more factors than Bourdieu takes into account. Bourdieu never really accounts for the possibility of ‘unique, innovative options’ (Harker et al., 2006). Position-taking within fields and according to habitus occurs

quasi-mechanically - that is, almost independently of the agents' consciousness and wills - from the relationships between positions, they take relatively invariant forms [...] amounting to little more than a *parti pris* of refusal, difference, rupture (Bourdieu 1993, 59).

Granted, the agent's disposition can help create the position taken, as well as vice-versa, and it is through the disposition that the potential of the position is realised (1996, 256; 265). At one point Bourdieu even suggests it is possible to create a new position (1993, 60), though he does not elaborate upon how. But that disposition which can mould position is *itself* a product of habitus (1996, 265; 1993, 71; 133), and the lens through which one perceives potential positions is produced by the habitus and field position one already occupies (1993, 64-65; 137; 1996, 265).

Foucault's perception of power is more flexible. We have seen that he too believed it was ubiquitous. But because he does not theorize agents through the restrictive concept of habitus, it is fluid and able to be appropriated, transformed, evaded, and altered. Resistance, according to Foucault, is a necessary correlative and element of the power relationships which traverse society: 'the role of adversary [and] target' ([1976] 1998, 95):

There cannot be relations of power unless the subjects are free [...] that means that in the relations of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance, for if there were no possibility of resistance – of violent resistance, of escape, of ruse, of strategies that reverse the situation – there would be no relations of power (1984 interview, in Bernauer and Rasmussen 1988, 12).

As power exists everywhere, from no single source, resistance exists everywhere also, at multiple heterogeneous points. Because in Foucault there is no great principle to which all exercises of power can be traced, like 'The State', or 'Class', there is conversely 'no soul of revolt [...] or pure law of the revolutionary' ([1976] 1998, 95-96). I find this theorization of statement/counter-statement/assertion/evasion a useful way to investigate the operations of text in online spaces, which are polyvocal, highly dispersed, and more networked than centralized.

Also useful to this study, Foucault addresses the normative function of visibility. The New Media environment has opened fandom to more participants, making it more visible to the public and to copyright owners. Andrejevic utilizes a Foucauldian perspective on visibility and normativity when he analyses *Television Without Pity* as a monitored, productive normalization of fans who generate free labour for industry, presenting themselves for market research through the work of being watched (2008, c.f. Van Dijck 2009). In Andrejevic's case study he demonstrates these findings convincingly. But we should not leap from this case to a generalized determinism: Andrejevic chose an NBC-owned site used by industry professionals, where most fan-talk takes the relatively normativized forms of review and criticism. Visibility and normativity are important factors in *Supernatural* fandom. Whilst earlier creators sometimes attempted to ban fannish creativity through an application of repressive law, as when Lucasfilm famously (and ineffectively) banned all Star Wars 'pornography' (Jenkins 1992, 31), creators in the contemporary media landscape tend to understand that fandom happens regardless of their wishes, and that they would do well to utilize it.<sup>1</sup> *Supernatural* creator Eric Kripke has gone so far as to write fan fiction himself and insert it into the program, as the work of the fangirl character Becky (5.01). Most people have taken Becky's presence and proclivities as Kripke's official sanction of fanfic. According to McCardle's definition of 'implied consent', this should hold up in court (McCardle 2003, 449-50).<sup>2</sup> Perhaps for the owners of *Supernatural*, fanfic is

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<sup>1</sup> For an explicit example, see the User Agreement for the MMO game *City of Heroes*, which states that 'the Publisher and its related Game Content Providers grant to Customers the right to use the Game Content for non-commercial, personal purposes, including in connection with creating non-commercial fan fiction or fan web sites regarding the same' (Article 6b, 2006), available at <<http://eu.ncsoft.com/en-gb/legal/user-agreements/city-of-heroes-user-agreement.html>> [accessed 24/10/11].

<sup>2</sup> This is complicated by the fact that though he is the original creator of *Supernatural*, Kripke does not own all the rights to it. In order for programs to get made, creators typically have to sign some rights over to broadcasters (Ellis 2004, 283-84). According to the copyright screen on the UK version of the *Supernatural* DVD box set, 'NS Pictures Inc' has the right to enforce the rights granted by the Berne Convention, which is the primary international agreement on copyright. Also, Professor Aaron Schwabach of the Thomas Jefferson School of Law informs me that

something like a ‘tolerated illegality’ tacitly acknowledged as necessary and permitted so long as it does not pose a real threat to property ownership or the structure of power (Foucault [1975] 1977: 82-89; 273-75).<sup>3</sup> Yet the presentation of Becky – silly, hyper-feminine, nymphomaniac – and the clichéd, parodic fanfic she writes, is an instance of what Johnson would call ‘fan-tagonism’: producers explicitly hailing their fans and (mis)representing them as part of the official text, legitimizing some fan interpretations and disavowing others (2007a). Categorization is imposed on the fic writer from a place of economic and cultural power, and the visibility of fandom is presented to itself. Like the authorities in *Discipline and Punish*, the copyright holders are not concerned with the eradication of delinquency but its management. ‘Perfection of [visible] power’ Foucault suggests, ‘should tend to render its actual [forcible] exercise unnecessary’ (1977, 201). The knowledge that one could be visible at any time has the potential to act as an automatic limit on freedoms – though whether it has been successful in this case is questionable. Some fans were upset at seeing their activities parodied (Schmidt 2010, 2.9-2.15); but *Supernatural* fan fiction continues to proliferate in its ever-surprising variety.

It would follow Foucauldian logic that fandom’s constant presentation of itself to itself, its self-normalization, organization and categorization, demonstrates internalized training by the interests and observation of the creators. Conversely, *Supernatural* fandom has a reputation for outrageousness, transgression of cultural and fannish norms, and having absolutely no limits on the genres and topics of fic its writers will produce. Evidencing this cultural visibility, TV.com rates it the most insane example of the insane practice of fandom, its ‘level’ being ‘10 out of 10,

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implied consent can be overruled by explicit non-consent (Schwabach 2011), though this might cause significant reputational damage.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Illegality’ requires a caveat: fan fiction is a thoroughly grey area. Much depends on the attitude and history of the copyright holders, and certainly after episode 5x01, it would be difficult to argue that *Supernatural* fan fiction is illegal.

call the National Guard' (Surette 2010, n.p). But in fact, I demonstrate that fan fiction production is intensely organized and categorized – it simply operates according to different structures than those of the masculinist, capitalist, dominant discourse the TV.com list perpetuates unproblematically. We must remember that in Foucault's description of power through visibility, the king is replaced by the machinery: there is no definitive operator/watcher, no definitive subject/watched. Those who would update Foucault to contemporary technologies rightly make this very explicit (Boyne 2000; Krueger 2005), but the principle is in Foucault: 'he who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it' – i.e., s/he who participates in fandom – 'inscribes himself in the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles' (1977, 202-03, [1977] 1980, 156).

Having established that Foucault's conception of power provides more appropriate tools for this project than Bourdieu's theories, I turn to their writings on language.

#### b) Language

Foucault and Bourdieu diverge in their writings on language. Both show Nietzschean influence in their conceptions of language as an instrument, and awareness that the power-effects of language are elided as we attempt to 'squeeze living meaning' from it (Snook 1999, 163). But for Bourdieu, language exchange is essentially economic. It is part of a social style no different from dress or possessions (170). Bourdieu builds upon the theory of speech acts to claim that

performative utterances are one example of the symbolic domination evident in all linguistic exchanges. He believes that language cannot be understood apart from the people who use it, that a statement has to be authorized by the speaker in order to become effective: 'what speaks is not the utterance, the language, but the whole social person' (Snook 173, quoting Bourdieu 1977). Online, the 'whole social person' is text: the styles adopted, references made, history of contribution, graphics chosen, reading evidenced (c.f. Lothian 2013, 542). This point is useful in observing how reputations are built online, but we cannot understand 'social person' here in the sense Bourdieu did, due the deliberately selective self-presentation of fanfiction writers, and the mass of social data unavailable on them.

For Foucault, language is likewise active, and not a reflection or sign but 'some sort of practical intervention' (Callewaert 2006, 91). There are three levels to his understanding of language: statement, discourse and archive. Discourse is the most famous of these, and as the term has been widely taken up, it will be useful to recap what Foucault meant by it. Discourse is language without a fundamental Truth from which to interpret its meaning, language devoid of an underlying Text to provide the ultimate meaning of signs. Essentially it is language post-God, open to 'criticism' rather than exegetical commentary:

One no longer attempts to uncover the great enigmatic statement that lies hidden beneath its signs; one asks how it functions, what representations it designates, what elements it cuts out and removes, how it analyses and composes, what play of substitutions enables it to accomplish its role of representation (2002, 88).

Here, Foucault was attributing the ‘invention’ of discourse to the Renaissance.<sup>4</sup> In *The Order of Things*, he proposed that this mode of language became replaced by a Modernist conception of pure Being, but he later renounced this (see pp. 27-28); therefore this definition of discourse applies well to his famous usages of the term, from around 1970. Discourses, in the plural, are the contingent codes according to which a society operates and understands itself: they are not True in any essential sense, but produce the necessary ‘truths’ of particular cultures. Discourses are active and productive, as well as exclusive and repressive.

The unity of a discourse, which Foucault calls a ‘formation’, is not some pre-defined topic or concept, but the rules that determine how topics or concepts are formulated, what possibilities are thereby brought into creation (Young 2001, 400-01; Andersen 2003, 8). Discursive formations are systems of production and organization. Foucault gives the impression that this was discovered as he worked – he *did* set out to find, for instance, what it was possible to say about a pre-defined entity like ‘medicine’ at a certain period, but discovered that no such thing existed. Therefore he had to change his research question to something like: *in accordance with what rules has this discursive formation we call medicine come to being and organization* (1989, 31-39)? What conditions must particular statements meet to be accepted as part of that formation? His research questions then have much in common with mine, and do not propose the pre-existence of a field to the language that constructs it. Discursive formations pass thresholds in their development. After a certain point, they begin to produce statements about their own

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<sup>4</sup> Before this, according to Foucault, language in the Middle Ages existed indissolubly with the world of things, all of Creation being a great intelligible text inscribed by the divine Author and penetrable, with effort, by humanity. This is an over-generalization. The anonymous author of the mystic treatise ‘The Cloude of Unknowyng’ (late 1300s), for instance, posits a fundamental disconnect between language-signs and reality (Gallacher 1997).

norms (186-87). Ample evidence of this can be found at fandom commentary and analysis communities such as Metafandom <<http://metafandom.livejournal.com/>>.

Discourses are comprised of ‘statements’. Foucault’s definition of the statement is largely negative (demonstrating that it is not a speech act, not a grammatical unit, etc.) and ultimately unhelpful – Young perhaps makes best use of it in stressing the statement as material event, an ‘incision into a discursive field’ (Young, 402; c.f. Foucault 1989, 28). The statement’s primary effect is therefore change and discontinuity; yet it must also have a relation to sameness and regularity in order to function within the discourse it affects (Young, 402). This accords with Foucault’s purpose

to show that to speak is to do something – something other than to express what one thinks; to translate what one knows, and something other than to play with the structures of a language (*langue*); to show that to add a statement to a pre-existing series of statements is to perform a complicated and costly gesture, which involves conditions [...], and rules [...]; to show that a change in the order of discourse does not presuppose ‘new ideas’, a little invention and creativity, a different mentality, but *transformations in a practice, perhaps also in neighbouring practices, and in their common articulation* (1989, 209, my emphasis).

I would add that, in their relation to sameness, statements can also solidify and reinforce structures, the primary function Said attributed to them (2003). Though the formation of objects is the best known property of discourse, Foucault also suggests discourses have means of authorizing individuals, of making concepts emerge, and of making choices available: the formation of strategies, as Foucault put it (Young 403). It is these ‘regularities’ that define a discourse. At the root of a discourse are governing statements, and other statements branch off according to the conditions of possibility of this discourse. So in Young’s example, one would



not interpret instances of colonial discourses in order to reveal their hidden meaning, an ‘imperial unconscious’, but attempt to formulate their rules of possibility and see how these enabled specific statements (408). A wide range of statements on the relation of Englishmen to Indians might be found without violating the British right to Empire as a governing statement that delimits the range of possibilities, from Social Darwinist arguments to nostalgic appreciation of ‘primitivism’ to essentialist reflections on national character to Christian missionary statements.

Finally, for Foucault, the concept of the ‘archive’ is derived from all the various systems of statements operative in a culture at a particular time. It seems to be something like an arch-discourse, ‘the general system of the formation and transformation of statements’ (1989, 130). It is a hypothetical construction rather than a theoretical-methodological tool, for he states it would be impossible to describe the archive ‘in its totality’ (ibid.). Our hypothetical archive might be ‘media’. I would suggest that transformations in a discourse begun at the level of statement may come to have broader effects on the archive and so on culture, for as Fairclough and Fairclough put it, discourse is ‘on the one hand an effect of social life, and on the other, ha[s] effects on social life, both helping to keep existing forms in existence and helping to change them’ (2012, 79).

I will now narrow the focus from language in general to fiction in particular, in order to establish that whilst Bourdieu’s work does not adequately account for its specificity, Foucault’s theories of discourse and authorship can be usefully adapted to do so.

c) Foucault and Bourdieu on Fiction

i) Bourdieu

Related to their rejection of an autonomous subject, Foucault and Bourdieu denied the autonomous artistic creator. For Bourdieu, the 'field' of literary production in which the author operates creates the author, as it creates his publishers, critics, etc. as authorities (1996, 167-70). This is similar to Foucault's perception of the Author-function, those cultural/institutional operations by which an 'author' is symbolically created as the principle of textual interpretation (1991). But again, Foucault was primarily concerned with the function and circulation of text, Bourdieu with the sociological creation and representative value of literature.

Johnson demonstrates that Bourdieu's theories call for an explicit method when approaching a literary work. First, one must determine 'the position of the literary or artistic field within [...] the set of dominant power relations in society', then 'the structure of the literary field (i.e. the structure of the objective positions occupied by agents competing for legitimacy in the field as well as the objective characteristics of the agents themselves)' and finally 'the genesis of the producers' habitus' (1993, 14), which as Swartz acknowledges, incorporates the trajectory taken by the producer to his current place (see Bourdieu 1996, 237; also Swartz 1997, 142, and Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 104-5). Bourdieu's analyses of literary works are grounded on 'an immense mass of social and cultural data' (Moi 1999, 307).

The difficulty of the ‘field’ concept has already been addressed, and here Bourdieu suggests he can assume the writer’s perspective in it. He would ‘reconstitute both the conscious and unconscious parts of the way writer’s choices were shaped’ by ‘participating in the author’s subjective intention’ (1996, 89; 88). It is tenuous to suggest one could access another person’s subjectivity in such a way. It is also appropriative, and unsuited to the study of fan fiction, where by the decision of the participants, a restricted amount of sociological data is available. Further, it elides the question of how fiction differs from ‘factual’ or report writing. Bourdieu claims the field of production effects a ‘refraction’ of social forces in fiction, which is more thoughtful than the simplistic Marxist understandings of literary ‘reflection’ he rejects (202), but still reads fiction as a code for *actually existing* social conditions and relationships. Bourdieu believes the literary work performs a ‘denegation (in the Freudian sense of *Verneinung*)’ of some greater social reality (3).

Speller argued that literature for Bourdieu ‘shows these [social] structures “in action”’ (2011, 104). But as Lane perceives, the roles Bourdieu demands that literature play are actually a little more complex and a lot more contradictory. Sometimes he writes as though the specificity of literary form ‘ensures the repression of the [sociological] truths contained in literature’ and other times posits it as ‘the very force which reveals those truths through “anamnesis” [a Freudian concept of repression]’ (2012, 67). So sometimes Bourdieu seems to claim that fiction is thoroughly embedded in the habitus of its writer and reader, indeed its absolute best expression – and others that it has some unique property to reveal that habitus which is usually invisible to its inhabitants. But in either case, the sociologist’s task is to treat literature as the *mask of or explanation for something else*, for, ‘those truths’ of a deeper social reality. Moreover, it is

questionable how Bourdieu could pronounce so generally on the effects of texts on readers.

Bourdieu argued that Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily* had the power to unsettle the assumptions of readers concerning their own habitus by its unexpected ending. But as Speller argues,

Bourdieu's suggestion that the ending of 'A Rose for Emily' is completely unforeseen is unlikely to match the experience of many readers with even a little knowledge of — or informally acquired familiarity with — literary genres. In his enthusiasm to find in Faulkner a support for his theory, we might say, Bourdieu bent the story to make it literarily 'flatter' than it in fact is (2012, 89).

Bourdieu proceeds as though *Rose* were a naïve accounting of actual events, ignoring the permeation of Gothic discourse, the imagery and techniques of literary foreshadowing that may render the macabre ending unsurprising to those familiar with these discourses.

Now for Foucault, the distinction of fiction is precisely that it does *not* refer to social reality, that it suggests ways of thinking which do not exist but might potentially become (Rayner 2003; O'Leary 2009, 6). The relation of fiction to reality is a crucial difference between Foucault and Bourdieu. De Certeau was correct that what interests Bourdieu is not, 'as in Foucault, what [practices] produce, but what produces them' (58). Essentially, for Bourdieu, the author is 'conducting an experiment in [his] own theoretical terms' (Eastwood 2007, 155), a sociological experiment to help readers and himself make life choices (Robbins 2000a, 77) which results in 'excessive sociological reductionism' (Eastwood 157). Yet Bourdieu does not always read fiction according to his own model. His shorter readings are not well known: that of Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily* is placed at the back of *Rules of Art*, and that of *To the Lighthouse* is in *Masculine Domination*. The reading of *To the Lighthouse* makes no mention of the status of fiction in contemporary Britain, nor Woolf's position in the literary field (Speller, 117). Again,

it treats the text like a recounting of real events. Bourdieu applies a generalized social structure through which he reads Woolf's characters as though they were actual humans:

it is because men are trained to recognize social games in which the stake is some form of domination and are designated very early in particular by the rites of institution, as dominant, and thereby endowed with the *libido dominandi* that they have the double-edged privilege of indulging in the games of domination (2001, 75).

Where? When? What has that to do with this piece of fiction? The reading of *A Rose for Emily* is even less explicable in Bourdieu's own terms: he creates an ideal reader of the sort he had accused Iser and Fish of making (1996, 302), then partially conflates that reader with the story characters, claiming that as the 'readers' submit to the author's misdirection, the *characters'* habitus predisposes *them* to 'official, public truth' (324, my emphasis), only to be corrected by the narrative. 'Readers' are not the story characters. In this assertion, Bourdieu assumes a) who the 'readers' are b) what the characters think, as though they were real people, and c) what the story teaches the ideal reader, none of which are demonstrable (328-29).

Usually, though, Bourdieu chose fiction conducive to his theories (Guillory 2000, 34, Speller 2011, 70). As Speller notes, this 'places a question mark over the more general applicability of his method [...] and it is left to later literary researchers to test whether other authors and works are amenable to this method of analysis' (70). What use, then, have literary critics made of Bourdieu?

Singer (2003), reading a single text, repeats Bourdieu's own conceptual error of treating fictional characters and novelistic settings as though they really existed.<sup>5</sup> Taking a broader focus, Robbins (2000b), Hipsky (2000), and Ekelund (2000) make Bourdieu-influenced readings of works of Coleridge, Victorian literature, and Gardner respectively. Robbins too notes that by choosing texts which suited his agenda, Bourdieu 'fudged the methodological tension' in constructing a view of the author's trajectory for less amenable authors and periods (190). Robbins's project requires 'constant vigilance to understand the social role that Coleridge was seeking to establish for himself' (192), essentially a 'quest for the historical Coleridge' (193). This is precisely what I resist as doubtful and appropriative: how could we demonstrate the historical conditions experienced by such a person, and discern their effects on him? Foucault, conversely, denies any claims to psychological or sociological insight:

There can be no question of interpreting discourse with a view to writing a history of the referent [...] what we are concerned with here is not to neutralise discourse, to make it the sign of something else, and to pierce through its density in order to reach what remains silently anterior to it [...] [We are not] treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak (1989, 47-49).

For some, this principle will sound alarmingly relativist (see e.g. Taylor 1986; Habermas 1986, 108; Fraser 1989, 29; Lyon 1994, 167 for readings of Foucault as a moral relativist). For me it is responsible, carefully avoiding the researcher's appropriation of voice and power whilst retaining a sense of the destructive/productive potentials of language.

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<sup>5</sup> She does consider the novel she reads to be deliberately constructed as more rigid and deterministic than the writer's (501), but this does not prevent her from directly applying the concepts of habitus, field and capitals to the novel's characters as though they were social subjects.

ii) Foucault

Foucault's theories of fiction changed dramatically over his career (Freundlieb 1995; During 1992; O'Leary 2008a; 2009). Until around 1969, he utilized a Modernist lexicon of transcendence, compensation, and estrangement offered by the special category of literature (by which he meant mid-century Anglo-French Modernism). O'Leary sums up his early-period concept of literature as

the dissolution of the subject as guarantor of discourse; the experience of transgression; the relation of language to death; the possibility of coming into contact with an 'outside' of thought; and a heightened sense of the importance of the fictive in language (2008a, 91).

Foucault was attracted to those forms of language which experimented with ousting the rational subject of humanism (O'Leary 2008a, 92): see especially *Order of Things* and 'The Thought of the Outside', both 1966. But from the 1970 lecture on discourse, literature appears in Foucault as 'just one more object of analysis' (O'Leary 2009, 53), comprehensible primarily in terms of external structures. O'Leary argues that a 'new awareness of the materiality and violence of discourse', its subordination to and perpetuation of constraints, is crucial to an understanding of Foucault's 'turn from literature' (2008a, 105). Foucault here moves closer to Bourdieu, losing a theorization of fiction as a specific category.

In 1976, Foucault declared that his early writings on literature had been a ‘swan song’ (O’Leary 2008a, 93) for the Great Author theory. This is ironic considering he had always insisted on the absence/death of the writing subject. By the late interviews, we find him criticising the sacralisation of writing as inherently subversive and revolutionary; which as Freundlieb notes, is what he had formerly done himself (317-18). Foucault suggested that the appeal of such authors for him was the fact that, in his position as philosopher, they represented the ‘outside’ of Enlightenment-descended rationality, and in conjunction with the thought of Nietzsche, allowed him an alternative means of thought (O’ Leary 2008a, 93).

For Faubion, Foucault’s early work on fiction is an ‘ontological preliminary’ to his later theme – an inquiry into the possibility of thought outside the subject (1998, xiv). *Order of Things* illustrates this, wherein Foucault theorizes that from the nineteenth century onwards, language detaches itself from the world of things and exists in its own being: ‘language began to fold in upon itself, to acquire its own particular density’ (Foucault 2002, 322). Literature appears as the highest form of language: ‘it addresses itself to itself [...] all its threads converge upon the finest of points – singular, instantaneous, and yet absolutely universal – upon the simple act of writing’ (327). It has ‘nothing to say but itself, nothing to do but shine in the brightness of its being’ (ibid.). *Pace* Bourdieu, it is this very detachment from things as they are, this freedom from any form of representation, which gives fiction its potential. Thus it is that at the moment of epistemic change from representation to the Being of language, *Don Quixote* enters a new reality made of language alone (O’Leary 2008a, 103; Foucault 2002, 51-55).

Further, Foucault claimed that ‘fiction consists not in showing the invisible, but in showing the extent to which the invisibility of the visible is invisible’ ([1966a] 1998, 153). In other words,



through representing *that which is not*, fiction highlights the invisibility of our basic (oppressive?) assumptions. By describing or relating possibilities that do not exist, it asks us to consider what assumptions we make and live according to that are preventing those possibilities from coming into being, and whether or not they are of benefit. When he referred to literature as existing outside discourse ([1963a] 1998, 76), a claim both I and the later Foucault reject, Foucault seems to imply something like, outside that form of representative language which retains a relationship if not correspondence with the world and the subject (O'Leary 2008a, 98, Foucault [1966a] 1998, 148-49). Fiction, Foucault postulated, was 'a writing so radical and so sovereign that it manages to face up to the world, to counterbalance it, to offset it, even to utterly destroy it and scintillate outside it' ([1966b], 1998, 173). It makes sense that Foucault later interpreted this in terms of his institutional position, because for someone with a background in English literature, it sounds like quite a recognizable Modernist aesthetic manifesto proclaiming the sufficiency of language and escape from meaning. During explains this by noting that France in the 1960s lacked the Modernist critical tradition associated with Richard and Leavis (15). Further back, we can locate the roots of this kind of rhetoric in the Romantic Movement, as Foucault's interviewers and critics (McCall 2005; Freundlieb) sometimes do:

M.F.: For Breton, writing [...] is a means of pushing man beyond his limits [...] Hence the interest he brought to bear on the unconscious, on madness, on dreams.

[Interviewer]: Like the German romantics?

M.F: Yes, but the dreams of the German romantics are the night illuminated by the night of wakefulness, whereas for Breton dreams are the unbreakable core of the night placed at the heart of the day ([1966b], 1998, 172).

That is a rather vague qualification of ‘yes’. This connection explains Foucault’s association of madness and fiction, as in *Madness and Civilization*, where madness presents a challenge from the ‘outside’ of rationality.

We must be suspect of such glorifying generalizations. Carroll thought Foucault’s conception of literature relegated the critical potential of his work to an ‘idealized concept of disruptive discourse’ (Fisher 1999, 280, quoting Carroll 1984, 189). In opposition to Foucault’s valorisation of a modern anti-humanist ethics, Bourdieu thought ‘the discourse of modernity [was] an ideological disguise of literature’s withdrawal into itself’ (Dubois 2000, 95). Fiction does not just exist - it is created subject to a whole network of constraints and productive factors of the kind Foucault recognized for other kinds of discourse, and began a discussion of in terms of literature in with ‘What is An Author?’ ([1969] 1991).

An author’s name, Foucault argued here, is not an indicator of a single person: it functions as a ‘description’ which must be modified as new works come to light or are shown to be inauthentic (1991, 105-06). We utilize the figure of the author to limit the meanings of text: ‘the Author is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes and chooses’ (119). Fan fiction, in which the author’s pseudonym stands purposely and demonstratively for a body of text, whilst the body of text forms the only clue by which one can decipher the supposed master-key of the author, seems a fruitful site to substitute the questions of discourse Foucault finds outdated - ‘who really spoke? And with what authenticity?’ - with the more pertinent ‘what are the modes of existence of this discourse?’ (120).

This study assumes the later position: that fiction partakes in discourse. Yet there is still use to be made of Foucault's early period work. O'Leary (2009) suggests that the key insight from that period is that literature can function in modern culture as transgressive by virtue of its unique relationship between language and the world, which is 'fictive, anti-representational, or oppositional', more than by its content (59). It 'introduces a foreign element into our thought and or experience', playing a role in Foucault's late conception of ethics as the modification of subjectivity (ibid.). But if (fan)fiction needs to be treated as a discourse or set of discourses subject to its own rules of possibility, how does it introduce new thought?

In what became the preface to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault included fiction as just one kind of discourse amongst others ([1968] 1998, 303). But even before he allows it the modern Being of language, Foucault does not really *analyse* fiction nor art in this way.

Throughout the historical chapters of *Order Of Things*, fiction is the place where archaeological shifts appear, where the remnants of old epistemes linger, and new ones begin to suggest themselves. In their anti-realist relationship to the world, they may introduce thought outside the former boundaries of a particular formation. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault credits certain works of art and literature with preserving the experience of anti-rationality against the "progress" of the Enlightenment: he called these discourses 'subjugated knowledges' (O'Leary 2009, 51-52). Fiction is both connected to and distinct from other practices of discourse and wider governmentalities (O'Leary 2009, 49; During 1992, 224-35; see also O'Leary 2008b, 20-21; 2005, 550). I want to suggest that we eschew the term 'outside' for 'subjugated': in its anti-realist relation to the world, fiction has a certain experimental freedom to mix statements from different formations, including subjugated knowledges, in ways that create new thought, hinting

at the introduction of new epistemes. To some extent all texts hold these possibilities (see Fairclough 1993, 65; 80; 105; 115-119), but as fiction is not obliged to claim reflection of reality, or the world of things, it is capable of introducing more varied and more subjugated statements than the recording or reporting of 'facts'. All statements come from somewhere; but, like fanfic itself, their recombination presents new possibilities. Moreover, in fan fiction, which channels many heterogeneous elements and influences through sub-culturally normalizing filters, the introduction of subjugated knowledges seems particularly likely. Like all fiction, it states 'what is not' in reality, with the potential added layer of stating 'what is not' in canon, drawing attention to those absences and the assumptions that underlie them, suggesting what might potentially become if those absences are challenged. For what is missing when Foucault turns purely to external analysis is a theorization of what makes fiction fiction: not necessarily in a valorizing sense, but in recognition that fiction is a particular sort of writing with its own restrictions and freedoms.

Therefore, I will maintain O'Leary's suggestion that on a Foucauldian model, fiction creates the possibility of new thought through the introduction of subjugated knowledge to particular (sub)cultures and contexts. O'Leary, however, fails to address discourse. I have established that I am treating fan fiction as discourse, due to the networks of constraints and possibilities it functions through.

Now we have a lucid way of theorizing how the competing, clashing, mutually supportive statements of the source text and its fan fiction operate, introducing the possibility of subjugated knowledges that alter the discourse as they manifest. Some statements will originate in dominant

cultural discourses, exercising their repeatable materiality, and others from subcultural and resistant discourses, including archaic and literary formations.

For example, slash can invert the heteronormative values of dominant Western culture; but equally, it can reproduce normative discourses that elide women and celebrate the comedy of social integration (Flegel and Roth 2010, 3.1-12). We might argue that the online spaces of this sort produce no new possibilities, repeating the dominant cultural knowledges that women are less interesting than men, and that two people pairing off together forever and settling down amid a productive community is the condition of fulfilment. What is interesting in *Supernatural* and its fan fiction, what brings a thought from outside mainstream knowledge, is that the most popular slash pairing is incestuous: the protagonists Sam and Dean are brothers. The source text makes statements that encourage this reading in a highly deliberate manner (see pp. 203-10). Because an incestuous relationship is verbally denied onscreen (4x18), this knowledge remains subordinate and subtextual. But the Sam/Dean relationship is an endless source of pleasure and fascination to slash writers. The methodology chapter, which explains in detail why I have chosen my particular discursive formations for study, will further discuss the relationship of the incest formation to Foucauldian thought.

d) Conclusion

Though his theories of capitals and bids for distinction are still useful, Bourdieu's understanding of fiction is insufficient for a textual analysis, depending on his broader concepts of habitus, trajectory and the capitals of the author, which are difficult to determine and of uncertain relevance to fiction. Utilizing Foucault's theoretical concepts, conversely, we can conceive of fan fiction as comprising discourse formations, identifiable by their conditions of possibility, constructed by and constructive of active statements, producing and revealing subjugated as well as dominant forms of knowledge due to its freedom from direct relation with reality. The next section will review key work on fandom so far, and consider how my project might advance it.

## II. Fan Studies

Fandom scholarship begins as development and response. Its seminal texts are a development of recuperative work on popular media by cultural critics in the second half of the twentieth century, notably Hall's encoding/decoding model of texts (1980) and Fiske's work on selective and resistant uses of popular media (1990a; 1990b). It developed these theories into a response to the popular and academic pathologizing of fans (Jenson 1992; c.f. Scott 2011, 19). This pathologization – of fans as outcasts, obsessive, dangerous – has not disappeared, but is complicated both by democratizing movements within education and a certain popular understanding that, in a mediated society, 'everyone's got to be a fan of something' (Hills 2005a, 35). Ames suggests that today, the object of one's fandom is more likely to determine the nature and extent of fan pathologization than fannish habits (2010; see also Hills 2007a). The popular denigration of *Twilight* fans, who are typically young and female, is a prime example of fannish and non-fan displacement of pathologization onto a Bad Other.<sup>6</sup>

The branch of fan studies developing recuperative cultural studies work has taken a socio-political path to the present, coming in the last decade to focus on new media-influenced fan/industry relations. Meanwhile, the branch responding to pathologization has tended to take a more intrapersonal and psychoanalytic approach. As I outline each 'path' below, I point out where and how my Foucauldian approach will advance the field.

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<sup>6</sup> For a sample of incredulous comments on the possibility of *Twilight* – as opposed to another fannish object – becoming an 'obsession and addiction', see Hickerson (2010), 'Can Fandom Go Too Far?' at *Slice of Sci Fi* <<http://www.sliceofscifi.com/2010/06/28/can-fandom-go-too-far/>> [accessed 04/19/11]. For female *Twilight* fans as subject to a specifically gendered form of disparagement, see Click 2010.

a) Resistant Poaching and Cultural Capital: The Socio-Political Branch

The socio-political branch of fan studies, then, develops from Hall's insights into the situated practices of industrial encoding and audience decoding of televisual texts (1980); Morley's refinements in terms of the viewer's political situation and later gender (1980; [1981] 1992); and Dyer's refinements in terms of relevance and interest (1977). Tulloch utilized a modified encoding/decoding model in his study of *Doctor Who* fans, adding attention to decoding practices influenced by education, age and sexuality (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995). Brooker noted that audience 'decoding' can be complicated by performance and self-conscious irony, for instance when working class males adopt a stereotypically 'laddish' mode of reception (2002, 54-55). Thomas developed the category of age and life-stage in decoding practice (2002). The principle that industries code and audiences decode in imperfect alignment influenced by social position remains an underlying tenet of fan studies.

Another foundational tenet is that audiences 'poach' or take from the terrain-texts of corporate owners that which is of use to them. The metaphor is from De Certeau, whom Fiske introduced to fan studies and Jenkins popularized in *Textual Poachers* (1992, see especially pp. 23-27). Camille Bacon-Smith (1992) and Constance Penley (1997) both utilized the metaphor in their interpretations of pre-internet fandom as a resistant women's culture, poaching from androcentric media whatever women needed to support a culture based on mutual support, a gift not market economy, alternate erotics, and the acknowledgement and sharing of pain around and through their favoured texts. Jenkins, Bacon-Smith and Penley dominate that early phase of fan studies



we might call the ‘valorizing of resistance’: resistance to capitalism, gender conformity, and the shallow, materialistic way of living Jenkins called ‘mundania’ (Jenkins 1992, 262-64). Though broadly political in impetus, this phase overlaps with responses to pathologization, challenging the stereotype that fans have ‘no life’. The valorizing phase enjoyed a brief resurgence with the move of fandom to the internet (Costello 1999), newly imbued with the rhetoric of technological utopia.

Fandom is sometimes still characterized as having elements of a gift culture (Hellekson 2009; Scott 2009; 2011; Chin 2010; Rebaza 2010; Booth 2010; Busse and Farley 2013), but the poaching model has been criticized by Wright (2009) as degradingly connoting theft, and overlooking the fact that fans are productive (56-57). It glosses over the ‘complexity of reader-writer/producer-writer interaction’ in the New Media environment (57). Hills notes that the spatial metaphor of nomads poaching the domain of owners cannot easily apply to cyberspaces which fans have affectively made their own (2001), or when fannish acts of appropriation that may be perceived as tactical from the perspective of media producers and professional academics function simultaneously as subcultural strategies of domination (2004, 146-47). Jenkins himself has largely disavowed the metaphor, admitting that it no longer accounts for the complicated ‘negotiations during which the media industries have to change to accommodate the demands of consumers’ even whilst seeking to ‘train consumers to behave in ways that are beneficial to their interests’ (2007a, 362; though contrast Jenkins 2012, xxi). A one-way legalistic model of resistant fans ‘poaching’ the terrain of the gamekeeper has little to offer a project dealing with a canon that purposefully incorporates and appropriates fan-discourse in ground-breaking yet disciplinary gestures.

The presentation of fans as a community of anti-capitalist, anti-elitist rebels has been seriously questioned. Hills (2002) critiqued Jenkins's (1992) chapter on 'How Texts Become Real': in short, Jenkins claimed, through love and playful use, as the parabolic children's story *The Velveteen Rabbit* teaches. Jenkins casts Adorno as the 'toymaker' in the story, analogous to the guardians and corporate owners of high culture who would keep the texts 'pure' and unsullied (Jenkins 1992, 51). Hills responded that Marxian use-value (what the child does with the toy, or the fan with the text) and exchange-value (the text/toy's capital worth) are not cleanly separable. Fans are consumers as well as producers (Hills 2002, 31-35), and 'commodity-completist' (28) as well as discerning audiences. Indeed, fans are studied as consumers by business researchers (Kozinets 2001; Avery et al. 2010, pp. 482-511).

Jones and Pearson are skeptical that fans are resistant readers who appropriate the text to their non-hegemonic uses: they believe that the majority of fan production 'stems not from a resistance to capitalism' but 'an imaginative engagement with cult television programs encouraged by [...] textual characteristics' (2004, xvii). In other words, cult television producers have learned what fans enjoy (such as unending narratives and fantastic story elements) and successfully sell it to them. Gill (2004) argues that if anything like resistant reading happens, it is likely a secondary property of fandom: first, one falls in love with a text, *then* creates the narrative of how it relates to one's life (253-56).

Sandvoss (2005) criticizes the notion of fandom as politically transformative. For him, fandom is a form of self-reflection, not between fans and their social environment but between the fan and his fandom-object. The fan-text functions as a mirror, and readings are shaped by fannish self-

recognition, including academic self-understanding as a critical media consumer. Sandvoss depends on Iser's 1970s theories of reception, which suggest that all texts contain polysemic gaps which the reader fills by experience. A "good" text cannot easily be filled in and therefore normalized, because it challenges the reader and expands her horizons. Fan-texts, claims Sandvoss, can be easily normalized: the definition of a fan-text is one that reinforces the reader's horizon of expectations, be it Haydn or *High School Musical*.<sup>7</sup> All texts are polysemic, but fan-texts are 'polysemic to the degree that they become *neutrosemic*' (126, emphases in original). They mean whatever the fan projects onto them. Whether one thinks this matters depends on one's opinion of the social function of fiction, but it hardly seems conducive to cultural progression and transformation. It is also a fundamentally flawed analysis of reception, because if fan-texts are truly neutrosemic, how would one ever *become* a fan, or choose one text over another (c.f. Hills 2005c)? Reading is of course constructive: for a persuasive account drawing both on literary reception theory and neurology, see Turner (1998). But Sandvoss has, more or less by assertion, dismissed the concepts of encoding and decoding, Barthesian mythology, and culturally-learned semiotics, all of which demonstrate that texts tend to produce certain more-or-less predictable meanings in specific contexts, which may or may not be resisted upon reception.

The discussion of resistance and passivity is increasingly attentive to the interactions of fans and industry. Producers are becoming more attentive to what kind of texts and textual gestures tend to produce a cult following (Jones and Pearson 2004: xvii; Jones, same volume, 84-97). New media and especially Web 2.0 are decreasing the distance between industry and fans through platforms like *Television Without Pity* (Andrejevic 2008) blogs (Chin and Hills 2008; Rebaza

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<sup>7</sup> Notably, though he considers that whilst a high-cultural icon could be a fan-text, a traditional masterpiece like a classic novel probably couldn't, as the institutional policing of its meanings prevents neutrosemia (2005, 136).

2010) and Twitter (Marwick and boyd 2011). Via multiplatforming and the text itself, TV producers offer implicit and explicit invitations for fans to ‘participate’ in the narrative, whilst seeking a certain control over, and ability to frame, that participation. Pearson describes ‘producer solicitation of user generated content’ (2010, 85) in the form of stories and vids, but only within boundaries set by those producers. Johnson’s concept of ‘fan-tagonism’ is another example (2007a, 2007b; Hunn 2012). As will be elaborated in Chapter 5, I prefer the term *textual provocation* for *Supernatural*’s engagement with its fans. Stigmatizing portrayals of fans in the text is provocative in the first sense, of baiting and mockery, but may also it also provokes the production of more text, which may counter, resist or reframe that mockery and thus alter the discourse formation. For discussion of specific and explicit fan-show interactions see Fathallah (2010a); Gray (2010); Wilkinson (2010); and Scott (2011, 294-304). A Foucauldian perspective wherein visibility is ubiquitous, disciplining norm replaces law, and power is fluid, situated and multi-centred, is highly applicable to internet fandom in general and textual provocation in particular.

The internet has long been viewed through Foucauldian perspectives on panoptic surveillance, sorting and organization, networked power, and the formation of a willingly participatory subject (Poster 1990; 1995; Loader 1997; Lyon 1998; Jordan 1999; Campbell and Carlson 2002; Chun 2006). Maltz (1996) suggests that the panopticon model is particularly suited to internet communities because the user’s whole ‘existence’ is in textual exchange, and so entirely is visible and policeable. Foucault’s work is also appropriate for demonstrating power online as non-repressive, user-dependent and non-centralized: Elmer (1997) stresses how the architecture and topology of the internet utilize user participation in creating a profiled consumer for

marketers, whilst Mehta and Darier point out self and in-group normalizing practices online, as well as practices of evasion (1998, 109-10). Amongst the best-known cyber-theorists, Lawrence Lessig (1999, 2006) rarely acknowledges Foucault (although see 1999, 241-42, n7; 254, n4; 2006, 363, n4), but his primary argument as well as his ethical stance are Foucauldian through and through: he demonstrates that internet regulation is primarily a matter not of law, or the plotted machinations of some vague capitalist entity, but of code: the architectures by which the internet is built, which allow or disallow methods of self-authentication, traceability, message transfer, and so on (c.f. Boyle 1997). Much like Foucault's demonstrations of contingency, Lessig's point is that 'the "nature" of the Internet is not God's will. Its nature is simply the product of its design. That design could be different' (2006, 38).

Barry, conversely, finds the interactivity of web 2.0 contrary to Foucauldian discipline, discipline being exhaustive, but interactivity specific and instant, inviting creativity without imposition or judgment (2001, 148-9). He does, however use a lexis of transformation through participation (31, 149), which could be seen as a form of governmentality: users police themselves and their output in accordance with the interests of industry. For Jarrett, the pull of interactivity is simply discipline adapted to produce 'the active, entrepreneurial citizen of neoliberalism' (2008, n.p). More positively, Fung takes the Foucauldian stress on local resistances to analyze an online community of Hong Kong Chinese in the US as a resistant cultural practice within and against a penalizing dominant discourse (2002).

These perspectives align with the optimistic and pessimistic narratives of fandom on the internet. Like Barry and Fung, the first fan scholars to study online fandom tended to be optimistic regarding the potential for greater fan/producer interaction and an increased sense of fan

ownership (Bielby, Harrington and Bielby 1999) as well as greater interpersonal communication and satisfaction online (Costello 1999). Jenkins (2006a) continues in this vein by suggesting that we now live in a 'convergence culture', which 'represents a shift in the ways we think about our relations to media' (22-23). He contends that because the internet connects fans both to each other and the industry, we can now think of fandom in terms of Pierre Levy's knowledge communities: 'Levy describes his vision of "collective intelligence" as an "achievable utopia" [...] Fandom is one of those spaces where people are learning how to live and collaborate within a knowledge community' (2006b, 134). Fandom in convergence culture teaches people participatory citizenship, and Jenkins predicts that people will progress from applying their communal skills from pop culture to politics. How, why, when or for whom this will happen is rather more asserted than argued in *Convergence Culture* (c.f. Couldry 2011, 496), which is ultimately a conservative argument to justify play in the name of work. It is locatable in terms of two narratives: the expansion of education to the popular, and the fan as miniaturized academic in an informal learning environment (Whiteman 2007, 26-27). Further, Fraiberg (1995), Bury (2005) and Baym (2000; 2010) have thoroughly dissected the myth of cyberspace as some kind of disembodied egalitarian alternate dimension: inequalities of class, gender and culture do persist even amongst that privileged minority which has reliable internet access. They are simply mediated and managed differently than in face-to-face communication.

The more cautious narrative of the online fan follows Lessig in suggesting that, far from the internet being an open commons, the deep code structures which contain its ideology are only accessible to and increasingly appropriated by corporate control (Consalvo 2003). It aligns with perspectives on the internet panopticon and discipline, following Terranova (2000) in suggesting

that far from emancipating ourselves, what we are doing by dissecting media, writing fanfic, modifying games and reviewing is performing free labour which adds value and creates revenue for copyright holders (De Kosnik 2009; Lothian 2009; Andrejevic 2008; Milner 2009; Martens 2011; see also Ouellette and Wilson 2011 for an account of gendered governmentality through convergence). De Kosnik argues that fannish creators need to start asserting their right to profit from transformative work before it is appropriated by corporations, which is what has historically happened to grassroots music movements utilizing remix (2009, 119-20; see also Noppe 2011). An attempt has already been made: see Jenkins (2007b); Pearson (2010, 89-90) and Lothian (2013) on the case of Fanlib, a failed corporate attempt to co-opt and profit from fanfic without legal protection for its creators. Amazon has recently launched Kindle Worlds, a venture allowing fanfic authors to publish in certain fandoms subject to a long list of regulations, for a small cut of the profits (Amazon 2013). As Andrejevic noted, the poaching metaphor cannot hold, for unlike crops, texts are not ‘used up’ by consumers, but on the contrary, some fans ‘enrich them, not just for themselves but for those who economically benefit from the “added value” produced by the labor of viewers’ (49), an explicitly Foucauldian perspective (30) similar to Jarrett’s. He is not claiming viewers are duped: the posters Andrejevic studied demonstrated great awareness of capitalist media logic, and ‘the minimalist, defensive pleasure that remains for the savvy subject [was] that of ensuring he or she is seen to not be a dupe’ but rather a sophisticated postmodern cynic (39). This recalls Scodari’s early insight that a large factor in whether fan dissection can be called resistant is whether ‘there is resignation and acceptance of industry motives and/or the content they generate as natural and immutable’ (1998, 174). She criticized the tendency among techno-positivists to equate ‘free speech’ with ‘power’ (170), a charge which could be levelled against *Convergence Culture*. Building on both sides of

the argument, Schäfer has offered a balanced and nuanced perspective suggesting that corporate responses to new media practice can be categorized in three main ways: as confrontation, which aims to prevent users from challenging established business models; implementation, which attempts to utilize user-generated content (UGC) in new revenue models; and integration, which seeks to involve new media practices socio-politically responsible ways (2011, 13).

That differentiation brings us to the final warning concerning fan-industry interaction. Busse writes that

legitimizing fannish activities and artifacts through various modes of convergence may create a two-tiered fan system of acceptable and non-acceptable fan productions by dividing the fan activities into those approved/encouraged by the producers and those that are not, legitimating the former and further ostracizing the latter (2006, n.p.).

Schäfer's otherwise thoughtful book could be criticized for lack of attention to what *kinds* of UGC tend to receive what kind of corporate response. Scott's (2011) thesis argues this case, identifying a gender divide between the approved fannish production (primarily masculine, e.g. vid creation from licensed material) and non-approved (primarily feminine, e.g. slash). In fact, the first part of Busse's prediction is already happening. In addition to Kindle Worlds' regulation of content, Lucasfilm has offered content to fans to remix and re-use on terms specified by the company (Jenkins 2006a, 150-54), and J. K. Rowling has publically sanctioned Harry Potter fanfic which is 'not obscene' (Waters 2004, n.p.).<sup>8</sup> The second half of Busse's prediction, that non-legitimated fanworks will be 'further ostracized', is debatable, but Russo fears that

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<sup>8</sup> Her spokesman is confused about the meaning of obscenity: he then conflates it with 'x-rated', which legally speaking is almost a contradiction in terms. For a full discussion, see Fathallah (2010b, 69-72).



‘recognition by and on television is incentive enough to channel [...] artistic labor out of the Internet at large and into [the] SciFi [channel]’s walled garden’ (2009, 128). *Pace Ragnedda*, we might interpret this as panoptically grounded discipline: we understand that The Powers That Be are watching, so behave ourselves, monitor each other and produce only content that is industrially acceptable, for we never know when we might be recognized and rewarded. Relatedly, Scott warns that as corporations invite fans to participate and mimic fannish production habits, we are being sold a false imitation of grassroots fandom (2009, 1.5; c.f. Stein 2011). Scott considers that such activity potentially stifles real fannish production, colonizing the gaps and meta-spaces in the text that fans have conventionally filled (2008; 2011, 142-220; c.f. Pearson 2010, 85-86; 91-92).

New media fandom has attracted the attention of legal scholars working on intellectual property. Murray (2004) argues that perspectives from political economy and critical legal studies will realistically ‘temper the elevation of fan agency often encountered in studies of cult media [...] quer[ying] the utility of cultural studies’ celebration of fan practices as displays of ‘*discursive power*’ [...] [and] capturing the increasing economic significance of ‘independent’ fan networks to corporate marketing regimes’ (8-9, quoting Tulloch in Tulloch and Jenkins 1995, 150, italics in original). De Kosnik and Russo might agree. However, Murray misses the fact that *law itself* is a discourse: Young actually uses it as a representative example of the concept (2001, 402-03). Moreover, transformations in bodies of discourse affect their neighbours (c.f. Foucault 2002, 230). Hence, when the Organization for Transformative Works presented a well-known fanvid at a Digital Millenium Copyright Act hearing in 2009, it was subsequently referenced in the

Register of Copyright's Recommendation to the Librarian of Congress, leading to an exemption in copyright law for non-profit video remixes (Scott 2011, 48).<sup>9</sup>

We should avoid, then, 'assign[ing] unwarranted cohesion and intent to a capitalist system in which nothing unexpected ever happens' (Carraway 2011, 706), and in which some cohesive entity called The Law or The Market always deliberately co-opts and defuses audience dissent. Hetcher notes that toleration of non-commercial fan production is now the 'putative norm' amongst commercial copyright holders; and that those who defy the norm risk reputational damage (2009, 1888). Norms influence law: to enforce a law that is actively rejected by the majority of people is impossible. As Hetcher puts it, the more people create derivative fanworks, the greater the costs to corporations to pursue them; thus in a de facto way, the more we exercise the concept of fair use, the more we expand its notoriously vague legal meaning (1930-31). If the public were inhibited in producing derivative works, fanworks would be disappearing (1935). A Google search for 'fan fiction' by LaChev in 2005 returned 11,200,000 hits (2005, 86). The same search by me on 20/04/11 returned 69,300,000, and on 23/08/13 returned 90,700,000.

This is not to claim that fans are 'winning' any kind of moral/economic war against corporations. Corporations do what makes money, be that by increasing profit or decreasing legal and production costs. Whilst some legal scholars are concerned with public benefit (Tushnet 1997; Tussey 2001; Stroude 2010), Ogbu (2003) advises that an over-restrictive regime is not in the copyright holder's interest, risking alienation and reputational damage: in Foucauldian terms, the forcible exercise of power is politically costly ([1977] 1980, 155). Though public good is of

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<sup>9</sup> For the OTWs statement, see <<http://transformativeworks.org/copyright-office-cites-fan-vids-recommending-new-exemptions>> [accessed 15/08/11].

concern to him (2008, 95), Noda argues that derivative fan activity ought to be permitted as on balance it serves the interests of copyright, increasing the body of work available to the public *and* economically benefitting the copyright holder, even where the fan profits too (2008, see especially 84; 2010, 151). Resistance on the owner's behalf is therefore 'foolish' (2008, 101), as well as impossible to enforce (103-04). On the side of cultural studies, Bailey reminds us that, far from seeing their practice as anti-capitalist rebellion, a lot of fans justify their works as *not* impinging on owners' interests: in fact, they see them as free promotion (Bailey 2005, 191). Therefore I think the question of whether derivative fan projects are or should be legal is being superseded by Foucauldian questions of norms and power: which statements, canon and fanon, wield discursive power? How is this power circulated, challenged, subverted, bolstered or escaped?

Thus, a Foucauldian perspective should bring new light to the socio-political study of fandom online, granted that discourse itself is a socio-political practice, by treating it as a normalizing and productive network of multi-directional power, influenced by and dependent on on visibility. First, though, I must outline the second 'branch' fan studies has taken: the intrapersonal, psychological approach.

b) Intrapersonal/Psychological Perspectives

The intrapersonal approach to fandom responds to early pathologization of fans by conservative cultural critics and psychoanalysts in the (simplified) tradition of the Frankfurt School.

Following Adorno, Sharrat argued that popular cultural forms create a displacement of knowledge, pacifying the masses and preventing people from discovering the real conditions of their subordination (1980). Goulding's (1985) diagnosis of *Star Trek* fans was similar: they were dupes of the show's deliberate mythologizing of 1960s US policy, passively accepting this and unable to imagine any social alternatives. Perhaps the classic statement of pathologization is by Horton and Wohl (1956). They coined the term 'para-social' for the relationship between a media spectator and the 'remote and illustrious men' in 'radio, television, and the movies', including 'character[s] in a story who comes to life in these media in an especially vivid and arresting way' (1956, 215; c.f. Jenson 1992, 17). They argued that 'when the para-social relationship becomes a substitute for autonomous social participation [...] it can be regarded as pathological' (200). Most vulnerable to this pathology are 'the socially inept, the aged and invalid, the timid and rejected' (Jenson, 17). Later research on para-social attachment has shown that conversely, para-social attachments can 'broaden the scope of interpersonal relations a person has, rather than compensate for a lack' (Ballantine and Martin 2005, 198; see also Auter and Palmgreen, 2000, Giles 2002, and c.f. Williamson 2005, pp. 161-62). The overriding theme of the more recent work is that fandom is a means of negotiating self-identity and interaction with the external world (see also Stever 2011). It remains to modern cultural critics to explain

attachment to fanish objects in a way that is neither pathologizing nor condescending, yet accounts for the real felt importance of fan-texts.

Harrington and Bielby (1995) addressed the problem by drawing on the Winnicottian theory of transitional objects. A person's transitional object exists in a realm between the internal and external realms, influenced by both internal reality and external events. For children, the object is often a special toy or blanket to which they feel great attachment and invest much emotion in. Adults too have transitional objects, because we are always negotiating the external and internal, the real and the fictional, the objective and the subjective; but only certain objects are acceptable for adults, such as particular types of music and religion. An object of fandom, Harrington and Bielby posit, is a transitional object: both external reality and part of ourselves, both subjective experience and external reality. Hills (2002) modifies this, suggesting that as fandom-objects are inherently more social/external than children's primary transitional objects (PTOs), we should call them secondary transitional objects (STOs) (108). He theorizes that a fan culture forms around a text which has served as a PTO for a number of individuals who remain attached to it as part of their cultural experience. This object is both intensely significant to the individual *and* cultural and intersubjective. This tension makes the fan-text a secondary transitional object (108). So an STO might be a transitional object which has been re-contextualized as a cultural experience but retains personal affective significance; or, not have been a PTO but become absorbed into the subject's third (internal/external) space, entering the 'cultural repertoire which "holds" the interest of the fan and constitutes the subject's symbolic project of self' (109, original in italics). Therefore, fan cultures are neither rooted in an objective interpretative

community and its texts, nor collections of individuals whose subjective passions overlap, but both and neither, created and found.

Being concerned with affect, with ‘fans as subjects with psyches’ (2002, xiii), Hills also offered a refinement of simplistic equations of fandom with religion. He proposed that we see fandom as a form of neoreligiosity: that is to say, fandom is *not* religion, but it may serve some of the same needs and channel some of the same emotions that religion has historically (117-30). McCloud agrees, for as he puts it, ‘while religion [like fandom] has certainly been a field in which people could seek and attain identities and communities, it has never been the only place’ (2003, 199). Citing Hills’s observation that fans themselves utilize religious language in describing their attachments, he suggests this is ‘because the late modern project of the self is weighty business, and for many moderns the most serious language they have access to is religious’ (203).

I do not refute these theories, or their use for more ethnographic methods of fan studies such as in-depth interviewing, but as explained in the last section, I decline in this project to read ‘fans as subjects’ off the texts they consume and/or produce, a trap that Bailey (2005) falls into in his attempt to document fandom as a project of (broadly Foucauldian) self-formation. Bailey proposes to analyze ‘self-construction in the fan experience’ (subtitle) which accounts for both reflexive self-construction in response to social circumstance, and a space of personal agency. In his introduction he argues that the effects tradition has been guilty of ‘a behaviourist elimination of active subjectivity’ whilst the ‘uses and gratifications model’ failed ‘to account for the social character of meaning-making’ (11). But Bailey’s conclusion that ‘the primary texts (music and films) are absolutely critical to the ways that such cultures produce modes of self-creation and identity formation’ (211) does not solve the problem. Fans as subjects are ultimately read quite

deterministically through the texts they are attached to. Instead, I take the fan-text as a source of grounding statements in fan discourse, and consider how these statements are taken up, repeated and modified in fandom.

Other interpersonal approaches tend to neglect social, industrial and economic power relations. For instance, Lancaster (2001) views the fannish practices of role-playing, card-games, and creating fan web pages and fanfic as immersive performance that is essentially nostalgic, desiring to recapture the emotions of initial viewing. His under-theorized default fan, a kind of ideal reader, wants ‘more of’ not ‘more from’ the media text (the phrase is from an unknown writer cited in Pugh 2005, 19) presumably because the industrial production pleases him or her regardless of social position. Further, when Lancaster discusses the fan’s options in recapturing said emotion, he demonstrates the possibility of choosing the various attributes, character types that come for selection in a role playing game without acknowledging the fact the situated fan is negotiating this from what is on offer from the culture industry (c.f. Gripsrud 2002, 289). Booth (2010), too, elides questions of power when he proposes Alternate Reality Games as the new model and metaphor for the study of new media fandom. He suggests that the ubiquity of mediation actually ‘erases’ mediation, because in a media culture, there is no window between the inside and the outside, no difference between the virtual and real. Booth assumes an enormous degree of privilege. Aside from the fact that the kind of high-speed, multi-function, transportable technology required for Booth’s model is only available to a tiny minority of people (c.f. Baym 2010, 18-21), for some, fandom is an escape to be grabbed when possible, a stealing of time as for Radway’s romance readers (1984). We might recall Bury’s finding that women stealthily logged on to fannish mailing lists at work because despite having the

technology, they had limited time and leisure at home to engage with fannish pleasures (2005, 176-78). These women viewed and were expected to view the home as a place of labour before leisure. In such circumstances, the 'frame' of mediation could be appreciated as a ritualistic passage from work to play.

A final danger of the psychoanalytic/intrapersonal approach is that it can (still) tend towards pathologization (see Sandvoss above). Abercrombie and Longhurst skirt the edge of this tendency when they position fandom as a reflexive practice, proposing their 'spectacle/performance paradigm' (SPP) as alternative to behavioural and incorporation/resistance paradigms of early media studies (1998; Longhurst 2007). They suggest that in a hyper-mediated environment, we are now always in the audience position, existing in a mediascape fuelled by the ubiquity of 'spectacle' and 'narcissism' (1998, 77-98). By 'spectacle', they mean the understanding of things as images: the external world comprehended as it is 'looked at, gazed upon' (78), which gaze is ultimately possessive (83). By 'narcissism', they mean persons constructed and maintained only in the reflection received from others (88-96; this is the same way Sandvoss used the term). This narcissism is closely connected to the modern 'project of the self' (94) concerned with self-development. This vision of society necessitates a Foucauldian perspective on power as diffused and ubiquitous, but makes no account of resistant possibilities. The metaphors of mirrors and reflexivity adopted by Abercrombie and Longhurst invite determinism and closed readings. A reflection is a copy determined by external material – is there no room to manipulate or alter it? Have we no subjective influence over the manner in which we receive the materials through which we constitute ourselves? If so, Abercrombie and Longhurst's model does not explain how.



One enduring influence of Abercrombie and Longhurst's work is the acknowledgement that, in a mediated culture, a certain degree of fannish attachment is part of everyday life. There is a wide spectrum of fannish engagement, not all of which is productive in a traditional sense.

Researchers have expanded the definition of fandom from contemporary textual poacher to include literary societies (Brooker 2005), academic admiration (Lacey 2000), nineteenth-century literary fan letters (Eisner 2007; 2009), and fandom of other fans (Chin 2010). Gray calls for attention to the 'anti-fan' (2003; 2005). The anti-fan, like the traditional fan, has a strong emotional attachment to a particular text, investing intellectual effort in critiquing and dissecting it. Indeed, her activity often looks very much like fandom, except that the overriding emotion is hatred. When two fannish objects are positioned as rivals by some similarity and some difference, fans of one will often be anti-fans of the other, and thus emotionally invested in both. 'Behind dislike', Gray observes, 'there are always expectations – of what a text should be like, of what is a waste of media time and space, of what morality or aesthetics texts should adopt, and of what we would like to see others watch or read' (2003, 73).

The category of 'anti-fan' is useful in considering how *Supernatural* and its fandom privilege or police discursive statements because both canon and fanon position a specific Bad Other: namely, *Twilight*. Both texts share the premise that the monstrous exists in the human world, and utilize Gothic conventions. But *Supernatural* is cynical, funny, elitist, 'masculine', extremely violent, flamboyantly post-modern, meta-textual, and bordering on the nihilistic in ethos, particularly in later seasons. It positions itself as 'adult' and 'clever', and derides the idea of a moral God or just order to the universe. Fumbling attempts at heteronormative relations end in tragedy, farce or both. *Twilight* is earnest, not funny, 'feminine', and positions itself as a teen

romance, holding out the possibility of emotional justice. Many *Supernatural* fans hate and deride *Twilight*, notably for its valorization of patriarchal romance. In this derogation of the vampire film infected by the teen-girl audience and vice-versa (Bode 2010, 710-12), *Supernatural* fans align themselves with professional film critics and feminist scholars (Bode *ibid*; Seifert 2008; Miller 2008; Aubrey et al. 2010). A Facebook group asking which of the two texts is better garners fan responses such as ‘supernatural basically salt-guns its face off’ and ‘Uh, Supernatural, absolutely no effin contest!!’. Another fan describes *Twilight* as ‘the story of one girls choice between beastiality and necrophelia [sic]’.<sup>10</sup> These fans have been rewarded in grand style: in *Supernatural* episode 5x03, a protagonist remarked, ‘Eat it, *Twilight*’, upon executing a vampire, and then 6x05 comprised an aggressive and hilarious parody entitled ‘Live Free or TwiHard’.<sup>11</sup> *Supernatural* buys (and buys into) its adult, clever, masculine cultural position by Othering the feminine and age-subordinated. It will be important to see what, from this reciprocal discourse, is in the texts I study, and what resisted.

In summary, then, a Foucauldian perspective employing the tools of norm and resistance, the Author-function, power dispersal and an awareness of situated discourse is appropriate to forward the particular branch of fiction-orientated, socio-politically positioned fan studies that

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<sup>10</sup> See Facebook [n.d.] ‘Supernatural or Twilight?’ <<http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=8274712979&topic=6416>> [accessed 20/04/11] and Fowler (2010) for IGN TV, ‘Supernatural vs. Twilight?’ <<http://uk.tv.ign.com/articles/111/1113667p1.html>> [accessed 20/04/11] respectively.

<sup>11</sup> Rival fan-objects in media are of course not in such direction opposition as, for instance, sports teams (Theodoropoulou 2007). Some of the commenters on the message boards in the previous note profess to enjoy both shows, though usually not to an equal degree. Some have usernames indicating this. Further, the tag for ‘Crossover: Twilight’ at the popular community Supernatural Story Finders would suggest that some fans can combine their pleasure in the two shows.

this project will contribute to. I attempt to answer Johnson's call for 'more expansive theorizations of constitutive, hegemonic antagonisms', given that

ongoing struggles for *discursive dominance* constitute *fandom as a hegemonic struggle over interpretation and evaluation* through which relationships among fan, text and producer are continually articulated, re-articulated and dis-articulated (2007a, 286, my emphasis)

with the addition that inter-fandom discourse is crucial to this study.

To better situate this project in terms of the material it addresses, I now review the scholarship on fan fiction specifically, with attention to the theorization of 'fiction' as a category.

### III. Fan Fiction

If fan studies so far has lacked a text-sensitive theory of power, the study of fan fiction lacks sufficient theorization of the category 'fiction'. Fan fiction has been treated as a political act (Jenkins 1992) and as literary art (Pugh 2005); but in the former case writers fail to properly distinguish written fiction from other kinds of writing, and in the latter, it tends to be problematically isolated from its contexts of production. In this first section, I trace a trajectory from celebration of fan fiction as a political resistance to corporate media (Jenkins 1992), and/or the expression and binding material of an alternate female society (Bacon-Smith 1992), through to more sceptical and reserved readings of fanfic by contemporary critics (c.f. *Cyber Echoes*

2012, 1.2). Then, I consider perspectives treating fan fiction as literature. As work on slash still comprises a substantial amount of the extant work and follows its own more specific narrative, I treat that separately below.

a) Fan Fiction in the Academy

The academic history of fan fiction in general begins with *Textual Poachers*, and Jenkins's De Certeau-inspired resistant reader as a nomad who steals fleeting pleasure from the territory of the producer (1992, 24-27). Unlike the nomad, the writer creates an artefact; thus a community can evolve around a new corpus (44-49). Penley invokes De Certeau, to theorize fans' utilization of hegemonic material to their own ends, in a process of cultural *bricolage* or recombination of given elements. Recombination is important, as fans typically appropriate from a wide variety of media sources, creating new meanings by re-contextualizing as well as reshaping texts. Like Jenkins, Penley considers that fannish production renders this process more concrete, its effects more lasting, than De Certeau's 'ordinary man' (Penley 1997, 104-05). As we have seen, the New Media context of convergence has dated the poaching metaphor.

Jenkins argued that fan fiction communities work according to a moral economy (2006b; et. al 2009). This term was first utilized by Thompson to explain the morality of those historical actors behind De Certeau's metaphor. Thompson thought that the eighteenth and nineteenth century

peasant leaders legitimized their revolts through an appeal to ‘traditional rights and customs’ and the ‘wider consensus of the community’, claiming that their actions protected pre-existing property rights ‘against those who sought them abuse for their own gain’. They found ‘consensus [...] so strong that it overrode motives of fear or deference’ (Thompson 1971, 78-79). Jenkins draws a parallel with fan fiction writers who see themselves as protecting the characters they love according to a communal idea of moral right, against those who would exploit or abuse them for profit (Jenkins, 2006b, 54-57). Jenkins probably exaggerates in invoking Thompsons’s reference to ‘fear’ of traditional owners, though ‘deference’ might apply in some places. Contemporary fan fiction practices both exhibit and contradict a feeling of communal ownership: on the one hand, it is popular to refer to the appropriated characters as ‘ours’: see, for instance, the deliberately provocative subheading/assertion, ‘We love our boys bloody’, of a community dedicated solely to the hurt/comfort trope in *Supernatural* fan fiction.<sup>12</sup> On the other, the practice of disclaiming ownership of the characters used in the heading for individual fictions serves as a pre-emptive defense against alleged wrongdoing: the claim that one is taking some limited liberty with the property of another, but ultimately recognizes their rights of ownership (c.f. Bailey 2005, 191).

Bacon-Smith (1992) inaugurated the ethnographic tradition of fan fiction studies. She argued that dominant culture silences women’s pain and experiences, and makes male/female relationships difficult. The processes of creating fan fiction enable an alternative female community; whilst fan fiction, especially hurt-comfort, gives voice to the pain and vulnerabilities that people, especially women, are denied the expression of in life (Bacon-Smith 1992, 270-79). Actually,

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<sup>12</sup> I.e., the Livejournal community ‘Spn\_hurtcomfort’ <[http://community.LiveJournal.com/spn\\_hurtcomfort/](http://community.LiveJournal.com/spn_hurtcomfort/)>.

there is a significant subsection of hurt/comfort invested in the rather less properly-feminist exploration of sadomasochism, as the community header above seems to perform. Bacon-Smith is aware of this (270); yet goes out of her way to deny the possibility of erotic appeal in her archetypal story (259) and suggest that sadomasochistic fantasy is ‘limited to a small group’ of non-American fans ‘specifically interested’ in using the source material for this purpose (280,14n).<sup>13</sup> She considers that fan fiction and the fan community have reformist potential, but, like Geertz’s deep play (1973) , could also retard social change by providing means for the expression of tension whilst maintaining the status quo (Bacon-Smith, 287). Under a guise of play, fan fiction creates an alternative culture and alternative narratives to express their experience (292-94); but Bacon-Smith is not prepared to claim this can alter hegemony. Like Murray, Bacon-Smith does not account for the ability of discourse to affect transformations in neighbouring discourses, or the media ‘archive’. (For a continuation of the theme of fan fiction as a ‘women’s club’ updated to utilize the ‘protection and freedom of cyberspace’ see Cumberland 2000).

Jenkins’s later work casts fan fiction as a point of potential convergence between corporate and grassroots media. He stresses the educational potential of fan fiction for teenagers, who are creatively utilizing ‘affinity spaces’ useful to the types of work and learning they will need as adults in the present economy (2006, 169-77). This potential of fan fiction as training in new literacy is increasingly noted by education researchers, teachers and librarians (Chandler-Olcott and Mahar 2003, Moore 2005; Mackey and McClay 2008; Kell 2009; Roozen 2009; Wright 2009, Andersen 2010; Coleman 2010; Flynn 2010; Gilroy 2010; Land 2010; Larsen 2010;

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<sup>13</sup> Lamb and Veith also briefly acknowledge the presence of sadomasochism in h/c slash (1986, 246).

Parrish 2010; Shultz 2011; Eleá 2012). The most prolific writer on this topic is Rebecca Black, whose *Adolescents and Online Fan Fiction* (2008a) comes endorsed by Jenkins.

The theme uniting all Black's work is twofold: firstly, that English as currently taught in schools is disconnected from the kinds of literacy children will need in work and higher education; and secondly, that online communities such as fan fiction groups, which utilize a wide range of experience, multiple forms of knowledge, and teach participation skills rather than information retention, offer better models of practice. Black explores the use made of fan fiction by English second-language learners, both in improving their Standard English and incorporating their multi-cultural knowledge and experiences to forge empowering transnational identities and friendship networks (2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2008a; 2008b; 2008c; 2009a; 2009b; 2009c). She demonstrates how a young writer can utilize the codes, internet environment, and conventions of fan fiction, including the solicitation and management of reader feedback, 'to design an effective learning environment that meets her needs as an English Language Learner and enables her to achieve the online identity of a successful writer' (2007b, 133). However, whilst her view of education is reformist, Black considers fandom as ultimately a learning experience conducive to sustaining 'New Capitalism' (Gee 2004). For instance, she conducts the analysis of it through the 'interrelated aspects of design' (Black 2007b, 116) which according to Gee "reap large rewards in the New Capitalism: the ability to design new *identities, affinity spaces, and networks*" (Gee 2004, 97, quoted in Black, 116). She demonstrates that participation in fan fiction communities increases some adolescents' competencies in these facets of design.

What she does not demonstrate is her justification for theorization of (fan)fiction as a training ground.<sup>14</sup>

Jenkins's and Black's portrayals of fandom as a collaborative knowledge community are not the experience of everyone. Black is enthusiastic that in an online environment, novices and experts share the same space: unlike many offline scenarios, there are 'no constraints in place' to prevent it (2008c, 39). Granted, there are no physical constraints for those who have to the internet – but there are powerful discursive ones. It is quite possible for coteries of accomplished, highly educated writers to develop and cease to interact with the less accomplished (c.f. Brobeck 2005, 253; 261).

Others have followed Jenkins and Bacon-Smith in the study of fan fiction by adults. Here perspectives diverge. Jenkins notes that one reservation he has about *Textual Poachers* is that it encouraged academics 'to read fan fiction in primarily political terms' (2006b, 37). I agree; but observe another tendency, rooted in the literary tradition, to embrace the opposite extreme, bracketing politics to construct a discourse of fan fiction as art, specifically a postmodern art, worthy of studying like any other literature but exempt from theorization of what fiction is and does. This is the impression one gets from Pugh (2005; c.f. *Cyber Echoes* 2012, 1.2; 3.5). Pugh's work studies intertextuality; the communal writing process; genres and tropes; authorial voice, and the different experiences of professional and fan fiction writing. However, it lacks theory, and leaves one wondering what the argument is. Despite Pugh's appreciation of intertextuality,

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<sup>14</sup> One exception to the utilitarian educational perspective is Knobel and Lankshear (2006), who briefly discuss fan fiction in the context of New Literacies (109-116), but state concern that whilst literacy in general was once considered an end in itself, it is fast becoming a means to 'meet national priorities' and 'contribute to a more competitive workforce' (126).



the book actually falls into the Modernist trap of the literary work as self-sufficient, existing without social context.

Other literature-orientated theories of fandom include Stein's models of boundaries and opportunities: fan fiction, she theorizes, thrives within communal and practical limitations such as the use of canon, use of fantext (fan-originated ideas regarding character, theme and plot which have come to be commonly accepted within discrete communities), genre expectations, and technology. These boundaries place restrictions on fic, but simultaneously they create its possibilities and impetuses (Stein and Busse, 2009; Stein 2006b; 2008). These concepts integrate neatly with Foucauldian discourse analysis, with canon, fantext, genre and technology being observable factors in the development of discursive formations. In collaboration with Busse, Stein suggests that fan fiction might be viewed as part of a tradition that celebrates reproduction, mechanical or digital, and therefore poses a challenge to concepts of originality as creativity and the ownership of art (Stein and Busse, 2009, 193). The creation of fan fiction *in practice* challenges notions of originality as being the condition of creativity; however, Stein and Busse also observe that the *rhetoric* of fandom tends to stress the innovative qualities of fic writing rather than appropriative remix. Jenkins thought that 'a poached culture requires a conception of aesthetics emphasizing borrowing and recombination as much or more as original creation and artistic innovation' (1992, 224), but in fact, fandom's rhetoric of originality suggests lingering adherence to older models of cultural authority (Stein and Busse 2009, 205). This residual tendency supports the legitimation paradox in that it affirms the legitimacy of a fanfic, a practice of pastiche, via a lexis of authorial genius and completeness. For example, performances of speechlessness or incoherence in the face of brilliance are expressed as random lines of keyboard

characters, or claims to have ‘died’ from the experience of reading. Another dialogue-closing gesture is the expression ‘You win the internets’, which performs resignation of the discourse into the hands of the most accomplished, most creative writers. All three of these tropes can be observed in the hundreds of comments on an acknowledged fandom masterpiece, Fleshflutter’s hilarious yet profoundly moving epic farce, *The Incestuous Courtship of the Anti-Christ’s Bride* (2009; see the comments by roundaboutit, merihn and buddleia respectively). I suggest we understand these as statements in a construction called the author, which informs the fifth chapter of this thesis.

Still privileging a traditionally literary perspective, Derecho (2006) suggests that fan fiction be viewed as a form of archontic literature: this concept, again adapted from Derrida, views fanfic as an always-open archive of text of the sort historically used for cultural critique by marginalized groups. The main problem with this, aside from the dialogue-closing gestures noted above, is Derecho’s too-easy comparisons between fanfic and early forms of literary appropriation. She claims that

Historically, writing archontic literature has been a risky undertaking for women, and this is as true of contemporary fanfic authors today as it was for the first published women authors. Today, women who write fan fiction write under threat of legal prosecution (72).

As explained, this is unrealistic from a legal studies perspective (Hetcher 2009, 1888). Derecho writes that ‘many’ fan fiction participants have ‘received warnings or cease-and-desist letters’ (72), a rather disingenuous generalization: Jones observed that ‘only a tiny percentage of the tens of thousands of copyright-infringing fan websites have received cease-and-desist letters from

studios' (172, 2003). Today the number of websites is probably in the millions. To the individual, the chances of being noticed by the corporate owners of her fan fiction characters, and that said corporate owners would consider it worth pursuing the particular infringement, are insignificant. Lindgren Leavenworth and Isaksson (2013) have taken up Derecho's theory to analyse specific works of fanfic from a literary perspective, contending that 'canon works occasion fanfic in the first place and fanfic, in turn, deposits interpretations and associations into the archive which may influence any new reading of the canons' (n.p.). This may be so, but their lack of attention to inter-fan or fan-producer tensions and hierarchies fails to account for the fact that different statements in fanfic make different levels of impact on fandom and canon, and some make no impact at all, despite their assertion that 'to see fan fictions as archontic texts turns questions of ownership and hierarchies on their heads' (n.p.).

When critics write about fan fiction as 'works of literature' (Kaplan 2006, 135), they typically address those texts that exhibit literary cultural capital in a scholastic context. That is, texts that are polished, stylish, complete, conform to Standard English spelling and grammar, and exhibit the sort of literary tropes, jokes and references which suggest a degree of higher education in the arts. Kaplan goes some way towards acknowledging this omission when she notes the question of 'whether only literature of a certain quality rewards literary analysis' (2006, 151, 1n). I am not content with her continuation that 'regardless, there exists plenty of fan fiction which meets the criteria of quality usually desired by literary critics' such as that she analyzes. In *Supernatural* fandom, the cultural capital exhibited by fic that meets traditional standards of literacy relates to its potency as a statement in the context of its particular archive or community. Fic that meets these standards is still more likely to make an impact, but we should also pay attention to how

and where *lack* of these capitals minimize impact or how fic can wield impact despite lack of them. The show itself offers statements constructing class and education as divisive. At the level of narrative content, *Supernatural* seems to espouse the tradition of working-class heroism, positioning personal relations, intuition and affect as more valuable than education. Yet it also deliberately effects a separation of its audience at the level of reference and interpretation, utilizing a dense set of allusions to *Faust*, *Paradise Lost*, Dante's *Inferno*, the Bible, the Kabala, and other high-cultural texts. Whilst not essential to follow the plot, these references massively enhance the meanings and significance of the action even as they bid for cultural legitimacy (Bourdieu 1996, xvi; 101; 222; Moi 1999, 296). A continuation of this process can be seen at work in the fandom's most vaunted works, and the interpretation and reception of them.

Bury's *Cyberspaces of Their Own* (2005), Williamson's *The Lure of the Vampire* (2005) and Wright's (2009) thesis, 'The Discourse of Fan Fiction' address class and language use. Wright's 'discourse' is different to my use of the term: she means, following Bakhtin, 'the centripetal and centrifugal struggles of the fan fiction (discourse) community' (13). She is not concerned with fiction so much as the textual power struggles between older, established fans and less literate newcomers. She primarily chooses fic according to the fan-profile of the author (66). The actual texts she cites are reviews and interviews. Still, her work provides useful insight into some discursive practices constructing proper/legitimate fan fiction and silencing, segregating or normalizing that fanfic constructed as inferior, notably due to literacy and the inferred aged of its authors. Here Bourdieu's theories of capital can be utilized to observe how degrees of cultural and educational capital influence the impact of statements on discursive formations. Wright documents strong peer pressure for Standard English (79; 99-100; 115; 139; 141; 159; 160).

Bury too analyzes a fan fiction community's language use, revealing commitments that are unsurprising after Bourdieu: to a traditional model of education and the valuation of distanced aesthetic criticism over emotional or voyeuristic engagement, though the tongue-in-cheek performance of such was permitted (108-30). Bury asks participants what sort of fan fiction they avoid at all costs: their replies include work with poor spelling, grammar, lack of style, lack of the canon knowledge, and headers implying that the author has written the fic due to an experience she had, which she would like to see the characters negotiate. This last stricture, which not all participants agreed with, demands as Bury notes a critically proper degree of distance between author and artefact (98-103). The more personal, emotive involvement is viewed by some as amateurish and naïve. Overall, 'there is a strong bent towards quality literature' and 'a concern for quality is highly normative in terms of class' (103), and quality can be defined as exhibiting a high degree of cultural and literary capital.

Williamson likewise finds that fan fiction spaces are stratified by 'appropriate cultural capital' (2005, 164). Analyzing Bacon-Smith's comments on the way her fans 'work to preserve the standards of fan fiction', Williamson notes that in such a case, fans must take positions to sanction themselves as experienced fan writers, able to legitimately designate who is and who is not experienced enough to be considered, and also to endorse others to take up the same rank as themselves (179). Despite the increase in access offered by the internet, similar norms have emerged online (180). Brobeck (2005) documents this process in a selective Tolkien archive. Wright (2; 84; 87; 126; 142; 176) and Bronwen Thomas criticizes Pugh's use of the descriptor 'democratic', given that 'fan fiction sites and those who run them can exert considerable control over the fanon, and often seem to consider themselves to be beyond criticism or scrutiny'

(Thomas 2007, 5). Eleá also notes communal practices to establish norms and criteria of participation and hierarchize fanwork (2012, 72; 77).

More critics are coming to recognize, then, that fan fiction should not be hastily generalized as radical (c.f. Bury, 205; Cyber Echoes 2012, 1.2). Several essays in *Internet Fictions* (2009) take this perspective (Grandi; Pimenova; Lepännen). For Lepännen, fanfic is

simultaneously about change, innovation and creativity, as well as about insuring that what gets communicated is comprehensible and appropriate, i.e. about regulating and constraining what can be said and written, in what ways (Leppänen 2009, 64).

She likewise observes that fic is regulated by normative measures and controls and is therefore inseparable from politics and language ideologies (63). Further, the transgressive nature of the driving question behind fic, which she calls ‘what if’, is somewhat neutralized by the conventionalization and categorizations of the fan fiction archive. I too understand the archive as a code-based normative organizational principle, but it should be remembered that the degree to which fic communities are moderated is variable. (For further perspectives on fan fiction with a literary/linguistic slant that neglects socio-political context, see Grandi Collin-Smith 2009 and Lanier and Schau 2007).

What then is missing from the study of fanfic so far? Theoretically, a perspective that combines a sensitivity to literary fiction and the active properties of language with a socio-political consciousness. Topically, class, gender and education have both all received attention, but with the exceptions of Penley and the brief observation by Maddison (see next section), academic research into fan fiction, race and ethnicity is lacking. Chander and Sunder (2007) believe that

the figure of Mary Sue<sup>15</sup> can be utilized as an instrument of self-empowerment by racial minorities; but as the focus of their article is legal, they do not really explore how. However, discussions of race and institutionalized racism are gaining ground amongst fan fiction communities themselves, on forums such as the LiveJournal community Metafandom. In 2001 Boyd wrote that in taking the topics of her ethnographic work from her fan fiction community itself as well as academia, race did not appear an important concern (2001, 101-02). I doubt this would be the case today. Because the discursive construction called ‘race’ is emergent in fandom and fundamental to Gothicism, I have chosen it as my first discursive construction (Chapter 3). The fourth chapter will continue the concern with Gothic heritage to address a discursive construction integral to both canon and fandom: that of sibling incest. The fifth chapter studies the formation of the author, whose disappearance or irrelevance all Foucault’s work on discourse after ‘What is an Author?’ is premised on, in relation to the construction of the fan. *Supernatural* is in some ways *about* [the absence of] the Father/God, yet the industrial text had until Season Six a strong God-figure in persona of Eric Kripke, whose in-text persona is the hapless ‘Prophet Chuck’, a neurotic writer who drinks himself into stupors before receiving ‘visions’ of the doings of ‘his’ characters, which he records by creating the ‘text inside the text’: a series of comic books called, of course, *Supernatural*. These discursive formations are introduced and justified more fully in the methodology section, but first, I must summarize a strand of academic theory on fanfic that informs the incest chapter: theories of slash.

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Mary Sue’ is a disparaging fan term for original characters that are or read like idealized self-insertion. Chander and Sunder are attempting to revalue it, as Willis (2006) and Bonnstetter and Ott (2011) do from queer and feminist perspectives.

## Slash Theory

The history of slash in academia, despite its narrower focus, pre-dates academic attention to fan fiction in general. Nonetheless, we can discern a similar movement in terms of a valorization of resistance giving way to more situated, sceptical perspectives. Further, earlier theorists tended to ask whether slash, which was perceived as almost exclusively written by women about men, was more usually a coded portrayal of ‘love and sex as women want them’ and therefore ‘blatantly female’ (Russ 1985a, 83; 95); or a portrayal of relationships in which ‘somehow the two men are lovers without being homosexual’<sup>16</sup> (Penley 1992, 487); or ‘consciously and deliberately about men’, and ‘the gay male’ (Bacon-Smith 1992, 247; though her account is self-contradictory: see p. 70 below). Now, critics tend to view the production, reading and online spaces of slash as more polymorphous, able to accommodate a wider range of gender identifications and sexualities. Busse’s theory of the ‘queer female space’ has been influential in this change (Busse 2005, 105).

In 1985, Russ published two versions of the same essay. Intended for a scholarly audience, ‘Pornography for women, by women, with love’, appeared in an academic book (1985a), whilst ‘Another addict raves about K/S’ appeared in the fanzine *Nome* (1985b). The central argument was the same: that Kirk/Spock slash is not about homosexuality, but a coded exploration of ideal

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<sup>16</sup> It takes a long acquaintance with slash to fully understand this (still extant, but by no means ubiquitous) contradiction. Basically, it is the vaguely-homophobic message, implicit or explicit, that the characters in question are simply meant to be together, and that biological sex, gender identity and same-sex desire have nothing to do with it. It might be called the ‘I’m not gay, I just love X’ trope, or, as a fan shrewdly rephrased it to Jenkins, ‘I’m not gay, I just like to suck Spock’s cock’ (1992, 220).



love as desired by women: the perfect union between egalitarian partners, free of gender roles and dominance. Russ theorized that this was impossible to envisage in a heterosexual union. In a similar vein, Lamb and Veith (1986) described Kirk/Spock as an ‘androgynous’ union uniting and emphasizing the culturally-masculine and culturally-feminine qualities of both characters (242-44). They found that egalitarianism in a heterosexual relationship was extremely difficult to write (1986, 239-40); Kaveney affirms this difficulty even in 2010 (245). This idea of slash as gender-transcendence and the elision or bracketing of the gendered body reaches its height in Lamb and Veith’s assertion that K/S is ‘not about sex’ (254). The idea used to be quite influential: Russ drew heavily on it from the pre-publication and conference papers of Lamb and Veith (1985a, 83- 84).<sup>17</sup> Bacon-Smith appears to endorse it when she repeats the question Lamb and Veith attributed to the slash writer: ‘Not, why can’t men be more like women, but why can’t we all just be human?’ (1992, 249).

Likewise, Falzone (2005) insists that slash is more a matter of spiritual unity than a genre of the body, repeating the myth of the reunification of two halves of a complete being which Plato attributed to Aristophanes (254-55).<sup>18</sup> Yet this article also attempts to import the lenses of queer theory and post-Marxism: K/S, Falzone claims, ‘has defeated the system of market reappropriation, and in its aberrancy, remained somehow pure’ (250). Moreover: ‘In the same sense that mechanically reproducible art was useless for purposes of fascism, slashed narratives

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<sup>17</sup> To be specific, in the unusual case of Spock, it is only the specifically male parts of his anatomy that have to be so bracketed. As Russ noted, his alien ‘reproductive biology is cyclical and uncontrollable’, (Russ 1985a, 83) and therefore (problematically) gendered female.

<sup>18</sup> Though this myth is probably the most famous part of the *Symposium*, Plato’s attitude towards its merit is ambiguous. Aristophanes was a famous comic, and is delayed in speaking due to a fit of hiccups. Plato has him observe that his speech may be found laughable, and appeal to be taken seriously when he has finished (c. 360 BC). The notion of an egalitarian sexual relationship would in fact have rendered this speech ‘unusual and a bit scandalous’ in the context of fourth century Athens (Foucault [1984] 1992, 232).

are useless for purposes of patriarchy, heterosexism, and commodification' (251). Even if Falzone is unaware of the feminist and queer problematization of slash (see below), I would question how, given the sheer proliferation and ever-surprising variation of slash online by 2005, academics could still be attempting to valorize it as something 'pure'. Further, Kripke's introduction of slash to *Supernatural* demonstrates that 'slashed narratives' certainly *can* be re-appropriated and utilized by industry (see episodes 5x01; 5x18). This gesture does not necessarily deflate all subversive potential: some fans thought the official 'approval' of incest slash a delightfully progressive introduction of outsider-statements to mainstream TV discourse. Arguably, it inscribes in popular myth a relationship with genuinely radical potential. But it is certainly not 'pure' fannish resistance to the market.

Bacon-Smith also broaches some different theories of slash. She briefly admits the possibility that women just like writing about attractive men having sex with each other, moving swiftly on to the consideration that, at the time of writing, there were not many female characters in the media and fewer still interesting enough to write about (239-42). She also suggests that women identify 'within' the television screen, finding sensuality in the relationships between characters, as opposed to projecting an objectifying gaze across it. Therefore, literature dealing with connections between three-dimensional characters, which at the time of her writing usually meant male ones, was more likely to bring pleasure to women (193-97).

Penley is one of the few slash theorists to address the relationship between slash and social power from a perspective other than gender inequality, albeit US-centrally. Considering Fiedler's analysis of the 'Sacred Marriage' of males in American fiction, she feels that slash is a creative reworking of the American tradition of interethnic male bonding, found in canonical

texts like *Huck Finn* and *Moby Dick* (Penley 1997, 135-37; see also Lamb and Veith 1986, 235-38). She argues that slashers have rewritten this mythos, which in its original form is sexist, because men must leave women and the restrictions they represent behind in order to become free; and racist, because this very lack of women guards against miscegenation. For Penley, slash avoids misogyny by virtue of an implicit code dictating that female characters are handled respectfully, rather than as devices to further the male/male bond, and challenges racism by celebrating interracial sex (136-45). She is explicitly influenced by K/S, as were all these early theorists, and perhaps these assertions were more plausible when slash communities were smaller and more unified. Certainly, both Penley's challenges to hegemony are possibilities for slash; but today one easily finds slash which treats female characters with indifference or outright disdain (c.f. Scodari 2007, 51), and the infinite variety of male/male pairings utilized from and by different cultures means the Sacred Marriage theory has lost force. Nonetheless, Penley's work stimulates questions regarding how slash can (de)construct various power relationships, including that of ethnicity.

In *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins sees slash as a female-orientated critique of 'masculinity'. He suggests that slash breaks down the artificial barriers and restrictions patriarchy imposes on male/male relationships, denying the continuum between friendship and love (1992, 202-19). The central problem with this is a problem underlying the treatment of 'masculinity' in many slash theories (Bacon-Smith 1992; Kustritz 2003; Lamb and Veith 1986, Russ, 1985a; Penley 1997; Woledge 2006): it is pervasively Western-centric. On the pleasures and problems of slash for a woman raised partly or wholly according to Eastern social norms – the present writer included – wherein strong and demonstrative same-sex bonds are a very *condition* of

masculinity and sociality in general, academia is silent. Hegemonic Arab masculinity, which was my primary model as a child, is constructed as homosocial, communal and politically committed (Aghacy 2009, 8; 14; 17; and especially 56-93). The lone hero is a Western construct (pun intended). See Woledge (2006) for a perpetuation of this Westernizing tradition in the present century, in which what is 'subversive' in (much) slash is simply intimacy between men (97). Woledge also references the 'Sacred Marriage' tradition as a precedent for slash (100-01). In an earlier article, she had noted that it is Western constructions of gender that she discusses (2005, 53; 63 2n). It is disappointing that this distinction is dropped by 2006, bar one reference to ancient Greece quoted from a character and not unpacked by the author (102). When Woledge acknowledges that 'what is subversive in one community may be completely normative within another', one hopes that she is about to acknowledge her Western-centrism, but instead she continues: 'thus in today's highly sexualized [apparently, universal - JMF] culture, the *intimacy* of intimatopic slash is most remarkable, though it is viewed as normative within its own community' (2006, 111). Again, for Kustritz (2003), slash is oppositional to 'stereotypical masculine ideals' in a universal sense (382). In our context, it should be noted that *Supernatural* itself is deconstructive and critical of 'stereotypical male ideals', constructing characters whose performances of masculinity are frequently exposed as vulnerability, selfishness, fragmentation and confusion. Incest then becomes the new taboo, as opposed to the 'feminine' qualities of men which the canon positively revels in.

For Salmon and Symons, writing from a Darwinian perspective, it is not a culturally constructed masculinity that is transformed in slash, but the biological nature of male sexuality. They write that male and female mating psychology, and therefore male and female fantasy, are

fundamentally different because in the course of evolution, natural selection favoured ‘psychological adaptations that function to promote the pursuit of low-cost reproductive opportunities’ (2001, 39) in men but not in women. The authors argue that these preferences are demonstrated in the contrast between male-targeted impersonal pornography, and female-targeted romance novels building to monogamy (56-69). Slash, they write, is ‘so similar to mainstream romances that it can be regarded as a species of that genus’ (88); except that as some women prefer to envisage themselves as a co-warrior rather than wife, the characters available for identification are both men (89-90). Thus, ‘a naturally promiscuous masculine sexuality is transformed and harnessed by the power of love to create a permanent, intimate, nurturing, monogamous bond’ (86). One wonders how much slash the authors have actually read. They only seem aware of a particular *variety* of slash, sometimes called domestic fic or ‘curtain fic’,<sup>19</sup> which some women deliberately avoid. They also depend on the assumption that slash has no appeal for gay men (5), because gay men are still men and thus aroused by the one-off, ‘low-cost’ sexual encounters associated with traditional pornography. Contrary to this distasteful generalization, some of the most deeply characterized, plot-heavy, climax-delaying slash I have ever read is by gay, bi-, and/or queer-identified men: see also Griffin (2005). Salmon and Symons also fail to explain how they understand queer attraction in the first place. This accords with the criticism of evolutionary psychology as a dubiously totalizing and politically suspect ‘theory of everything’ (Kember 2003, 51; see also Rose and Rose 2001). Finally, they discount the bi-female erotic charge of the slash exchange between women, and the fact that quite a lot of female slash writers identify as gay, bi or queer.

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<sup>19</sup> A slightly derogatory metonym for traditional concepts of domesticity, e.g., shopping for curtains. Also connotes a private sphere, literally curtained from the outside world.

Jenkins expands on the ‘critique of masculinity’ model in the brilliantly titled ‘Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking’ (Green, Jenkins and Jenkins, 1998). There is deliberately no unifying theory here: the article is written in discussion with the slash writers, some of whom espouse earlier theories, including the reconstruction of masculinity and the lack of interesting female characters in media, but others of whom take the unapologetic sex-radical position implied by the title. ‘To be honest,’ says one informant, ‘I don’t even identify with any of the characters. I’m just fascinated by them. Plus, I’m prurient and salacious and simply adore to watch’ (17). The article also notes some problems recognized in and around slash: the potential misogyny of erasing women from the narrative (20-22); the separation of gay sex from queer political experience, and relatedly the homophobic overtones of the trope noted by Penley, wherein characters are portrayed as ‘normally’ straight, yet irresistibly in love with each other (22-30); and the tension between “acceptably feminine” narratives (32) and stories depicting, for instance, rape, sadomasochism, and alienation. Cynthia Jenkins observes a tendency to divide ‘good porn’, which is ‘relationship orientated as hell, oh so caring and tender’, from ‘bad porn’, which is neither (32-33). Relatedly, Lepänen suggests that it is ‘because [slash] does not involve women’ that it can be a ‘neutral’ way for girls and young women to explore sexuality (Leppänen 2008, 170). The absence of female bodies probably makes for a safe read given that ‘no female characters are taken advantage of or abused’ (170), but I would question the descriptor of ‘neutral’ – slash often involves distinct power inequalities, variably related to Western constructions of masculine and feminine sexuality.

Cicioni (1998) is still influenced by the tradition of slash as a ‘female’ rewriting of relationships, in which women’s desire for nurturance and commitment is displaced onto male bodies due to

alienation and for erotic purposes. Following Jenkins, she sees slash as potentially subversive in that it ““provides common terms within which a dialogue about the politics of sexuality may be conducted, and creates opportunities where the social construction of gender may be explored with greater openness and self-consciousness”” (Jenkins 1992, 221; quoted in Cicioni, 174). On the other hand, she warns, slash might also function as kind of a safety valve that vicariously supplies the needs unmet by patriarchy rather than providing an impetus to change social institutions (c.f. Bacon-Smith, 228). Likewise, Clerc (2000) asserts that slash ‘is not gay porn’ (though she admits some ‘similarities’), because it is ‘written with an eye to feminine sensibilities – lots of touching and talking along with the fucking’ (228-29). Boyd (2001) found that many of her study participants had difficulty with the term pornography and what they felt it implied. One participant claimed that she did not write pornography but ‘erotica’, the difference being that ‘erotica’ is ‘positive writing’ focused on relationships (77). Others preferred the term pornography, and one respondent noted that the term erotica ‘smacks to me of making things tame and safe to protect the delicate sensibilities of women’ (77). Boyd notes the historical roots of the erotica/pornography distinction in attempts to regulate women’s and the working classes’ access to texts, including politically sensitive material and texts on birth control (23-26).

Cicioni considers slash more radical than romance fiction, because it voices women’s desires outside the dominant notions of acceptable heterosexual relationships. In her conclusion, we see the beginnings of a newer influence on slash critics: queer theory, which tends towards a broadly Foucauldian conception of resistance as multiple and polymorphous pleasures, a ‘creative practice of producing new ways of relating to others and ourselves’ (Hayes and Ball 2010, 224). Slash, writes Cicioni, is queer in the sense of a non-heterosexual response to mass culture – a

response from people who don't share the orientations supplied in the texts they respond to (175). This conception of queerness is from Doty (1993, xviii), a strong influence on slash theory since around the mid 2000s.

If a queer perspective and methodology is the first hallmark of recent slash theory, the second is scepticism towards anything 'inherently' resistant-feminist or subversive in slash (see especially Scodari 2003). Contemporary critics are alert to the alternative potential in slash: to re-inscribe both sexism and heteronormativity through its treatment or elision of women, and its attitudes to power roles in relationships. Thirdly, it should be recalled that contemporary theorists are working in the context of fandom post home-internet, which amongst other changes, has prompted an unprecedented increase in the volume and visibility of slash, wider demographic variation in its author/readership, and erased the complex initiation and barriers to entrance Bacon-Smith detailed in print-zine culture.

The phrase 'queer female space' as a way of thinking about slash was coined by Busse (2005, 105). She points out that slashers have a great variety of sexual identities, and argues that the subversive nature of slash is the erotic space in which readers and writers can experience, explore and connect through sexualities outside the heteronormative binary. She takes up queer theory's focus on the performative, non-essential nature of gender, especially flexible in cyberspace. Busse's paradigm has been taken up by Lackner, Lucas et al. (2006), Busse (2006), and Lothian (2007). Lackner, Lucas et al. note that the complaint that women are absent from slash only makes sense in terms of a Modernist conception of the text as eliding the reader and writer (195-96). Busse and Lothian (2009) extend the focus on multiplicity and inessentiality by discussing the queer potential of genderswap slash, wherein the trope of two straight men who



happen to love each other often gives way to depictions ‘less definable in terms of sexual orientation’, and ‘rather than the attainment of a pre-destined love *despite* bodies, this relationship happens *because* of the ways that bodies trouble identities and desires’ in the realization of a queer commonality (116; 119). Elsewhere, however, Busse notes that a playful performance of queerness in a safe online space can be problematic when disconnected from queer identity and activism in real life, and may be seen as ‘exploitative and offensive’ to those who live with discrimination (2006, 211). The negative potential is for a ‘fetishization of gay sex and the lack of a clear sociocultural and historicopolitical context’ (211).

This concept of queer female space has the advantage of being more flexible than the old binary of resistance or misogyny, is better informed by postmodern gender theory, and sensitive to the new online context of fandom. Russo stresses the interactive, not-for-profit nature of the online slash community as a microcosmic manifestation of the new sorts of queer possibility slash narratives make manifest (2002, 24-28). However, I question the blanket employment of ‘female’. Male slash writers are numerically few, but I can attest from eleven years of experience in slash communities that they a) exist; b) identify as men; and c) identify their work as slash. According to Dennis (2010), at least one third of the slash writers on Fanfiction.net are male. His source is their profiles (749), a questionable gauge of accuracy, but as queer relations gain gradually in acceptability especially amongst young people,<sup>20</sup> it is not unreasonable to assume that at least some of them are telling the truth. According to Davies, gay men were writing and

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<sup>20</sup> Fanfiction.net is considered a ‘young’ site. Respondents to Lawrence (2007) describe it as having ‘an extremely large number of younger teenagers’ (5.3) and as hosting ‘a bunch of junk written by children and teenagers’ (8.1). Another suggests that it is frequented by children because they do not know how to make their own websites (5.4). Similar fan categorizations of the site as young/immature were collected by Chin (2010, 169-72). As of 2002, Fanfiction.net banned adult-rated material.

circulating slash based on cinema as early as the 1920s (197). Maddison provides resources for a slash archive featuring work by straight women, lesbians and gay men (2000: 97; 209 55n),<sup>21</sup> and Brennan analyses the neglected contributions of gay male slash artists and the importance of the form to identity construction (2013a; 2013b). Therefore I resist a terminology that excludes men.

Two further questions have been raised regarding the resistant or subversive nature of slash: firstly, do slash writers subversively create a queer subtext in the source, by way of a resistant reading, or are they making latent what is already there? The latter is Jones's (2002) opinion: slash centers on 'cult' texts, she argues, precisely because these fantastic, open-ended narratives resist the stability and closure of domestic heterosexuality. Woledge also focuses on latent elements, though *pace* Jones, she considers these to be the intimacy of the Kirk/Spock relationship rather than *Star Trek's* cult qualities (Woledge 2005a, 238). She therefore reads the pairing using an encoding/decoding model, considering slash a decoding of the encoded relationship.<sup>22</sup> Tosenberger too takes this perspective, on *Supernatural* slash, noting that 'too strong a focus upon slash as a subversion of canon can mask consideration of the ways in which the canon itself may make queer readings available' (2008, 1.3). She cites Doty's observation that

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<sup>21</sup> The link he provides, to a geocities site, is actually defunct. However, the site Slash Kink Archive has been mirrored to <<http://www.oocities.com/soho/gallery/8743/slashkfact.htm>> [accessed 12/11/10].

<sup>22</sup> A rare case of television theory being explicitly utilized in slash criticism, but Woledge does not consider that slash itself, being based on a televisual text, might be an encoded text in need of decoding in ways similar or different to that which we read television.

to base queer readings only upon notions of audience and reception leaves you open to the kind of dismissive attitude that sees queer understandings of popular culture as being the result of 'wishful thinking' about a text or 'appropriation' of a text by a cultural and/or critical special interest group' (Doty 2000, 4).

From a Foucauldian perspective on language, slash need not be *either* extracted/made latent *or* radically invented, because new statements in a discourse alter discourse: there is no clear separation between source text and fandom, but the creative language use of fandom creates possibilities in the text and vice-versa. Fanfic inflects and alters statements from the source text through re-iteration with variation, using hints, lines and references to create alternative explanations and expansions which are then read back onto the source text and in some cases taken up by the producers for explicit reference. Regarding *Supernatural*, this is highly and demonstratively relevant due to canonical uptake of slash, the inclusion of the fan who writes fanfic, and the fact that its most-slashed protagonists will never *actually* become a couple on screen according to the show's own denial. I would note, however, that cult texts are increasingly open to textual exchange with their fandoms, and only Western-centric, 'heterosexist logic' (Jenkins 1992, 204) assumes that everybody is straight until proven otherwise.

A final question regarding the 'subversive' nature of slash is whether these texts are in fact reproducing the power dynamics of heteronormative relationships. Woledge notes that in the tradition of slash as gender-transcendence or blending, we can only conceive of the characters as 'gender-blended', their union as androgynous, by retaining the idea that certain traits are essentially masculine and others essentially feminine (Woledge 2005, 62). Flegel and Roth cite slash that follows a normative pattern of romance as problematically suggesting that even if women were men, the culturally constructed binaries of patriarchy would remain (2010, 4.3; c.f.

Ng 2008). Scodari warns that ‘fans sometimes appropriate resistive rhetoric in defense of hegemonic proclivities’ (2003, 111), a point taken up by Åström in her investigation of mpreg. Åström observes that ‘the theme of male pregnancy has the potential to produce narratives that challenge our notions of gender, identity, sexual, and social practices’ (2010, 7.1), and her disappointment at a lack of such challenges is evident. On the contrary, the mpreg stories she analyses repeat very normative assumptions about pregnancy: the pregnant character is emotional and vulnerable, lacking bodily integrity, but ultimately the birth is achieved following a remarkably quick labour and the couple settle into ‘parenthood just like heterosexual couples’ (4-5; 3.4). As Åström notes, there is some mpreg that departs from this model, and the simple fact that the sex of pregnancy has been changed forces a certain amount of re-conceptualization (2.4; 7.1; see also Hayes and Ball 2010, 232). But the article forms a salient warning against easy judgments of radicalism.

No recent attempts have been made to put forward a universal theory of slash, and this is probably due to a tacit acknowledgement of its endless variation. Slash can be progressive or regressive, transgressive or traditional, pornographic, romantic or both (Driscoll 2006). The term covers relentlessly brutal tales of alienation and violence, and sweetly domestic vignettes. It can be homophobic or gay-positive, parodic or serious, and depict anything from handholding to gang rape. It is more productive, I think, to take a focused perspective on slash in a particular fandom, which in *Supernatural*'s case is rendered more unconventional by the factor of incest. From the perspective of fiction's non-relation to reality, I will consider how incest is constructed in the *Supernatural* fandom, where capital-R Romantic constructions encouraged by the text are tempered by sociological and Gothic perspectives. This is a clear example of statements of

different heritage interacting in a fictional space to prompt new thought. The choice of discursive formations and their relation to the text is more fully explained in the next chapter.

This project, then, offers a perspective on fanfic that affords precise attention to its social, cultural and technological situation, without losing focus on the specificity of what fiction is. The theoretical tools best suited to this are drawn from Foucauldian discourse theory, with attention to the influence of cultural and literary capitals recognised by Bourdieu. It does not attempt to account for 'slash' as a specific phenomenon, but as one of those discursive practices where, in the recombination of statements of varied provenance, assumptions may be revealed and alternative possibilities suggested. The next chapter lays out the exact process.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

Two research traditions inform the methodology: discourse analysis inspired by Foucault, and internet studies. This section outlines the contribution of each to my aim of establishing how discursive formations prominent in my fandom form and operate. I explain how I apply the Foucauldian principles of discourse as active, constructive, formative language and practices to the context of online fan fiction, informed by earlier Foucauldian studies of text and network analyses online. I note particularly a lack of methodical attention to the *reception* of statements in discourse, crucial to the hierarchization and regulation of fanfic, which this project addresses. Then I explain in more detail why I have chosen the specific discursive formations addressed in the main chapters. Next, in the spirit of critical responsibility, I situate myself autoethnographically with respect to this project (c.f. Hills 2002; Thomas 2002; Chin 2010), thus avoiding the criticism that Foucauldian theory tends towards a God's-eye-view of discourses and cultures, claiming analytical power to survey all power relations objectively (Derrida [1967] 2001; Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 100; 102-03; Habermas 1986, 106; Tomlinson 1993, 38; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009, 231). Finally, I explain the ethical protocols of the project.

## I. Discourse Analysis

There is no prescriptive Foucauldian methodology (Kendall and Wickham 1999, vii-viii; Carabine 2001, 267-68). Foucault considered his texts as tool boxes, from which useful parts could be taken or discarded as required (1975 interview, cited in Patton 1979, 115). Nonetheless, previous researchers have taken up these tools in ways which set some precedent for this project. Foucault's influence can be generalized or specific: on the general side, Critical Discourse Analysis takes him as one of its founding philosophers (see e.g., Fairclough 1993; 2003; Wetherell, Taylor and Yates 2001; Van Dijk 2001; Macdonald 2003; Matheson 2005). A problem here is that 'discourse' can be interpreted in terms so broad as to be unhelpful in forming a method: Macdonald locates her work as Foucauldian, and defines discourse very generally as 'a system of communicative practices that are integrally related to wider social and cultural practices, and that help to construct specific frameworks of thinking' (1). Fairclough, whose precedent is a useful one to me, links close textual analysis to relevant social structures, arguing that discourses can be 'invested' with ideologies even though they are not ideological in themselves (1993, 59-60; 67; 91). He seeks the sources of discourses in socially available genres, so that each discourse combines pieces of many others (1993, 65; 80; 105; 115-119). A newspaper article on a promising new drug might combine lexis from the discourses of religion (miracle, hope), science (jargon) and commerce (brand names, costs and benefits). This intertextuality and interdiscursivity creates ambivalence and potentially changes the discourse, as meanings associated with the source texts carry more or less powerfully into the new one (104-05). Fan fiction, I contend, can make use of more subjugated and less generally available,

epistemically approved statements, as it does not claim a direct link with reality. To clarify, I make no claim about the actual connection between texts that present themselves as ‘true’ and an extra- or pre-discursive world, only that in order to be comprehensible, such texts are obliged to utilize statements from more culturally established and readily available discourses to position themselves as addressing the real world. An editor’s column could not utilize the subjugated discourse of Medieval Christian mysticism to report her conversation with the Virgin Mary upon the previous evening as evidence for her political opinions.

The discourses Fairclough studies are established, and my project requires more specific tools for mapping the discursive formations I am finding. Further, I attend to bibliographical organization and reception—statements as power-operations that help shape discourse. Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) conception of discourse also includes social structures, but they understand the operations of discourse explicitly as a struggle to stabilize the meaning of signifiers. Hegemonic intervention can resolve discursive struggles by force (Laclau 1993), though no closures are total or final. These concepts do not apply well to the various and dispersed milieux of fan fiction. Fan fiction expands and varies the uses to which signifiers are put – within limits. Discourse analysis derived more specifically from Foucauldian concepts will be used to map those limits. I am, however, following both the CDA tradition and Laclau and Mouffe in my conception of discourses as various and problematically co-existent, rather than, as Foucault tended to imply, one vast epistemic discourse per historical period (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 13).

Others employ Foucault’s tools more specifically. The most famous ‘Foucauldian’ work is probably *Orientalism*, which argued that the powerful, cumulative, tight-knit discourse of the title produced an entire field of study for imperial Europe (Said [1978] 2003). Said shared



Foucault's perception of the constructive and organizational capacities of discourse, and a professed concern with exteriorities. He understood the 'enormously systematic discipline' by which the West has invaded, administrated and exploited the East as a discourse (3). However, Said's use of 'discourse' is primarily concerned with the formation of objects (Young 2001, 403): in this case the object of 'The Orient'. He neglects the means by which discourses authorize individuals, make concepts emerge, and make choices available (this is Young's helpful gloss on Foucault's 'formation of strategies': see Young *ibid*). Said has also been criticised for holding a monolithic view of power (Bhaba 1994; Mills 1991), and for an illogical fluctuation between a discursive perspective proper (concerned with exteriorities and the formative character of language) and a tendency to contrast representation with some external "reality" (Bhaba 1994, 72; Young 2001, 391). He maintains that 'Islam has been fundamentally mis-represented by the West', but on the same page, denies the possibility of a pre-linguistic truth distinct from representation (2003, 272, original emphasised, c.f. Young *ibid*). For Young, as for me, this contradiction has no place in a Foucault-inspired methodology: the aim is not to validate or invalidate truth-claims, but 'to establish the rules according to which [...] discursive events emerge' (Young 2001, 389). Said remains a strong influence in postcolonial work, but has been modified by Bhabha especially to account for the ambivalence and heterogeneity which Foucault himself understood to inhere in power. Bhabha draws attention to Foucault's 'repeatable materiality' of statements, the 'process by which statements from one institution can be transcribed in the discourse of another', where the change in context renders the statement different (22). In a project dealing with fiction that appropriates a canon, identifying statements which accumulate this materiality across various contexts is important (see Hodges 2011, and below pp. 88-89).

Closer to my subject matter, Miles (2002) conducts a Foucauldian ‘genealogy’ of Gothic fiction from 1750 to 1820. Genealogy in this sense is the technique of tracing discourses backwards to their unstable and fragmentary origins, thus unsettling assumptions certain cultures take for granted. Rejecting a psychoanalytic approach, Miles historicises the Gothic genre in terms of 18<sup>th</sup> century discourses such as ‘national origin’ and ‘the sublime’ (2002, 1-6) then conducts close intertextual readings in which those discourses are evident, focusing on particular codes and devices. He also, helpfully, links the varied discursive provenance of the Gothic to its characteristic fragmentation and disjunctions, for ‘what is normative in the one [discourse] unravels in the transgressive space of the other’ (200). For instance, a moment of ‘unveiling’ might be normative in an eighteenth-century discourse of sublimity, but problematically charged with eroticism upon entering the feminised Gothic (67). This aligns with my contention that fan fiction can (re)produce subjugated knowledges in specific contexts: what is normative in one space can be transgressive in another due to the varied derivations of fanwork, drawing statements across discursive boundaries. Consider that sibling incest is usually constructed heroically in Romantic discourse, but not in the broader contexts of fandom; whilst explicit male/male eroticism is constructed positively in fan spaces invested in slash, but omitted from the valorized Romantic discourse of heterosexual sibling incest (see Chapter 4). In some *Supernatural* fanfic, statements from each combine. This accords the Radford et al.’s contention that alternative archives combine ‘existing statements with other statements in new and unique ways’ that are ‘generative of knowledge’ (2012, 264), and thus reinvigorates Penley’s early understanding of fanwork as *bricolage* with transformative potential. Statements from one discourse combine with statements from another to highlight the absences and assumptions in both, and suggest new possibilities by their combination.

Miles lacks a systematic analysis of the reception, validation or rejection of the texts he studies. Therefore, his perception of discourse suffers theoretically: recall that a discourse is defined by its regularities and conditions of existence, and statements become significant through their support or alteration of those conditions. Sparing attention to the reception of texts makes it hard to see the regularities and boundaries of discourse formations in Miles's study; though in fairness, evidence of such phenomena is much easier to find for a project like my own. Where Miles does discuss critical reactions (176-91), these are not clearly linked to how the text's statements challenge or uphold a discursive formation.

Lack of attention to the reception of statements also weakens Said's argument (Young 2001, 389-90). Indeed, this is a significant gap in Foucault-inspired studies dealing with texts, that the present research addresses (note the lack in, for instance, Tomlinson 1993; Lupton 1995; Prior 1997; Greco 1998; Reekie 1998; Copeland 1999; Gamman 1999; Turner 2000; Jacobs 2000; Halperin 2002; Walker 2002; Fuentes Peres 2003; Tamboukou 2003; Archimedes 2005; Harwood 2006; Berglund 2008, Fejes 2008; Fogde 2008; Skålen et al. 2008; Solomon 2008; Kirchengast 2010; Mazher 2012; Kuchler and Linnér 2012; Moncrieff and Timimi 2013). The problem is not that these previous studies never acknowledge intertextuality or responses to statements, but that they lack a methodical and transparent way of addressing them and tend to treat them thinly: why is a particular critic quoted? Where did the author find that particular response? How popular is 'popular' or 'influential'? Compared to what? These questions must be addressed in order to see how a discursive formation takes the shape it does, and how it changes. Followers of Bourdieu have perhaps been more conscientious here: Sapiro especially argues that 'the positive or negative sanctions that a work receives can contribute to the

redefinition of the space of possibilities' (2012, 42); though again, lacking sociological data or unwarranted psychological speculation on fan fiction authors, I keep the focus of this insight on manifest discourse rather than the social persons who produce it. Readman draws attention to this limitation, but admits that in his own work sustained investigation into the reception of specific statements would be impractical (2010, 113-14). Porter and Hall's (1995) Foucauldian study of the creation of sexual knowledge in Britain utilizes library and publication records, letters and reviews wherever possible (e.g. 81-83; 162-64; 220), but ultimately the authors regret the lack of available evidence for the impact of the majority of their texts (6-7). In my work, however, I conduct systematic analysis of response and reception to statements in the form of further statements, enabling me to support arguments about boundaries and changes in discourse. Thomas has acknowledged the influence of real-time reviewing and feedback to the directions fic takes (2011b), and the section on internet studies (pp. 92-96) explains in technical terms how I address this.

One partial exception to this lack is Hodges' discursive study of the 'War on Terror' narrative (2011). Though not concerned with reception so much as repeatable materiality, Hodges traces the uptake of statements in the form of soundbites from the speeches of George W. Bush repeated in various media contexts, with or without attribution. He usefully invokes Derrida's 'iterability' and 'citationality' to describe how repetition of key phrases can solidify characterisations, and how quotation draws attention to the original context from which the text is taken (10). He also quotes Kristeva to remind us that repetition may take 'what is imitated (repeated) seriously, claiming and appropriating it without relativizing it', but may also introduce 'a signification opposed to that of the other's word' (86, quoting Kristeva 1980). I too seek

repetition and variation in altered contexts as I trace the impact of statements. However, Hodges is concerned with specific repeated soundbites, and whilst this is appropriate in the context of political media, Foucauldian statements in a body of fiction cannot be reduced to a particular arrangements of words. Moreover, despite Hodge's stated denial of such a binary (156-57), his actual analyses retain the sense of pitting actors who accept the 'narrative' against those who reject and consequently transform it.<sup>23</sup> This tendency is evident in the lexis of his subheadings: see 'establishing and reinforcing' versus 'challenging' (86; 99). Such oppositions may become rather blunt tools that obscure the complexity of discourse, which is why I find 'discursive formation' a more useful conception than Hodges's 'narrative'.

Jacobs (2000), in another Foucauldian study of Gothic discourse, provides both an instructive precedent in the archaeological study of text, and a clear illustration of how neglecting reception reduces its persuasiveness. Where Jacobs addresses contemporary critics (168), he tends like Miles to omit connection to discourse and statements. His bibliographical research is impressive and instructive. Careful quantitative and qualitative study of early modern archives, promotional material and library catalogues provides strong evidence for the discursive practices of early modern libraries. Yet the position and contribution of the reader is missing, and this limits the conclusions Jacobs can convincingly make. For instance, he writes:

By constructing, localizing and marking discursive genres, [early circulating] libraries implicitly – and perhaps inevitably – inflected their 'objective' display of available reading with effective judgements about the relative

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<sup>23</sup> This criticism applies to the body of the book, but in fairness, Hodges's conclusion goes beyond binarism with a subtle analysis of the new President Obama's resignification of terms like of 'war', 'struggle', and 'central front' (157-59). The concept of 'war' as a discursive formation open to alteration would have been enlightening at this point.

value, function and status of the books they offered [...] and hence with judgements about which classes of patrons ‘fitted’ each class of books (185).

He supports this by analysing the structural divisions of an important early library catalogue. But when he goes on to contend that Gothic play with genre and labelling ‘tempered the ways in which the “straight” promotion of labelling [...] played into the hands of critics’ attempts to link and target women, circulating libraries and generic writing/reading as causes of cultural degradation’ (227) the argument comes too close to speculation without demonstration of such ‘tempering’ in action.

In summary, then, I follow the Foucauldian tradition back to Said in seeking the regularities and boundaries of discursive formations, heeding Young’s warnings not to slide towards an implicit contrast of representation and “reality”. I follow Hodges’s example in attending to the repetition and variation of statements, and Jacobs in attention to structuring through bibliographic organization. Originally, however, I attend in a methodical way to the reception, affirmation and rejection of statements in discursive formations. As I coded fic, I kept qualitative and quantitative records of the amount and type of feedback each work received in different online contexts, including recommendations and insults. This data forms an integral part of the analysis. For, if as Andersen writes, the aim of Foucauldian discourse analysis is to ‘detect the rules that govern the way different statements come into being in discursive formations’ (Andersen 2003, 18; c.f. Tomlinson 1993, 37), it is necessary to ask how those rules come to be put in place, how and where their implicit power operates.

This method is best characterised as an archaeology. Archaeological analysis is concerned with the conditions of a discursive formation at a particular moment, though this may include ‘displacement over time’ (Andersen, 30), which is necessary in tracing reception. Genealogical criticism, the other tradition claiming inheritance from Foucault, is less applicable. Foucault stated that

‘archaeology’ would be the appropriate methodology of the analysis of local discursivities, and ‘genealogy’ would be the tactics whereby, on the basis of the descriptions of these local discursivities, the subjected knowledges which were thus released would be brought into play ([1976] 1980, 85).

Kendall and Wickham suggest that archaeology be seen as the explicit method, genealogy more of a strategy, a way of putting archaeology to work (31). Despite much overlap between the concepts (Neal 2006, 41), it is archaeology that ‘describes regularities of statements in a non-interpretative manner [...]; analyses the relation between one statement and other statements [and] [...] formulates rules for the repeatability of statements’ (Kendall and Wickham 1999, 33). Archaeology also ‘analyses the positions which are established between subjects in regard to statements’ (33), rather than seeking the interpretative principle of an author. There is some consensus that genealogy is broader, more historical and more concerned with subjectivity than archaeology. For instance, Leedham and Hendricks suggest that genealogists analyse ‘the web of power relations in which we [subjects] are involved’ (2006, 35), including discursive formations, to understand how we have come to exist as we do in the present. Or as Alvesson and Sköldbäck express it, archaeology ‘studies the forms of discourses and genealogy their (power-related) origins [here I think they should add, and future potentials - JMF]’ (2000, 224). This explains why Carabine (2001) calls her discourse analysis of unmarried motherhood a genealogy: she

seeks to show how historical discourse contributes to the construction of unmarried motherhood in the present. My work is better characterized as archaeology because it is a close study of specific local discursive formations that have existed for a relatively short period of time. I do, however, trace the descent of certain statements in a small-scale way, notably from canon to fanon, thus showing in genealogical moves the contingency of certain solidified regularities. I also draw attention to the possibilities and eruptions of subjected knowledges. I take precedent from internet studies in developing the concrete, pragmatic steps to do so.

## II. Internet Studies

Much research on internet text and communication takes the label ‘cyberethnographic’. The reference to culture in the ‘ethno’ morpheme exhibits its early impetus: to rebut fears that the internet would damage social ties through the medium’s inability to convey emotion or sustain “real” relationships (Walther 1992; Hine 2008, 259). Important works in this vein include Rheingold 1993; Watson 1997; Mackinnon 1997; Markham 1998; Pacagnella 1997; Hine 2000; and on fan community specifically Baym (1995; 1998; 2000) and Bury (2005). Most of the procedures are recognisable adaptations from traditional ethnography: participant observation, interviewing and surveying online and in person, focus groups, close linguistic analysis and coding procedures taken from quantitative discourse analysis (Baym 2000, 24-30; 219-30; Bury 18-30; 217-23). Baym notes that ethnographic work on fan audiences relies on shorter research



duration and smaller subject pools than ethnography typically demands (2000, 19). Though I am a full participant in *Supernatural* fandom, and in agreement with Hine that ‘being a participant in [discourse] creation allows for deeper understanding’ (2000, 23), my methodological deficiencies from the perspective of traditional ethnography are not problematic, as I make no claims to overarching description of a culture. I do not have sociological data on the backgrounds, aims and perspectives of the writers quoted, nor have I attempted to describe or explain what fandom is, who counts as a ‘fan’, or where. This sort of data is unneeded for a discursive study which declines to read authorial intention into text or posit text as symbolising or representing extra-discursive cultural phenomena.

Aycock and Buchignani (1995) took a Foucauldian genealogical approach in their study of events on a Usenet newsgroup, tracing both the continuity and discontinuity of related postings.<sup>24</sup> Rather than topics or objects, they found ‘broadly constrained chronological incoherence [in posts that] disperse themselves along tangentially related threads of discussion’ (200-01). Strategies of coherence – like citing past posts – could be undermined by the way Usenet technology mixed up posts and by cross-posting (205). Threads nominally on the same topic could be ‘genealogically coiled differently’ and ‘unwind at different rates’ (205). This genealogy showed the discourse in the process of object formation, but also revealed the fragility of the ideology on which the group was based (science as an objective practice). Their brief but dense article is a useful demonstration of how the Foucauldian concept of fragmentary origins resulting in apparent coherence can be visibly demonstrated online, structured partly by code and its flaws.

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<sup>24</sup> This discourse too had not existed long when the researchers approached it, but the surface appearance of direct temporal linkage in a bulletin board perhaps explains their genealogical orientation.

Other online research is more strictly language-focused and employs quite traditional linguistic analysis (Danet 2001; Crystal 2001; Myers 2010). Baym (2000) and Bury (2005) do the same where appropriate, taking advantage of the internet's archival properties as 'ultimate field recorder' (Stone 1995, 243). Because I am studying fiction, I employ close analysis of literary and linguistic devices, including forms of expression unique to computer-mediated communication (c.f. Baym 1998, 52-54). These include emoticons and special vocabulary (c.f. Danet 2001; Crystal 2001). I also follow Baym and Aycock and Buchignani in attending to the way contexts of participation and technological infrastructures affect meanings online (1998, 40-45). These ideas are similar to Herring's proposals for computer mediated discourse analysis, which in its search for patterned regularities in CMC, includes attention to 'technological' as well as 'situational variables': the former include factors like the channel of communication and degree of synchronicity, the latter 'setting' and 'purpose' (2004, 67). Likewise, Taylor (2004) drawing on Lessig (1999) demonstrates that the architectural codes of multiuser environments are a shaping factor of online experience, and Su explores how technological and social codes combine to help form a new linguistic style amongst Taiwanese internet users (2004). For my work, the technological and social codes that govern fan fiction archives and community spaces must be considered as shaping factors of discourse (see also Rebaza 2008; Schäfer 2011; Jwa 2012).

Though neither a discursive nor linguistic study (c.f. 9, 3n), Schultz's (2011) work provides some precedent in considering how the technological structures of LiveJournal and Fanfiction.net structure participation differently. She posits these sites as 'sponsors of literacy' after Brandt (1998; 2001), which 'recruit, enable, regulate, and suppress' literacy as they position

participants (Schultz ix): an argument very compatible with Foucauldian theory. Shultz is concerned with what university instructors of composition can learn from college students' extracurricular practices, and pays little attention to the actual fic in favour of analysing the positioning of writers and readers.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless she makes several useful observations, including how Fanfiction.net's posting rules 'position FFN as a site that shares some of the same standards as the dominant culture' regarding good writing, such as correctness in spelling and grammar (Shultz, 84). She also explores the ways profile and homepage templates shape, to some extent, the presentation of authors and beta-readers, in conjunction with the users' own input (90- 116; 121-36); and observes that LiveJournal encourages more interactivity and more in-depth criticism of fic (86), as the Fanfiction.net review page does not allow the two-way conversations LiveJournal's comment feature does (155-58). These are good examples of how techno/social codes work to structure discourse, though Shultz underestimates how the shared codes of specific fandoms and fandom in general operate across different sites to form a websphere, though a varied one. Further, at several points Shultz displays a lack of familiarity with fan practice that undermines her perceptions of regulation. For instance, she posits without context that slash is 'controversial' (54; 68-69; 100), which is hardly the case everywhere, and that writing OOC (out-of character) is a 'cardinal sin' (2; 123), whereas crack and parody can depend on it.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, internet research and Foucauldian theory/method are both compatible with the techniques of network analysis, which seek to chart and analyse connections between nodes. For

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<sup>25</sup> Her guiding theorist Brandt, unsurprisingly, cites Bourdieu as a strong influence (Brandt 1998, 184, 2n).

<sup>26</sup> 'Crack', appearing in all fandoms, is outrageous and/or surreal humour, often featuring bizarre adventures, semi-coherent plots, transformations, talking objects and/or animals, and a variety of in-jokes. The name is derived from the double implication that it is addictive, and that it makes sense when one is high (c.f. *Supernatural* Wiki 2011a, 'Crack'. Dates for this site are given for last page updates).

instance, Beaulieu's study of hyperlinks draws attention to their symbolism as well as functionality (2005, 183). A link however is not always an endorsement: it could be an invitation to mockery or disapproval. Rebaza suggests that LiveJournal's hyperlinking of fan friends makes connections a matter of social capital (2010, 108). In combination with the ethnographic practice of participant observation and literary/linguistic tools of analysis, I analyse the use of links in the fan fiction network, noting points of high or low centralization (Park and Thelwall 2003) as an indicator of impact in a discursive formation. It should be noted that impact will not necessarily equal credibility: links are very often recommendations, but high centralization can also occur around statements deemed risible or offensive, indicating a discursive boundary. Impact is thus analysed qualitatively as well as quantitatively.

### III. Sampling and Process

I locate this work as Foucauldian archaeology in an online context. I am attempting first to identify statements in the discursive formations 'Race', 'The Author', and 'Incest' within *Supernatural* fan fiction; and then, working outwards, the conditions of the formation to which the statement belongs. Between 28/02/12 and 19/07/13, when the formations were exhausted, I kept a research diary dating all searches and findings: formations change, after all, and archaeology can only hope to describe them at a certain point in time. I began seeking material in the Fanfiction.net category for *Supernatural*, followed by the LiveJournal communities

*Supernatural* Story Finders and Supernaturalfic (see figures 1-3), because these are the points of highest centralization.<sup>27</sup> But as Hine notes, technologies themselves are not research sites (2005, 111; c.f. Kennedy and Hills 2009, 171): there are other fic communities on LiveJournal, and the Archive of Our Own (hereafter A03) hosts a respectable amount of *Supernatural* fan fiction. There is much cross-posting between the sites. *Supernatural* fan fiction is best conceived of as a ‘websphere’: a set of ‘dynamically defined digital resources spanning multiple sites’ requiring a process of ‘dynamic bounding’ to analyse (Schneider and Foot 2005, 158; 161-63). In other words, the ‘site’ is not defined at the outset but ‘explored through the course’ of the work (Hine 2000, 64).

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<sup>27</sup> *Supernatural* Story Finders is a moderated community wherein posters request links to a specific story they cannot locate, or ask for any stories fitting particular requirements. As of 23/02/12, it contained 28,200 entries, the vast majority of which contain at least one link directly to a story, and most of which contain several. ‘Supernaturalfic’ is a moderated central archive for authors to post headers, summaries and links to their stories. As of 23/02/12 it contained 28,664 entries. FanFiction.net’s *Supernatural* category contained 46,630 fics as of the same date and the A03’s 15,201. There is, of course, some overlap.

FanFiction.Net - unleash your imagination mobile edition Sign In · Sign Up ·

Home Just In Communities Forums Beta Readers Search Help

TV Shows » Supernatural stories  Supernatural Crossovers (4,183) Communities (272) Forums (108) Feed

Sort: Update Date ▾ Genre: All ▾ Rated: K -> T ▾ Language ▾ Length: All ▾ All Characters (A) ▾ All Characters (B) ▾ Status: All ▾ Go

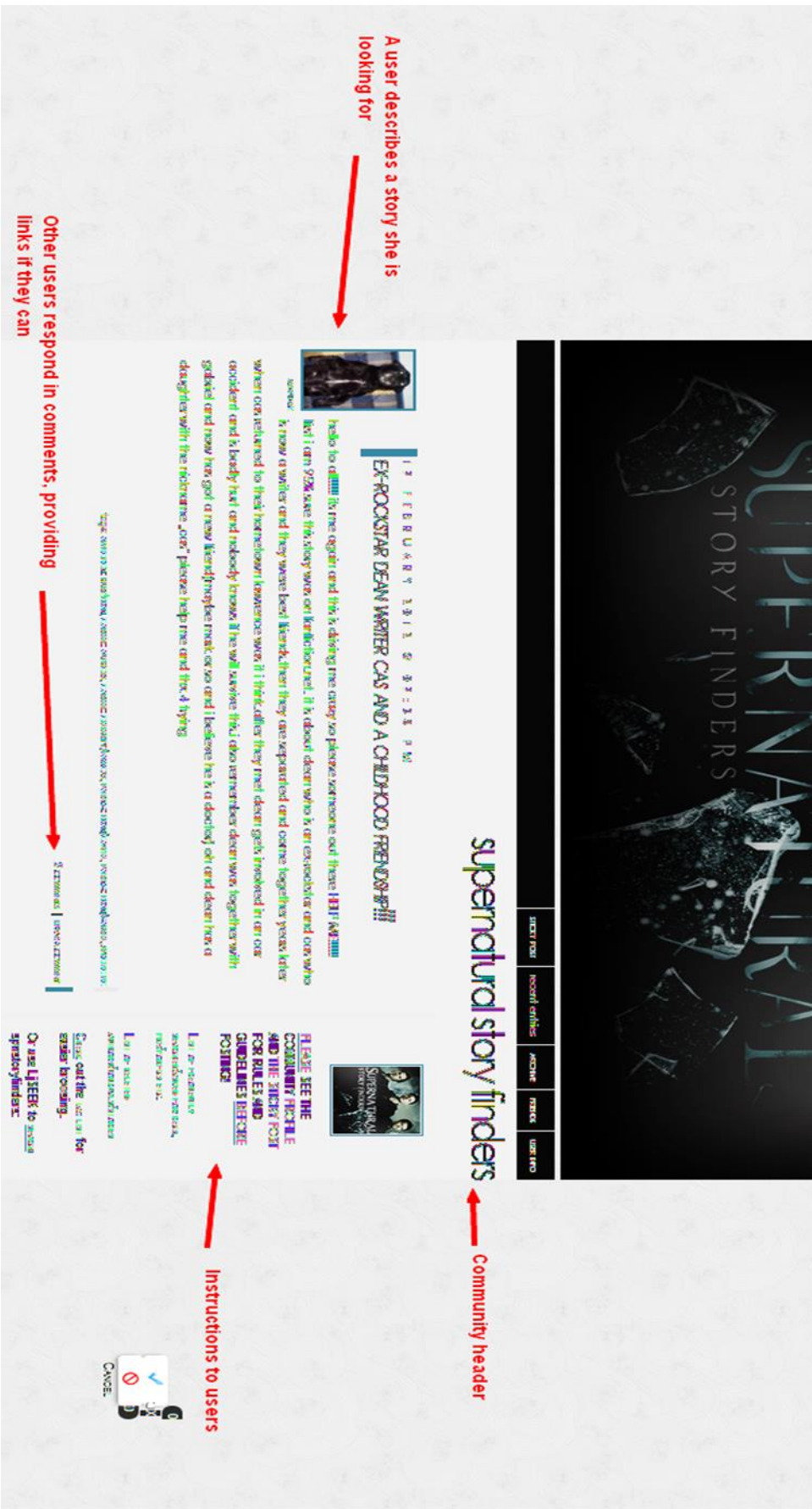
46,654 found: Page 1 2 3 4 11 .. 1867 Next »

[link back to other categories](#) [story filters](#)

- [1. SUPERNATURAL: Superbunch » by Littleoshi reviews](#)  
John lleva a casa a sus hijos de Adam y Eve, tras la muerte de su madre. Los Winchester pasaran de ser 3 a ser 5. Y todos tendrán que adaptarse, contiene spanking /algadas de memores, sino te gusta, no lees.  
Rated: K - Spanish - Family - Chapters: 29 - Words: 63,806 - Reviews: 38 - Updated: 2-23-12 - Published: 1-15-12
- [2. The Road So Far by Waiting To Get Out Of Here](#)  
Twenty six little disconnected stories, mostly centered around Dean, Sam, and Cas, with prompts starting with every letter of the alphabet. No slash, but yes swearing and a fair dose of fluff. Please read and I love reviews! No hint...  
Rated: T - English - Family/Friend/Comfort - Chapters: 1 - Words: 692 - Published: 2-23-12
- [3. You kept it by catlyn](#) [titles link to stories](#)  
Dean x fem!Castiel sort of... A strange girl turns up on the Winchester's doorstep. But maybe she's not as much of a stranger as she seems. Cite fic that explores what would have happened if Cas returned in another vessel.  
Rated: K - English - Hurt/Comfort/Friendship - Chapters: 1 - Words: 4,182 - Published: 2-23-12 - Dean W. & Castiel - Complete
- [4. Lift the Veil » by Panda reviews](#)  
The Heavenly Father and the Holy Mother keep watch as their children set loose the Apocalypse. Latest chapter: Castiel falls to earth, saves the day, and begins to plan his revenge.  
Rated: T - English - Family/Drama - Chapters: 17 - Words: 49,219 - Reviews: 16 - Updated: 2-23-12 - Published: 10-19-11 - Sam W. & Castiel [stats and filter categories](#)
- [5. The Book of Daniel » by Just Judy](#) [links to author profiles](#)  
Season 7 post "Hello Cruel World." What happens to Castiel after being overpowered by the Leviathan, seen through the eyes of a young boy's affair.  
Rated: T - English - Supernatural/Drama - Chapters: 4 - Words: 3,950 - Published: 2-23-12 - Castiel & Dean W. [continues below](#)
- [6. The Secrets Out » by 2people reviews](#)  
Written by Tia of 2people. All Bobby gets a call from Dean saying he needs to be picked up from the hospital, but when he goes to help the man he always thought of as a son what does he find? MURDER! This is not slash! Fatherly Bobby!  
Rated: T - English - Hurt/Comfort/Family - Chapters: 18 - Words: 29,193 - Reviews: 210 - Updated: 2-23-12 - Published: 4-10-11 - Dean W. & Bobby S.
- [7. Confession by Keitheprince](#)  
It's a late upload for a v-day story. Sam goes on a hunt to burn off his frustration from Castiel ignoring his calls continuously, during his hunt the Angel decides to make a visit, but Sam's just not in the mood to deal with him. -One shot, cussies-  
Rated: T - English - Romance - Chapters: 1 - Words: 1,734 - Published: 2-23-12 - Castiel & Dean W. - Complete

Figure 1: the Fanfiction.net category for *Supernatural*.

Figure 2: the LiveJournal community *Supernatural* Story Finders.



supernatural story finders

Community header

A user describes a story she is looking for

Other users respond in comments, providing links if they can

Instructions to users

**Supernaturalfic - Fic/Art/Vids**

Please read comm info before posting

[Previous 10](#)


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Mar. 1st, 2012


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Beer, Pie, And The Fine Art Of Gungan Killing, [PG], Sam, Dean

**Title:** Beer, Pie, And The Fine Art Of Gungan Killing  
**Author:** Still Waters  
**Rating:** PG  
**Characters:** Sam, Dean  
**Genre:** Gen  
**Length:** 2483  
**Disclaimer:** I do not own Supernatural. Just playing, with love and respect to those who brought these characters to life.  
**Summary:** After a hunt, a bruised Sam and a wired Dean unwind with a Star Wars marathon.....and some serious discussion on how to gank one Jar Jar Binks.



[stillwaters01](#)



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[Profile](#)

**MARCH 2012**

| S  | M  | T  | W  | T        | F  | S  |
|----|----|----|----|----------|----|----|
|    |    |    |    | <u>1</u> | 2  | 3  |
| 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8        | 9  | 10 |
| 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15       | 16 | 17 |
| 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22       | 23 | 24 |
| 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29       | 30 | 31 |

**REFERENCES**

[Archived Memories by Category](#)

-- WRITERS RESOURCES --

[Arduinna's Chrestomathy](#)

**Link** → [Beer, Pie, And The Fine Art Of Gungan Killing](#)

**Figure 3: The LiveJournal Community Supernaturalfic. Reproduced by permission of the poster. The entry follows the specified template for story postings: Title; Author; Rating; Characters/Pairing (compulsory); Warning; Spoilers; Wordcount; Note; Summary (optional).**

From points of centralization I moved outwards to other sites and pages, and also followed links to any relevant fics connected to those I had found. These methods led me to lesser-known sites and archives forming statements at the peripheries of discursive formations, whose contribution is shaped in part by their niche context. Each site has searching tools, which made finding fic



related to my discourse formations easier (c.f. Lindgren Leavenworth and Isaksson, 2013).

LiveJournal and A03 rely largely on tags, whilst Fanfiction.net has genre and character filters (see figures 4, 5 and 1 respectively) as well as a keyword search. LiveJournal also has a function called 'memories', allowing users to affix keywords to entries. I pursued all the links from the tagged, 'memoried' or filtered material until that search was exhausted. Then I moved on to the next search.

|                              |                         |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| CHARACTER: ELLEN             | GENRE: EPISODE AU       |
| CHARACTER: GABRIEL/TRICKSTER | GENRE: EPISODE CODA     |
| CHARACTER: GOD               | GENRE: FAIRY TALES      |
| CHARACTER: GORDON WALKER     | GENRE: FANTASY          |
| CHARACTER: IMPALA            | GENRE: FEMSLASH         |
| CHARACTER: JESSICA           | GENRE: FIRST TIME       |
| CHARACTER: JIMMY             | GENRE: FOOD             |
| CHARACTER: JO                | GENRE: FUTURE!FIC       |
| CHARACTER: JOHN              | GENRE: GEN - NO PAIRING |
| CHARACTER: JOSHUA            | GENRE: GHOST!FIC        |
|                              | GENRE: GHOSTFACES       |
|                              | GENRE: HAPPY FIC        |
|                              | GENRE: HET              |
|                              | GENRE: HIGH SCHOOL      |
|                              | GENRE: HISTORICAL       |
| STORY LENGTH: EPIC           |                         |
| STORY LENGTH: LONG           |                         |
| STORY LENGTH: SHORT          |                         |

Figure 4: a small sample of the numerous tags at *Supernatural* Story Finders.

**See No Evil** by Susangel date of post → 20 Feb 2012

**Supernatural** tags

**Author Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings**, Jessica Moore/Sam Winchester, Castiel/Dean Winchester, John Winchester/Mary Winchester, Castiel/Lucifer (Supernatural), Castiel, Dean Winchester, Jimmy Novak, Gabriel (Supernatural), Sam Winchester, Jessica Moore, John Winchester, Mary Winchester, Lucifer (Supernatural), Blindness, Musicians, Piano, Hurt/Comfort, Hurt Castiel, Angst, Humor, Fluff, Protectiveness, Alternate Universe, All Human, Abusive Relationship, Past Relationship(s) ↑ more entries above and below: same format

Human AU, Dean's life is about as normal as can be, he has his job and his brother and is perfectly happy. Then Cas, a blind pianist, enters his life and everything gets turned upside down. Co-written with Zeppx.

Words: 15,972 Chapters: 2/13 Comments: 2 Kudos: 12 Bookmarks: 2 Hits: 259

**Figure 5: A variously tagged entry on A03. Clicking on one of the tags will produce a chronological list of fics with the same tag. Clicking on the title takes one to the story.**

Each time I found a relevant fic, I coded it for discursive regularities by close reading. I noted whenever a statement contributed to an emerging regularity, or transformed or subverted one. No computer program has the necessary understanding of context and semantics to automate the process (c.f. Crystal, 210-16; Deacon 2007; Blank 2008, 547). Explaining the main features of leading Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) packages, Schönfelder reiterates that they still ‘do not perform qualitative analysis, but [...] provide a variety of tools to support it’ (2011, 3). The core tools assist in coding (5.5.1). But fiction is sufficiently allusive and unpredictable that I would still have to close-read large bodies of text, because I would not know what kind of statement would shore up or change a discursive formation until I found it. Having viewed instructional videos for the latest versions of NVivo, Atlas:ti and MAXQDA at their respective websites, it seems the only advantages they would afford me are organizational and tagging functions, which I can do sufficiently in MS Office programs.

Though keywords can be a useful means of locating material for analysis if supplemented with other search methods, I would not depend on keyword-searching as a means of analysis itself.

As Willig notes,

Both explicit and implicit references need to be included. The fact that a text does not contain a direct reference to the discursive object can tell us a lot about the way in which the object is constructed (2001, 109).

This was particularly important in studying the incest formation. As I read, I considered how significant statements enacted and affected the regularities which comprised the discursive formations. Where applicable, I theorized the most consistent regularities as governing statements, for as Young observes, there is a hierarchy of importance within the regularities of a discourse. The governing statements are the fundamental core of a discourse, and various options will be developed at the peripheries, some of which may contradict each other (2001, 405).

Foucault compared governing statements to the roots of a tree, opening up and demarcating the most general domain of possibilities for other statements, analogous to branches (1972, 147-48).

For instance, if I were to read 100 examples of fiction about reproduction available at mainstream bookshops, I might find a governing statement like 'reproduction is achieved by penetrative intercourse between a man and a woman at the time of the woman's fertility' as a condition of the discursive formation 'reproduction', but many varied statements constructing 'reproduction' at the peripheries. The source text *Supernatural* is one obvious source of governing statements, for the fic I study would not exist without it, but these consistent regularities could also have their sources in broader culture (c.f. Fairclough above, also Willig 2001, 110). Carabine writes that 'discourses "hook" into normative ideas' from broader society as shortcuts to complex meaning (2001, 269). It would more precise to say that statements in

particular discourses hook into elements of broader, normative discourses circulating in larger social contexts.

Next, in order to claim that any particular statement is ‘transformative’, I will need evidence of its impact on a discourse. As noted above, this is where many Foucauldian studies lapse. An exception is Mills’s (1993) study of women’s travel writing during the British Empire. She does refer to specific critical responses, notably disbelief, and points out their function in defining/revealing the boundaries of discourses such as womanhood (126). But the context of my work allows a more sustained and comparative study of reception and discursive impact, based on the number and content of reviews a work receives, number of recommendations, and other responses. I established versions of what network analysts call ‘ego networks’ (Beaulieu 2005, 186) for each fic by searching for the title and/or author in quotation marks, always remembering that the context of a connection bears on its importance in a network (Park and Thelwall 2003).<sup>28</sup> This part of the process has an unavoidable margin of error: occasionally, where both the title and username were very common words, I had to enclose “[title] by [author]” in quotation marks, and thus may have missed some references. A title-and-author reference, whether a recommendation or a negative comment, almost always takes the form of a hyperlink. I began these searches with Google, as it is the world’s most-used search engine, then repeated them on Yahoo and Bing, the world’s second-and-third most used search engines respectively. After these

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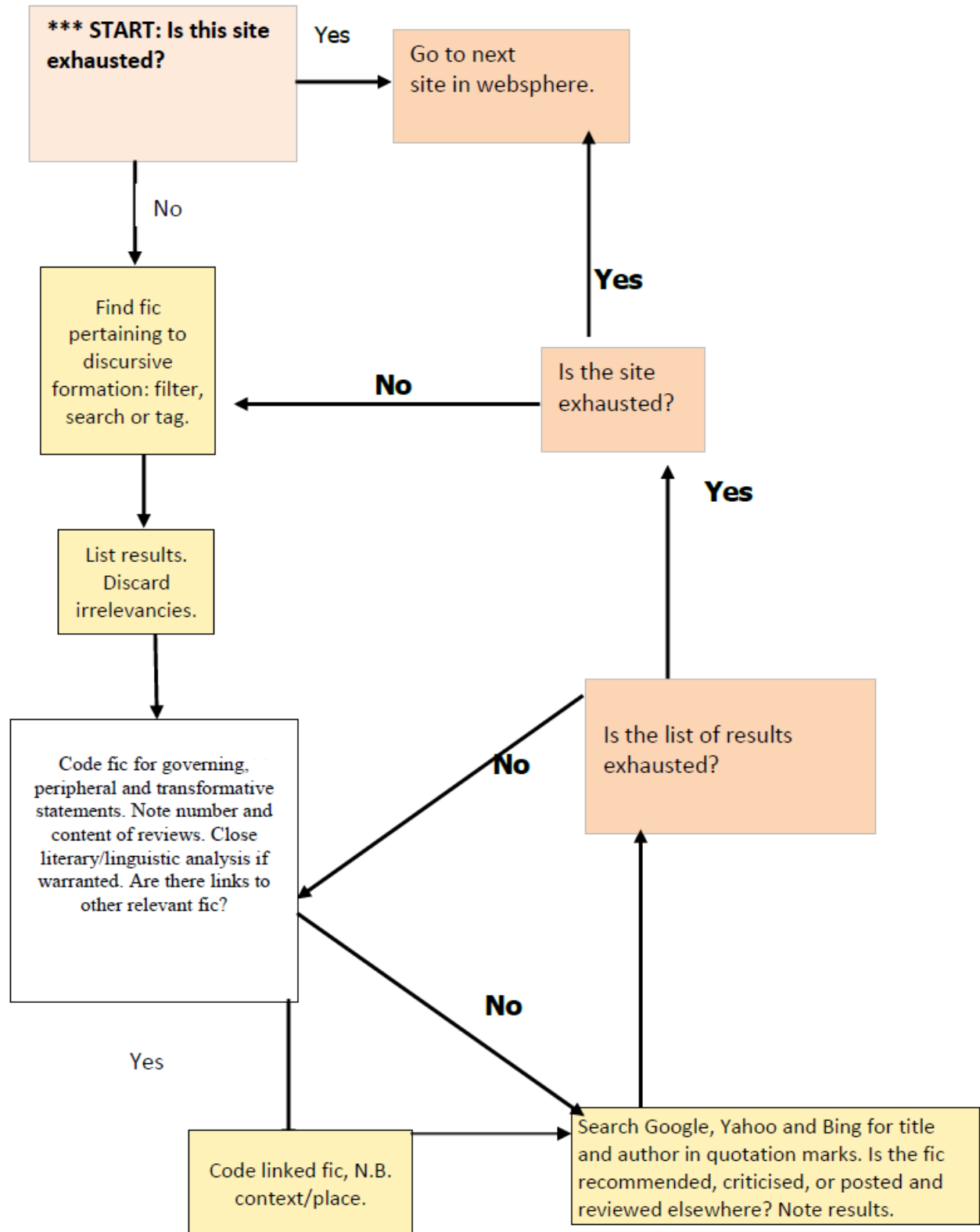
<sup>28</sup> ‘Version of’ because I am not aiming for total knowledge: see p. 108.

the market share in search engines drops dramatically, so it is unlikely that further engines would yield more relevant data.<sup>29</sup> Figure 6 presents the process as a flowchart.

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<sup>29</sup> Search engine data correct as of 29/12/11 (Experian Hitwise 2011). The shares are 61.71% (Google), 16.26% (Yahoo) and 15.06% (Bing). After this usage shares drop to 3.93% (Ask). These figures are based on volume of searches. Measured by visits, Bing and Yahoo exchange places, but the top three sites are the same.

Figure 6: methodology.



That leads me to the issue of comprehensiveness. To engage a reflexive lens that Foucauldian research can be criticised for lacking, if technology and contexts shape the discourse studied, so do they shape this research. Firstly, I am only able to read fics written in English. The majority are: for example, of the 58,669 available on Fanfiction.net as of 24/02/12, 46,656 were English language (79.5%). Secondly, just as Hine notes that her virtual ethnography is ‘shaped by the available technology and [her] understandings of it’ (2000, 81), so is my archaeology. According to the search methods above, I attempted to catalogue every relevant fic, at least for statistical purposes, in the more centralized archives during the periods of the study. However, whilst I am computer literate, I am certainly not an expert in IT, and where on some peripheral sites I have had to resort to Google insite search, I am less certain of its comprehensiveness. It is possible that a researcher capable of designing his or her own search programmes would present a different project.

Even given those constraints, I am dealing with a vast amount of material. Some fics will warrant close analysis, others mere inclusion in statistics. I take note of highly influential fics - those with the most reviews, most references and links - for their impact on discourse. Some are chosen for analysis for that reason. But I also consider texts that are otherwise illustrative of the discursive formation. Either they are paradigmatic, exhibiting discursive regularities clearly, or they are critical cases: texts that most visibly alter or challenge those regularities (the criteria are adapted from Flyvbjerg 2006). These latter are the texts that seem most likely to disprove hypotheses I have formed about the governing statements of a discourse: if the hypothesis survives the limit case, I will have strong evidence for a governing statement. If it does not, I will have evidence of



a change in discourse altering a previous regularity. As Jäger and Maier (2009) advise, I pay particular attention to discursive limits, or peripheries as Young might say, seeking techniques for extending those limits and narrowing them down. Where fic contributes statements that alter boundaries, there may be special techniques necessary to render the statement acceptable or intelligible, to produce a relation to sameness and regularity as well as difference and change.

#### IV. The Discursive Formations

The discursive formations, which are ‘Race’, ‘Incest’, and ‘The Author’, are chosen for reasons linked to both Foucauldian theory and the source text, though they also grew from my insider’s perspective of what formations would make fruitful research material (c.f. Hodkinson 2005, 143). I was academically aware that ‘scholarship on fandom has an immense gap when it comes to dealing with race’ (Gatson and Reid 2012, 4.12), and as a non-White fan of *Supernatural* educated in postcolonial studies, the problematic treatment/erasure of race in the text has been evident to me since I started watching in 2007 (c.f. Alaya Dawn Johnson, 2009). *Supernatural* is a postmodern text whose play with genre is one of its main appeals, but as the name suggests, it draws heavily on horror tropes as well Gothic discourses of race, gender and class (c.f. Wright 2008, 1). With its premise of a dead mother and dictatorial father looming over the ghost-and-demon hunting exploits of two compromised second-generation heroes, violently forced from their family home and unwillingly appropriated to the greater family drama of the apocalypse,

*Supernatural* is self-consciously overloaded with Gothic tropes. As Fiedler puts it, in the Gothic aesthetic, ‘nothing succeeds like excess’ (1970, 126).

Discourse-orientated work in media and literary studies has demonstrated the complicity of horror and Gothicism with racial constructions, and thus the perpetuation of racial inequalities, which psychoanalytic work tends to mask (Fiedler 1970; Brantlinger 1988; Halberstam 1995; Malchow 1996; Goddu 1999; Carroll 2000; Edwards 2003; Townshend 2007). Townshend’s (2007) argument is that the apparently neat fit between Gothicism and psychoanalysis can itself be deconstructed from a Foucauldian perspective: it is not that Gothic fiction reveals some pre-linguistic subject, but Gothic discourse, like psychoanalysis, contributes to the discursive formation of the modern ‘subject’. William Patrick Day posited Gothicism and psychoanalysis as ‘cousins’, both ‘responses to the problems of selfhood and identity, sexuality and pleasure, fear and anxiety, as they manifest themselves in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’ (1985, 6; see also Watt 1986). Relatedly, DeLamotte argues that the maturation of Gothic fiction in the eighteenth-to-nineteenth century, with its anxiety to position a Self distinct from a dark Other, participated in the discursive construction of race theory (2004).

As Fiedler demonstrated, the Gothic in an American context addresses ‘special guilts’ attendant on the formation of the new country (143), including very prominently slavery. Indeed, Fiedler believed that ‘the proper subject for American Gothic is the black man’ (368). Given that *Supernatural* now stands at more than eight seasons and the amount of fanfic is uncountable, I have chosen the figure of the Black secondary character Gordon Walker as an appropriate and manageable point of focus for my discussion of the race formation. For not only is the Black man a figure of critical importance in Gothic and horror generally (c.f. Carroll 2000), but the

character of Gordon resonates uncannily with the specific arguments of Toni Morrison concerning Black characters in American fiction (1992; c.f. Wright 2008, 26). Morrison argued that Black characters, rather than being portrayed as humans in their own right, essentially exist as a foil for the construction of the White protagonist, as that element of ‘darkness’ that that must be suppressed in the production of the full, White, human.

Like most TV drama, *Supernatural* is about straight White men. Women, Queer characters and non-White people exist, have sympathetic and three-dimensional characters, and play positive roles in the narrative; but the essential stuff of the epic – the history, the narrative cruxes, the crucial turning points, the projected outcomes - concern the actions, characters and decisions of a small group of conventionally attractive White men. These are the leads, the brothers Sam and Dean Winchester, and to a lesser extent the rebel angel Castiel (who inhabits a White male body for the vast majority of his screen time).

What do I mean by White? As Dyer explained, this complex and paradoxical descriptor refers both to hue and symbolism (1997, especially 46-70). Invaluably, Dyer unpacks Whiteness both as *marker* and the *state of unmarkedness*, whose primary power is its invisibility. Non-White people are racially marked, but Whites are just people, whose interests are ‘human’ interests as opposed to raced ones. That the main characters of *Supernatural* are White is in some ways necessary to the plot: the series depends on a never-ending succession of ‘passing’ on behalf of the characters, who assume different roles in different episodes, convincing and gaining the trust of outsiders. This would be far more difficult were they ‘marked’ as other than White (Dark Agenda 2010). Like Dyer, I want to distinguish between White as a symbolic (non)property and white as the gradating absence of pigmentation, so I use the upper and lower case respectively.

The main cast of *Supernatural* are well within the flexible borders of the capitalized descriptor, though none embody Dyer's 'extreme whiteness' (222-23): that imaginary snow-Whiteness that leaves ordinary White people to just be people. Jared Padalecki (Sam Winchester) is of Polish heritage, and whilst actually the least white main character in terms of colour, has the kind of lean height and sharp features that used to be called 'Anglo-Teutonic' and directly contrasted to Othered 'races' (see Dyer 52-53). Jensen Ackles (Dean Winchester) is of Celtic descent, and has pale skin and green eyes. Despite his name and occasional Tweets in Russian, Misha "Collins" Krushnic (Castiel) claims not to know his ethnic origin (2008 interview), but the only way he could be any whiter is if he were blond, having bright blue eyes and very pale skin.

Gordon Walker, portrayed by Sterling K. Brown, is a Black vampire hunter, well-meaning tragic villain, temporary father and dark double to the Winchesters. He was introduced in Season Two and killed in Three. He initially befriends Dean, who is grieving the loss of his father, and being confronted with the moral conundrum of a vampire coven which has sworn off drinking human blood, is reassured by Gordon's uncompromising ethics. If something is supernatural, Gordon kills it, and vampires happen to be his speciality. Dean first agrees, but changes his mind over the course of the episode, coming to see that the White, female vampire Lenore (*Buffy's* Amber Benson) is really in need of help. Gordon's narrative function is to help construct Dean, who is finally free from his overpowering father. Exactly as Morrison recognized, savagery is the contrasting background of the White man's character formation (45). It is his dark potential that he must control in order to become a "real" modern man. Morrison asked that we consider how Black characters 'limn out and enforce the invention and implications of whiteness' (52), and there is much dense visual imagery in the Gordon episodes that will be further analysed in the

race chapter. I pursue the multiple ways that Gordon and his episodes have been used in fan fiction, beginning with a close analysis of his narrative arc and investigating what has been taken up as a grounding statement, what transformed, what rejected.

If race is the sociological theme of American Gothic, as Fiedler contends, sibling incest is its erotic one (483). Even before the metatextual introduction of slash, *Supernatural* outwardly toyed with suggesting an incestuous relationship between the brothers (Cox 2006; Tosenberger 2008). As if the camera cuts associated with sexual tension, obsessive, continuous self-sacrifice and intense dialogue were not enough, two of the shows' head writers have described it as 'the epic love story of Sam and Dean' (Sera Gamble, quoted in Borsellino 2006; Kripke 2010). Outsider-characters in the series frequently mistake the brothers for a couple, and in the 100<sup>th</sup> episode, the angel Zachariah declared in apt terms what slashers knew all along: 'Sam and Dean are psychotically, irrationally, *erotically co-dependent* on each other' (5.18, 'Point of No Return': a significant episode title). The fannish pun for the brothers' relationship is 'Wincest': a portmanteau of 'Winchester' and 'incest' with a play on the morpheme 'win' as denoting something excellent.

Wincest comes in all fanfic genres, from tragedy to crack. But as Flegel and Roth have noted, it often finds powerful expression in narratives of self-annihilation, renunciation of the world and sociality, and (in the cardinal sin of incest against capitalism) of productivity. Flegel and Roth relate the division between this kind of slash and that which follows a heteronormative model to conflicting queer agendas within the gay rights movement: the first, an assimilationist model of gay experience arguing for equal treatment of gay and heterosexual couples, emphasizing the similarity of the relationships; the second, a model of radical difference which 'Edelman

identifies as “*sinthomosexuality*” - an identity that “finds its value not in a good susceptible to generalization, but only in the stubborn particularity that voids every notion of a general good” (4.6). This is thought from outside the epistemological boundaries of the dominant culture. The challenge of this type of story is to ‘value as defined by the social, and thus [...] the very value of the social itself’ (Edelman, 2004, 6). Some of the most respected work in the fandom, such as Flegel and Roth cite, takes up the apocalyptic theme of the source text to position Sam/Dean at the literal end of the world, a perfect and perfectly destructive union possible only after right and wrong, good and bad have collapsed, and we have been “absolved of mortality” (2.10, quoted from ‘Drvsilla’ 2009).

Yet thought from outside the dominant episteme is not thought from nowhere (see pp. 30-32 above). The fic I have just been describing does belong to a discourse, one that is subjected knowledge in our culture but highly recognizable to students of literary history: it is capital-R Romanticism (c.f. Tosenberger 2008, 5.9), understandable in terms of the eroticized anti-humanism and anti-rationality of institutionally sanctioned writers like Blake, Byron, Keats, Shelley, and their descendants in the form of poets such as Ginsburg, whose *Howl* has been dissected to provide subtitles of a long Sam/Dean series, including ‘Trembling Before the Machinery of Other Skeletons’, ‘Burning for the Ancient Heavenly Connection’, and ‘Listening to the Crack of Doom on the Hydrogen Jukebox’ (PaxLux 2009). However, I have found that *Supernatural* fan fiction also constructs incest negatively, with statements from the discourses of Gothic horror, as sexual titillation, and a sociological discourse following Westermarck. Some of the statements it inherits from broader culture are more conservative than canon’s construction. The discursive formation of incest raises important and difficult questions of sexual ethics in a

(neo)Liberal era, in contexts where sexual practice is no longer outlawed or tabooed on religious grounds. The constructions of Race and incest, traditionally depicted as properties of the Other, reveal the paradox at the heart of this thesis: fanfic legitimates these properties to an extent, but does so via the cultural capital of the straight White male.

This paradox is most literal in the final discursive formation addressed, that of ‘The Author’.

Most cult media texts and fandoms have an author-figure, constructed textually; in official paratexts; and through fan discourse. This figure is often analysed in Foucauldian terms as an ‘Author-function’, a discursively-constructed symbol through which a large amount of complex, collaborative text can be interpreted and organized (Jenkins 1995; Hills 2002; 2010a; Wexelblat 2002; Gray 2010; Kompare 2011; Scott 2011). The cult TV author, a modification of the *auteur*-directors of mid-twentieth century film theory, also serves to construct the cult text as ‘quality’ TV: authored, organized and purposeful, serving to fulfil the originating vision of a single creator/writer/director (Hills 2002, 133; 2004, 516; Kompare 2011, 101; Angelini and Booy 2010, 26). In the case of *Supernatural* this figure is Eric Kripke, who conceived the text, wrote and directed key episodes, and plotted the initial 5-Season story arc. His Author-function was strong in fandom until 2010, when he stepped down as showrunner at the end of Season 5. A fan project raised \$3,600 to take out a full-page ad in the *Hollywood Reporter*, thanking Kripke for his work and declaring, ‘we fell in love [...] because of you. It was your imagination and vision that brought *Supernatural* to life and imbued it with such heart and scope’ (June 11, 2010).

*Supernatural* establishes Kripke as author within the text itself, through the bathetic yet strategic character of the Prophet Chuck, who writes the characters’ story. Chuck, who utilises the genre-appropriate pen-name Carver Edlund (a portmanteau of series writers Jeremy Carver and Ben

Edlund) is in many ways representative of Kripke according to actor Rob Benedict (Benedict 2009).

Studying the discursive formation of The Author in relation to the writing fan who is simultaneously legitimated and dismissed by the text will cast light on fandom's negotiation of industrial power structures. Apart from studying the use of Chuck and the concept of authorship in fic itself, I will observe that fan writers are also constructed as authors (c.f. Kompare, 112, 19n). Coppa argued that 'in fandom, the author may be dead, but the writer — that actively scribbling, embodied woman — is very much alive. You can talk to her; you can write to her and [...] she will probably write back' (2006, 242). I think she overstates the case. Kripke's Author-function is alive and well in some fan work (c.f. Bonnstetter and Ott, 2011, 359), as are the Author-functions of highly esteemed fan writers. The paradox here is the use of both the author character and the authority of the canon to legitimate the work of the scribbling fan.

Thus I combine Foucauldian principles with techniques of network analysis and participant observation to access and analyse my material. My means of observation have been adequately discussed; now in the spirit of critical responsibility, I must outline my position as researcher and the nature of that participation.



## V. Perspective

The need for qualitative researchers to reflect on their cultural positioning and the inevitable structures of thought, judgement and taste native to it is by now well-established in cultural studies generally and media studies particularly (Clifford 1986; Probyn 1993; Couldry 1996; Gottschalk 1988; Markham 1998; Murphy 1999; Ellis and Bochner 2000; Medhurst 2000; Parameswaran 2001; Hills 2002; Thomas 2002; Ellis 2004; Bury 2005; Monaco 2010). Whilst archaeology is not an interpretative activity (Kendall and Wickham 1999, 33) in that I do not posit that a particular figure in a text means x or y, the selection and presentation of text in this study - both the formations that seemed evident to me, and the statements that appear to comprise those formations - involves judgement on my part (c.f. Dicks et al. 115-16). I aim to be answerable for what I have learned how to see (Haraway 1988, 583).

Hills suggest that, objectivity being impossible, researchers should take a reflexive approach to our own aesthetic judgements and their implications in our constructions of self-identity, recognizing their affiliation with certain ideologies and rejection of others (2007b). The fact that I love *Supernatural* and hate *Twilight* with all the passion of the anti-fan (Gray 2003; 2005) is not a coincidence, but a socio-culturally interpretable inclination to the masculine; the clever; the cynical; the postmodern and the sex-positive; and away from the Western-feminine; the naïve; the patriarchal and the Puritan. This kind of reflexivity is particularly important for Foucauldian analysis, for as Alvesson and Sköldböck note,

The problem about a categorical linking of power and knowledge is that it ought to comprise Foucault's own project as well. Critics ask what power Foucault's own knowledge produces and how he regards this (231).

It follows that to avoid false objectivity, the researcher must turn her Foucauldian perspective back on itself, considering 'the conditions for what one is doing' (245). I will thus attempt to outline some of the conditions of those perspectives which would seem 'natural' to me if I did not interrogate them. I then discuss my dual position as fan-insider in and academic student of the *Supernatural* fan fiction networks.

If I look backwards at the course of my fandoms in constructing my self-identity, it is clear that bar one brief and embarrassed love-affair with the boyband of the (2000ish) moment, I have gravitated to androcentric cult texts with a sci-fi or fantasy element and more-or-less ironic treatment of a quest-narrative. *Supernatural*, however, is undoubtedly the most nihilist text I have ever loved: the most metatextual, the darkest, the most reflexive of its own contexts of production (Garcia 2011), and the one that makes the most abject, destructive use of comedy (Abbott 2011). Partly I believe this change reflects my rejection of my High Church Anglican upbringing with a great deal of pain and jealous mourning; partly the fact that the privilege of a Cambridge degree in English enabled me to appreciate postmodernism. I learned Biblical writings from childhood and read Milton to myself in high school, whereas my first introduction to the abjection of horrific comedy or comedic horror was through Beckett, Brecht and Chekhov. I was later introduced to the theories of violence and spectacle in Baudrillard and Ballard. Thus I am gratified by cult texts that cater to these tastes whilst rewarding and confirming my cultural capital in literature, drama and theology.

Clearly these are classed perceptions: I am middle class and highly educated. Medhurst says that ‘anyone who speaks of a working-class upbringing, especially in Britain, is liable to find themselves accused of sentimentality’ (21), but I cannot agree. For me the shadow of working-classness have always been a matter of fear to be warded off (c.f. Skeggs 1997; Lucey and Reay 2002; Reay 2005; Wood and Skeggs 2008; Jones 2011; Tyler 2013). I was aware from childhood that my Welsh mother grew up in the literal poverty of a post-war single parent family. Her own father died very shortly after the end of World War Two, leaving her mother with his war pension denied on a technicality, and five children ranging from two to adolescent. I am guiltily aware that her working-classness meant literal hunger, literal cold, and literal housing insecurity. For me there is no positive value attached to working class histories. On the other hand, my father’s family, whom I physically resemble, were and are firmly middle class Iraqis: small business owners and academics, museum curators and property holders, scientists and engineers. My first habitus (Bourdieu 1986; 1993; 1996) followed this pattern. My mother was highly invested in education, as her success in it had granted her class-mobility, and at that time espoused middle-class values with conviction. My early childhood was an intensively-organized schedule of school, after-school clubs, music lessons, drama societies, writing competitions, and Arab socialization. My habitus was upwardly middle class, spanned an East/West cultural affiliation, and was gendered very differently from British models of girlhood.

This produces a problem of mis-identification I have in reading feminist criticism. Far from being socialized into passivity and silence, I have, if anything, suffered from an overabundance of praise and expectations of unwavering academic excellence, accomplished easy sociability, and mental and emotional strength. As I have been reprimanded by a female family member in

broken English: ‘Look! Iraqi women are tough’. A national identity shaped by violence and colonialism leaves no room for self-indulgence in pain and depression: that is for White girls. Aghacy observes that Arab women’s writing is publicly applauded for ‘taking stands on issues such as war, freedom, independence, immigration, nationalism [etc.]’ and criticised for ‘solipsistic delving into the private self’ and the ‘domestic sphere’ (2009, 11-12; 14; see also Accad 1990, 22-25). Arab identity is communal, historical and ideological, and men as well as women are subordinated and damaged by wars and the violence of ‘a patriarchal state’ (Aghacy 14; 94-179). Ismael and Ismael suggest that, whilst ‘no more benign to women’s emancipation than tribal patriarchy’, the secular nationalism of the Ba’ath regime replaced domestication of women in service of the family with service of the patriarchal state, pointing to the ‘aggressive expansion of female education at all levels’, and ‘effort to increase the female labour force across all economic sectors’, including government, in the latter half of the twentieth century (2007, 256; 255; see also Al-Ali 2005, 744-45, 754; Fischer-Tahir 2010, 1382; Masmoudi 2010, 71-74).<sup>30</sup>

I am not suggesting that a historically older, deep-rooted model of female subordination and correspondingly dominant model of Arab masculinity does not exist. Accad’s work (1990) demonstrates very thoroughly that it does, and one of its organizing figures is the tribal leader/military hero (30) upon which Saddam Hussein styled himself. Ismael and Ismael argue that this model and a correspondingly subordinate femininity regained prominence during the 21<sup>st</sup> century occupation of Iraq (2007, 259-60; c.f. Al-Ali 2005, 742). However, I was first socialized not amongst masculinist nationalists but ex-patriots and exiles, women and men who

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<sup>30</sup> These critics refer generally to the period between the 1968 Ba’athist coup and the 1990 institution of UN sanctions against Iraq, under which the entire civilian population suffered, women disproportionately (Al-Ali 2005, 746-48; Ismael and Ismael 2007, 256-57; 2008, 416-17)

had rejected or been forced to flee Saddam's regime and/or the Iran-Iraq and First Gulf Wars. Very early on, I was exposed to the model of vulnerable masculinity Aghacy views as a consequence of ongoing war, and high civic/social/educational expectations of women. This is partly why, though I have selected 'Race' as a discursive formation for study, I understand questions of masculinity and femininity as inextricable from this formation (Dyer 1997, Daileader 2005).

Just before my ninth birthday, my father died of a sudden illness. In addition to this profound reinforcement of masculine vulnerability, my habitus changed. My mother moved some way away from the middle class structures with which she had surrounded us, and now I was exposed to more working class socialization. My mother's time was taken up with caring for her own mother, whose life epitomized my terrible, abject object - she suffered from senile dementia which frequently manifested in verbal attacks on whoever was closest. Meanwhile, at high school, I experienced systemic racism for the first time, finding my 'not quite/not white' (Bhabha 1994, 92) face, body and most especially hair a visible target of abuse.

The overriding experience of my childhood is anger, which I never expressed but nurtured and turned inwards to patient, absorbing projects of work on myself and my body. Hair straighteners and bleach-dye failed to meet advertiser's claims, but the contradictions of my existence manifested eventually in anorexia nervosa, a cultural pathology that is both disease and protest, a rejection (of consumption, of womanhood, of materialism, of responsibility, of decision, of classed indulgence, of vulnerability), and simultaneously a literal internalization of the bourgeois norms of dispassion, control and rationality. I self-harmed, experimented with prescription and

non-prescription tranquilizing drugs, and engaged in deliberate high-risk behaviour between the ages of 13 and about 22. As an adolescent I was institutionalized in a mental health unit.

On first encountering the model of discipline in Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, it was the forcible recollection of my experiences as an inpatient that helped convince me of its accuracy as a theory of power. When I finally came to the lecture series on psychiatric power, I found the exposition of knowledge/power in the asylum almost uncanny in the precision with which it described my experiences. These include the 'technique of psychiatric questioning'; the constant supervision of the patient; and the formation of a 'permanent file...[so that] when dealing with him one must always be able to show that one knows what he has done, what he said the day before, what faults he committed, and what punishment he received' (Foucault 2006, 184-85). There is no more profound experience of surveillance than to learn that a remark made the previous day has been reported and recorded as evidence of ever-deepening pathologies. Further, 'when a patient has done something that one wants to curb, he must be punished, but in punishing him one must make him think that one punishes him because it is therapeutically useful' (185). In being questioned: 'the patient must realize that each of his answers has meaning within a field of an already fully constituted knowledge in the doctor's mind' (2006, 185). This field posits the mind as its own place, and accounts for no structure larger than the family, which exists in a kind of bourgeois isolation. Thus the psychiatric apparatus produces and reproduces the object of its knowledge (c.f. 252; 341). Finally, Foucault includes the extension of discipline into the body through tranquilizers (181). I am only surprised he did not add the corresponding use of stimulants – discipline being after all the incitement to certain regulated and organized actions as well as the suppression of unwanted behaviours.

Years of subjection (in both senses) by a psychiatric process seeking to extract the ‘truth’ of my illness from a pre-cultural, original and flawed self which I responsively produced for it - as well as the suspension of rights to dignity, freedom of movement and privacy that inpatient psychiatric treatment entails - have left me with a profound suspicion of interpretation and scepticism towards authority. This leads to my engagement with non-interpretative Foucauldian discourse analysis, refusal of essence for postmodern discourse construction, and attention to contexts. Further, I am impervious to the kind of fan-pathologization Jenson famously dissected (1992). I simply do not care about the opinions of mainstream culture, and rarely believe in authorities. I do not identify at all with the sense of ‘shame’ Zubernis and Larsen frequently attribute to *Supernatural* fans (2012, 2013): if the unusual education of anorexia and institutionalization taught me anything, it is that internalizing the contradictory demands that patriarchy places on women, girls and female sexuality is – literally – a dead end. I have found this accords with my adult self-identification as a left-wing academic quite neatly. This may make me insensitive to some disciplining forces at work in the text I study, which is why invite the authors’ comments on my work wherever possible.

I locate this project as ‘insider research’ (Hodkinson 2005), given that I was an active member of the *Supernatural* fandom before I decided to research it. Fan fiction was the first thing I enjoyed and found interesting after the worst years of my adolescence. Like Hodkinson, I share ‘various secondary features’ (136) common in my fan community, as well as attachment to the text: in my case these are middle class identity, being female, education to degree level or above, being versed in the Anglo-American literary canon, and considering my sexuality fluid. Similar

secondary characteristics were common in the fan communities Bury (2005) and Penley (1992), and are evident in the fan interviews Zubernis and Larsen conduct (2012, 87-95; 2013, 23-26).

‘Insider’, however, does need some qualification. Larsen and Zubernis rightly note a ‘danger for the researcher [...] in believing that whatever slice of fandom he or she knows best is therefore representative of the whole (2012, 36). This would be an irresponsible over-representation, given that the researcher addresses an academic audience as well as a fannish one. I am not claiming to be ‘inside’ some holistic entity called ‘fandom’ (c.f. Campbell 2011), but rather to use the term signalling my ‘location’ in ‘a set of [particular, fannish] networks and connections’, which properties the label ‘aca-fan’ signals to Lothian (2011).<sup>31</sup> The way I write to and for other fans is a learned practice common to these particular networks, and, internalized long before I started this project. LiveJournal is my primary comfort zone, and I found my perspective less of an insider’s on Fanfiction.net, where the demographic tends to be younger, the writing less polished, and the structures of the site do not allow for much conversation around the fic.

Moreover, deciding to approach one’s fandom academically has consequences. I write from an institutional context as well as a fannish one, a ‘culture of research production’ (May and Perry 2011, 176) with its own narratives, priorities and expectations. For instance, like many fans, I was aware that *Supernatural* fandom tends to elide race problematically, but the work of Daileader, Wright and Morris informs and influences the patterns I have perceived in the formation, and in the writing of this thesis, consolidated for an academic audience. The research and writing of this thesis helps consolidate the very formations it analyses. Conversely, bringing fanfic to academic and/or outsider attention, removing it from its context of publication and

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<sup>31</sup> My rejection of the term ‘aca-fan’ for myself is explained on p. 27.



reprinting it as part of an academic text for a new audience, is an exercise of the power that my institutional position gives me.

Therefore, as is thoroughly described in the Ethics section, my policy is openness with regard to my project (see pp. 127-31). I sought permission for every fic and review quoted, and where a fic was analysed in depth, offered to share a draft with the author. In this way I hope to mitigate the power imbalance of the ‘politics of knowledge production’ (Sultana 2007, 376) between the ‘knower and the known’ (Adkins 2002, 340). This is particularly important given my privileged education and networked institutional context, which afford me with protections and advantages that the fans whose work has gone into the making of this thesis may not have.

Further, as Hine notes, becoming a researcher as well as a participant increases one’s awareness of one’s writing (2005, 21). I devote time to the kind of fanwork that takes greater effort than simply reading fic – writing fan fiction, recording podfic, writing about this project in general terms in my LiveJournal, maintaining fan contacts, discussing the show and revealing certain aspects of my personal life. Like Hine, I find myself acutely aware of my self-presentation in fandom in a way I might not be had I no professional stake in it. I leave reviews and recommendations, as I consider these contributions an important form of reciprocity to the community (Fetterman 1998, 143) as well as deepening my understanding of discourse practices. In that spirit, I submitted novel-length fics to the 2012 and 2013 Big Bangs (a fandom event wherein authors write and artists illustrate long works of 20,000 words or more, publically revealed on a calendar schedule over the summer). I have promptly found the validity of Hine’s contention that ‘a reflexive understanding of the medium, if critically examined, can provide for insights not accessible from the analysis of archives’ (2000, 23). For instance, when a podfic I

had laboured over recording apparently failed to post on an audiofic community, I witnessed how the vagaries of technology can influence visibility or its lack. When the popular hosting site Megaupload was taken down in 2012 due to allegations of its use in copyright infringement, hundreds of podfics including mine disappeared (not permanently in my case – I back up). The visibility and availability of fic is thus structured by as well as structuring of legal discourse. Or to give an example of communal structuring, when recently using the header codes required for posting at Supernaturalfic, I faced a conundrum. Given that the whole point of my story, an outsider perspective piece, was ambiguity over whether an incestuous relationship was taking place or not, what should I put in the header section for ‘pairing’? I settled for inserting a question mark after the customary denotation, which the moderator let pass. Had s/he insisted I remove it, or remove the slash-mark denoting a pairing, that statement contributing to the formation ‘incest’ would have been quite different. As it is, the presence of the slash-mark may still push readings towards the positive, an instance of regulation by bibliographic organization. I doubt that I would have this sensitivity to the varied regulatory structures of fanfic were I not a regular participant.

Clearly then, there are research advantages to ongoing participation. There are also downsides, notably the danger of my overlooking community assumptions I have long internalized (Hine 2008, 262; Hodkinson 145). Mitigating against this is the dispersion of *Supernatural* fan fiction over so many sites and online contexts. Contrasting work from different contexts can reveal embedded assumptions in both, and where fic is duplicated in different context, I found that the new context frequently altered reception patterns, an instance of regulation by space.

I reject the term ‘aca-fan’ for myself, because I find it rather redundant to my situation. do not think my relationships with my fan-texts are qualitatively different to the intellectual/affective relationships I have had with the more traditionally canonized texts I have studied throughout my BA and MA in English (c.f. Jenson 1992; Gray 2011; Pearson 2011; De Kosnik 2011). Coming from an English background with elements in art; film; linguistics; and adaptation, to transformative fan fiction and a media text that is about as culturally legitimate as TV gets, I have made nothing like the institutional/methodological shift that academics trained in, for instance, philosophy or sociology have (c.f. Tosenberger 2011). Perhaps for those who must resituate their work more profoundly, ‘aca-fan’ could usefully articulate a new relationship to their text(s). My only real changes are participation in the discourses I analyse, and the ethical implication of quoting texts produce by a subculture. If the noun ‘research’ of the phrase ‘insider research’ may be taken to indicate the same institutional context that ‘aca-’ does, and ‘insider’ is understood situationally rather than totally, the term accounts for my position with regards to the material.

## VI. Ethics

As a textual analysis, this project poses no immediate harm to participants. As I am only using text which is already, technically speaking, in the public domain due to actions taken by the author, it could be argued that I have no legal obligations of protection even where said text

contains sensitive information about a recognizable individual (see Data Protection Act 1998, Schedule 3, clause 5). However, as fanfic is intended for limited circulation within established communities, there are ethical considerations in quoting it, its responses and reviews.

The Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) acknowledges that research on the internet raises a variety of ethical dilemmas (Ess et al., 2002, 3), the boundaries between public and private spaces becoming ambiguous. The report suggests that in general, ‘the greater the acknowledged publicity of the venue, the less obligation there may be to protect individual privacy, confidentiality, right to informed consent, etc’ (5), and advises that researchers consult any statement affiliated with the online venue regarding access to content. My main venues, as stated, are LiveJournal, Fanfiction.net, and A03. LiveJournal’s privacy policy states explicitly that

Whenever you post content on the Service and set the privacy setting to “Public” or “Everybody,” you understand that this information may be accessible by anyone with Internet access, whether or not they are logged into LiveJournal [...] You should further understand that any personally identifiable information and/or content that you post on LiveJournal that is viewable by other users may be copied and/or shared without your consent. [...] LiveJournal may repost public entries, in whole or in part, on the LiveJournal homepage or other LiveJournal pages in order to help users find friends and communities based on mutual interests (LiveJournal Inc, 1999, n.p.).

In posting openly on LiveJournal, then, one has already consented legally to quotation. The A03 states that only the sharing of information ‘sufficient to identify a person in the physical world *that he or she has not voluntarily shared on the Archive itself*’ (n.d., Terms of Service IV.F, my emphases) is an infraction, and Fanfiction.net does not guarantee any confidentiality with respect to any User Submissions, making the submitter ‘solely responsible’ for the ‘consequences of

posting or publishing them' (Terms of Service 2009, 6A; 6B). Moreover, I will primarily be quoting 'authors', rather than 'subjects', a distinction the AoIR makes explicit:

if the research focuses on publicly accessible archives; inter/actions intended by their authors/agents as public, performative (e.g., intended as a public act or performance that invites recognition for accomplishment) [...] then there may be less obligation to protect individual privacy (Ess et al., 2002, 7).

Logically, then it seems quite defensible to freely quote any fan fiction I find unlocked. But ethics must account for experience and judgement as well as law (Ess et al., 4), and having participated in fan fiction communities for over twelve years, I am confident that most fans would prefer to be asked before being quoted (and c.f. Freund and Fielding 2013; Busse and Farley 2013). Part of this concerns the legal status of the activity – for although, as I have shown in the literature review, a number of legal scholars believe that fan fiction either should be or already is legal, corporate owners have more money and consequently better lawyers than fans. More immediate, however, is the potential breach of trust concerning sensitive personal revelations, or such revelations as could be inferred, correctly or incorrectly, from a person's creative writing. The AoIR warns that 'the greater the vulnerability of the author/subject, the greater the obligation of the researcher to protect the author/subject' (Ess et al., 5). Those of us fortunate enough to live and work in circumstances where diversities are welcomed have a duty to remember that our participants may not be so privileged.

Secondarily, to take more steps than are legally necessary for the protection of participants quoted will benefit me as researcher, because my as-of-now good reputation in fandom depends

upon my maintaining trust and openness with all concerned as much as my active participation. Were I to quote without permission, and that breach of trust later become known in fandom, I would jeopardise not only this research project but any other work I might later do in the same field. I received mainly positive responses to my requests for permission to quote, with many fans thanking me for my consideration in asking, and the rare refusals were cordial. However, as Kozinets observes, the fact that some participants do refuse weighs in evidence for the duty to ask (1997, 471), and I myself have received a few polite refusals with expressions of appreciation for my ethics of transparency. I asked how fans would like to be named and abided by their wishes. Most opted for screen-name, but some requested that their real name be used or that they remain anonymous. There were times, however when it is impossible to obtain consent or denial from an author, either because I could get no response or because message features were disabled. In this case, balancing commitment to the thesis with ethics, I reference by the same screen-name/identifier given where the work exists online, duplicating only what has been made publically available.

As the material I will need to quote does not fall within the remit of the Data Protection Act (1998), formal considerations such as consent forms and processing notices are not an issue. Taking precedent from Hine (2000, 73), my practice was to send informal messages asking for permission to quote, using my fan-identity, which links directly to my own LiveJournal, full of my own fan activity. In the messages I gave my real name, institution, a link to my university webpage and brief description of my project, offering more information upon request. I took the same approach to comments/reviews, as the respondent can be considered as an author in the capacity of critic. I did not seek permission for inclusion in numerical data, such as numbers of

reviews, as this does not reflect on individual personas. I have filed permissions to quote on a password-protected drive, in accordance with the Records Management advice sheet issued by Cardiff University (2011). Where fic is analysed in depth, I offered to show the relevant piece of writing to the participant quoted while drafting it.

This project, then, takes instruction from some of the most fruitful uses of Foucault to analyse text, notably Hodges (2011) and Jacobs (2000), and transposes it to the context of online research via network analysis techniques. It contributes to uses of Foucault through a methodical analysis of the reception of statements, revealing thereby the processes by which discursive formations are constructed. I have combined academic understanding and a situated insider's perspective on the most prominent discourses of my fandom to settle on the three discursive formations for analysis. I own that I write from a middle-class, non-White, educated perspective with an experience of gendering that is different from that proposed by most Anglo-American writers. The next chapter begins the research proper, with my study of the discursive formation 'Race'.

### Chapter 3: “All Black and White”: Race, Darkness and the Story of Gordon Walker

#### I. Introduction

Horror and Gothicism’s problematic treatment of race is well established (Fiedler 1970; Brantlinger 1988; Newman 1996; Carroll 2000). Indeed, if the term ‘gothic’ has any abiding reference, it is to outsiders: those who are not Roman, to that which is alien and potentially destructive to ‘our’ culture (Sowerby 2000). Fiedler (1970) demonstrated that in the translation of the genre to an American context, Gothicism came to express particular anxieties attendant on the formation of the new country. America was supposed to be the ‘anti-gothic’, a new country of freedom, Enlightenment and reason, and Gothicism expressed the unspeakable counterpoints of slavery and genocide upon which the new world depended. Poe and Twain and helped consolidate slavery and ‘black revenge’ as the ‘sociological theme’ (384) of American gothic, but Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* is the archetypical statement of gothic horror, mixing incest, murder and miscegenation. This is a story of mistaken identity, in which the young White Southerner Henry Sutpen unknowingly befriends his half-brother, Charles Bon, a man with Black blood. Charles becomes engaged to their sister, Judith, before their father breaks the news of their relationship. Henry rejects the knowledge, and the brothers run away to fight for the Confederacy together. It is only when Henry learns of Charles’ racial heritage than he rejects him, and ultimately murders him, heralding the destruction of the family.



Fiedler calls this a story of Black and White brothers ‘more in love with each other than either with the sister’ (1970, 383). The full horror of mixing, the threat of the dark outsider to the Self, is expressed when ‘the man who screams in panic that some Black buck is about to rape his sister’ is speaking of his ‘brother’, whom he secretly loves (383). The Self/Other dichotomy is profoundly threatened by the possible penetration of the Black man into the White family.

*Supernatural* is the story of a White American family under threat from within and without. Seasons 2 and 3 featured the secondary character Gordon Walker (Sterling K. Brown), a Black vampire hunter. I outlined above the manner in which, in accordance with Morrison’s theories, and noted by Wright (2007), Gordon’s dark savagery must be suppressed as a stage in the construction of Dean Winchester as a White man (see pp. 111-13). At Wright’s time of writing, what she did not know was that Gordon would return, and return to take part in another discourse with a distinct racial genealogy. Gordon’s story continues in Season Three’s ‘Fresh Blood’, where he is turned, and becomes a vampire himself. Gordon’s most important predecessor is the problematically-empowered Black hero/monster standing behind all problematically-empowered Black hero/monsters in Western discourse: I mean, of course, Othello. ‘Fresh Blood’ presents us with a prime example of what Daileader (2005) calls ‘Othellophilia’: supposedly colour-blind casting that places a Black actor in a role distinctively recalling the tragedy of Othello (6-7). Gordon’s agonizing transformation scenes enact a well-known story of regression, in which a superficially civilised ethnic Other reverts to what s/he “really is” (c.f. Shohat and Stam, 1994, 183). Green Macdonald observes that *Othello* retains its fundamental power because it tells audiences ‘what they think they already know’ – that Black men ultimately cannot be civilised (2001, 197).

The first part of this chapter will analyse Gordon's story-arc in *Supernatural*; the second explores how the discursive construction of race is solidified and/or altered by statements in fan fiction featuring the character.

## II. Canon

Like every prominent character in the anti-naturalistic *Supernatural*, Gordon Walker is not named at random. 'Gordon' is the first name of the first Black vampire hunter in popular culture, the dogged and misguided Dr. Gordon Thomas in the Blaxploitation classic *Blacula* (1972). 'Walker', like 'Winchester', is a weapon, marking Gordon's similarity to and difference from the protagonists. In its depiction of a professional Black hunter, a Black monster-protagonist, and Black-White friendship, *Blacula* is a genealogical predecessor for the Gordon arc. It is worth noting that *Blacula's* William Marshall portrayed Othello in six different productions (A+E Networks 2013), connecting statements in Gordon's genealogy in a discourse of Black monstrosity. But *Blacula* is about race, and in the best naïve Liberal tradition, Gordon's story is written as though race were not an issue. Apart from a few Black American speech patterns ('bro'; 'flipside'; 'mama'), Gordon Walker's Blackness is as silent as it is prominent.

Gordon first appears in the Season 2 episode 'Bloodlust', and is killed in Season 3. There are certain important statements in the discourse that constructs him, and certain absences. The most obvious absence is that race is not spoken, whilst important statements construct Gordon as a

threat to White women; a Black man who will regress to what he is; and contrast White civility with Black savagery ('Bloodlust'; 'Hunted'). Later statements introduce the possibility that the White man too may be a monster ('Fresh Blood'). However I would argue that there are two grounding statements, the strongest in the canonical discourse, which are never contradicted:

- 1) The Black man exists to construct Whiteness
- 2) Blackness must not infiltrate the White family

The first grounding statement, then, counteracts the American nightmare Fiedler recognized in Faulkner's work. The contrasting construction of Whiteness can be a positive construction (civility, restraint) or an ominous one (killer). But in the story of Gordon Walker, *Supernatural* does not succeed in challenging Means Coleman's conclusion that

'horror, for blacks, continues to be a study in racism, exoticism, and neo-colonialism in which black Americans are portrayed as outside of western images of enlightenment, while being subordinated to a stream of primitive images' (2011, 213).

I will now explain the branches of the formation.

- a) White Civility; Black Savagery: the Black Man must Construct the White

Gordon would like to conceive of himself and Dean as similar. In 'Hunted' he appeals, 'we have to stop [the psychics]', but visually, he has Dean tied up at this point, illustrating the divide between them. The light, which is refracted by slats, falls on Dean; whilst Gordon, foregrounded, is shadowed. At the climax of 'Bloodlust', Gordon argues, 'We're on the same side here' and

Dean's response: 'I don't think so you sadistic bastard' is presumably his lesson learned. Gordon insists: 'you're not like your brother. You're a killer like me'. Dean proves him wrong, this time, by leaving him tied to a chair instead of killing him, though he also shows his own sadistic streak by punching Gordon when he is already tied up and slamming his head against a wall. Dean's verdict is that he might or might not be 'like Gordon', but Gordon is the one tied up. The threat of savagery is contained, leaving Gordon literally 'bound and violently silenced' (Morrison 38; c.f. Wright, 26).

The coda is Dean's self-realization, framed by the dawn sun against his car, constructed both by light and an emblem of Western masculinity. He asserts that his instincts were to kill the vampire Lenore but he overrode them, the White civilizing process in action. Becoming an autonomous character at last, he admits that his dead father was not perfect and may have made mistakes. He is bloodied and bruised after a climactic fight with Gordon: as Dyer notes in relation to Stallone films, particularly *Rocky IV*, White masculinity must sometimes be 'tortured into existence' (1997, 155). *Rocky IV* is explicitly referenced in this episode with Lenore's paraphrase, 'If we can change, they can change'.<sup>32</sup> Dean then looks at the camera and lens flare is visible, forming a halo effect contrasting with his marred face (figure 7). Virtuous Whiteness is acknowledged as artifice, a construction rather than nature, but the fact remains that only white characters can earn it. 'Thus it is that the whiteness of white men resides in the tragic quality of their giving way to

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<sup>32</sup> From Rocky Balboa's address to the Russian crowd, 'If I can change, and you can change, anybody can change' (*Rocky IV*, 1985).

darkness and the heroism of their channelling or resisting it' (Dyer, 28).



**Figure 7: Dean Winchester (Jensen Ackles); 'Bloodlust' coda.**

'Hunted' also climaxes with a fight between Gordon and a Winchester, Sam this time. When Gordon is at his mercy, he challenges Sam, 'Do it. Do it! Show your brother the killer you really are'. But Sam refrains, giving the lie to the self-doubts Gordon has already voiced for him, that Sam is 'no better than the filthy things [they] hunt'.

As Sam decides to spare Gordon's life, light through the slats clearly frames and defines him (figure 9). Dean is ready to kill Gordon but Sam persuades him to leave it. Here Sam is cast as the White woman, exerting civilising influence over males (Dyer 1997, 184-85; Newman 1999, 40-42). Gordon's narrative function is to construct the Winchesters: he is the savage they might become, but their White civility triumphs. That is, until 'Fresh Blood'. The manner in which

Sam ultimately kills Gordon places Sam's humanity and civility in question. Nonetheless Sam and Dean remain the focus of the narrative. Gordon is absent from the coda, and we never learn what happened to the body. His function in death was to alter the construction of Sam.



**Figure 8: Sam (Jared Padalecki), framed by light, considers executing Gordon but refrains ('Bloodlust').**

b) Blackness Must Not Infiltrate the White Family

Gordon is turned by a white vampire, thus becoming in vampire mythology his 'son'. Note the lack of capitalization: the vampire that turns Gordon may be white-skinned, but he has not gone through the same social/civilising process that the Winchester brothers negotiate in this story-arc. Gordon cannot penetrate the White family, though the threat and possibility is continuously

raised. Even his place in the white vampire ‘family’ results in gory death: first he murders the vampire girls, then ultimately, dies himself.

Initially, Dean and Gordon bond in a bar. Dean plays the feminine role here: usually it is a White woman tempted by the darkness (Daileader 2005). Dean is ready to trust and look up to Gordon, whom we learn is entirely alone: he had to leave his family as they suspected him for the death of his sister. This might be read as our first clue that he is pathological. He sees only ‘black and white’ in the world, (presumably meaning bad and good even to a Black man) which according to Duda, is untenable for the modern monster hunter (2008, 74). To survive one must see shades of grey. Gordon tells Dean:

You know why I love this life? It’s all black and white. There’s no maybe. You find the bad thing, you kill it. Most people spend their lives in shades of grey. Is this right, is that wrong? Not us (‘Bloodlust’).

Then comes his first threat to the integrity of the White family: ‘Doesn’t seem like your brother’s much like us [...] you and me? We were born to do this. It’s in our blood’. Gordon constructs Dean and himself as an interracial, blood-bound family that excludes Sam. Dean does not reply, but the statement captures his attention and inspires an uncertain expression. Non-diegetic music rises uneasily. Sam and Dean then argue. Sam accuses Dean of attempting to use Gordon as a substitute father figure, which he claims is ‘an insult to [John’s] memory’, and Dean punches Sam. Further, in ‘Hunted’, Gordon aligns himself with John, against Dean:

It would wreck him. But your dad? If it really came down to it, he would have had the stones to do the right thing here. But you’re telling me you’re not the man he is?

As he delivers these lines, Gordon gags Dean with a scarf, supressing him and challenging both his status in the family and his construction as a man. But the codas of the episodes reaffirm Sam and Dean's togetherness, and Gordon's exclusion. The coda to 'Fresh Blood', when Gordon is dead, is the most explicit. Dean, who has less than a year before a Crossroads Deal condemning him to Hell comes due, prepares Sam for life alone. In teaching him to fix it, he allows him to see internal workings of the car, his symbolic interior (Bruce 2010, 4.2). Gordon's threat, but non-infiltration, and his narrative function constructing the White men, are the grounding statements of this discourse formation.

Gordon is a sympathetic character, and our White 'heroes' come out of his episodes far from uncompromised. Nonetheless the visual and narrative presence of the Race formation is as obvious as its verbal absence. In the best Liberal tradition, nobody apparently notices that Gordon is Black and everyone else is White, and before he turns out to be a villain after all, Dean is only too happy (indeed rather pathetically eager) to become Gordon's new best friend. Heroes – even ironic antiheroes like Dean Winchester – are never denotatively racist (c.f. Wright, 28).

### c) Threat to White Womanhood

'Bloodlust' (2x03) opens with one of Fiedler's key gothic archetypes: the fleeing maiden (120). In the prologue, a young woman is being chased through some dark woods, and then beheaded by an unseen attacker with a curved blade, later revealed as Gordon. Her lacy white blouse



reveals her pale cleavage. There is no dialogue. The twist on this familiar scenario, revealed later in the episode, is that the young woman was a vampire, and Gordon is a vampire hunter.

The vampires are extremely white, especially Lenore, but rather cadaverous than exhibiting Dyer's 'glow of white women' (1997, 122). Gordon assaults Lenore and stabs her with dead man's blood, which subdues vampires. He addresses her as 'bitch' and tortures her for information. Though Sam casts himself as the protector of White womanhood, wanting to rescue Lenore, the threat to Sam is what makes Dean raise his gun. In this confrontation scene, we learn firstly that Gordon killed his own sister after she was turned into a vampire – a threat to Black womanhood this time – and that he knew all along that Lenore only drank animal blood, but considered her a monster anyway. For the final predecessor of Gordon's story is the propaganda film *Birth of a Nation* (1915): a crucial text in the consolidation of the Black man as the despoiler of White womanhood, and the White male as her protector. The White male's necessary violence is tempered by intimacy with her (Dines 2003, 452-53). The emblematic image in which Gordon looms over Lenore, enjoying her torture, has 'a long genealogy in racist discourse' (Wright, 26; see figure 9). This is complicated by the fact that Lenore is a literal monster whose fangs descend horribly when Gordon tempts her with human blood. However, she restrains herself: as Leavenworth and Isaksson note, abstaining from human blood is a popular statement in the construction of the humanized, moral vampire (2013). Dean correspondingly restrains himself from killing her. These statements form the necessary suppression of violence and animalism in the construction of Whiteness.



**Figure 9: Gordon (Sterling K. Brown) tortures Lenore (Amber Benson), 'Bloodlust'.**

Gordon's last episode, 'Fresh Blood', cites 'Bloodlust' with alteration. This process 'draw[s] attention to the previous context' whilst simultaneously altering the statements (Hodges 2011, 10, drawing on Derrida 1977). The reference in the title establishes the pattern. This episode features the beheading of a White female vampire by the Winchesters: a bleached blonde, once again with lacy blouse and visible pale cleavage, she ironically embodies Dyer's extreme whiteness, as do all the women turned and killed in this episode. Sam and Dean's position as defenders of White women is thus compromised.

d) The Black Man Will Regress to Barbarism

In 'Hunted', Gordon presents himself as civil. He does not harm for pleasure and assures Dean that despite his being left tied to a chair, 'This isn't personal. I'm not a killer [...] I'm a hunter'. He asserts that he is not 'some reckless yahoo' but has carefully researched the need to kill psychics, of which Sam is one. He apologizes to Dean and says Sam's death will be quick, constructing himself as reasonable and non-sadistic. He believes he is doing the right thing:

Let's say you were cruising around in that car of yours and, uh, you had little Hitler riding shotgun, right? Back when he was just some goofy, crappy artist. But you knew what he was going to turn into someday. You'd take him out, no questions, am I right?

Yet Gordon the rational monster hunter must become a monster himself. His self-construction cannot stand. He is captured by a white male vampire, who is keeping three more blondes in shackles to turn as his daughters. It is highly significant that though white people can be vampires, it is only the Black man who physically and morally regresses to savagery, suggesting it must be some property of moral darkness *in him* that comes to the surface. The epithets Gordon hurls at the vampires are like a vocalization of colonial gothic fears: 'bloodthirsty animals', 'fang whores' with 'less humanity than a sewer rat'; 'murderers' who 'spread disease on base instinct' ('Fresh Blood'). The vampire turns him, and his transformation is, as Robert Gordon wrote of Othello's transformation, 'a ritualized enactment of [...] regression to barbarism' (2009, 134; c.f. Daileader 46). Accompanied by pulsing drums, sweat beads on his forehead, the lights blur and buzz; his mouth gapes, his eyes are bloodshot and his breathing

heavy. He shies from the light. He rips the heads off the blonde women (offscreen) and after trying desperately to resist, leaps on a convenient victim to feed with an animal roar. He kills his friend, but looks devastated to do so, staring at his own bloodied hand and mournfully embracing the body as Othello kisses the dead Desdemona.<sup>33</sup>

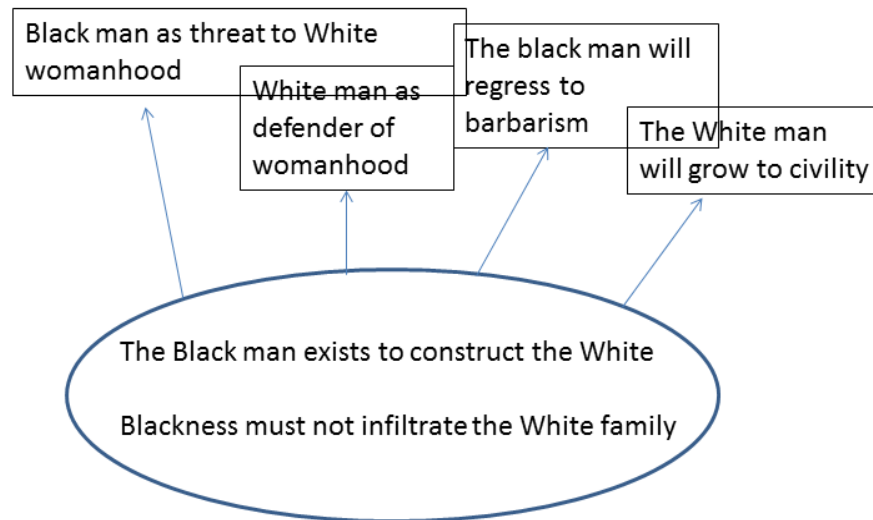
Using his new vampire senses, Gordon traps Sam. He means to do one good deed, killing Sam Winchester, before killing himself (*Othello* again: Shakespeare 2006, 5.2, ll. 344- 55). Sam implores him that he can resist, is 'still a hunter', but Gordon replies: 'no. I'm a monster'. This statement of internalization evokes Bigger Thomas's assertion in *Native Son* that he had 'no soul' and 'couldn't help' killing Mary Dalton (Wright [1940] 1995, 376; 389). Sam kills Gordon in a horrific manner, beheading him with barbed wire and his bare hands. Schreibman observes that this ill-advised sequence recalls a lynching: 'When you look at the screen in that scene, there's no vampire. There's a hot young white stud and an older, animalized black man' (2009). Gordon's fangs show as he dies, and our last sight of him is of his severed head. Fiction's ability to show 'what is not' is not always positive or progressive: the fact that vampires do not exist licenced this unfortunate scene.

So, the grounding statements that the Black man must construct the White, and that the Black man must not penetrate the White family, branch into interconnected statements constructing his threat to White womanhood and regression to barbarism as the White man grows to civility.

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<sup>33</sup> The stage direction is of course editorial, but the line 'killing myself, to die upon a kiss' (2006, 5.2, l.357) is instructive enough. In prominent modern versions, Laurence Fishburne kisses the dead Irene Jacob then collapses to embrace her in death (Parker 1995), whilst Eamonn Walker kisses the dead Keeley Hawes before taking her hand and shooting himself (Sax 2002).

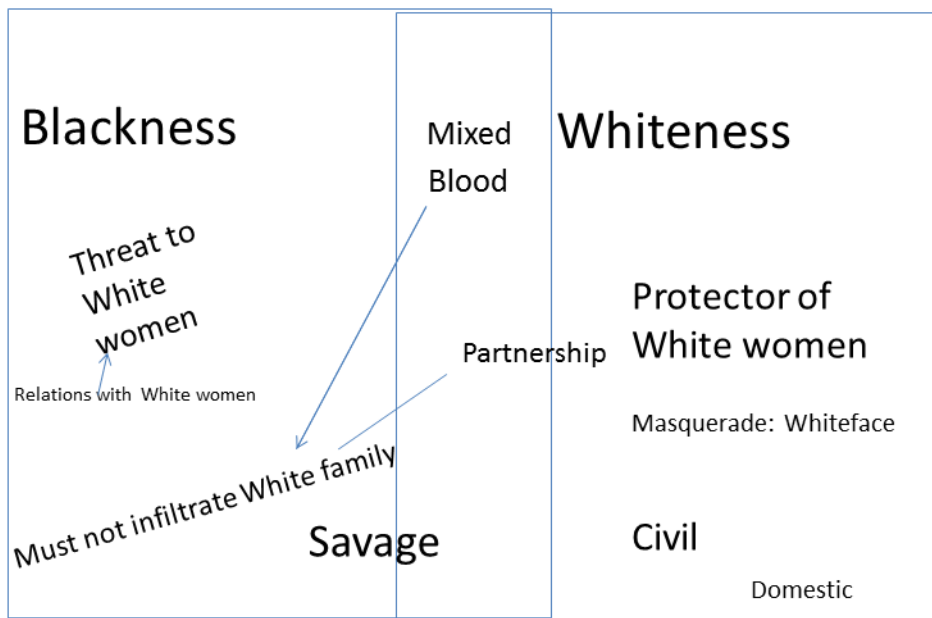
The canonical discourse formation can be rendered thus:



**Figure 10: the canonical construction of the Black man**

I have not titled it 'Race', for race is silent, though the 'Black man' is an obvious visible presence. The overlap between the contrasting boxes is intentional, as the White man is so frequently implicated in what he must not ultimately become, and each branch implicates another. The rest of this chapter considers how the discursive formation of race, in relation to Gordon, is consolidated or altered in fanfic. I will argue that fandom's reconstruction of the formation can be rendered as figure 11:

Figure 11: fandom's reconstruction.



The formation is more varied, with a wider range of statements. Notice that race is iterated and named in a way it is not in canon. Moreover, though the grounding statement that the family must not be infiltrated does stand, it has been destabilized by statements of constructing partnership between the Winchesters and Gordon, and possibilities of mixing blood that canon elides. The White man's status as protector of White women is, if anything, enhanced; but the groundings statement that the Black man exists to construct the White is gone. As the shape of the formation shows, very often the White man *is* constructed via favourable contrast (civility to savagery, protector to threat), but this is no longer a condition of the discursive formation.

### III. Fandom

Beginning at the communities of highest centralization (Fanfiction.net, LiveJournal, A03), I tracked down all the fic featuring Gordon or directly linked to his episodes, as described in the methodology. These sites led me to more peripheral ones in the websphere. I found 344 examples ranging from less than 100 words to over 200,000, all of which I read and coded with their responses. I took note of the number and content of all responses to all fic, again as described in the methodology. It should be noted that negative comments were extremely rare: out of 20,954 comments across the entire websphere, only 6 were unambiguously or completely negative. LJ user thedeadparrot reflects on the convention for praise over criticism with the metaphor that ‘fandom is a giant karaoke bar’ (2007): online fanfic is acknowledged as an amateur practice from which we all derive free entertainment, so whilst we might cheer and acknowledge when an amateur is extremely good, we generally do not complain too much when they are bad. This important structuring convention might mean that more experimentation and risk taking is possible here than in professional settings, but it might also mean that problematic consolidations are more likely to go unchallenged. The following table shows the number of fics per site, and the average and range of numbers of comments per fic per site. Averages are to the nearest whole number.

|  | Site: | Ff.net | LJ   | A03 | SV  | DW  | SD  | S/D | Other |
|--|-------|--------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Number of fics:                        |       | 211    | 142  | 54  | 43  | 25  | 10  | 14  | 11    |
| Highest number of comments<br>on a fic |       | 1539   | 1336 | 24  | 278 | 110 | 263 | 776 | 217   |
| Lowest number of comments<br>on a fic  |       | 0      | 0    | 0   | 0   | 0   | 2   | 0   | 0     |
| Average number of comments<br>on a fic |       | 49     | 46   | 3   | 38  | 21  | 46  | 71  | 40    |

### Key to Sites

Ff.net = Fanfiction.net   LJ = LiveJournal   DW = Dreamwidth   A03 = Archive of Our Own

SV = Supernaturalville   SD = Sinful Desire   S/D= The Sam/Dean Slash Archive

Note that some fics (and comments) appear on more than one site, hence the sum of the top row is 510 not 344. The highest total number of comments on any one fic, including all sites, was



1775. The lowest was 0, and the average was 61. There is a slight margin of error due to the use of quotation marks in the search engines, as described in the methodology (p. 105), and also because I did not have access to LiveJournal comments in 2 instances, as the entries were friendslocked. The reason the average number of comments on A03 is so low is twofold: firstly, because it serves as a repository for much fic already posted on other, less secure sites, and secondly because the option of leaving virtual ‘kudos’ by clicking a button has replaced commenting for some readers.

As I coded the fics, five overlapping thematic patterns emerged. They bear some relation to the evident statements in canon, but with more flexibility and variation. These are a) Iterability of race; b) Threat to, and reaffirmation of, the Winchester family; c) Construction of White men d) Relations with White women and e) Savagery (animalism, monstrosity). These branches will be discussed in turn.

#### a) Iterability of Race

Canonically a minor statement draws attention to Gordon’s race. After Dean calls him a ‘son of a bitch’ and Gordon slaps him, stating calmly, ‘that’s my mama you’re talking about’. This discursive marker typical of Black American speech was repeated four times in the fanfic I studied, and paraphrased twice as ‘I told you to leave my momma out of this’ and ‘I told you about bad mouthing my momma’ (idiot4dean, 2007). The repeatable materiality of this

expression increases the iterability of Gordon's racial difference, as does the fact he is frequently referred to as Black, black, dark-skinned or African-American in fan fiction. Perhaps the convention of visual description in written fiction is a factor here.

Usually, no further note is made of this, solidifying the dominant construction of race as irrelevant to power (Bonilla-Silva 2006). Other times Gordon is referred to as a 'dark hunter', with the typical double meaning concerning his morality. In Tree66's *Midnight of the Soul* (2006-07), which is well-received at Supernaturalville with 97 reviews and an award for 'Best Threat', Dean considers the 'dark hair, dark skin, dark eyes and dark soul of his enemy'. This statement makes explicit the connections between Gothic darkness and racial darkness, which canon elides. This story also draws explicit parallels between Dean and Gordon, further explored in the section on White male construction. However, some fics explore the social consequences of colour in greater depth. In Kijutsu's *Monster* (2007), which relates a backstory for Gordon explaining 'what exactly happened to turn him into the monster Sam and Dean encountered', a young Gordon tells his new mentor that he never made football captain in school because there were 'too many rich white for that'. Like most stories from Gordon's perspective, these statements have little impact, garnering just 8 reviews on Fanfiction.net and not posted elsewhere. In tigriswolf's *Familial Relations*, Gordon reflects on how his 'Momma insisted they both knew how to defend themselves—memories of a childhood in the Deep South haunted her' (2007). *Familial Relations* has more impact, as a whole, because tigriswolf is a well-known author whose fic holds high literary capital, but these are side comments, not story themes. Three stories take race as a thematic strand, altering the Liberal discourse with statements of systematic

social consequence. The first is *Lick the Valleys Up*, by xxamlaxx, the second *When the Devil Drives*, by cofax, and the third *Sanctuary*, by house\_of\_lantis.

*Lick the Valleys Up* is an AU (alternative universe) story based on the 1878 Spanish novella *Marianela*, by Benito Pérez Galdós. The literary capital is evident. The original tells the story of an uneducated orphan girl whose face is marred by a childhood accident. She is in love with a rich blind boy, who loves her too, but once he regains his sight he instinctively understands beauty and marries a social equal. *Lick the Valleys Up* casts Dean as a teenager who was disfigured as an infant and put into social care, Gordon as his friend, Sam as the rich blind boy, and Jess (Sam's canonical dead girlfriend) as the social equal Sam eventually partners with. When Dean, Gordon and the monstrous Alistair (a canonical demon cast as a murderous pimp) are living together in a city,

Gordon makes what he calls nigger money, busting tables and washing dishes, working random construction jobs during the day. Dean would like to work jobs like that too if anyone would hire him. No one wants the repulsive kid working on their building, in the kitchen of a restaurant where a customer could see him (xxamlaxx, 2010a).

Race is spoken and matters in terms of social opportunity, but still renders Gordon higher than the disfigured. The only thing Dean can work as is a prostitute for clients with particular degrading fetishes. Dean considers himself a 'monster', and that 'Gordon and Alastair and Zach and everyone else get to look normal. If he can just look normal maybe the people who took in his little brother will want him as well'. Pace Dyer, Whiteness is not the non-mark of normality here: being free of facial scarring is. Yet 'Alistair calls Gordon a 'worthless jungle bunny, a porch monkey who can't even do simple tricks to pay his way through'. Indeed, 'racial slurs' is

included as one of the warnings for this fic, and a commenter is ‘glad you warned for the racial slurs - I think those were the harshest part’ (eggblue, 2010a). Xxamlaxx returns that they were ‘the hardest part of this fic to write. Just *no* on so many levels, but they had to be done’ (2010b). The significance of race, indeed the necessity and difficulty of speaking of that significance against a discourse that would elide it, thus enters the formation in a prominent way. Compare Dean’s acknowledgement in thepurpleswitch’s *About the Things That You’ve Done* that he ‘shouldn’t say that [Gordon’s] skin tone is great camouflage’ (2010).

*Lick the Valleys Up* is an important fic, more popular on LiveJournal than Ff.net, where it appears with the explicit sex scenes edited out in acknowledgement of Ff.net’s ban on adult material. This is an example of regulation by site and purpose superseding literary capital. Moreover, Ff.net tends to construct the Winchesters in more positive, heroic terms, LiveJournal more abject and darker. Hence the reservation of one anonymous Ff.net commenter: ‘Your writing draws a person in like a[n] auto accident. I admit to a morbid fascination. I wonder at the need you have to write of the subject matter and of the manner’ (anon. 1, 2011). Another thinks it ‘really fantastic’ and ‘really, really well done’ but would ‘rather pretend it never existed’ (anon. 2, 2011). These situational variables partly override literary capital on Ff.net; the 77 LiveJournal comments are uniformly enthusiastic with much praise for the author’s clipped, brutal style and agreement with her character (de)constructions: ‘I am glad Sam has a happy life, and Dean is disfigured and crushed by a bus - it's very SPN-y of you :D Or very Dean-y?’ (eggblue 2010b). Gordon is possibly the noblest character in this fic, and escapes to go and live with his sister, whereas Dean is destroyed, desiring at last an ‘end to his Frankenstein life’. Not merely colour, but skin itself is literally constructed, artificially, and determines the course of

one's life. After the fire, Dean is 'the man made with the parts of other people, the skin of a pig and dead men on his arm and face. He's nothing but a patchwork quilt' (xxamlaxx, 2010a). The fic also gathered an illustration, and four linked recommendations in its network.

*When the Devil Drives* by cofax (2007) is explicitly hailed as making statements that change the construction of race by commenters: 'AWESOME. Way to work the unfortunate racial subtext into something important and interesting' (loligo 2007). Vonniek adds, 'I loved how you turned problematic racial overtones on the show into something that makes sense in the universe' (2007). The discourse of race can be self-critical once expanded to the fanfic context, reaching that threshold at which it makes regulating statements about itself (Foucault 1989, 186-87). In this story, Gordon is interrogated by the FBI agent Hendrickson, who is also Black, for information concerning the Winchester. The two never meet in canon, in accordance with Greco-Larsen's observation that 'Black characters are usually shown in the context of their relationships with whites rather than each other' (2006, 25). Gordon uses their shared racial identity to his own ends, constructing a 'fairy-tale about John Winchester and the White Aryan Nation, about gun-running and credit-card scams' (cofax 2007a). An anonymous commenter objects: 'what i don't get is how could john/dean/sam fit under the category of a white supremacist? It doesnt make any sense to me =/' [sic] (anon. 3, 2007). This is one of the rare negative comments, and shores up the canonical statements that our heroes cannot be racist. The fact that the commenter chooses anonymity suggests unwillingness to publically contradict the general reception of the story, which is positive. The technological codes of LiveJournal allow authors to respond visibly to commenters in a thread, adding more statements to the discourse, whereas Fanfiction.net only allows reply by private messaging. Cofax responds:

Oh, I can see someone getting there, circumstantially. I bet John and other hunters aren't all that particular about where they get their weapons and other materials, and hunters and neonazis/militia types have a lot in common: heavy weapons, a need to stay under the radar of the law, disrespect/mistrust of civilian authorities, a certain individualistic attitude, the importance of military experience (2007b).

Anon. 3 does not respond. *Devil Drives*, then, contributes another statement on the social meaning and visibility of race, though this time it serves as a unifying factor between Blacks on opposite sides of the law. By these statements of ‘what is not’ in canon –a conversation between Black characters that observes the hunting community from outside, inflected by their racial identity – some unspoken uncomfortable parallels between hunters and White supremacists are made evident. The fic gathers 67 LiveJournal comments, and two recommendations from major rec communities. One comes under the theme ‘Stories about Chromatic Canon Characters’ (from the LiveJournal community spnroundtable). This categorization increases the significance of the racial theme, an example of discursive formation by organization. The other recommendation, however, comes under the heading ‘Minor or Guest Characters’ (from the LiveJournal community sawedoffrecs), which helps to keep the Winchester family at the center of the discourse but creates a space for other perspectives.

The significance of race is most explicitly spoken in house\_of\_lantis’ *Sanctuary* (2008). This story is labelled AU Real Person Fiction: the actors are referred to by their real names, as though cast in a film, rather than their characters. But Gordon appears uniquely by character name. Perhaps there is something about the altered context of RPF that enables statements to diverge from the majority of the formation: Gordon occasionally appears as a minor character on roughly the same side as the Winchesters in Alternative Universe fic. In *Sanctuary*, Jensen Ackles is cast

as the political leader of the vampire tribe of San Francisco, and Jared Padalecki as a sympathetic human politician whom Jensen turns in order to save his life after Gordon attacks him. Vampires are associated with queerness:

Jensen had come to San Francisco about 50 years ago to set up a safe city for his vampire community [...] the vampire rights movement began to take shape, culminating to a point 25 years ago that they won the same civil rights as anyone else (house\_of\_lantis, 2008).

These are modern, humanized vampires of the kind explored by Lindgren Leavensworth and Isaksson (2013), able to live in relative accord with humans. But Gordon's attack threatens the peace. Jensen seems to have met Gordon in the 1960s, during the civil rights movement:

He remembered standing near the reflecting pool at Washington DC to listen to a man speak about dreams and freedom for all men. How moved he was, how optimistic he had felt that perhaps vampires would have those same freedoms, too.

He sat back and stared at the vampire sitting across from him. "When I first saw you, you were already a man, passionate and angry, wanting all those things that free men desire most [...] I never realized how angry you were until it was too late (2008).

Black rage at political injustice is a real threat, and race is explicitly spoken. This novel-length work is unusual and significant, gathering 614 LiveJournal comments. A soundtrack has been compiled and it has been translated into Russian. Searches turned up 15 linked recommendations, but none mention Gordon or race.

The majority of statements in the discursive formation, then, speak of race but elide its social significance. This may be due to a greater consciousness of race on behalf of fandom than canon, or it may be simply that the differing mediums require more visual description. A few statements alter this, including one by a successful author that comes highly recommended. The statements in fic *do* alter the elision of race in canon, but not as often as transformative theorists might expect, and not necessarily in a socially progressive manner (c.f. Scodari 2003; 2007; Åström 2010). Bold statements written in accomplished style, however, can gather enough impact through recommendation and reputation to change the shape of the discourse. Categorization by theme or perspective increases the significance and clarity of statements in the formation.

#### b) Threat To, and Reaffirmation of, the Winchester Family

As described, Gordon's story arc in canon ends with a reaffirmation of the bond between Sam and Dean as they work on the car together. Several fan-written codas make further statements reaffirming the family after the threat from Gordon is neutralized. These can be gen or slash. For instance, in KKBelvis's *No Demons Allowed*, Sam doubts himself, his civility and morality, after the end of 'Fresh Blood'. He briefly considers suicide:

"You don't understand, Dean." I pulled the hammer back. "You saw me. Saw what I did back there." I gestured with a slight toss of my head toward the warehouse. "What human being can do that? Tear off a head like that?" (2008)



Even his humanity is in question. Dean asserts that Sam's essential nature is good, telling him, "You are no monster! You're a hunter. You are my brother. You save people. You are no Demon", and takes on the role of a father, asserting "today I am [Dad]". Sam is convinced. Or, in thenyxie's *Freedom's Just Another Word for Nothing Left to Lose* (2007), fixing the car leads to desperate sex against it. The situational variable of site regulates the kind of reaffirmation: on Supernaturalville, Winchest is banned; on Sinful Desire it is expected.

The name 'Winchester' gathers repeatable materiality as an affirmation of identity and familial bonds: 'the Winchesters had always been their own small community' (Korossy 2008); 'Winchester determination' (bjxmas 2008); 'I am a hunter. I am a Winchester' (Briarwood 2009); 'you're a Winchester. We're God's gift to women' (hopefulwriter27 2009); 'We're Winchesters'; "GORDON IS NOT A WINCHESTER!" Dean bellowed at the top of his lungs' (girlyghoul, 2010). This last statement, which consolidates the others by establishing that Gordon must not be allowed to infiltrate the family, appears in the crack fic *Terminators and Training Wheels*: Sam, Dean and Gordon have travelled back in time to the 1980s and de-aged to a baby, toddler and child respectively. Sam and Dean are left at the mercy of a hopeless babysitter, who upon discovering Gordon in the yard, exclaims, "Like how many kids does Old Man Winchester have, fer reals!". But the seriousness and solidity of the statement is increased through citationality: a reviewer quotes "GORDON IS NOT A WINCHESTER!" - You tell her Dean!' (twilightkristy, 2010).

There are 46 fics wherein Gordon hunts one or both of the brothers in an independent plot, mostly on Supernaturalville and Fanfiction.net. The situational variables at stake are that these sites seem to be invested in a discourse of the brothers as heroes, less morally grey than they

often appear on LiveJournal and A03. Reviewers express both hatred for Gordon and love for him as a villain, a favoured adversary. Sometimes the statements constructing him are clearly traceable to a broader cultural discourse of Blacks in horror: in *Joyride* Gordon has kidnapped Dean's (non-canonical) girlfriend 'as bait until that lover boy named Dean comes to your rescue' (ladyinwhite, 2008). He is monstrous and apelike: 'two strong muscular black arms pick her up off the floor and drag her away' and she knows that he 'could crush her to death if he wanted'. These statements construct him as a 'brutal black buck' (Greco Larsen, 30). Other times he is more complex. In *Wish You Were Here* he is not a sexual predator, but believes that 'the evilness in Sam has enlightened [him] to God'. He is desperate to feel 'the true meaning of the hunt' and demands, 'When will I feel the satisfaction? When will I feel the worth?' (cherry 2009). *Wish You Were Here* gathers 17 reviews and 23 on Fanfiction.net, whereas *Joyride* gets only 7. This renders the more complex construction a stronger statement, though the reason may be nothing to do with Gordon. Fics featuring female love interests are generally not well received. Even Supernaturalville, which bans slash, archives just 320 stories under the genre category 'romance', out of 4350 total. Disclaimers such as 'one more thing for readers that are new to the story it has OC's in it, and one is female. No worries, the story has no romance in it' and 'SHE IS NOT ANOTHER JO! She will never be a romantic interest' appear above stories featuring original female characters to assure readers romance will not intrude (Arielmarie 2007, Redwinged Blackbird 2007). Perhaps het romance is too close in association to the Bad Other of *Twilight* and the feminine genres it partakes in (Bode 2010; Moruzi 2012).

Just as in canon, Gordon usually dies in the fics where he threatens the family, and *Sanctuary*, for all its originality, is no exception. It does compromise the grounding statement in the sense

that that Jensen, who turned Gordon, explicitly calls him his ‘child’. This is the more disruptive in that, unlike the white man who turns Gordon in canon, Jensen appears as a fully-drawn character with a claim to Whiteness in the capitalized sense: he is a rational leader, a politician, and a humanized vampire. Gordon’s address of him as ‘Father’ threatens not only whiteness, but precariously constructed Whiteness and the civil status that brings. After the attack, Jensen realises he must kill Gordon to preserve the tribe’s social position. He asks Gordon rhetorically what he has done:

“What have I done?” [replied Gordon] “What have I done! I’ve done what you created me to do, you fucking bastard!” Gordon shouted, laughing. “You, who art the creator, do you now find your creation to be distasteful?”

Again, the Self/Other boundary is profoundly threatened, with an intertextual echo of Prospero’s, ‘this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine’ (Shakespeare 1998, 5.1, ll. 275-6) and a near-citation of the remonstrance of Frankenstein’s monster: ‘You, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us’ (Shelley 1992, 90). Drawing on a statement from its literary heritage solidifies the connection between the Dark Other and the Self, and foreshadows the violence to come in attempts at separation. Compare Fiedler’s analysis of *Native Son* cited above, wherein ‘the man who screams in panic that some black buck is about to rape his sister is speaking of one who is indeed, his brother, and whom secretly he loves’ (413). Gordon claims to be ‘a reflection of the monster that [Jensen] is’, and the death Jensen inflicts on him is terrible:

The once virile vampire was hunched against the wall, using his blunt teeth to tear at his own skin, slurping his blood. “Daddy...daddy...daddy...daddy said bad, bad, bad...”

[...]

Blood,” Gordon hissed, baring bloody teeth at Jensen. “Give me blood...daddy!”

[...]

“Blood daddy?” Gordon said, letting out a low whine at the back of his throat. His bloodshot eyes looked at Jensen.

“Give blood now?”

Jensen reached out slowly, stroking Gordon’s cheek. He wiped the tears that were on Gordon’s face. “I’ll only remember the good man, the man who first challenged me to join the 20th century [...] That was you, Gordon, and that’s the child I will always remember in my heart.

Jensen is truly the monster in this scene, the terrible killing father. Having his fangs pulled, Gordon is left in the ‘sub-basement’ to starve, ‘chained down to the cement floor at the neck, wrists, and ankles’. The image recalls slavery. There is an irresolvable tension between Gordon’s accepted status as Jensen’s child, even after death, and the fact he must kill him.

Occasionally in fic, Gordon kills a Winchester, but never in such a way that he infiltrates and replaces the other one. In *Lost and Won* by Chips03, Dean dies protecting Sam in ‘Fresh Blood’. His ‘untimely death’ gets him out of the crossroads deal, and he does not go to hell. This is as close as Gordon ever comes to breaking the family, and the last line draws away from the possibility, as ‘Sam remembers what Dean had said to him seventeen years ago. ‘Be brave for me’. He did, and the tears started to dry’ (2007). Unity is established despite death. This fic is received poorly, gathering just 2 reviews, one of which states simply, ‘very sad. I am so glad this did not happen’ (Phx, 2007). Reception diminishes the statement as canon is privileged over

fanon here, constructed as the real text, with the fic as an alternative which did not ‘really’ take place. Stating ‘what is not’ does not, here, affect the canonical ‘what is’, despite the fact that both are layers of fiction. In tigriswolf’s *Between Dawn and Dusk*, Dean commits suicide after Sam kills Gordon, and they meet in the afterlife:

*'bout time, Dean.*

*Sammy...*

*C'mon, man. It's time to go home (2007).*

A reviewer responds: ‘I shall comfort myself with the thought that at least, in death, they're together’ (anon. 4, 2007). Finally, in a limit case at the very edge of the discursive formation, Sam appears to be forced into killing Dean after Gordon’s blood has turned his brother (Briarwood, 2009). Gordon is not present in the story – he does not replace either brother – but it is his blood that is the ultimate cause of their separation. As Jäger and Maier (2009) predicted, special techniques must be employed for this statement to be made acceptable. Dean’s death is not stated, only that Sam ‘pulled the trigger’. As the warning states, ‘Character death is implied (but open to interpretation)’ (Briarwood 2009). Still, this fic gathers just 4 comments on LiveJournal/Dreamwidth, and 3 on A03.

One novel-length fic exhibits Gordon’s threat to the Winchester family in statements drawn from broader culture. *Baby Steps* (2006-11) by Juli is mpreg: Dean becomes pregnant by *deus ex machina* (literally, in the form of a fertility goddess). Sam and Dean have settled down together, quit hunting and become a family with children. John is alive and accepts them. Gordon hunts them, attempting to kill their offspring, whom he believes will inherit Sam’s powers. He kills the

family dogs, and nearly kills Dean when he attempts to protect the children. Gordon still believes that he is doing good:

“They aren’t children, they’re spawn of evil,” Gordon stated [...]. “You’re evil, with powers that were a gift straight from hell. You’re the worst kind of monster, the type that’s all pure-looking on the outside, but corrupt within. You and your offspring have to be destroyed, for the sake of everyone else (Juli, 2006-11).

Sam almost proves him right by torturing him in return, but John intervenes at the last moment, shooting Gordon through his head to put him out of his misery. John attempts to re-civilize Sam, assuring him that Gordon will “be punished by a much higher authority than you or me”. This statement from the discourse of Christianity frames the Winchester family as moral. But Sam returns, “When I’m done with him and he’s dead, he’ll burn in hell, but that doesn’t mean we can’t start the proceedings here and now”. That would render Sam a demon or Satan.

Nonetheless, once Gordon is dead, the family is restored, as ‘Gordon Walker was dead and Sam was ready to forget about the man, at least for a little while. With his brother’s warmth pressed close, [Sam] might actually be able to do it’.

*Baby Steps* gathered 776 reviews on the Sam/Dean archive. Though this is a peripheral site, and therefore the statements are not so prominent as if they had been made on LiveJournal, searches turned up 17 recommendations. These statements constructing the Winchesters in normative domestic terms, with Gordon as a dark threat to the family, are thus quite influential in a particular space, though not over the discourse generally. Hence it is rendered of moderate size in the diagram, but at some distance from other statements – the nearest is ‘civil’ (see figure 11). This is striking considering the fandom’s usual denigration of romantic/domestic genres, and

suggests strong segregation by site as a mitigating factor in how discourse is produced and manifests.

The other means by which Gordon threatens the family is friendly or sexual relations with Dean. These stories elaborate on the canonical statements constructing their initial friendship, but ultimately restore Dean to Sam. Fleshflutter's *Life in Monochrome* (2007a) is a prominent example. In this fic, John is dead, and in Sam's absence Dean has started hunting with Gordon. The infiltration is explicit and obvious to Sam:

There's a whole new book about Dean: Gordon wrote it and Sam's not in it.

[...]

It should be a moment for just them but Sam's too conscious of Gordon being right there.

[...]

There's a second when Sam thinks Dean is going to hug him again and then suddenly Gordon's in the way. He's only picking up a t-shirt to hand to Dean but his arm cuts right between them.

Moreover, Sam believes 'Gordon's fucking Dean', and 'there's no being reasonable when [Sam] thinks about the fact Dean and Gordon are fucking'. Gordon is positioned as the active partner, Dean as passive, adding statements to solidify the feminine role he plays in canon. Sam's angry, anxious jealousy is of the sort White men are constructed as feeling over Black male/White female coupling, again dating back to *Othello* (Daileader 2005; Bland 2005). Sam feels that 'Gordon's obsessive need to kill things is going to one day mean the death of Dean', echoing

Green Macdonald's analysis of the Othello myth as a warning about 'what happens to nice young (white) girls' who compromise the family (2001, 197).

When Gordon turns on Sam, however, he is 'dead before he hits the ground, before Dean's even lowered his handgun'. Dean then asserts: 'I did what I had to. You or him. No shades of grey,' which ends the fic. The denial of grey areas links Dean discursively to Gordon: they are both single-minded, but their aims are opposite. The comments then re-open the possibility of Gordon's infiltration even after his death, an example of reception altering the statements: 'Great note to end it on. This is so sly. Maybe Sammy isn't getting his Dean back after all...' (ahania 2007a). To this the author admits she is 'a sucker for people learning things off other people that they really shouldn't!' (fleshflutter 2007). Sam and Dean are together, but the possibility of Gordon's influence remains. Fleshflutter is a high-capital writer in the fandom, which grants these statements authority, though with 88 LiveJournal comments, this is not her most popular story. It still gathers 9 recommendations, and a translation into Russian. One recommendation describes it as 'awesome, creepy, believable Dean/Gordon' (orange\_8\_hands 2012), giving the pairing as the noun descriptive prominence.

Closer to the edge of the formation is Jane St. Clair's *Civilization and its Discontents*. Dean and Gordon have brief, consensual, angry sex, as Dean tries to convince himself that 'If he sometimes likes older guys [...] that's not \*freudian\* either' (2006). The title, of course, contradicts this, and even though Dean leaves with Sam, he is still longing for a 'punch' he knows he could have received from Gordon. Reception is praiseworthy but not entirely comfortable: 'Kind of hate Dean here :( It's like he forgot he loves his brother, but I can see him finding sexual relief in someone such as Gordon. I really like this couple' (denistap,



2007). Familial reaffirmation is not necessarily constructed as happy or good. In silver\_ruffian's *3 Times Gordon Walker Didn't Take Dean Winchester, The 2 Times Gordon Did & He Wished He Hadn't*, Gordon apparently kills Sam and turns Dean. He is sleeping with Dean, who appears to be in his power, but it turns out Dean is deceiving him all along, and kills him:

It was true what they said, that the eyes continue to see moments after the head's cut off.

Gordon watched Dean drop the bloody ax and turn away from the bed. He watched his green eyed prize walk right into the arms of Sam Winchester.

Huh.

They hugged each other tightly, and when Sam angled his head down to kiss Dean on the mouth Gordon saw a flash of dark yellow in the taller boy's eyes, half hidden by those shaggy bangs of his (2008).

Yellow eyes, in the *Supernatural* canon, mean that Sam has become a demon. *3 Times* gathers 10 reviews, wherein the primacy of Sam/Dean is affirmed. Commenter StoryTagger has 'decided...this was just plain funny...honestly, what made Gordon think he could ever have Dean really choose him over Sam...'[sic] (2009). Athena dancing admits 'Dean & Gordon did have great chemistry' but qualifies, 'Of course, I like Sam/Dean even more' (2008).

Yet the fic also attracts rare censure. On an offsite thread titled 'Things I learned from Supernatural fanfiction' at psychfic.com, a poster warns:

WHATEVER YOU DO, DO NOT READ 3 Times Gordon Walker Didn't Take Dean Winchester, The 2 Times Gordon Did & Wished He Hadn't BY SILVER RUFFIAN. IT WAS WHAT PROMPTED #357.

\*steals Dean's bowtie and prepares to gouge out brain through eyeball\* (Windscrier, 2008).

Item 357 on the list is 'just when you think the internet can't get any weirder (OR WRONGER) it does. In SPADES' (ibid.). Whether it is the Gordon/Dean pairing or Sam turning evil, or Dean's duplicity and dubious consent that is weird and/or wrong, the thread does not say. However, Gordon/Dean is elsewhere called 'a pairing abomination' and 'Sick, sick, sick [...] Gordon...just...EWWWWWWWWWW!' (anon. 5, 2011). Gordon, then, cannot ultimately infiltrate the Winchester family, though he can threaten it. Fandom here consolidates the discursive formation established in canon, upholding one of the grounding statements, and providing an example of how fic is sometimes more elaboration and consolidation of media discourse than transformation.

### c) Construction of White Men

Fanfic concerning Gordon continues to make statements which construct Sam and Dean by contrast and comparison to him. Sometimes, as in the earlier parts of canon, this is a matter of civility, as Sam is made to ruminate, 'Gordon says we're the same now, he and I, but I am not like Gordon. I still believe I have a choice in this demon blood thing, that I am not destined to turn darkside' (bjxmas 2008).

Joyfulgirl41's *Bloodlust Coda* has Dean consider Gordon's words and reject them:

*We're alike.* The thing is-- what's bugging Dean is that he knows what's in him. He doesn't want to be like Gordon. He doesn't want that void inside of him to get so big, so out of control that it consumes him (2006).

But Dean ultimately knows that he cannot become Gordon because 'there is nothing in this world or the next that could make him kill Sam', regardless of 'what Sam did, or what he was or what he *became*. Dean's not sure if that's a good thing, but it's what makes Dean different' (2006). Contrast is favoured over comparison. The same is true of Tree66's *Midnight of the Soul*, though here the comparisons between Dean and Gordon are much more extensive, making heavy use of parallelism. Certain statements are initially made of Gordon, but then repeated of Dean:

The Knife! Cold! Inanimate! Forged steel! Hard, sharp and deadly! It was the embodiment of what he stood for, of what he had become after so many years

[...]

He knew hate; had embraced that emotion

[...]

His enemy! For a brief moment, he was remorseful. He had liked the guy. He thought they were cut from a similar cloth, both single-minded on their mission in life (Tree66, 2006-07).

The short exclamatories evoke the epic style, foreshadowing the conflict between two warriors of near-even prowess. In the end, Sam stops Dean killing Gordon, playing the same civilising role John played for him in *Baby Steps*:

“Dean, please!” Sam pleaded.

There it was! The single word, the tone of voice, the calm rational Sam dragging him back from the edge of the abyss (Tree66, 2006-07).

Again, it is the difference between Gordon and the Winchesters that is ultimately emphasised. The Winchesters are our focal characters and the story concludes with them, so the parallelism ultimately uses Gordon to construct them rather than vice versa. Sam wounds Gordon to save his brother, and a reviewer writes: ‘for a moment there I thought Sam had killed Gordon, but I should have known better’ (Midge 2010). This reads as ironic now that Sam has killed Gordon in canon, which the author responds she never thought would happen (Tree66 2010). The irony is deepened by the fact Gordon uses barbed wire as a means to torture Sam in this fic: the very weapon with which canon Sam eventually kills him. There is an echo of the Crucifixion in the imagery of *Midnight*, where ‘each of his extremities was tightly encircled with the rusted metal and were pulled, outstretched, leaving him spread eagle against the rough wood’. Christ-imagery is absent in canon, though logically the wire Sam used to behead Gordon must have pierced his hands. As noted, Supernaturalville constructs the Winchesters morally and heroically, perhaps more than canon.

On LiveJournal, the construction of the Winchesters by Gordon can be much more sinister. In *Blood Brothers* (2007), by nomelon, it turns out that the ‘one last good thing’, which canon Gordon vowed, was leaving his blood on the wire with which Sam beheaded him. *Blood Brothers* is not found on Fanfiction.net or Supernaturalville. This emphasises again how domain inflects the discourse. There is a lack of previous academic work comparing the *kind* of fiction

found on different sites: researchers have noted how the technologies of individual sites construct, for instance, author homepages (Black 2005a on Ff.net); facilitate conversation and use of graphics (Rebaza 2008 on LiveJournal) or provide a comparatively permanent home for fic wherein fans own the servers (Versaphile 2011 and Lothian 2013 on A03). But my examples demonstrate the way domain inflects the content of discourse; the statements allowed to be made.

In the *Supernatural* canon, one becomes a vampire not by being bitten, but by one's blood contacting the blood of a vampire. Given that Sam beheaded Gordon with his bare hands, this should logically have happened to him. In a comment, katsheswims writes:

During that episode when Sam cut his hands up on that wire and then cut Gordon's head off, I had the exact thought that the blood may have mixed. Though I knew the show wouldn't have that, unless it was to show Sam couldn't change or something because of the demon blood (2010).

Katsheswims acknowledges that canonically, it would be impossible for Sam and Gordon's blood to mix due to the dictates of the industry and audience expectations, but statements in fan fiction may differ. It seems that in this instance, fandom has more of that fictive freedom than canon to fulfil that role of suggesting 'what is not/could not be', unsettling our assumptions. Canon stated 'what is not' in reality – the death of a vampire, unfortunately coded. Fanfic states 'what is not' in canon. For in fanfic, Sam and Gordon's blood *can* mix (e.g. Morrigan 2008), though following the canon logic that vampire blood turns humans, this is problematic:

Oh my god, are your hands cut? Did you get Gordon's blood on your hands? Oh god, Sammy, please say that didn't happen (Morrigan, 2008)

[Sam] had avoided getting Gordon's blood in him by some unknown miracle but there were spots on his clothing, hands and arms that he wasn't sure were Dean's, Gordon's or his own (Peterson, 2008).

There was nowhere that Gordon's blood could have infected him. Yet, still, there was the stain of his blood on Sam's hands (Macklem [deangirl1], 2008).

As Sam attempts to expunge Gordon's blood, Lady Macbeth and her cultural echoes are frequently recalled:

[Sam] hastily washed his hands, scrubbed until his hands were raw and every drop of blood was gone, even with the blood gone the memory remained (Peterson, 2008).

[Sam] began the rigorous process of getting all the blood off of his hands. He scrubbed and scrubbed until his skin was raw and all his tears had finally finished falling (anon. 6, 2008).

He just couldn't stop staring at his blood slicked hands (Colby's girl, 2008).

This trope is so repeated that it gains considerable materiality, and its genealogy is acknowledged explicitly in comments, as the poster alphabet is 'loving the shades of Macbeth' (2008). Though the statements are re-posed, and inflected by a literary heritage in which the hand-washer is the guilty party, their genealogy is an old, troubled discourse: blood mixing between White and Black people, including the spread of pathology through it, has historically been a source of horror (Kenny 2006, especially 474-78). The impurity of Sam's blood, which was tainted by a demon at the age of six months, is already a source of anxiety in the text which compromises his status in the Winchester family and on the side of Good. The text permits mixing with demons, but not mixing with the Black man. The ultimate expression of this cultural horror must be the One Drop Rule, which 'classified all persons with any black ancestry

whatsoever as black', and outlawed White/Black marriage in many US States as late as 1967 (Polsky 2002, 178). Canon avoided this whole problematic by omitting any reference to the way the wire would have broken Sam's skin, cutting straight from Gordon's death scene to the coda. Fanfic, which traditionally fills in such gaps (Scott 2008; Musiani 2010; and see especially Pugh 2006, 57-64) seems unable to avoid it, combining the statements from canon and the genealogies of race and horror until both brothers are turned into monsters. When the blood on the wire penetrates Sam in nomelon's *Blood Brothers*, Sam becomes a savage vampire. He turns Dean because he 'didn't want to do it alone' (nomelon, 2008). They descend into monstrosity together, 'broken bodies, torn throats, blood everywhere' observed as 'Dean's calling card'. Sam knows it is 'what happens when he can't control the hunger'. Still in keeping with the grounding statement of the discourse concerning non-infiltration, Gordon has not broken them apart: 'it's just the two of them, smeared with blood, snarling at each other through awkward fangs, laughing at how they look, amazed at what they've become'.

Bodies can be breached, their boundaries broken by fluids. In Colby's girl's *Aftermath*, Sam's hands 'looked like hamburger meat and the blood just kept flowing from the gouges caused by the razor wire he had grasped in his bare hands to separate Gordon from his head'. His blood is 'leaking off his hands and splashing down onto the pavement in tiny red drops. It took no time for a small puddle to form at his feet (Colby's girl 2008). Dyer argues that the proper White male body, hard and taut, should not 'look like it runs the risk of being merged into other bodies. A sense of separation and boundedness is important to the white male ego' (152). Gordon's blood and the manner of his death compromise Sam's body and ego with it, a messy, fluid image of Kristevan abjection (1982). The abject is that which threatens the boundaries of the self,

feared and desired, and the racial other – the Jew in Kristeva’s own work – is one example (174-87; see also Boyer 2011). Daileader calls the ‘racial abject’ a ‘feminized, racial darkness that threatens to poison or devour the white, male ego’ (80), exactly as Gordon’s blood would Sam.

However, being cut does not necessarily turn Sam, and being turned does not necessarily make the Winchesters into monsters. In Muffy Morrigan’s *Blood Brothers* (2008), the brothers remember that ‘Lenore lived on cows’ blood’, and decide they can ‘live like this and not be a monster’. Gordon, they believe, was ‘a monster long before he was turned’. Their civility and moral nature triumphs over vampire blood. As a commenter puts it:

I really like this story, usually when a fanfic has one of the boys turned into a vampire/werewolf they end up psychotic and it never ends well. This one is cool because it actually treats them as themselves (FullMetal Edward, 2008).

Their essential nature is constructed as civil and sane. But the discourse also offers a statement reversing the situation: in *Sanctuary*, white-to-Black contamination is considered, as Jensen fears there is ‘something in [his own] blood’ that made Gordon ‘unstable’ (house\_of\_lantis, 2008). Gordon’s infection by the white man, which canon glosses over, is repeated with a variation that amplifies and complicates it. This statement alters the discourse, but because it relates to terms whose meanings are already well-constructed, its potential is limited. Rather than reversing the significations of Gordon’s dark skin and Jensen’s light skin, what these statements do is challenge Jensen’s claim to capitalized Whiteness (c.f. pp. 174-75). Gordon may be a reflection of the monster Jensen truly is – but Gordon is still a reflection of a monster.



Finally, in *Bloodletting*, which appears on LiveJournal and A03, Sam and Dean appear as human psychopaths who tear Gordon apart. The key statement of this fic, which is foregrounded because it serves as the summary, is ‘it’s a love story really. A testament to their bond created in sharp steel and shades of red’ (anon. 7, 2007a). Upon reading, one finds that the ‘love story’ described is Gordon’s mangled body: he is *literally* used, an object to construct the other characters, and this fic is remarkable for demonstrating the full horror of that trope taken to its logical conclusion. Compare the aptly titled *No Turning Back*, where a vampire Sam sinks ‘razor sharp fangs into Gordon’s neck, taking everything from him, his pride, his blood, and his life, but at the price of his own humanity’ (Cliffhanger Monster, 2006-09). Gordon’s death is constructed as consequential, but Sam’s humanity is the crucial point.

Gordon is no hero in *Bloodletting*. He has captured Dean, cuts him, and considers his desire for him out loud. In revenge, the Winchesters decide to kill him: ‘Without speaking they agree, just like when they were kids and would settle on what show to watch or when they’re hunting and silently decide which way to run’. They kill him slowly and sadistically, and soon ‘Sam understands why Gordon feels he has to kill him. He could easily become addicted to this feeling of power and control, of holding someone’s life in his hands and deciding to end it: seeing the heart slow and the blood run’. The murder is an act of unity, as ‘their combined hands jab the knife into Gordon’s stomach’. Soon Gordon is ‘bloody and bruised, his chest heaving with every shallow breath. He looks like a piece of battered art: a love story really’. Reduced to a literal object, his corpse remains as ‘a declaration of what happens when anyone threatens the Winchesters’, stating the sinister side of the unbreakable Sam/Dean bond this discourse so far has celebrated. Afterwards, they fuck against the car, and Dean admires ‘white skin against black

paint, the only color being specks of red blood that dot Sam's face and hands'. The innocence of whiteness is ironized.

The author states in the header: 'I do not condone any of these activities. It's all FICTION'. Yet the comments enthusiastically enact the murder:

It was so dark and the boys are dark together and GUH. Die Gordon DIE (anon. 8, 2007).

*Die Gordon DIE*. \*stabs along with you\* (anon. 7, 2007b).

Notice how darkness as a property has been shifted from the Gordon to the Winchesters, a quality of their psyches and characters contrasting with their pale skin. Canon too uses 'dark' to mean 'evil': Sam calls the destiny he must avoid the 'dark side', a *Star Wars* reference that also demonstrates the dark/evil connection embedded in popular culture.

How can darkness refer to both the soul and the skin? According to Duvall (2008), it is possible for Caucasian characters to perform 'whiteface': a tenuous performance and appearance of Whiteness contrary to their experience and identity. As his torture of Gordon reveals, this is ultimately how the vampire Jensen is constructed in *Sanctuary*. These figures in Southern American fiction experience a failure of proper White identity, particularly along lines of 'gender/sexuality and class' (2) – and recall that in *Sanctuary*, vampirism is constructed a parallel to queer identity. These characters 'do not parody, but rather internalize and perform blackness' (7). Their souls are dark. So 'blackness in Faulkner is repeatedly associated with a kind of undisciplined libidinal energy producing a variety of nonheteronormative possibilities (homosexual, bisexual, incestuous) that defy cultural taboos' (27). Something of this 'darkness' is at work in *Bloodletting*. Its images challenge the White/Black essentialist binary of the

apartheid imagination (c.f. Duvall, 5). However, as Duvall pouts, if ‘all forms of illicit sexuality enacted by poor whites [...] perform “black” libidinality, then the performance can always stop and white identity still has plausible deniability vis-à-vis blackness’. The whiteface masquerade is a privilege reserved for those who can pass as White, even though there is no such thing as essential Whiteness. Gordon cannot be made to ‘go light’ in the same way Sam and Dean ‘go dark’. Sam and Dean’s darkness is celebrated. Gordon’s inner darkness can be justified, but not elevated in this way. This is the legitimation paradox at work: darkness is legitimated by White men. Black characters are developed through the medium of the White men’s story. *Bloodletting* is of average impact, gathering 67 LiveJournal comments, and also appears on A03. *Blood Brothers* by nomelon is of higher impact, with 61 LiveJournal reviews plus 46 on Dreamwidth, five linked recommendations, and a podfic.<sup>34</sup>

Fandom then perpetuates the discourse of familial bonds which Gordon cannot break and uses him in the construction of the Winchesters. But it is far more explicit than canon about the costs of those bonds and constructions. Such costs are likely to be constructed as ‘creepily romantic’ (realpestilence 2007, on *Bloodletting*), a topic which will be explored in depth in Chapter 4.

On the other hand, there are 28 fics written completely or mostly from Gordon’s perspective. These might be understood as counter-narratives, intertextual responses with precedent both in the horror genre (Hills 2005, 163-81) and postcolonial writing (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 15-52). Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is often considered a counter-narrative to *Heart of Darkness*, whose racism Achebe criticised in his 1975 Chancellor’s Lecture at the University

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<sup>34</sup> The podfic is by me. I found the story enjoyable and of high quality: its literary capital influenced me to increase the strength of its statements.

of Massachusetts Amherst. Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone* (2001) explicitly rewrites *Gone With the Wind* from the perspective of a female plantation slave. Horror counter-narratives sometimes take the perspective of the monster, as in Golden's edited collection, *The Monster's Corner* (2011), whereas the postcolonial counter-narratives can construct the voices of the oppressed in opposition to the historical grand narrative of Western imperialism, drawing attention to the 'gaps and blank spots' of that narrative (Ilmonen 2002, 111) as fanfic does with canons. Fics from Gordon's perspective, in a combination of these precedents, do not use him to construct White men, but construct him as a character in his own right. 28 is only 8% of 344, and the average number of reviews on these fics is 26 (as opposed to the overall average of 61). This average is boosted by the fact one of the fics is by fleshflutter, and gathers 167 reviews.

Gordon's perspective in the fic featuring him and linked to his episodes is statistically a minor consideration, but some notable statements are produced by it. To some extent these challenge the paradox of legitimation, though like all fic they exist because of the Show, and to that extent, are granted audience and comprehensibility in fandom terms via the White men's story.

For instance, *Monstrosity* provides an 'internal view of Gordon, turning into a vampire' (caffienekitty 2007). At first he thinks, '*I can fight this. This is not me. I am not this thing*', showing the kind of self-determination and resistance usually attributed to White men. Ripping the heads off the vampire girls is re-constructed as an act of mercy: 'They asked for help before they started screaming, so he helped them. Nothing he wouldn't want done for himself'. In another instance of Kristevan citation with alteration (1980, 73), repeating the canonical statement 'I'm a monster' here changes it, followed immediately by the qualifier that he 'doesn't have to fight himself to believe it *anymore*' [my emphasis]. The fic gives Gordon a reason for

and a process of accepting the inevitability of his monstrosity: he chooses to believe one must be ‘monster or human, no middle ground’, because otherwise, ‘his entire life and the way he lived it was a lie, and his sister...’ The reader informed by canon can supply the blank, as reviewer *irismay42* does: ‘He'd rather give in to becoming a vampire than face the thought that he was wrong to kill his sister, that she might have been saved’ (2007). *Irismay42* also states here: ‘I, personally, really felt for Gordon’. The qualifier, separated from the rest of the sentence by commas, suggests that this sentiment may be unusual, and it is: considering the whole discourse formation, expressions of hatred for Gordon are far more common than sympathy. She praises, ‘great insight into Gordon’s emotional journey throughout the ep’, constructing Gordon as a complex character capable of change.

*Irismay42* also contributes a first-person piece from Gordon’s perspective, where he is in heaven. Because this was written in 2009, whilst Season 4 was revealing Sam’s destiny as Lucifer’s vessel, Gordon can reflect that ‘John was *right* to tell Dean to kill his brother’ (*irismay42*, 2009). He ‘got to gloat when that nice little butter-wouldn't-melt-in-his-mouth Sammy Winchester started sleeping with demons and exorcising them with his mind’, but retains a certain generosity, hoping Dean makes it to heaven when all is over. He observes that there is ‘nothing like "I told you so" to make your death seem meaningful’: this statement retrospectively reconstructs Gordon’s canonical death, wherein Sam exhibited that White restraint and stood framed by the beams of light. Now Gordon has been charged by Heaven with averting the Apocalypse, and he comments, ‘but, damn, I already tried that while I was alive, and look what happened? Head cut off with razor wire!’ Responses are mixed. *Primadonna cat* remarks, ‘As season 4 unfolds I keep asking: "What if Gordon was right?"’ (2009). Vindication of Gordon’s

perspective is a blank in the canonical story which these fics fill. Similarly, halfshellvenus replies to a comment on her own Gordon POV fic: ‘thinking about where S4 ended... I realized that Gordon was actually right. :0’ (2009). But shakensilence ‘seriously doubt[s] that Gordon Walker went to heaven’ (2009).

Two fics provide a backstory for Gordon, describing how he was expelled from his family and became a hunter. The effect of these statements on discourse is demonstrable through their reception. Kijutsu’s *Monster* gives Gordon a real family, a mother who died of the ‘overwhelming grief of losing both her children’ (2007). It is Gordon’s mentor who initially demands they kill his turned sister: Gordon responds, ‘fuck you’, a sentiment usually attributed to Dean when anyone suggests Sam needs to die. Gordon grieves ‘the little sister who would sneak into [his] room and mess up his stuff, knowing he’d forgive her as soon as she smiled at him [...] The little sister he had failed to protect’. This alters his canonical statement that she ‘wasn’t [his] sister anymore, it wasn’t human’, and that he ‘didn’t blink’ upon killing her. Katee\_q responds that the author ‘got into gordon’s [sic] head and made him someone you can feel sympathy for’ (2007) and anon. 9 that she ‘Made me feel sorry for Gordon. \*Shakes head in disbelief\*’ (2007).

These statements, and the performed action, stress the *alteration* of discourse by statements contributed in fanfic, though their connection with the text is stressed by an unsigned observation that ‘of course there has to be a reason as to why he is the way he is in the episodes’ (Anon. 10, 2007). This accords with the observation by Young (see p. 20), that whilst a statement effects change and discontinuity it must also be related to sameness and regularity in order to function within the discourse (Young, 402). On one hand, Gordon’s perspective is dependent on the

master narrative for its existence, an instance of the legitimization paradox and a potential weakness of postcolonial counter narratives in general (c.f. Singh 2012). For it could be argued that though counter narratives affect an alteration in discourse, they simultaneously re-instate the primacy of the master narrative on which they depend. In the court proceedings against *The Wind Done Gone* on grounds of copyright infringement, literary scholar Alan Lelchuck called it ‘parasitical’ and ‘dependent solely on its relation to *Gone With the Wind*’ (quoted in Gómez-Galisteo 2011, 68). Yet Toni Morrison, on behalf of Randall, stressed the book’s address of the absences and gaps in Mitchell’s book, its glossing over the historical realities of plantation life (Gómez-Galisteo 67). For on the other hand, it could be argued that these texts undermine the sufficiency, authority and primacy of the original text, challenging these concepts in the process. If one perceives statements as active, temporal primacy matters less than impact in a discursive formation. When the concept of originality is deconstructed, we compromise the legitimization paradox. This possibility comes to fruition in Chapter 6.

These counter-narrative statements do alter the discourse established by canon, but they are not particularly prominent. There are 16 total reviews for *Monstrosity* (8 each on Ff.net and LiveJournal), and 7 for the other story detailing Gordon’s past: *Twist the Knife*, by Impertinence (2007, LiveJournal only).

*Twist the Knife* is prefaced by the statement, ‘all this talk of racism made me think more about Gordon than I usually do’, constructing race and racism as important to the character, whereas canon elided it. Here, Gordon killed his possessed brother and as ‘He watches Dean with little Sammy—state after state after state [...] he knows Dean’ll never have the guts to do what’s necessary. The envy is like a blow straight to the gut’ (impertinence 2007).

Again, responses to the fic are good, but to Gordon as a character, mixed. Halfshellvenus points out that ‘it never occurred to Gordon to *exorcise* the demon out of his brother and then kill it’, an example of ‘how Gordon approaches everything’ (2007). Soda\_and\_capes is ‘actually rather fond of him’ (2007) – again, note the double qualifier.

Fanfic also gives Gordon a perspective on his failed infiltrations of the Winchester family. In tigriswolf’s *Lonely for Something to Touch* (2008), ‘Gordon needs to convince Dean to ditch his little brother, come with him. He can hone what John Winchester (scary bastard) started. Dean could become the greatest hunter in America, if he got rid of Sam’s stifling presence’. Dean is constructed here, but by his father: a patriarchal threat to his autonomy. Gordon’s intentions are not cruel or savage, though they are, as kriptkeeper puts it, ‘creepy’, and ‘stalker-like’ (2008). Kriptkeeper states that this ‘fits perfectly with the canon’ again casting Dean in the position of threatened woman. The most prominent Gordon-perspective piece, fleshflutter’s *The Living Among the Dead*, also considers Gordon’s (in)ability to replace Sam in Dean’s life. Here, Dean and Gordon are in hell together, and Dean’s Prometheus-like fate is to be torn apart by hellhounds daily before his body reassembles itself. Gordon helps:

[he] cradles Dean against his chest as flesh knits over the bone, tucks Dean's pretty pink heart back behind ribs and skin, straightens his limbs out like he's a crumpled paper doll. Dean's lips move soundlessly, shaping words that Gordon strains to catch before they disappear into the bloodied air.

*Sammy* (fleshflutter, 2007b).

In Hell, Dean and Gordon have some sort of partnership, and Gordon is the furthest thing from a sadist, ‘taking some of the violence on himself rather than letting it all rain down upon Dean. He



doesn't regret giving Dean five extra seconds without pain'. Ultimately, Sam, who has fulfilled his destiny as the Anti-Christ, comes for Dean. Gordon attempts to make him see that Sam is a monster: "'Dean, *look*," [he] whispers. "*Look*. Don't you see them bowing down to him? Don't you hear the songs they're singing for him?'" But Dean goes, leaving 'Gordon and the blood-damp desert of Hell stretching out around him forever'. As this is the closing line, the reader is left with Gordon's despair rather than Sam and Dean together. Gordon is entirely sympathetic: one reviewer 'love[s] how Gordon tries to save/keep Dean from Sam' (anon. 11 2007) and ahania 'love[s] the weird tenderness between Gordon and Dean, here'. She 'always felt that Gordon was trying to reach out to Dean in his own bizarre, super-earnest way' and 'love[s] that Gordon's first impulse is to protect Dean from Sam' (2007b).

So whilst Sam and Dean remain at the center of the discourse, fan fiction contributes statements which form Gordon as a character rather than a device to construct Sam and Dean. *The Living Amongst the Dead* gathers 167 comments, two podfic recordings,<sup>35</sup> 8 recommendations and a translation into Russian. One of the linked recommendations is at chromaticvision on LiveJournal, as a memorable work featuring a character of colour. This categorization adds to the construction of Gordon as an autonomous character.

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<sup>35</sup> One of which I performed myself for the same reasons as *Blood Brothers*.

d) Relations with White women

There are not many prominent women in *Supernatural* canonically. Fics exploring the relationships between Sam, Dean, Gordon and White women tend to either elaborate Lenore's role by pairing her with Sam or Dean or introduce a new character. Gordon/Lenore does not exist: apparently a statement that would alter his threat to her enough to make them lovers is outside the possibilities of this discourse. When another female character is introduced, Gordon is usually a threat to her. We have seen how he kidnapped Dean's girlfriend in *Joyride*. In *Love in the Time of Werewolves and Demons, Part 2* and *Part 3*, Sam must protect his wife Madison (a werewolf with whom he had a canonical fling) from Gordon in his role as a hunter (anon. 12, 2007a; 2007b). This constructs Sam as protector of White women in contradiction to canon: canonically, Sam killed Madison at her own request when she learned that she became a monster by night (2x17, 'Heart'). In *Awake in the Dark*, Dean is paired with an older woman with children. Gordon breaks into her house and assaults her. His threat is sexual violence: 'his eyes burning with intensity, he gestured toward her with the gun. "Strip, now. I want to see everything"' (Waterstradt 2007). Dean responds with righteous rage and jealousy, more explicit than Sam's in *Monochrome*. Here he thinks, 'Damn it Gordon, don't you touch her. I'll kill you, do you hear me don't you touch her.'" Gordon taunts with the suggestion he could possess Sara sexually: "'I can see why you dig her man, really. And her body, can I say, wow. That mole just under her left breast, hmm...she's a tempting bit alright.'"

Overall, the discourse formation affirms that White women are to be protected from Black men by White ones, indeed strengthening it from Madison's canonical fate. The fics that pair Sam and Madison in an extended romance, allowing him to overrule and save her, restore their story to a more traditional narrative. There are, however, a few statements that alter this. They branch from an official paratext made available with the US edition of the Season 1 DVDs. This is a journal attributed to the hunter Jo Harvelle, a young White blonde woman. They imply that as a teenager, she had a crush on Gordon, and that he gave her some training whilst visiting her mother's bar. It is significant that these statements could not appear in the main body of the text: their paratextual position keeps them peripheral. On the other hand, Gray argues that the paratext 'constructs, lives in, and can affect the running of the text', having a 'constitutive role' (2010, 6-7), and certainly if one chooses to read and accept the diaries and fic branching out from them, they alter the construction of Gordon and Jo.

Keerawa's *Playing Rough* (2009) is set in Jo's teenage years. The summary on A03 (2011) reads 'So Bill's little girl liked to play rough? He could do that'. Based on the discourse so far, I expected 'he' to be Gordon, but it is actually an original character who attempts to rape Jo despite Gordon telling him "I wouldn't, if I were you". Jack asks if Gordon is 'staking a claim' but Gordon corrects, "just a little friendly advice". Jo is not constructed as his property and successfully defends herself against the rapist. In this story, a White man is the threat, and the young White woman can protect herself. But it gathers only 2 reviews on A03, and 8 on LiveJournal. In winterwaltz6's *Pride*, Jo 'likes to wait on [Gordon] because he actually tips her and doesn't think her ass is a pincushion' (2007). Again, other men are more of a threat to her. Gordon and Jo do not go beyond flirtation, or Jo's perception thereof, a 'weird tingle run[ning]

deep in her stomach'. The pairing for this fic is 'Jo/Gordon. Or something like that', but it is tagged 'jo/gordon', thus ambiguously categorized. The author and a commenter were planning an 'epic Jo/Gordon AU hunter fic' (anon. 13, 2007), but notably, it does not appear to have been written. Similarly, in Dan Kroh's *Night of the Hunter*, Jo is attracted to Gordon's 'high cheekbones, the outline of hair shorn close to his head, and the ripple of muscle under the dark skin on his arms as he turned the page of the book he was studying' (2012). This statement attributes a sensuality to Gordon which is neither emasculating nor barbaric, and is written in response to a piece of fan art which shows Jo flirting with Gordon in the bar. Again, the relationship does not develop: as in the journal, Gordon takes Jo on a hunt and may or may not use her as bait for a monster, depending on interpretation. Thus, these statements open the possibility of a healthy relationship between Gordon and a White woman, but do not form it. Fan fiction opens transformative possibilities, but does not fulfil them in this case.

There is a final branch to explore. When Gordon is slashed with Dean, Dean tends to play the submissive role hegemonically attributed to White women. These statements build on the role Dean plays structurally until the end of 'Bloodlust': the pale woman tempted by the darkness. In dragonspell's *Payback* (2010a), Gordon considers that Dean was 'definitely offering that first time I'd met him', appreciates that 'little bit of terror in his eyes' whilst restrained in 'Hunted'. He feels it 'brings out his beauty'. Dean has a 'delicateness to his face that you just don't see on many guys', but Gordon believes he 'hasn't been innocent in a long time'. According to Gordon, Dean cannot help but respond physically to his advances: 'He can't stop his own nature. This is what Dean was made for, after all'. Dean is cast as the White whore in the Othello myth, his desire a threat to familial integrity. Indeed, darkestangelspn suggests the author add the fic to a

community titled ‘Dean...the sexy slut of the Winchester clan’ (2010). The banner shows Dean posing provocatively on his car, with the title superimposed in curling white font embellished with hearts. The technical codes of LiveJournal allow this graphic to be embedded in the discourse.

Similarly, in Larson [reapertownusa]’s *Shades of Grey*, Gordon perceives in Dean the ‘tentativeness of a virgin that wanted it so bad they were on the edge of coming in their own pants, but who didn’t know how to ask for it’ (2011). He is ‘soft, tender and confused – needing so bad for someone to show him the ropes’. Gordon feels a ‘rush of power’ knowing ‘this thing beneath him was his to save or break, delicate as grandma’s antique porcelain’. Here, Dean is an object, and Gordon the subject and focalizer. In *Shades of Grey* and *So Damn Sweet*, which is the sequel to *Payback*, Dean’s pale skin is depicted in contrast to other physical features: muscles and scars respectively. A marker of femininity is balanced with those of masculinity, complicating the gendered discourse, for as Gordon observes, there are ‘a lot of stories that skin ha[s] to tell’ (Larson 2011). He ‘love[s] how [Dean’s skin] looks against the blackness of [his] own skin. Like chocolate and vanilla, a sheer contrast that’s pleasing to the eye’ (dragonspell, 2010b). Their interracial sex is constructed as erotic, but problematically so, as Dean’s consent is dubious.

The construction of Gordon-as-Black-man/Dean-as-White-woman reaches its logical conclusion in *Time to Pass* (anon. 14 2009). Here, Gordon rapes Dean whilst he is restrained in ‘Hunted’. Gordon is described as ‘black’, and ‘dark-skinned’, and Dean metonymically as ‘the blonde’. Whether Dean is dark blond or has light brown hair has been a topic of ‘wank’: strident debate in a segment of fandom considered hilarious and pathetic by others (Dunlapp and Wolf 2010;

Hellekson 2010) . In a thread now deleted, incredulity was expressed as to why it could possibly matter how such a subtle gradation is categorized. In this context, though, we can see why it does: because bloneness is a form of elevated Whiteness (Dyer 1997, 44; 118). In *Time to Pass*, it is Dean's identity. Finally, in one instance, the role of White woman is played by Sam and Dean's half-brother, Adam (who is canonically dead). Adam is strongly sexually attracted to the 'dark skinned stranger with intense eyes and bad boy aura'. When Gordon finds out that Adam has magical powers, as all 3 do in this AU, he beats him. Adam returns to the family, his 'restless wander-lust' gone: 'it was clear now that he belonged in a huge warm family home surrounded by his freaky siblings and his adorable nephews and an Aunt and Uncle' (Watson, 2012). After threatening the family through abandonment, he learns his lesson (again, c.f. Green Macdonald, 197).

So Gordon is almost always a threat to femininity, with a few exceptions, but in this discourse formation, femininity is not always a property of women. We might consider fandom as more transformative concerning gender than race, though once again it legitimizes femininity through transposition onto men, and certainly the researchers who lauded the radical potential of fanwork used gender as a primary lens (Bacon-Smith 1992; Penley 1992). Though refreshing to a researcher whose background is at odds with the traits of masculinity and femininity Western culture assigns men and women, it remains to be seen whether fandom could legitimize Western conceptions of femininity using female characters.

e) Savagery (Animalism, Monstrosity)

There are some fics that continue the theme established with Gordon's monstrous transformation, but rarely in a simple or straightforward way. Tigriswolf's short fic *Parasite* describes Gordon's experience of drinking blood:

It's better than chocolate or whiskey or anything else he's ever had. It's sticky and sweet and warm, life sluicing down his throat, thick and vibrant. Every sense is on overdrive, but taste... he almost climaxes at the first sip (2010).

The ability to appreciate and compare taste, connoisseur-like, counters the uncontrolled transformation in canon. Yet these statements in turn are compromised by the reader's canonical knowledge of what 'it' is. In *Joyride*, Gordon wants Dean's 'blood on [his] hands', to 'rip [Dean's] heart out and eat it for lunch'. Yet in the same utterance he points out, 'You and Sam tried to kill me before and it's your fault I'm a vampire [...] I'm so tired of you doing things to me, Dean' (ladyinwhite, 2008). This places the responsibility for the situation on the Winchesters, and constructs them as the first aggressors. Having been objectified and made passive by things done to him, Gordon speaks back. He is variously described as an 'animal'; 'a sick animal' (Tree66, 2006-07), 'like a shark that had found blood in the water' (Beloved-Stranger, 2010) 'rabid' (Spoilerwolf, 2007), 'like a hawk viewing a helpless field mouse' (Silver Kitten, 2006-07) as having a 'big paw'(anon. 14, 2009) as having the 'constitution of a bull on steroids' (skag trendy, 2008) as 'charging forward like an enraged bull' (girlyghoul, 2010). Yet Dean is described as 'a pit bull' (Katy M VT, 2010), 'like a pit-bull'(Briarwood, 2009) 'a feral animal that needed to be free'; 'like an abandoned dog too dangerous to go to a new home but

not quite strong enough to fend for itself" (Larson 2011). Sam is very rarely described in animal terms, except where he has been changed into a vampire. This consolidates the connection between Dean and Gordon. In fact, statements in the set of fics featuring Gordon or linked to his episodes that construct the savagery or civility of the Winchesters are more common than those constructing Gordon: civility dominates on Ff.net and Supernaturalville, whilst savagery or at least ambiguity dominates LiveJournal, A03 and Dreamwidth. Other peripheral sites are divided, but the influence of *Baby Steps* in *The Sam/Dean Archive* tips that balance towards a domestic form of civility. This constructs their characters as more important, but not necessarily more civilized or morally better.

On the side of civility, some fics contribute statements which reconstruct or mitigate the violent manner of Gordon's death. The preface to Smudge93's *Away from the Sun* asserts that 'Dean always likes to finish a job' and as 'the boys just left Gordon lying on the floor of the warehouse', she 'figured he'd go back and do the right thing by him, monster or not' (2009). The canonical construction of Dean is depicted as inauthentic or insufficient. In the fic, Dean goes back to deal with Gordon's body and 'ha[s] to admit' the severed head 'freak[s] him'. He reflects that he has 'bought this head a drink and had chatted with it in a bar': Gordon's death is made more consequential; Dean is made more conscionable. The first time he attempts to roll the head into a bag, 'he didn't roll it in far enough [...] and it rolled back, stopping at his foot, Gordon's unseeing eyes staring at him'. Gordon's head is an object of Gothic horror, in the manner of the Tell-Tale Heart: "'What are you looking at! Please God stop staring at me!" Dean's voice was barely a whisper'. He digs Gordon a grave and deposits the body, but the head continues to torment him, 'the bag catching on something in the trunk and ripping'. Dean addresses the dead



man: "Damn it! Some people just don't know when to give up. Gordon, you are a son of a bitch!"

Eventually he picks up the head in Sam's jacket and tosses both into the grave before burning them. His last words to Gordon are 'Rest easy, you crazy, mad ass, son of a bitch'. The story draws clear lines between Gordon and Dean, for though they are 'so similar in outlook with their hunting that it scare[s] Dean a little' he knows that concerning 'family they were light years apart, Gordon had killed his because it was evil, Dean was prepared to die for his, evil or not'. Affirmation of the family, rather than a woman's influence, is the civilizing factor here, redrawing the Self/Other boundary and allowing Dean to ritually expunge the dark aspect. When he returns to the motel room, Sam knows that 'in the simple act of putting Gordon Walker to rest Dean had finally proven to himself that he was nothing like him' and that 'Dean still had a soul that cared'. However, the fic ends on an ambiguous note as 'the next thought froze Sam, *at least he did for now*'. Azerjaban comments, 'sad last line' (2011).

On the other hand, some statements construct Gordon's death as a failure on Sam's part. White civility is more questionable in Laurel [sailorhathor]'s *Lacerated Sky* (2006-09). Here Sam has been turned into a vampire following the events of *Bloodlust*. In this version, Sam carrying Lenore to safety has unfortunate consequences. Eli, Lenore's mate, gets the 'wrong idea' and attacks him. According to Dean, who is narrating this, 'All the blame could be placed squarely on ol' Gordy's shoulders'. Sam is turned by Gordon's sister, who feeds him her blood as he is dying, 'playing a big cosmic joke on the whole Winchester family'. She too is a threat to them. When Sam is starving for blood, Dean feeds him, and this is described in animalistic terms:

His tongue came out, licking blood off his lips and chin, and he made a whimpery sound. I knew he didn't want to do this, that it was hard for him. But the bloodlust is irresistible. Sam began to lick at my wrist and make these satisfied noises [...] [he] lost some of his control. His vampire teeth came out.

Soon his 'vampire nature seemed to be in control of him', and his 'sharp teeth grazed over [Dean's] jugular vein, lazily, like an animal stalking its prey'. When Dean begins to fear that Sam will drain him, he begs "Please don't kill me. Just stop." His voice 'penetrate[s] through that haze the bloodlust had put over [Sam]. Sam apologises profusely, and Dean is able to assure him "You stopped yourself in time"'. The story vacillates between Sam controlling his instincts and giving into them, and because it is unfinished, there is no resolution. Sam, Dean and Lenore establish a threesome, and a statement as they make love alters the discourse of animalism: as Sam 'purr[s] and whimper[s] like a little animal', Dean finds it 'hard to believe that he could ever be considered dangerous'. *Lacerated Sky* is overall more popular than *Away from the Sun*, which gathers only 8 reviews between Ff.net and Supernaturalville. It has 46 reviews on LiveJournal, and 10 on Ff.net. Still it is notable that Muffy Morrigan's White vampire fic, in which Sam and Dean retain their civility, is the most popular on Ff.net, with 140 reviews.

I noted above that the episode 'Bloodlust' states the possibility of Dean as White Savage, such as when he beheads the vampire. A fic by revenant describes the canonical bloodspray: 'little red dots spatter across [Dean's] familiar face contorted in an unfamiliar expression - a dark parody of the freckles that Sam used to count teasingly when he was young' (2007). But one text constructs Sam and Dean as White Savages very explicitly: *To the Bone* by Cassandra Blake [tempestquill] (2007a). Gordon's function here is to be killed, so certainly he is used in the construction of the White men, but that construction is more awful and sinister than anything one

would see on the CW. Blake warns for ‘dark themes’, and this fic is recommended on Story Finders to a reader seeking ‘dark stories’: darkness again has a moral/psychological usage. For here, Sam has turned to evil and become a cannibal, though it is not explicitly stated whether he is demon, human or something else. Attacking, Sam ‘raises a hand and Gordon sails across the room until he’s pinned up against the wall, his hands clutching at some invisible force wrapped around his throat’, an action canonically attributed to demons. Sam offers Dean some ‘dark meat’, race spoken in its crudest form, yet it is Sam who is consumed by ‘maddening darkness’. Again, he is white on the outside and black within – yet his darkness is not without appreciation and vicarious enjoyment on behalf of the reader, as again, Sam and Dean legitimate darkness, union is celebrated at the end of the fic, even in their monstrosity.

Exposed to blood, Dean almost gives in: his mouth waters, ‘he’s weak and in agony from the endless hunger, and that smell, it offers relief, strength, speed, life. Pure, sweet, endless life’. Compare the statement above wherein Gordon tastes life in blood. This brand of monstrosity is equally applicable to White men and Black. However, Sam advises that ‘Gordon isn’t good, he’s poison. Sick with disease, slowly dying’. This statement supports those that framed Gordon’s blood as infection, but alters them, because Sam’s perspective here is that of a monster. The destabilizing effect is similar to the scene Dyer analyses at the end of Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*, when the White vigilantes descend, zombie-like, upon Ben: *they* believe he must be killed, but they are monstrous harbingers of death (211). The fic also evokes *Titus Andronicus* as Dean realizes that Jo’s mother Ellen is silent because her tongue has been cut out, and Sam tricks Dean into eating stew made with human meat. It is this that finally turns Dean and reunites him with Sam.

*To the Bone* is overflowing with abject unbounded bodies: images of ingesting, leaking, cutting, perforating, gushing. Sam as saviour of White women is thoroughly contradicted, as he cuts out Jo's heart and displays it on his sleeve as an appeal to Dean. On Fanfiction.net, this would probably have been rejected with horror, but unsurprisingly this fic appears on LiveJournal, where it gathers an above-average 112 comments and is tagged 'crack', constructing it as humorous and outrageous. The work is dedicated 'to Lissa, who said it couldn't be done', suggesting that the story is altering the boundaries of the discourse formation. Demonessjo finds it 'fantastic and sick at the same time! [She has] yet to see someone, anyone, take gore and horror to this level in the fandom' (2007). This suggests *To the Bone* has indeed expanded what is speakable.

#### IV. Conclusions

The use of Foucauldian discourse theory has allowed us to systematically map the patterns, impacts and limits of fandom's alteration of the formation. In this new discourse formation, statements which construct Sam and Dean as savages, animals and monsters are overall better received than those which would civilize Gordon through the telling of his story. In a sense, this again keeps the White men at the center of the discourses of *Supernatural*, but it removes 'darkness' as a property of race to one of the psyche and of morality. Darkness is separated from the body, and in illustration of the paradox, legitimated by the White men. Perhaps this comes

full circle to a problem of repression, allowing us to read unpleasant racial politics in generalized psychological terms (c.f. Savoy Martin 1998, xi). But the fact that Gordon's race is spoken alongside White men constructed as monsters may mitigate this. Moreover, statements made in fanfic *do* alter the discourse, contradicting the grounding statement in canon that Black characters exist to construct White. The stories told from Gordon's perspective exemplify this, though, in illustration of the legitimation paradox, they do depend on the canonical White men's story for intelligibility and a place in the formation. They are of slight impact in the formation, and the grounding statement that Gordon must not infiltrate the family remains intact. The greatest challenge to it is *Sanctuary*, with Gordon's repeated, haunting pleas to his 'daddy': but Jensen's inclusion of Gordon in his vampire family ultimately ends in Gordon's death. It is rather Jensen's 'Whiteness' that is compromised than the darkness of the Black character, who cannot truly penetrate the family.

A limit case demonstrates the resilience of that grounding statement. In *Blood Stains* by Red Dragon – Jura [sic] (2008), Sam and Dean argue following the events of 'Bloodlust'. They get into a car crash, and Sam dies without them reconciling. This takes place in the first chapter. The reviews demand a continuation, so the story goes on: it turns out Sam is not permanently dead, but Dean has witnessed illusions to teach him they must reconcile. The message comes from a vision of his dead mother. After skirting the edge of the discourse, threatening to divide Sam and Dean, the family is reunited, and 'everything [i]s back to normal'. The initial intended ending, with the family permanently broken through Gordon's influence, proved unspeakable. What is absolutely not allowed is penetration and displacement of the White Winchester family, particularly the Sam/Dean relationship. The few fics constructing his relations with White

women make Blackness primarily threatening, but this is very slightly destabilised by the fics featuring Jo. Notice how the insertion of a social background for Gordon, and the speakability of race, destabilize the strong statements of savagery. Gordon does now exist as a character in his own right and with a perspective, and though those statements are of comparatively low impact, their address of the gaps and erasures of canon can be read as the first challenge to the primacy and authority of the source text, and so, the first challenge to the legitimization paradox.

Nonetheless, the inviolability of the White family persists, though it is destabilised by the blood-mixing fic and the strong statements of *Sanctuary*, which constructed the White man as the Black's monstrous progenitor. The statements of monstrosity and savagery cross more clearly into the formation of Whiteness here. Perhaps the great racial cultural anxiety that Fiedler recognised is avoided, but its place, taboo possibilities of incest, sadism and murder arise. The reifying of the brothers' bond, at the expense of anything and anyone, is a profoundly Romantic trope, explored in depth in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4: 'Erotically Co-Dependent': Incest and the Winchester brothers

### I. Introduction

In 2010, Tim Surette of TV.com declared *Supernatural* fandom the 'craziest' of all fandoms, due to the fact that the most popular slash pairing is incestuous. Incest 'remains a taboo which is very difficult to cross in mainstream media' (Lindgren Leavenworth and Isaksson 2013, n.p.), despite the fact the source text obsessively incites, denies, hints and sublimates incestuous possibilities between the brother-protagonists (Tosenberger 2008; 2010; Flegel and Roth 2010). This is unsurprising considering that the Gothic as a genre deals with taboo, with the trope of the unspeakable (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985, 94). It would thus be impossible to study discursive formations in *Supernatural* fandom without giving a central place to incest. This chapter will demonstrate that though the Romantic construction of incest Tosenberger perceived in *Supernatural* fanfic is influential, that construction is reflexively problematized. Incest is also constructed as social dysfunction, a gothic horror, pornographic titillation, and as a justified lifestyle choice in a (neo)Liberal context. The discourse is highly regulated by site and Author-function. Moreover, the legitimation paradox will be seen to redeem the Othered sexuality of incest to a certain extent via the capital of the White protagonists; but we will also see that legitimation is not automatic and guaranteed, and is subject to regulations from broader cultural discourse.

Language about the unspeakable is of course a paradox, and for a subject whose discursive formation is rooted in taboo, Western culture, science and media has been extraordinarily prolix regarding incest. The Western discursive formation has two main branches (Spain 1987, 623; Walter and Buyske 2003, 353; Tidefors et al. 2010, 349), which might be called, loosely, 'Freudian' and 'Westermarckian'. The first branch, which dominated until the late twentieth century, comprises the range of statements which construct incest as a natural impulse repressed by culture; the second, which is currently in ascension (Wolf 2005; Erickson 2005; Turner and Maryanski 2005), comprises those which construct it as unnatural, and symptomatic of fundamental dysfunction and/or evolutionary failing.

In the Freudian tradition, 'normative sexuality is always inherently incestuous because all legitimate love objects are always already substitutes for the objects of incestuous longing' (Pollack 2003, 15). Our primal desires are incestuous, and we sublimate and substitute them with acceptable objects. A range of thinkers have posited incest taboo as the move into the social order, or into culture from nature. For Freud (1919), the superego's necessary repression of incestuous desire is a key factor in the civilizing process. For Lévi-Strauss, the incest-prohibition is the function that forced humans into social groupings beyond the pre-social, primitive clan. Exogamy is unnatural, a 'remodeling of the biological conditions of mating and procreation' (1960, 278). Lacan's development of Freud posits the entry into language, which is a sociolinguistic order centred around the phallus, as a forced end to incestuous possibility. As Pollack expresses it, 'a pre-oedipal state of imaginary fusion with the m/other is disrupted under the sign of the father's name and law' (7), which accounts for the difficulty of language around the taboo. Foucault belongs to this tradition. Incest, he writes, is the one relationship a capitalist



society absolutely cannot tolerate, due to the indispensability of bio-power: the harnessing of the human body as a working and reproducing machine. Thus, when in the eighteenth century the family became the locus of nurturance and affect, the incest prohibition operated as a discursive bar to such incitement. This was necessary to maintain the systems of exogamous marriage upon which capitalism depends ([1976] 1998, 106-114; 139-143). Though Freud spoke in human absolutes and Foucault in historical contingencies, both believed that convention and law rather than nature prohibit incest (1919, 202-14).

The Freudian construction of incest, in accordance with Freud's theories of human nature, is Romantic. O'Dwyer (2009) gives a full account of the Romantic dimensions of Freud's thought, notably the conviction that our fundamental nature, which is savage and libidinous, is at war with culture, which lets us live with each other. O'Dwyer calls Freud a 'realistic Romantic' (94) because he considered repression necessary, and civilisation good, despite its pernicious side-effects. Romanticism proper, which Tosenberger perceives in the incestuous subtext of *Supernatural* and its manifestations in fic, disdains civilization. In Romanticism, sibling incest specifically is celebrated as a natural and primal bond, a revolt against the F/father, society, religion and culture (Thorslev 1965; Richardson 1985; 2000, 554; Stelzig 1995; Stansbury 2008). As Richardson explains, 'Romantic sibling incest is presented not as a perversion or accidental inversion of the normal sibling relation, but as an extension and intensification of it' with which no other, later love can compete (Richardson 2000, 554; 1985, 739). The Romantics sometimes tempered this portrayal, 'representing the affects of shame, guilt, and disgust in their characters' in order to 'render their references to the forbidden more socially and culturally acceptable' (Stansbury 2008, 4). Indeed, Shelley's unrepentant *Laon and Cythna* was suppressed until he

rendered the sibling relationship more ambiguous. In the original work, Laon and Cythna are rebels, siblings and lovers whose sublime spiritual bond endures through torture and death together even as they are burned on a pyre with ‘snakes, and scorpions, and the fry/Of centipedes and worms’ (1818, XXXVIII, ll. 8-9).

Fiedler perceives the continuation of this tradition in what he calls American Gothic literature, though with greater stress on the guilt, shame and fear of revolution. If race is the sociological theme of American Gothic, Fiedler contends, sibling incest is its erotic one (1970, 483). This ‘special guilt’ attends the primal sin against the Father, or symbolically, the revolutionary break with the Church and states of old Europe. He theorized that for the ‘anti-bourgeois writer’ conscious sibling incest indicated ‘revolutionary contempt for middle class custom and law’, and the inherited ‘rule of the father’ (111-12). Brother-sister alliance against a corrupt and terrible parent ‘became the very symbol of justified revolution’ whilst the threat of the father to daughters particularly represented the old tyranny of the past (112). There is no need for critics to guess about any of this: Shelley’s original preface to the 1817 version of *Laon and Cyntha* informs us frankly that the purpose in having the siblings as lovers is ‘to break through the crust of outworn opinions on which established institutions depend’, incest being a mere ‘crime of convention’ (Thorslev 51).

Obviously, genre labels are elements of critical discourse rather than objective descriptors. ‘Gothicism’ and ‘Romanticism’ are ambivalently intertwined. They are both sensation fiction, appealing to emotion and irrationality (see e.g.: Hume 1969; Botting 1995; Gamer 2000; 2002; Talairach-Vielmas 2013). They share tropes: hell and devils, outcast heroes, madness, primitivism and the exotic. Historically the tendency has been to dismiss the Gothic, the

predecessor of contemporary horror, as a kind of ‘poor and probably illegitimate relation of Romanticism’ (Hume 1969, 282) more concerned with titillation and sales than philosophy or a revolutionary spirit, a ‘a juvenile fancy – an immature and sensationalistic aesthetic that any mature writer must reject for the more serious business of writing about nature, imagination, sublimity, dejection, and interior consciousness’ (Gamer 2002, 89). Gamer illustrates how the writers we call Romantic struggled to ward off associations of Gothicism out of fear for their cultural capital. Yet the Gothic has enjoyed critical redemption in recent years, hand-in-hand with a deconstructive attitude towards genre (Botting 1996; Gamer 2000; 2002). In labelling the (intercrossing) branches of this discourse formation ‘Romantic’ and ‘Gothic’ respectively, I am not entering the debate of what (if anything) constitutes and differentiates these genres, and not conflating them as far as Fielder does. I am using them to observe the division noted by scholars of incest in literature (Thorslev 1965; Perry 1998; Richardson 2000): that what we call ‘Gothic’ typically constructs incest as forced or of dubious consent, threatening, fearful and oppressive. It is usually a weapon of male authority, of which Lewis’ notorious *The Monk* (1796) would be a key statement. Here a virtuous fifteen year old is drugged, raped and killed in a crypt by her titular older brother. That which we call Romantic typically constructs it as a valorised sibling bond positioned against authority figures, of which Shelley’s suppressed *Laon and Cythna* would be a key statement. The Gothic discourse of male tyranny accords heterogeneously, in true Foucauldian style, with Bell’s (1993) account of feminist understandings of incest. The feminist discourse constructs incest not as pathological, but an extreme instance of the logical productions of a male dominated society, an abusive way to wield a socially legitimate power (60-62). It is most likely to occur where patriarchal familial roles are exaggerated.

Where contemporary media does break the taboo and depict sibling incest, the construction is generally quite sympathetic, and still informed by the Romantic tradition of defiance in the face of oppression (e.g, V.C. Andrews' *Flowers in the Attic* (1979); Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), *Starcrossed* (2005), dir. James Burkhammer; *Harry and Max* (2006) dir. Christopher Münch. *Starcrossed* (2005) repeats the supremely Romantic statement of a *Liebstod*, the sibling-lovers dying together in defiance of the world. As dramatically as *Laon and Cythna* burning on their pyre, the teenaged brothers drown themselves to escape their awful, patriarchal father, handcuffing themselves together and then to underwater steps of a motel swimming pool.

Yet the most prominent contemporary portrayal, in HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011-) is more ambiguous. Here, heterosexual sibling incest throws up the problem of reproduction, and is speculated to be the cause of insanity both in the old ruling dynasty and the present adolescent king. The pernicious social consequences are far-reaching. Moreover, fraternal twins Cersei and Jaime Lannister attempt child-murder for the sake of keeping their union secret. However, Cersei and Jaime's union is also conducted in defiance of a terrible father, the constraints of their unhappy social roles, and Cersei's forced marriage. Cersei is granted space to construct their union in Romantic terms, asserting, 'Jaime and I are more than brother and sister; we shared a womb, came into this world together – we belong together' (1x07, 'You win or you die'). The *consequences* of incest, which are primarily due to the characters' social standing and the institution of hereditary monarchy, are negative in *Game of Thrones*, but the incestuous union itself is not really criticised, and certainly not singled out for special condemnation against the backdrop of murder, betrayal, torture and infanticide that comprises the daily life of the nobility in the series. Contemporary media are also likely to repeat those statements in which the

Romantic and Gothic branches accord: that parent- child incest is an abomination, an abuse of authority by senior males (Thorslev 1965, 47; and c.f Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina*, 1992; or *Precious*, dir. Lee Daniels, 2009).

Tosenberger (2008) locates the incestuous sibling bond of SPN and its fic as Romantic, and it is true that Sam/Dean slash often finds powerful expression in narratives of self-annihilation, renunciation of the world and sociality, and productivity. Flegel and Roth relate the division between this kind of slash and that which follows a heteronormative model to conflicting queer agendas within the gay rights movement: the first, an assimilationist model of gay experience arguing for equal treatment of gay and heterosexual couples, emphasizing the similarity of the relationships; the second, a model of radical difference which 'Edelman identifies as "sinthomosexuality" - an identity that "finds its value not in a good susceptible to generalization, but only in the stubborn particularity that voids every notion of a general good"' (4.6). The challenge of this type of story is to 'value as defined by the social, and thus [...] the very value of the social itself' (Edelman, 2004, 6; quoted by Flegel and Roth: 4.6). Edelman's *No Future* (2004) is a manifesto for the present, for renunciation of sacrifice in the name of the Child to which he perceives Western culture as enslaved, and embrace of jouissance and the death drive. However, I contend that though Romanticism forms a strong branch of the discursive formation, fandom's construction is actually more detailed, critical, sensitive and indeed condemnatory than these critics have recognized, drawing on other discursive branches.

For the other main branch of the Western discourse constructs incest as aberrant and dysfunctional. Its roots are Gothic, in which incest is a weapon of those terrible fathers the Romantics would counsel we turn it on. These statements have transformed into the modern

view, which is Westermarckian, of incest as a result of dysfunction, of sickness rather than sin. Rather than the outburst of nature against civility and restraint, it is constructed as a product of deep-rooted familial dysfunction that actually perverts natural inclinations (Erickson 2005; Bittles 2005; Turner and Maryanski 2005; Bass et. al 2006; Thompson 2009).

Freud's narrative is a heroic one, in which we suppress our barbarism in order to live together. Westermarck is the 'antihero' of this story (Wolf 2005, 9). In Westermarckian theory, under normal conditions, people are averse to sexual relations with those whom they were intimate in infancy. The argument is Darwinian: the 'deleterious consequences of inbreeding have selected for an innate tendency to develop an aversion to sexual relations with childhood associates' (4). Far from tabooing it because we desire it, the moral taboo is generated by these feelings of aversion (Arhnart 2005), a subconscious chain along the lines of, *this notion repels me, therefore it must be wrong, therefore those who practice it are wrong* (Turner and Maryanski 2005, 24). We now have more empirical evidence for Westermarck's theory. Since the 1980s we have learned that human incest is much more common than previously thought, and much rarer amongst other animals, including our closest primate relatives (Erickson 2005). Reversing the Freudian scheme, there is something dysfunctional *about* certain social structures that overcomes inborn *disinclination*, and incest families tend to be severely dysfunctional (166). They lack boundaries for individuals, are inefficient at resolving conflict and lacking in empathy. Parents may be 'neglectful, emotionally unavailable, and unable to support autonomy in offspring' (166). Poverty, social isolation and patriarchy are less consensually agreed but suggested as factors (167).

This summary of findings reads like a description of the early Winchester dynamic through the glimpses we get in canon. Contrary to the Romantic constructions earlier theorized and Surette's fan-shaming characterization of *Supernatural's* fanbase as the craziest in existence, fandom contributes thoughtful and powerful statements to the discourse which construct incest on Westermarckian lines, wherein 'sibling incest can be seen as a way to compensate for unfulfilled emotional needs for nurture and comfort' (Tidefors et al. 357).

## II. Canon

'You know Sam and Dean Winchester are psychotically, irrationally, erotically codependent on each other, right?' – The angel Zachariah, 5x18.

'They do know we're brothers right? [...] That's just sick' – Dean on discovering Wincest, 4x18.

*Supernatural* plays a game of Schrodinger's Wincest: it denies, canonically in 4x18, that there is any sexual or romantic relationship between Sam and Dean, and has one protagonist state that the idea is 'sick'. Yet such a relationship is deliberately coded into the text through dialogue, genre convention, and camerawork (Pinkwood 2011). In canon, sibling incest is constructed as Romantic, affirmed at the same time it is denied. Not for nothing have Gamble and Kripke both called *Supernatural* 'the epic love story of Sam and Dean' (Borsellino 2006; Kripke 2010). In

the Pilot, where they reunite after a 3-year silence due to their father's banishment of Sam from the family, 'the great deal of angst and longing that charges their shared past makes them seem not so much long-estranged siblings as ex-lovers' (Cox 2006). Their first scene together as adults is a fight due to misrecognition, shot in shadow in darkness. It results in Dean pinning Sam, which Sam quickly reverses, and the dialogue recalls a failing love story:

Sam: What the hell are you doing here?

Dean: Okay, all right. We gotta talk.

Sam: Uh, the phone?

Dean: If I'd have called, would you have picked up? (1x01, 'Pilot').

This iconic scene is generically overdetermined (Pinkwood 2011), as the brothers stand facing each other in shadow, breathing heavily:



**Figure 12: Sam (Jared Padalecki) and Dean (Jensen Ackles) are reunited (1x01).**



It looks exactly like a ‘first kiss’ scene from any romantic text – although, of course, they do not. In the early seasons, they exist in transient isolation, hunting monsters and ghosts, looking for their father. Their relationship is volatile, intense and exclusive. They are frequently taken for lovers by outsiders (1x08, ‘Bugs’; 1x11, ‘Something Wicked’; 2x11, ‘Playthings’). This is played as a running joke, but ‘Playthings’ exploits its Romantic (capital R) potential very seriously (c.f. Tosenberger 2008). Set in an ‘old school haunted house’ (Dean) of winding staircases and hidden attics, this episode is deeply concerned with secrets and siblings: the mystery revolves around two sisters, one long dead and one now old and paralyzed, who eventually end up as ghosts in the house, together alone forever. As Tosenberger notes, the final scene of the girls, young again, playing together in the dust and sunbeams of an open window crystallises the brothers’ deepest fears and desires.

In this episode, Sam has recently learned that he is one of Azazel’s chosen, fed the demon’s blood in infancy, and a contender to lead the armies of hell. He gets drunk, and begs Dean for a promise to kill him should he ever ‘become something [he’s] not’. Dean refuses, his first distinct rebellion against his overbearing father, who commanded the same thing before dying. Dean asserts that his father ‘never should have said anything, I mean, you don’t do that, you don’t, you don’t lay that kind of crap on your kids’. This is a turning point for the character that until this point held patriarchal authority over all. Alternating close ups of the actors’ faces are lit by daylight in the dull hotel room, with Sam below and Dean above as one stands and one sits. Sam – very drunk – touches Dean’s face anxiously, a gestural prelude to a kiss that never happens. As fan Twinchester Angel puts it, ‘one more inch and it wouldn’t have been aired on network

television' (2012). Dean makes a false promise, before his and the camera's gaze lingers erotically on Sam's body as he settles into drunken sleep.

An overriding theme of *Supernatural* is that 'what's dead should stay dead' (Dean, 2x04; Azazel, 2x22), and that dying at the right time is a blessing. The brothers consistently fail to apply that rule to each other. Sam dies first, stabbed by one of Azazel's other contenders just before Dean can reach him (2x21). The twist is framed as a moment of horror and disaster, the cliffhanger before the second part of the Season 2 finale. Dean reaches Sam just in time to catch him and hold him as he dies, babbling ineffectual reassurances that it's 'not even that bad', and the camera pans out on the two of them, alone on a muddied road in the ghost town, before a final close up on Dean's anguished face. The music stops for Dean's cry of Sam's name, and weather sounds and crickets overlap the black end-screen to crystallize their absolute aloneness in an uncaring universe.



**Figure 13: Sam's death (2x21, 'All Hell Breaks Loose, Part 1').**

The death of one without the other is constructed as the ultimate horror/tragedy. In the second part of the finale, before Dean has the fateful idea of a demon-deal to bring Sam back, Bobby tries to draw him back to reality, arguing, 'something big is going down, end of the world big', to which Dean replies, 'Well then LET IT END!'. This is a profoundly Romantic statement: if the love-object is denied, the lover will let the world burn. The angel Gabriel in his guise as the Trickster warns the brothers their relationship is warped:

The way you two keep sacrificing yourselves for each other? Nothing good comes out of it. Just blood and pain. Dean's your weakness. And the bad guys know it, too. It's gonna be the death of you, Sam. Sometimes you just gotta let people go (3x08, 'Mystery Spot').

In the context of the story, however, this is less a condemnation than a cause for celebration, a legitimization that is extended in darkfic<sup>36</sup> like *To the Bone*. In fulfilment of the demon deal, Dean quite literally goes to hell for Sam (3x16). Later Seasons have focused less on the absolute nature of the brothers' bond, particularly with the inclusion of Castiel, with whom Dean actually manages to form a functional friendship. Nonetheless, pivotal moments like Dean's absurd decision to attend the deathmatch of Michael and Lucifer, the latter of whom has taken Sam as his ordained vessel, purely in order to not let Sam 'die alone', restore the series to its fundamental reliance on their relationship (5x22). Slash fans particularly were particularly delighted by the angel Zachariah's description of the brothers' bond quoted above, often repeated and quoted. The end of the Season 8 finale performs the same function. In the midst of another cosmic disaster, Sam regrets all the times he has let Dean down, and Dean denies that 'there is anything, past or present, that [he] would put in front of [Sam]! It has never been like that, ever!' (8x23, 'Sacrifice').

Romanticism is undoubtedly the primary canon construction, but some small nods are made to sociological possibilities on Westermarckian lines. In 1x18, 'Something Wicked', young Dean is left responsible for even-younger Sam whilst their father hunts, the dialogue making it clear this happens regularly. In 3x08, 'A Very Supernatural Christmas', a marginally older Sam gifts Dean the amulet he had intended for their father when it becomes clear that their father will, once again, be missing Christmas. Environments of neglect, isolation and poverty reinforce the bond, but the construction is primarily of the special relationship forged in childhood rather than a perversion forced by circumstance.

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<sup>36</sup> Fan term usually applied to fic wherein one or more canonical hero is featured as a villain, and/or set in particularly bad circumstances without a happy ending.

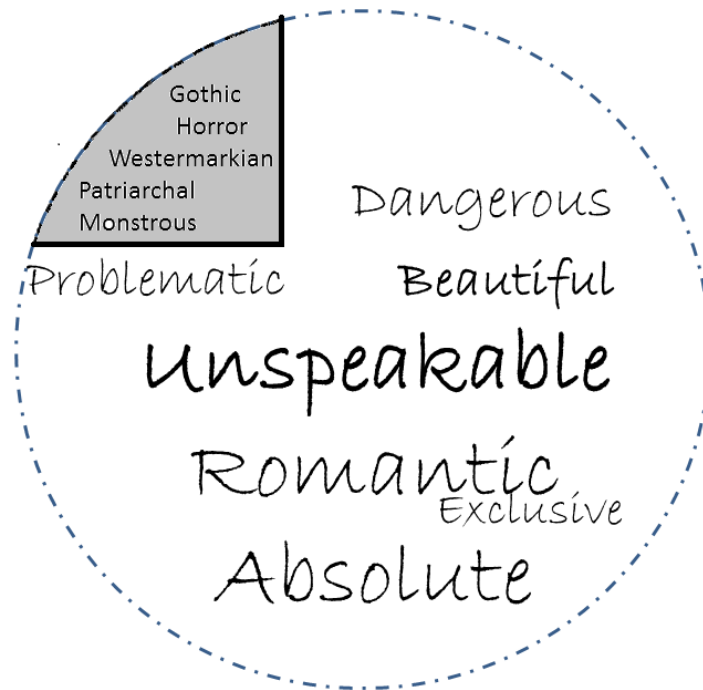
The Romantic ideal applies to Sam and Dean only. This is influenced by the queer generic structures of cult TV that Jones has demonstrated are conducive to slash, so often focused on the fantastic, open-ended travels and adventures of same-sex companions:

Cult television's imperatives are fantasy, adventure and the sustained virtuality of an exotic fictional world - imperatives that make heterosexuality problematic because the narrativized social process it invokes threatens the cult fiction's anti-realism. Cult series therefore tend to truncate or problematize heterosexual relationships (2002, 88).

This certainly applies to *Supernatural*. As nomads and adventures, Sam and Dean are unconstrained by domestic routines, and resist 'heterosexuality's narrative form' (Jones 87), their interactions with women being transient and truncated. In most cult TV, however, this does not extend to bonds between siblings.

Conversely, the traditional construction of incest in horror, which is a discursive offshoot of the Gothic tradition of terrible male authorities, is never attributed to the Sam/Dean bond but is evoked in contrast. In 'The Benders' (1x15), an inbred backwoods family in rural Minnesota is capturing humans to hunt them down and eat them. In 'Family Remains' (4x11), a man has impregnated his daughter, who later committed suicide, and hidden her feral, murderous twins in hollow walls of his house. In the tradition of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* franchise, incest in these episodes has resulted in human monstrosities. Moreover, the FBI agent Hendrickson, unaware of the existence of the supernatural, taunts Dean that John Winchester must have 'brainwashed [him] with all that devil talk and no doubt touched [him] in a bad place' (3x12). This creates a discursive paradox: there is Incest, treated with brief intermittent nods as a human horror, and then there is [incest], the unnameable relationship between Sam and Dean, the

Romantic absolute, which conveniently occludes the possibility of deformed children. The canon discursive formation, then, might be rendered thus:

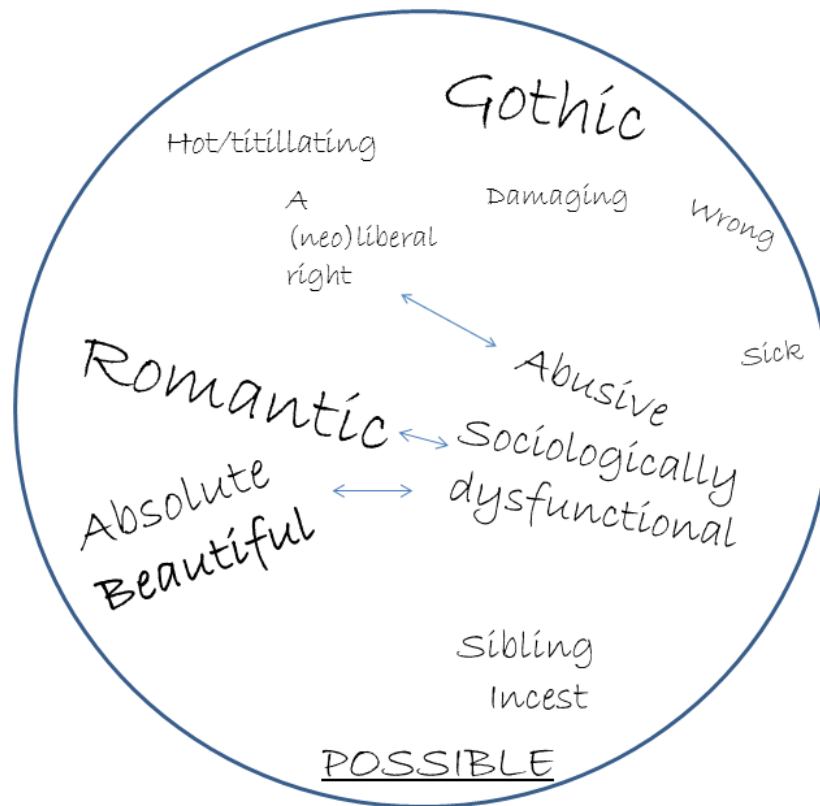


**Figure 14: The discursive (non)formation of incest in canon**

The fact that incest never occurs or is acknowledged between the brothers means that in the place of a grounding statement, we have a grounding absence: the primary condition of incest between the brothers it is never spoken. In others, it can be explicitly acknowledged (‘So the daddy was the babydaddy too?’ - Dean, 4x11), but that is ‘different’, a property like darkness belonging to Others, thus the solid lines in figure 14. Canon only briefly suggests a link between a sexual/romantic relationship between the brothers and their dangerous, isolated and itinerant childhood. Nor does it implicate Sam’s demonic potential. Fandom *does* draw these connections

between canon elements, and thus in many ways, to be fandom will be found more critical in its construction of incest. However, the legitimation paradox is at work here as well: incest, though troubled, is redeemed through capital of the White male primary characters. I will argue that fanfic reconstructs the incest formation as follows:

**Figure 15: fandom's reconstruction**



Firstly, fandom names the formation. The possibility of sibling incest realized is the grounding statement of this varied construction, replacing canon's omission. Compare the iterability of race: either the textual medium, the social conventions of fandom or their combination are producing the iteration of what is unspeakable in canon. The Romantic branch remains strong,

but is destabilized by branches constructing incest as sociologically dysfunctional. Fandom's construction removes the hard lines separating incest as a property of Others from the relationship between the protagonists, and thus, to an extent, incest is legitimated via the paradox. On the other hand, this also moves Gothic statements, and statements of incest as damaging and abusive, into the sibling incest formation. For as will be demonstrated, the legitimation paradox does not function automatically in fanfic: some constructions are beyond legitimation. Finally, a smaller branch has emerged that acknowledges the taboo of incest and argues for its irrelevancy in the modern world – I call this (neo)Liberal justification (see p. 216)

### III. Fandom

More selectivity and judgement is required here than in treating race. I am only considering sibling incest, partly due to the amount of data but partly because the parental discursive formation is different enough to require separate treatment. Nor could I include every fic pairing the brothers – firstly because entering 'Sam/Dean slash' into Google turns up 612,000 results, but also because the pairing 'Sam/Dean', or the signifier 'Wincest' are not always directly relevant to the incest construction. They include fic that simply treats Sam and Dean as a couple, as though the fact the characters are brothers has no relevance, making neither explicit nor implicit reference to incest. Of course, this absence itself adds one element the fandom's construction of incest – as ignorable, as a non-issue between Sam and Dean – but provides



nothing further to analyse in this particular construction. Moreover, the signifier 'Wincest' is also used for AU – 'Yeah, Wincest. But not incest...cuz they're not brothers' (screamKid 2009). Further, though there are 'flashpoints' that construct the incest theme, as described above, preliminary searches made it clear that sorting by episode, as I did when considering treatment of race through Gordon, was unproductive. There are vast amounts of fic tagged to these episodes that have nothing to do with incest, and vast amounts of fic constructing incest that have nothing to do with these episodes. The only option, then, was to take 'incest' and 'Wincest' as fanfic tags and filter search terms, then judge by title and summary what was pertinent, i.e. those that treat 'incest' as a factor, theme or obstacle in the brothers' sexual or romantic relationship. The websphere I mapped was the same as the previous chapter, with the exception of *Supernaturalville*, which does not accept slash.

| Site                                | Ff.net | LJ   | DW  | A03 | SD  | S/D | Other |
|-------------------------------------|--------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Number of fics:                     | 225    | 267  | 48  | 164 | 73  | 76  | 19    |
| Highest number of comments on a fic | 1379   | 1768 | 203 | 46  | 123 | 240 | 40    |
| Lowest number of comments on a fic  | 0      | 0    | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0     |
| Average number of comments on a fic | 24     | 104  | 41  | 5   | 13  | 20  | 6     |
|                                     |        |      |     |     |     |     |       |

### Key to Sites

Ff.net = FanFiction.net   LJ = LiveJournal   DW = Dreamwidth   A03 = Archive of Our Own

SD = Sinful Desire   S/D= The Sam/Dean Slash Archive

The total number of fics was 510, with 38,407 comments. Again, some fics appeared on more than one site, hence the sum of the top row is 872. The highest number of comments on a single fic was 1768; the lowest was 0. 73 comments in the formation were only and explicitly negative. This is a notable increase from the previous chapter, and reflects the fact that some fans dislike the incest construction. Most just avoid the fic, but some feel compelled to leave unsigned comments like:

Whoever wrote this needs help

Seek help, you have my support! :)

Don't give up, this just isn't normal (Zoe 2012).

Moreover, there is a tendency for positive reviews to begin with disclaimers that the reviewer wouldn't normally read W/incest, but in this case enjoyed or appreciated it. Already fandom has begun to blur the canonical hard lines separating Sam and Dean's relationship from 'bad' incest. Sometimes it gives the relationship its proper name, whilst acknowledging the difficulty of doing so, similar to the acknowledgement of race and its effects in some fan discourse. Other writers refer to 'the unnamable, unknowable something' between Sam and Dean (esorlehear 2006a), but use of the term is more common:

He can't even say the word to himself. Oh yes he can.

Incest (The Huntress 2007).

A shivery terrified voice in his head that won't let him avoid the hissing sound of the word *incest*, which sounds like a disease and maybe it is (candle\_ beck 2008).

Moreover, 'boldness in using the real term' (Gallagher 2012a) seems to be approved.

Romantiscue approves 'actually spelling out the i-word, incest' (2013). Fanfic constructs the discursive formation that canon offers yet enies. In coding I did discover many strong statements constructing incest Romantically (a), but also b) pornographically; c) as Gothic horror; and d) as a sociological issue along Westermarckian lines. This branch constructs incest as a product of specific, dysfunctional social situations rather than anything absolute or universal, and dominates in the sociological field (Fleming et. al 1997; Erickson 2005; Turner and Maryanski 2005; Brennan 2006; Bass et. al 2006; Thompson 2009). Though there is discursive hybridity between sociology and contemporary psychology, e.g. in Bass et. al, I found 'sociological' the more

appropriate term for this branch because it constructs incest as primarily a product of exterior structures rather than interior states.

Finally, some statements begin tentatively to branch into a new category, which we might call e) (neo)Liberal justification. I bracket the prefix and retain the capitalization of Liberal because these statements often rely on traditional Liberal values: that free personal choice is the highest good; that freedom must stop short of direct harm to others; and that individuals ought to pursue happiness on their own terms (Heywood 2012, 43-44). I retain the small-n prefix to indicate the impetus to self-realization and individual responsibility that is a hallmark of neoliberal ideology (Harvey 2005; Ong 2006; Ouellette 2009; 2011; McCarthy 2007), rather than economic policy, which is more often indicated with a capital letter (Marzullo 2011, 762). These statements, question whether there is anything wrong with consensual incest, overlapping an assimilationist discourse of gay rights by virtue of the characters' gender. This discourse, as Crawford summarises, argues from the very Liberal perspective that 'each of us must determine for himself what sort of life would be best' and 'the goal of society and of its juridical structures is to maximize the freedom of individuals to make this determination', short of harming others (2006, 240). Thus, rather than effecting any kind of significant social change or critiquing dominant institutions, assimilationist discourse argues for existing rights (like marriage) to be extended to sexual minorities, premised on the controversial argument that these minorities 'are just like heterosexual couples, have the same goals and purposes, and vow to structure [their] lives similarly' (Ettelbrick 1998, 483). It thus is distinctly at odds with the Romantic discourse of exceptionality. However, the neo(Liberal) construction likewise contains its own critique, addressing the problematic meanings of 'freedom' and 'personal choice', especially over the

body, in the context of knowledge, power and wealth inequalities produced by hyper-capitalist culture (McCarthy 2007; Wood and Skeggs 2008; Ouellette 2009; 2011; Winnubst 2012).

#### a) Romanticism

Romantic incest is an intensification and idealization of the sibling bond. The lovers do not love *in spite* of shared genetics and history, but because of them. Romantic fanfic plays on this trope:

[Sam] and Dean had some of the same genetic code written into every cell of their bodies, they'd shared the same childhood, the same memories, the same values. They'd brought each other back from the dead, saved each other's lives, been everything to each other, for forever (sonofabiscuit77 2009).

Sonofabiscuit77 is a high-status author, and *Crush* is a high-status fic, with 335 LJ comments (triple the average) and a link from a respected rec community. Similarly, in OhMercyMe's *Let's you and me call this affection*, Dean realizes despite internal struggle that

Their dynamic was too mired to really change, safe because he was always there. He was safe because he couldn't be a fuck-and-run, safe because he was Dean and Sammy loved him more than he could love anyone else. He'd always known it, and it hadn't even been pride; he felt the same. That little bundle of sharp elbows and sharp knees and fucked up desires that seemed increasingly predictable was the only person he could ever love like he did. That night he'd grasped blindly for the reasonable aspects of something so completely parted from any sense of reason, but now he saw with calm clarity not the reason but the inevitability of it (2013).

The construction of the sibling-bond as first and irreplaceable, the standard by which all others will fall short, is profoundly Romantic (Richardson 1985, 739) and belongs to the Freudian tradition of failed substitutions for familial love. It belongs to a tradition of ‘cultural nostalgia for a simpler, Edenic age where sibling incest is socially and morally acceptable’, prior to good and evil, that Stelzig recognised in the Romantic tradition (1995, 237). Some of the most significant Romantic statements locate Sam/Dean at the literal end of the world, a perfect and perfectly destructive union possible only after right and wrong, good and bad have collapsed, and we have been ‘absolved of mortality’ (Drvsilla 2009). In *Lion and Lamb*, John and Bobby are aware of the boys’ destiny, and try to force them apart. Dean is marked by heaven and Sam by hell, and ‘apparently they were going to turn on one another and bring about the apocalypse, the ruination of the heavens and bowels of the earth’. Subverting God’s will, they make love instead, and instead of ending the world, ‘gave it a good scrub, and time to start over’. The landscape is desolate but fertile, a liberatory apocalypse. They awake to a ‘deserted land’ and are at last left alone by all higher powers to wander the ‘freshly pressed, verdant and lonesome earth’. The descriptors emphasise beauty, emptiness and primordial wonder as infinitely preferable to suffering under the laws of God and man, regardless of the implied death toll.

In the social world of canon, there is little for Sam and Dean to rebel against. They are already wanted criminals, Dean is legally dead, and their only surviving friend outside each other is a periodically insane fallen angel. In early Seasons, however, they contended with the commanding presence of a militaristic father, John, hell-bent on revenge for their mother’s death, utilizing his children as his personal soldiers. ‘John finds out’ is a distinct subgenre of incest-fic, to the point that it has its own tag at Story Finders. These stories give Sam and Dean the

Romantic opportunity of rebellion against the father (as well as the Father). Usually he is horrified, beats and/or banishes one or the other. This is one subtype that does relatively well on Fanfic.net. In cottonmouth's *Sins and Tragedies* (2006), Dean chooses Sam over the abusive John. The stakes of the choice are condensed in an image, as he stands 'in the now open doorway, wearing the same rumpled t shirt and boxers he had slept in, looking between his father and his brother'. The choice is inevitable to the generically educated reader, and many comments (59) are of the hedging yet approving type. A-blackwinged-bird finds it

VERY tastefully done (tasteful wincest?) and you make the problem seem very... ordinary? I mean I'm not disgusted by this and I feel very strongly for all the characters. I've never seen a Wincest where John finds out- let alone is pissed- and I ADORE it. You're a talented writer who had the guts to post a not-so-popular theme, and it's coming across very well-handled (2006).

Of course, the incest-theme is popular: just not in this part of the websphere. Fanfiction.net seems to find the sibling-over-father statements the most palatable aspect, which may be related to the user demographic. Loverofgaydragons wishes that the boys would take the trope to its Romantic conclusion and 'go back and gank the stupid motherfucker' [John] (2012). Sometimes they do. For instance, in aliencatt's, *At Fifteen Years of Age*, 'Dean Winchester shot his father [non-fatally], grabbed his younger brother, ripped the keys to the Impala from the counter and fled' (2010). The tripling effect affords these actions an implication of natural justice, the logical conclusion to a young life of abuse. John is constructed as a monster, the description of 'beast' with 'so many fangs' ambiguously attributed either to the father or a thing they are hunting. This story also does quite well on Fanfiction.net with 29 reviews.

427-67Impala's [sic] *Forced* is a more emphatic example. The summary lays out the relations between the key players:

John was never Father of the Year, but he finally comes unhinged when he finds out his boys are sleeping together. Sam cops the full force of his rage, forcing Dean to take him & run to save them both; they're just starting to get it together in Sioux Falls when John tracks them down to finish what he started. Wincest, teen!chesters, non-con, char. death (detailed warnings within)<sup>37</sup> (2012).

The 'warnings' also function as genre markers in a solidly Romantic narrative and within the context of fanfic genres. The contextually educated reader knows what will happen: first Dean saves Sam, then eventually shoots John dead when their father pursues them. The function of this sort of fic is not to surprise or reframe, but to act as discursive consolidation. Notice also the reversal of canonical pre-series events, wherein Sam left Dean to their father's mercies in order to make himself a life. These sorts of fic rearrange the players to the preferred configuration, which is here a Romantic schema of sibling union against the father. Indeed, the author acknowledges that 'John Winchester would never do this stuff. But that's the beauty of fanfiction'.

John's construction as terrible patriarch is initially accomplished through associative imagery, as he sits 'by the crackling fire with a newspaper open on his lap [and] a half-finished bottle of scotch on the coffee table, right beside an empty tumbler.' He knows about the boys' relationship, but they are unaware of his knowledge, and he calmly torments Sam with a series of unnerving questions. The scene recalls the Master's study of *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) or the

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<sup>37</sup> Fan terms. Teen!chesters = set in the period when Sam and Dean were teenagers; non-con = non-consensual sex; char death = a significant character will die in this story.



commandant's office of *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), wherein a monstrous patriarch in possession of power and knowledge undermines a protagonist in his own domain, surrounded by the trappings of his position. A horrific assault follows, most of which we discover from Dean's perspective via a trail of bloody handprints. Later, after recapturing them, John tortures Dean in a style recalling Christ's wounds, and finally Dean shoots him, execution-style. There is a scene of regret for the man John had been before madness took him over, but the reader is left in no doubt that justice is satisfied; right choices have been made, and the monster slain. Fiedler calls this example of sibling primacy a choice between 'the devil-father who stands for 'the cold pursuit of power and knowledge' and 'angel-sister' who stands for 'warm abandonment to equivocal passion' (1962, 420). The devil-father in possession of knowledge and power is a perfect fit with Fiedler's schema, whilst both boys intermittently play the part of the angel and eventually, of course, surrender to their passion. The exclusion of women in the scheme is a result of the cult television context, with its focus on male pair bonds that fans are incited to slash. Consequences for the crossing statements constructing incest and homosexuality will be further dealt with in the context of (neo)Liberal justification: this is a clear example of statements from different discursive contexts meeting to create new possibilities. One might call this escape from the F/father schema the lighter side of the Romantic branch, and the most common on Fanfiction.net. It is a rebellion, but one with a fairly easy justification, as the father is patently a monster. The darker side, as we will see, construct incest as a rebellion against society and broader moral schemas.

These other statements, building from the canonical 'let it end', construct incest as darkly Romantic, a property of evil nonetheless celebrated and relished. In PaxLux's *Howl* series, for

which lines from the Ginsberg poem form the title, Sam and Dean have returned from Hell ‘all crushed and distorted into each other, as if Hell was a soldering iron and they’re welded by blood’ (2009). This statement draws attention to canon’s repeated insistence that dying at the right time is a blessing, and the Yellow Eyed Demon’s insinuation to Dean that what he brought back might not be the brother he imagined. In the *Howl* verse, whose sophisticated intertextuality draws attention to a twentieth century descendent of the original Romantics, the brothers kill and burn and love each other with reckless abandon, hunted by the other hunters. Embracing their status as ‘sick fucks’, they commit arson and murder, threaten priests, and find their own ‘absolution [...] whenever Sam bows his head and Dean draws a line up Sam’s spine with his tongue and they whisper words, nonsense prayers to each other over slick sounds’. Despite the Gothic tropes, construction of the brother’s bond is primarily Romantic because, as reviewer one puts it, it is ‘beautiful, in its weird perverse way’:

It's the mad obsessive love between the brothers that makes this so ... beautiful (can't think of a better word) even though the action is so horrifying. I can't even feel sorry for the people who are murdered for looking sideways at one of the boys, or just for being in the Wrong Place Wrong Time, because I want Sam and Dean together, loving each other, happy, joyful, and fuck everyone else (ex11ed\_nyer 2013).

As the verse has been purged from LJ and archived at A03, its comments there cannot be counted, and indeed the act of purging reduces its impact. Nonetheless it is very well known and respected in the fandom, enough to be podficced and frequently recommended. Its literary capital is high.

Pure Romanticism is most popular on LiveJournal. By default much appears on A03, where older fics are archived. It is surprisingly *unpopular* on Sinful Desire. Despite the name, which

seems to court Romantic rebellion, (neo)Liberal justifications tend to dominate those few fics which actually take incest as an issue. On Fanfiction.net, Romanticism is rare, and meets a lukewarm reception. *Our Dry Hearts* by Katieelessar and *Science Lesson* by hevaann are short pieces comprised of Romantic imagery to describe the Sam/Dean bond:

Some nights they lie tight and hard against each other—ripping at the seams like earth baked and broken by the sun. Sam meets his eyes—lush green oasis of promise and good—before reality bleeds to dream (Katieelessar 2007).

It was a matter of physics that when a North pole and a South pole were in the same vicinity they had no choice but to spiral towards each other; clinking together and holding on for dear life. It was a good metaphor for the Winchester brothers (hevaann 2012)

The latter particularly recalls Donne's *Valediction Forbidding Mourning*, which compares the lovers to the two poles of a compass, which 'though [one] in the center sit/yet when the other far doth roam/It leans, and hearkens after it/And grows erect, as that comes home' (1633, ll. 29-34). Their impact on Ff.net is small: *Science Lesson* has one review and *Our Dry Hearts* two. This is a clear example of the need to observe how discourse is regulated by site and audience before generalizing about fan activities. Notice the low average number of comments on Ff.net incest fic compared to LiveJournal.

Incest is also constructed Romantically through AU (Alternate Reality) fic which removes the boys from their grim isolation in the *Supernatural* world and illustrates that they are destined to be together in any universe. These are popular on LiveJournal. In fourfreedom's *Stopped at the Crossroads*, they grow up in a relatively normal family of five brothers, yet are still obsessed with each other, still encapsulated in their world of two. Dean grows up to be a cop, and during a

near-death experience after a shooting, a mysterious figure advises Dean, ‘In every world, every layer of reality, the same choice is put before you. And every time, you choose the same’ (2007a). Quoted in the comments section and gaining repeatable materiality, this reads as a metadiscursive comment on AU Romanticism, particularly as a commenter quotes it and then agrees:

God. Yes. They're meant to be together, forever, and I can't imagine a universe where Dean doesn't choose Sam first, above all else. And okay, I have to stop now before I do actually start to cry, because I'm at work...and that would be awkward (mickeym 2007).

The author's response clarifies that she is deliberately writing against those statements that frame incest as ‘a product of being raised on the road and around each other too much’ (see the sociological branch). Fourfreedoms believes that ‘if your [sic] going to love somebody, you can't blame the demons and your dad for it. It's all on you. So that's what I did. I made a story where all of those objects were removed’ (2007b). *Stopped* makes significant impact, with 282 LJ comments, 11 links from Story Finders, including a recommendation for ‘best of the best’ fics, and links from 2 large rec communities.

Interestingly, though, the Romantic branch contains its own dissenting and critical statements, both of the reified childhood bond and the ‘fuck everyone else’ principle. These criticisms come both paratextually and self-reflexively within the texts themselves. The paratextual criticisms are formed by negative reviews and by discussion on anonhaven, an anonymous community now primarily hosted on Dreamwidth, intended for critical commentary and fannish wank that would not be accepted in the main LiveJournal space. Certainly segregation by site lessens the impact

as compared to reflexive criticism in the text, but fics like Sonofabiscuit77's *Treasure* (2011) which are written for the *Big Bang* challenge have dedicated threads at anonhaven, so fans seeking or wishing to express criticism know exactly where to look, and anonhaven threads are linked back to fics they discuss. As Thomas expresses it, 'websites work against closure by constantly referring user outwards to other sites', redefining the 'notion of the page' and 'hence the text' (2011b, 208). Yet here is an example of networked hyperlinking that carries negative capital. Brennan observes that anonhaven commenters often express conservative backlash against boundary pushing, attempting to define parameters of acceptability (2013b, in press).

For instance, *Treasure* is a high status fic which has been specifically recommended 5 times on Story Finders and has 298 comments. It is a postapocalyptic scenario where Sam and Dean's relationship threatens their inclusion in the sparse community of survivors. It is anti-futuristic in Edelman's sense, one of the main internal threats coming in the form of the creepy Mrs. Fitzgerald and her 'fertility drives'. After an internal struggle, Dean gives into his desire to be with Sam and confesses he has wanted him since Sam was 14. Anonhaven commenters are displeased: 'Yeah, I was like "okay, awesome, going great, good times, -- OH MY GOD PEDOPHILE DEAN MY EYES" (anon. 15 2011). The conflation of childhood bonds with sexuality is criticised from a feminist perspective which structures incest as necessarily abusive. Another commenter chimes in that if her lover had confessed to desiring her in early adolescence, she would be horrified and 'want nothing more to do with him' (anon. 16 2011), upholding Brennan's observation of anonhaven's policing function of ridicule and regulation.

*Close your eyes and look at me*, by the same author, offers as the title suggests a critique of the insular anti-sociality which Romantic incest entails. Its popularity is similar (237 comments),

suggesting that the nature of the statements may be of less significance to their impact on the formation than the Author-function attached. Sonofabiscuit77 sets this AU in ‘our world’, i.e. a world without monsters and impending apocalypses, but in which Sam and Dean are still painfully obsessed with each other. The result ends Dean’s marriage to a third party. Attention is drawn to the costs of their relationship to other people, as Dean’s husband comments ruefully that he’s ‘never been dumped for incest’:

A spike of panic struck Sam’s chest. “You won’t tell her?” Lester gave him a disgusted look. “Of course not. I have a lot of respect for your poor mother. More than you have, evidently. I won’t be the one to break her heart” (sonofabiscuit77 2012).

Where community, and broader family, is a concern, the brothers’ bond loses some of its shine. Commenters’ statements consolidate the criticism. One reviewer summarises:

God, they were getting in so deep that you're right, it was borderline obsessive and really unhealthy. And then with it being AU and without the demon-hunting context, the relationship is really hard to swallow. In real life situations like these, it is so much harder to accept incest. Take [...] away the demon hunting and the craziness that is their lives [and] their relationship doesn't seem so justified anymore. I mean we know in canon it's messed up and crazy and in fics authors write it as unhealthy and co-dependent but it's always been justified by their unique childhood and lives, how Sam and Dean's aren't like every Joe out there and that made it ok to them and fuck the rest (fleeting\_wings 2012).

Justification by ‘their unique childhood and lives’ belongs to the sociological branch. Other fics make explicit and clever response to their own Romantic arguments. Sugarbucket’s *Supernatural Born Killers* utilizes the perspectives of the boys, a reporter, a prison guard and a psychologist. Sam and Dean are both monster hunters and indiscriminate mass murderers. They call

themselves ‘fate’, whilst the newspapers call them ‘narcissistic psychopaths’. Half the world is horrified by their killing sprees; the other half are their fans, and a psychiatrist offers his perspective for the TV news:

"Ah yes, Sam and Dean's devotion to each other. Well, after extensive study I believe I can be one of the first to give an official opinion, if not a diagnoses as to the nature of the relationship. You see, in a world where people can't seem to make the simplest of relationships work and the slightest emotional commitment is considered devastating, Sam and Dean have a do or die relationship of a Shakespearian magnitude" (sugarbucket 2010).

The psychiatrists' comments are immediately dismissed by the reporter as too long winded and boring to air, reflecting critically on the reader's own investment in the pairing and what popular media might be omitting in the name of entertainment. A cop sums up the Romantic attitude dismissively: ““These fucks think they're special. Daddy yanked their dicks, Momma never gave 'em a hug, so they have carte blanche to take innocent life””.

Nonetheless, the fic comes down on a Romantic endorsement. It turns out that the moral authority figures of cops and prison guards are as corrupt as those they prosecute. Having escaped their abusive father, brothers swear that ‘From now on, it's just you and me. Together. Gonna burn this world up. Got the road to hell in front of us’, and indeed, they survive the end of the world united, ‘staring up at the eternal sky’ together. ‘Poetic and romantic evil’, comments Armadura Fairy, ‘Nuff said!’ (2012). Another reviewer ‘really like[s] that co-dependent aspect of their relationship, when there's only them against the world, it's so sweet ☺’ (DeadEmy 2010). Compare the ‘creepily romantic’ approval of *Bloodletting* above (realpestilence 2007).

Thus it is fair to say that fandom continues the canon construction of sibling incest as Romantic, and by naming it, legitimates it to an extent via the paradox. However, this is not without criticism and inspection of the costs of that investment, which canon elides. The terrible patriarch statements are most easily accepted on Ff.net, which is otherwise wary of any incest construction. Romanticism is primarily popular on LiveJournal and A03, rather than a grounding statement of the discourse formation as a whole. For there is much more to the construction. In her article on Romantic Wincest, Tosenberger concludes that ‘Sam/Dean writers don't usually present the breaking of the [incest] taboo as titillation’ (2008, 5.9). In her article on Romantic Wincest, Tosenberger concludes that ‘Sam/Dean writers don't usually present the breaking of the taboo as titillation’ (2008, 5.9). Considering how explicit some fanfic is, this may seem surprising. What I have found is that statements which construct incest pornographically in fic are possible, but are filtered through strong discursive regulations, best accepted when accompanied by high literary capital.

#### b) Pornography

It is *de riguer* for writers on the topic to acknowledge the difficulty of defining ‘pornography’ (Cameron 2005; Rea 2001; Slade 2001; Grebowicz 2013). Rea documented five traditional kinds of definition: in terms of profit motive (Huer 1987); as bad art (Berger 1977); as exploitation/subordination of women (Dworkin 1981; MacKinnon 1987); as obscenity (Zurcher



and Kirkpatrick 1976); or as dependent on the intention of the producer and effect on the audience (Olen and Barry 1992). All of these, he argued were doomed to failure either because they are subjective or because they are insufficiently comprehensive. Rea proposed an anti-essentialist model based on reception. In short: x is pornography where x is a text *received as* solely a means to non-intimate, masturbatory arousal, *and* where ‘it is reasonable to believe that x will be used or treated as pornography by most of the audience for which it was produced’ (2001, 120). The definition is deliberately context dependent. If it is reasonable to believe that the intended audience will have interest in x that may accompany but is not dependent on sexual arousal, x is not pornography. Maes objects on the grounds that whilst Rea’s project supposedly rejected subjective and normative definitions as normativity as empirically useless, Rea is essentially asking the researcher to make such a judgement: to judge whether x has enough literary/artistic/other merit that it would be ‘reasonable’ to assume the audience would have interest in it other than sexual gratification (2011, 392). Nonetheless, Rea made an important contribution in demonstrating that attempts to define porn by some intrinsic quality in the text is impossible, and that the definition of porn is primarily a matter of contextual reception. In a discursive study, we might argue that porn is whatever is *constructed as porn* – i.e. explicitly named as porn, or as a text solely conducive to sexual gratification - upon reception. As we will see, according to this definition, statements constructing incest pornographically are acceptable, but only under certain circumstances.

Consider Drvsilla’s very high-status *Fix(ation)* series. The title in a pun, playing on the boundary between a shallow addiction and deeper psychosocial ramifications. The bracketed suffix highlights the first phoneme’s double-meaning: both an addict’s hit, and a repair. The fics are

explicitly sexually, yet also Romantic in their imagery (mayflies, fire, leaves, water, the passages of the sun) and borrow sociological statements in their reflections on the brothers' young lives 'criss-crossing the country in beat up rust buckets chasing and killing evil and living hand-to-mouth' (Drvsilla, 2006a). They are also extremely well-written. The *Fix(ation)* series contains explicitly sexual passages:

Sam's hand wandered- Dean's flexing chest, hard nub fleshy nipples, soft bend fleshy obliques, abdomen muscle lines, the trail of soft hair that led to where Dean's hand was busy up-down on his cock.

[...]

He watched- the pulse of breath and blood just under Dean's skin, the glisten-slick heat of Dean's arousal as it flared and spread, the press of Dean's feet down into the mattress hips pressed up towards his fist (2006b).

Yet these are interspersed with precise description of complex emotional states and spare, claustrophobic surroundings:

Dad's low snore filtered back to his awareness, had always been there low-hum register, told them the whole time Dad was still asleep. They were filthy, covered in each other, and tomorrow they'd have to be wary and would be thankful for the bitter cold room.

Neither would sacrifice this when shivers and clandestine sneaks into a lukewarm shower was the only price paid (2006b).

If I were to run Rea's test subjectively, as Maes objects to, my (classed, educated) response would be: *of course* there are reasons other than sexual gratification that people would read this, this is incredible, I wish I could write like that - but really this just illustrates that Rea's test *is* asking for a normative judgement based on cultural capital. A discursive study must rely on textual evidence. The *Fix(ation)* stories are truly a fandom legend, with no less than 13 specific recommendations from Story Finders, citations on all major rec sites, and podfics. Given that not all fans or LiveJournal users are Wincest fans, this provides strong evidence for interest in the work other than sexual.

Moreover, the lexis chosen by commenters constructs the fics as *both* sexually arousing *and* of other significant appeal, notably literary capital, commending the 'absolutely beautiful writing' (drinteot 2006). Perhaps deirdre\_c constructs the general response best:

Of course the sex is so hot, but I love the gorgeous description of location. I know exactly this apartment:

*low countertop bar skinned with brown orange-flecked formica ... The bathroom was dingy with age but clean, fixtures original, and the water whistled and screamed when the shower tap-stop was pulled on.*

and this image is wonderful, so precise:

*under the two open windows butted together, single pane that slammed shut unless propped. One of Dean's boots held up each, soles facing outside, laces fluttering in the wind.*

But really, it's the sensuality that kills me:

*The blanket was to the side, ignored so they could feel one another feeling the breeze.*

*Sam shivered, a mix of chill and happiness and their low-level hum of shared arousal* (2006).

If we agree with Rea that porn is received solely to arouse, then *Fix(ation)* is not pornography. Deirdre\_c appreciates the literary merit of the series. By claiming to ‘know exactly this apartment’, and the choice of ‘sensuality’ as a descriptor, her comment evokes the quality of intimacy which has been offered by a range of thinkers as a counter to a definition of porn (Rea 2001; Salmon and Symons 2001; Kovetz 2006; Kuhn et. al 2007). On the other hand, multiple comments on *Fix(ation)* approvingly name and hail it as ‘porn’, perhaps comparable to female fans’ affirmation of ‘porn’ in Boyd’s study (see p. 75) and the author does not contradict them. I would say *Fix(ation)* is *unstably* constructed as porn: via fics like this, pornography *does* enter the construction of incest, but comes accompanied by statements from stronger branches.

Conversely, consider the response to a piece of torture-porn posted on Fanfic.net:

[3: 18:04 AM] FCL-Fag: you

[3:18:04 AM] FCL-Fag: write

[3:18:05 AM] FCL-Fag: incest

[3:18:06 AM] FCL-Fag: and rape

[3:18:08 AM] FCL-Fag: and torture

[3:18:13 AM] FCL-Fag: what the fuck should I say about your writing?

[3:18:21 AM] FCL-Fag: I gagged more than on a fourteen inch cock

[2:53:01 AM] FCL-Hag: Look lady.

[2:53:05 AM] FCL-Fag: I'm not even affected anymore.

[2:53:21 AM] FCL-Hag: If you want to shock us with pedophilia, you need to A) not describe it in great long loving detail

[2:53:33 AM] FCL-Hag: and B) maybe have it at the end?

(FCL 2012).

This review claims to be ‘brought to you from two people Skyping while reading this story’, i.e., Fag and Hag, aka FascistChairLover (FCL). Their scathing deconstruction, which spans multiple text boxes, is the only response to the fic. The reception constructs it as ‘shitty rape porn’, as ‘meant to tantalize’ and ‘eroticize’ sexual violence. This warrants rejection from the discursive formation.

The rejection is not precisely based on content: Fag admits that he ‘would have semi-approved if it was well written rape, incest, torture, murder’, but goes on to quote ‘They did some torture’, and judge sarcastically, ‘QUALITY WRITING. I like to do some torture myself on occasion’. For if the writing were truly received as ‘quality’, the fic would have interest other than being

‘meant to tantalize’ (Fag) and thus by not be constructed pornographically. The bulk of the advice to the author is on *style*, specifically the style explicit material must have to redeem it:

[3:18:55 AM] FCL-Hag: Never ever ever EVER write things like "and then they had sex"

[3:19:04 AM] FCL-Fag: Or and then they raped

[3:19:05 AM] FCL-Hag: I mean, no, I don't want to read your shitty rape porn

[3:19:07 AM] FCL-Fag: or and then they died

[3:19:14 AM] FCL-Hag: But if you're going to write shit, at least do it well

(FCL 2012).

Porn is denied entry to the formation where it lacks literary capital. It is much better received if combined with statements from other branches, such as Drvsilla’s use of Romanticism. The division Cynthia Jenkins observed a between ‘good porn’, as ‘relationship orientated as hell, oh so caring and tender’, from ‘bad porn’, which is neither (1998; 32-33), does not hold here:

*Fix(ation)* is rather more brutal than tender at certain points. Acceptance into the formation depends rather on literary capital, just as in broader culture, writing designed to sexually arouse and break taboos can enter the literary canon once critics deem it art (c.f. Maes 2011, especially p. 389). From this perspective, fandom’s use of incest to titillate is relatively conventional.

Here we observe that the legitimation paradox does not function automatically. FCL lay down discursive lines that designate rape and glorified violence as outside the boundaries of what fandom can or will legitimate, supported by the lack of other responses. The next section, on Gothic horror, demonstrates a different way that legitimation can be refused: by constructing incest as nightmarish and inviting a response of censure, the White protagonists are rather condemned than the Other redeemed. This is not to suggest that these stories are purely moral didacticism - as Thorslev put it, Gothicism has never been above utilizing incest as sensationalist titillation for readers 'jaded with murder and tortures' (1965, 43) – but to demonstrate that the rules by which fandom legitimates and condemns incest may at times be more conservative than canon's silent elevation of the 'special' Sam/Dean relationship.

### c) Gothic Horror

Fandom alters the canon formation significantly when it constructs incest between Sam and Dean as a gothic horror, breaking the hard lines of the canonical diagram (p. 210). This is an interesting case of fanfic's constructions being more conservative than canon: Sam and Dean are not excused by the horror of incest by virtue of their special, Romantic, bond. The obvious opportunity here is to exploit Sam's contamination with demon blood. Canonically, Sam believes he has a 'disease pumping through [his] veins, and [he] can't ever rip it out or scrub it clean' (4x04, *Metamorphosis*). In a-pheonixdragon's *Trembling Darkness*, Sam tries desperately to fight the temptation within him, considering it 'unthinkable' and 'horrifying', but 'his surety of

what this would do to Dean, didn't stop the whispers, the slow destruction of his will' (2010). He deludes himself into thinking Dean wants him too, and reviewer tifaching picking up on the Gothic heritage, calls this 'very Poe like' (2010). Eventually the monster in him takes over and he drugs and rapes his brother, Gothic statements dating right back to *The Monk*. These sorts of constructions can be moderately well-received on LJ (92 reviews) but not especially on Ff.net, perhaps due its greater reservations regarding incest. In TorchwoodFallenAngel's *Confession*, Dean confesses in church that he has 'violated' and 'corrupted' Sam, with his 'love more disgusting than hate', 'letting the darkness in [his] soul burn through [his] veins like a poison of the worst kind'. He is a 'wolf'; his brother a 'lamb'; he a 'demon', Sam an 'angel' (2011). These kind of stark moral oppositions, with their Christian heritage, are noted in traditional Gothic writers like Matthew Lewis (Wright 2013, 144) and Ann Radcliffe (Geary 1992, 51). Ff.net reviewers, though not condemnatory, consider this 'out of character' (Faint Praise 2011; Troonye 2011), indicating that Gothic statements have shifted from Others to the protagonists. Moreover, in *Protection*, posted on Ff.net and A03, John rapes Dean in a truly Gothic scene of paternal terror. The abuse warps young Dean's mind, and he thinks that because sex comforts his sick father, 'when Sam cried, [Dean] knew how to make him feel better' (Heldor 2008). Incest is constructed as a nightmare. This is poorly received, with 5 reviews. Combining this observation with FCL's disciplinary statements, it seems that there are certain forms of incest which do not survive the legitimization paradox, because there is no way to legitimate them. Fandom holds discursively to broader moral schemas, perhaps inherited from feminist ethics, that rape and child abuse never ought to be glorified – not even though the capital of the White man.



However, a different form of Gothic statements, which construct the brothers as forced together by external and internal monsters, can do very well. In Gillian Middleton's *The Promise* (2006), they are imprisoned and starved together by a psychotic criminal of unknown motive, eventually finding comfort in each other. This gains 127 reviews on Ff.net, as well as 11 on Sinful Desire and 44 on the Sam/Dean archive. Esorlechar's *Ghosts and Clouds and Nameless Things* (2006b), on LiveJournal, contains a meditation on burning the bones of dead children: 'the naked little bones, terrified ghosts only more dangerous for their helpless confusion, so many ugly shades of grey'. The brothers must put to rest a sideshow attraction from a circus that failed in 1932, 'nine-year-old Siamese twins no one else would take, a burlap sack, a deserted stretch of river'. Their 'bones, fused at the hip, fragile and so pathetically small, burn like any other', and Dean is left with the memory of 'two small shadows, hands clasped and bodies joined, watching silently as all that was left of them caught fire'. Comments reinforce the twins' narrative function:

The fact that the twin are joined at the hip would definitely carry significance for [Dean] (Nice touch composition-wise, by the way.) (spring\_dorn 2006)

Great juxtaposition between the siamese twin story and the boys (culturegeek76 2006).

There is, these statements contribute, something awful about the 'nameless thing' between the protagonists: note that the Gothic trope of the unspeakable is upheld in this case. To be born tied to another person, without choice, at the mercy of forces more powerful than one can understand, is not entirely a bond to be celebrated. The statements are yet more striking because they appear in the context of a series that might otherwise be called Romantic, celebrating incest between the

brothers, thus complicating and criticising that construction. Compare the declarations of a shaman to Dean in hansbekhart's, *The Knuckles of Skinnybone Tree*:

“You, hunter - you'll walk the Milky Way forever. And you'll go alone. But you won't suffer alone.” He drags a finger up into the air, throws it in Sam's direction. “As you grow thirsty, so will he. And just like you, he will never be able to drink, and food will never satisfy him. Like you, he will never die. You will chase each other across the sky” (hansbekhart 2007).

The brothers' bond is constructed as a thing of torment, each compelled to suffer for the other despite physical separation, their cosmic destiny never allowing them the relief of death. Their canonical insistence on deals and violations of nature to revive each other is not a thing of beauty but a curse without end. *Knuckles* is another fandom legend, with 456 LJ comments, recommended on Story Finders 15 times, four times more on LJ generally including a major rec community, five times on DW, and four times on external sites including *Television Without Pity*. It has been podficced, and enhanced by the haunting intro and outro of America's *Horse With No Name*. *Knuckles* is replete with Gothic imagery as the brothers walk the Paths of the Dead, from the bloody desert sky, to the 'pale horses' the vision quest must be accomplished on with 'their eyes white and sightless' and the horrible Christlike 'wounds along their sides, great gouges out of their flesh'. The shaman who pronounces the brothers' fate appears as a skeleton.

Likewise, the single most influential fic in the incest construction is Gothic (1768 comments). Poisantaster, a significant Authorial name, categorises her fic *The Killing Moon* (2007) as 'crack fic. Or...PT's take on crack fic'. Comedy and Gothicism are certainly not exclusive (Richter 1996; Carroll 1999; Horner and Zlosnik 2004; Woodcock 2009), and the crack element here seems to come from the deliberate overload of tropes. *Killing Moon* is a 'quasi-apocalyptic

futurefic' with mpreg. The situation, adapted from *The Handmaid's Tale*, is that a plague has left all the women in the world dead, so in order to continue the human race, the government have secretly implanted uteri in certain males and wiped their memories with various degrees of effect. Sam is one of these men, and in order that he not be taken away from the family for breeding, John demands that Dean impregnate him. It is a logical extension of John's canonical insistence on family loyalty over all, and not 'bring[ing] outsiders into this'. It is a bad experience for all concerned. Dean asserts that he has not been 'perving on [his] kid brother' in any way, and whilst all Sam has to do is 'lie back and think of England', he is obliged to 'get it up, stay hard, [and] fuck [him]'. As 'one of the last human creatures on earth capable of producing a child', Sam's body is government property, his 'papers' stamped with 'BREEDER [...] in smeary blood-red ink'. Two forms of patriarchy force the act, and the result is miscarriage.

A significant authorial comment on a fic in the Gothic branch, in which Sam manipulates Dean's confused obsession with him in order to hold power over his brother, suggests that abuse and power imbalance is how the topic 'should' be treated. Cormallen reflects on her own, ironically titled, *State of love and trust*. I have indicated the different branches of the discursive formation in square brackets:

I was thinking about why we (the fandom) make all the excuses we do for the Wincest -- they have nobody else, nobody else gets it, they have no means of connecting with the outside world their father brought them up like this, this is Sparta [sociological], these are the Winchesters, they'd sell their souls for each other and the bodies are just an extension of that [Romantic] [...] It's surprising to me [...] that we're willing to suspend the more... I don't want to say normal, but... let's say, the more common response to this situation -- where there's a more defined imbalance of

power, where there's room to call the brothers' relationship too twisted, too codependent, too much [Gothic]. "He's my brother and he needs me" -- how far can we really take that and still consider it "good"? (cormallen 2009).

As this study shows, however, it is only the Romantic and (neo)Liberal branch which do structure incest as 'good', and though these statements might be the most common, they do not make the most significant impact. They are also critiqued, both self-reflexively, and by the other branches of the discourse formation. Indeed the next branch, the sociological stemming from Westermarck, structures incest as a result of deep family dysfunction, understandable but in no way "good". This illustrates again how statements from fanfic have altered the intensely queer dynamic of the canon into a construction which is in some ways more conservative. On the other hand, stories which construct the relationship between Sam and Dean as too dysfunctional to ultimately work meet resistance to the point of denial.

Gothicism also critiques Romantic tropes by exploiting the potential of Sam's demon blood. In Sometimesophie's *To The End*, the world is ending, and the psychics, with Sam as their leader, have turned to the dark side. The story opens with the Gothic trope of Dean running through the forest pursued by Sam, placing incest in the same structural position as the threat of the Black man in 'Hunted'. Incest like darkness is no longer a property of those Others, but of our heroes. The other psychics have all murdered their families, but Sam is content to hunt, capture and use Dean. They had had some sort of awkward sexual experimentation in their teenage years, but nothing approaching the epic bonds of the Romantic fic. Sam traps Dean with the typical threats of a sadistic abuser:

"Next time you try to escape, you stop for gas and I'll kill the girl behind the counter, the guy sweeping outside. You stay at a motel and I'll kill the sweet old woman who gave you your key - all the guests staying there, as well. You

smile at someone in the street, a girl, maybe, a kid, and I'll kill her too, spread her ribs and bare her lungs and heart” (sometimesophie 2007).

Dean now knows that, anti-Romantically, his father was right: he should have killed Sam long ago. However, Sam seems to love Dean in some warped way, and eventually their forced ‘relationship’ restores him slightly. He turns on the other psychics and defeats them. He feels regret for his horrific actions and the people he has killed. The conclusion is that whatever restorative properties their twisted relationship has, they are ‘going to have to keep on doing this until one of [them] dies’. They do love each other, in some sense, as far as either is capable of love. The author comments that whilst she is ‘always very open to the reader's interpretation’ she imagines ‘Dean hoping that one day they might be able to forget that they're touching each other, loving each other, for the sake of keeping Sam sane’ and ‘one day they might be able to reach a stage where they're loving each other just to love each other’, for statements that oppose the popular Romantic construction often require some sort of softening, in addition to segregation by category of ‘dark’ or ‘AU’ or ‘very AU’. These sorts of statements emphasise the negative elements of the brothers’ canonical personalities which could form barriers to a Romantic relationship: Sam’s sense of superiority to Dean, his occasional casual cruelties; Dean’s masochism, inferiority complex and moments of moral weakness. The strength of these Gothic statements with their construction of incest as rape, horror and abuse, mean that fandom has changed the shape of canon’s construction and segregation of Incest (the horror of Others), cordoned off from [incest], the inviolable bond between Sam and Dean. Often incest is thereby legitimated, but in the case of outright abuse it is not, demonstrating that the legitimation process is not automatic: it only works for statements of action within a broad moral framework. The sociological statements reinforce this.

d) Sociological (after Westermarck)

Stories that structure incest as a consequence of the Winchesters' isolated, claustrophobic and secretive life vary from tragic to comic, but in all cases, they stringently avoid the glorification and destiny-defying odds of the Romance fic. As dwarfankylosaur puts it, 'people talk about the incest taboo as a basically arbitrary biological safeguard, but it's also crucial protection against \*exactly\* the sort of crushing insularity you see on the show' (2008). These fics usually construct John as less a terrifying patriarch than a neglectful figure of frustration and pathos. The relationship between Sam and Dean is far from destined:

If it weren't for Dad, if it weren't for Dean, if it weren't for this crazy itinerant life where they do shit like pull him away from history homework because they need backup on a monster hunt, then maybe Sam wouldn't end up so fucked up (twoskeletons 2011).

These statements are strongly Westermarckian. Dysfunction, patriarchy, poverty and isolation are the cause of Sam and Dean's unnatural bond. Fic that structures incest in primarily sociological terms is not that common, but where it appears, it tends to be very well received across all areas of the websphere. Morgan's *Midwinter Montana* (2009; 240 reviews on the

Sam/Dean archive; 14 recommendations on Story Finders); Bloodkisses's *For the End of My Broken Heart* (2007; 46 reviews on DW; 172 on LJ and 152 on S/D); and soulfulsam's *They're My Boys* (2012; 28 reviews even on Ff.net) illustrate this tendency. My research suggests however, that this positive reception may be less a result of the choice of statements than the fact that many of the very best and best-known writers in the fandom choose it, an example of discursive regulation by Author-function, or in Bourdieu's terms, a statement made effective by the whole social person, here comprised of text and fannish history.

The most important writer to consider here is candle\_beck. She is a Big Name Fan, frequently cited as one of the best writers in fandom, and her mystique is heightened by the relative privacy she maintains online. Her Author-function is enormous: 'anything by candle\_beck' is a frequent recommendation. All her *Supernatural* fic constructing incest contributes statements to the sociological branch. The characters experience moments of Romantic sentiment:

If it gets Dean back to that one moment, that senseless frantic thing that happened between them up against a motel room wall four months again, if Dean gets another shot at that, he's pretty sure he'll take it. Abandon his lifetime of vigilance, nevermore swear on his brother's safety, but instead live madly, corrupt and joyful and hopeless and never mind what it would do to Sam, never mind that. Dean would take it all (2008b).

But ultimately, the characters are aware of their own self-deception:

He wants to tell Sam that this is the kind of love men fight crusades for. It's greater than the two of them, greater than the unfortunate circumstances of their births or their inevitable sanguine end. A force like gravity, like luck and faith and memory, an epic poem so beautiful that it gets passed down orally for five thousand years before anyone bothers to write it down. He wants to tell him that together they can overcome anything, but Dean's never been able to lie to Sam (2008b).

Candle\_beck explicitly constructs incest as dysfunctional *despite the fact that Sam and Dean both want it*. The fact that they are brothers makes it wrong and unhappy, not for moral reasons, but because they are stuck together, and ‘the social taboo against sleeping with your siblings almost assuredly arose from the unrelenting drama that ensues from the same’ (2008b).

Westermarckian discourse constructs incest as possible when healthy avenues for sexual expression are unavailable, and this is exactly what happens in candle\_beck’s stories. On the other hand, an unsigned review on Ff.net complains, ‘Ugh! God! [...] do you not know what happy endings are? At the end of almost every story I’ve been crying my eyes out!’ (Batman Anonymous 2011). Likewise L comments,

Okay well I get that their lives are majorly dangerous and that they can't stand to see the other hurt or in danger , but if they both want the relationship so much then why not just do it instead of going oh well we're brothers it can't happen blah blah blah (L 2012).

L desires a (neo)Liberal justification, and candle\_beck does not supply one. Constructing the relationship between the brothers as ultimately impossible, however popular the writer, meets resistance.

Indeed, a crucial development in candle\_beck’s output significantly weakened the sociological branch of the discursive formation and strengthened the Romantic. Her paired stories *Gone*, and *Gone Again*, used to comprise, as she put it ‘a giant open wound or something’ (2010a) in fandom’s posited psyche.<sup>38</sup> In these stories, Sam and Dean attempt to form some kind of functional relationship out of their profoundly dysfunctional lives, and fail brutally. Thomas

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<sup>38</sup> I am not suggesting that fandom actually *has* one, holistic, collective psyche: merely that the pair of stories were *described*, by the author and others, as a wound to fandom: hence ‘posited’.



suggests that fanfic reviewing and feedback has a strong influence on narrative direction (2011b), but until 2010, candle\_beck's output bucked the trend. She was repeatedly begged for a restorative sequel, and refused, stating, 'these two particular incarnations of sam and dean? never gonna make it together' (2009). However, a winning bid in a fandom charity auction eventually persuaded her, and she produced a final part, interestingly titled, *Never Mind That*, in which the boys at last concede in true Romantic style, 'this until it kills us' (2010b). The general response is summed up by elanorelle, 'OH THANK GOD. Even thinking about Gone Again leaves me feeling kind of gutted, so reading this has helped IMMENSELY' (2010). On the other hand thandie responded by enquiring, 'A trilogy?' with a tongue-out emoticon, 'You've become so commercial' (2010). Anonhaven commenters debate whether it should have been written (anon. 17, 2011). Candle\_beck takes it in good humour, admitting that 'apparently \$215 to earthquake relief is the price of my writer's integrity' (2010c). Doubt is cast on the authenticity of *Never Mind That*, as the author states publically that getting together was not her initial intention for the characters, and some commenters agree with her. This conflict illustrates a division in the formation between incest structured Romantically and as sociological dysfunction, and the difficulties that ensue when a writer of high enough status to make definitive statements in the fannish formation espouses one side or the other.

Sociological fic can critique Romantic tropes without backlash, but it cannot permanently separate the boys without it. In ivyfic's *Crazy Faith*, Dean eventually chooses his wife and child over Sam's obsession with him. This adherence to heteronormativity – a true 'straightening out' of canon – gathers many positive comments and much appreciation of its treatment of the difficulties involved in love and family. But others find it traumatic and respond with passion:

I hate you and wish upon you the most painful death. There i was thinking i was going to read a good happy Sam/Dean fic and what do i see? A story i've read before but forgotten how terrible it ended. How could you do this to them and me? We deserve better than being murdered in the heart. Thanks for nothing even though it was well written. Now i have to go and find something to wash away this bad taste and feeling. If your goal was to have my heart in pieces, then consider yourself succeeded (erivar 2010).

When fandom restructures the exclusive portrayal of the brothers' relationship, it runs into problems: the stakes of altering discourse formations are high, a 'complicated and costly gesture' (Foucault 1989, 209), and constructed as painful by commenters like this. Compare the anonhaven commenter who claims that a fic 'ruined something beautiful for [her]' (anon. 18, 2011) by extending Sam and Dean's relationship to include a third party.

On the other hand, cyndrae's *Of Hot Showers and Female Intuitions* also critiques the Romantic structures by making the obsession largely one-sided, and this is the second most popular in the formation (1392 comments). Sam is in love with Dean and mentally sets him as the polar opposite to their father, believing John 'would have given him up to social services or maybe dumped him in a trash can somewhere long ago, if it hadn't been for Dean' (2007a). Parental neglect and compensative solace in each other are the factors (c.f. Erickson 2005 and Tidefors et al., above). At this point it should be obvious that most sociological fics deal with the boys' childhood and adolescence, in keeping with popular discourse on character formation. Borrowing from the Gothic branch, Sam is afforded an imagistic warning whilst on a hunt for two brother Wendigos, witnessing one lying 'prone on the ground as a second one... the other brother... crouched beside him... devouring him'. Commenter littlestarling appreciates this as a 'reflection of the brothers' relationship' (2007). Though Dean loves Sam, he has grave

reservations about a relationship, fearing what ‘terrible consequences the brothers could possibly inflict on themselves, on each other’. Whether he eventually gives in because he wants to or because he wants to make Sam happy is ambiguous in the story, but the anti-Romantic aspects are solidified by the authorial approval. Ladymadness comments:

selfish, horny lil' brother - check!

complying, scared of losing lil'brother, horny big brother - check!

ohhhhh....so that's what love is made of!;DDDD (2007)

The capital ds are a quadrupally-emphasized grinning emotion, the wink rendering the construction of ‘true love’ entirely ironic. The author affirms, ‘way to summarize, baby!’ (cyndrae 2007b). The format of LJ, where the author can publically comment on her own fic in the same textual space as the fic itself appears, allows for paratextual establishment of the ‘correct’ interpretation (c.f. Scott 2008).

Sociological statements, then, form a counter and critique to the Romantic construction. Though not the most frequent, they can be strong, high-status and much celebrated. In rare cases when they attempt to divide the boys permanently, they meet backlash or alter themselves.

e) (Neo)Liberal Justification

"It's...uh... it's not a girl, I'm in love with"

[...]

"These days? You should be proud it's a person!" exclaimed the man (DrayMiaOnly 2011).

The last branch of the formation denies that there is anything problematic or anti-society about mutually consenting incest between adults, framing it simply as a lifestyle choice. This is relatively unpopular on LiveJournal, but acceptable on Ff.net. It is common on the Sam/Dean archive and - oddly enough – Sinful Desire, sites at the fringes of the websphere. Many fans are interested in the Sam/Dean relationship because it *is* extraordinary and problematic. Our engagement with it, after all, stems from a poly-generic cult TV show about dysfunctional brothers and a fallen angel who hunt monsters and periodically attempt to abort the end of the world. Thus fic that seriously attempts to structure incest as not particularly problematic our *outré* tends to change the canonical genres. *Forever United*, a long fic on Ff.net, is tagged ‘romance’ and utilizes the soap opera format to enmesh the brothers in a web of multiple incidents and characters, who respond to revelations of their relationship with more or less total equanimity. Castiel 'felt no sin in it' and 'believes they 'deserve happiness wherever [they] can find it'. A human character simply responds, 'Its [sic] not common, but I can tell you both love each other greatly' (Seldenta 2010). *Forever United* is one of the most popular fics with 50 reviews, the majority of which are praise. However, the it also attracts criticism based on the

tropes of domestic drama:

it kinda looks like you were trying to cram as many traumatic events into a couple of chapters as possible- it was overdone- a bit too much- the cheating, the accident, sam's multiple serious injuries (he would probably be knocked out and on a ton of drugs if all the stuff you wrote happened to him)- no way he'd be acting so normal like [...] (asm613 2011)

And when the author offers a sequel if it gathers enough reviews, her critic responds, 'what if you get enough reviews begging you not to write a sequel?' (ibid). Seldenta's fic rejects *SPN's* aggressive Othering of small-r romance and genres traditionally called feminine. Yet genre categorization is a hierarchical practice in general (Mittell 2004), with domestic drama and small-r romance near the bottom. With particular reference to the Bad Other of *Twilight*, Pinkowitz criticises this gendered discourse as 'the dismissability of girl culture', (2011, 0.1). As noted (p. 54), *Supernatural* fandom is often complicit in this dismissability, and readers are not necessarily convinced by situating the characters in feminine genres.

Overall, though, it seems that Ff.net fic posits less strangeness, and certainly less darkness in the relationship than LJ and A03: compare the lukewarm reaction to Romanticism. Likewise, emileerocksyoursocks'  *Holding on To What You Caught*, which she declares as her 'first time writing Dean without guilt' (2012), Dean decides that 'he did like what he saw and Sam really, really liked him. So, why not just go for it?'. Also on Ff.net, this is received as 'very nice' (Raine 2012) and 'hot & funny & sweet' (twilightmecrazii 2012).

Unsurprisingly, this branch of the discourse hybridizes with assimilationist statements of gay rights (see Flegel and Roth 2010). Assimilationist justifications are the opposite of Edelman's radical agenda (2004). They are those that state, we gays are just like everyone else, except in our gender preference. We too desire to settle down in monogamous marriages, raise children, contribute to the community, invest in the future. Our desires are your desires, our rights are human and civil (Ettelbrick 1998). These statements are profoundly anti-Romantic. They usually involve a brief homosexual panic on Dean's part, followed by internal reconciliation that he is 'gay for his brother'. These statements build on Dean's canonical unease on the frequent occasions he and Sam are taken for a couple, and Sam's blithe reply that 'you are pretty butch. They probably think you're overcompensating' (2x11, 'Playthings'):

This was such a fucked up situation. Dean wasn't gay (fanspired 2011).

"Have you done anything sexual with a guy?" "No. I'm not gay, Sam." That came out easily, it wasn't a lie, and Dean felt better. He wasn't gay (deansgirl369 2010).

Sure, he was gay, but being gay for your brother? That was a whole new level of coming out of the closet (FlippinSirens 2011).

Interestingly, the negative responses conflate homosexuality and incest as operating at the same level of transgression, with the same justification that it is 'wrong' and false:

well i hate this fic cause its wrong! sam and dean are brothers and i hate incest its wrong and i dont care that its fiction! and anyway those bitches in the forum make me laugh samdean girl and dean and sam are not gay (ebonyloves dean and sam [sic] 2011).

slash and incest is wrong and who ever writes it is dumb! (ebonylovesjensenandjared 2012)

These blunt attempts at regulation, claiming incest and slash are wrong just ‘because they are’, occur solely on Ff.net, and the commenters who make them always choose anonymity, suggesting awareness that their opinions are unpopular and would be subject to backlash themselves if other fans were allowed the opportunity. Anonymous commenting on Ff.net, allowing no space to respond to the comment, is a tactic for leaving a statement that can be deleted but not countered.

In these fics, where incest is discovered by a wider community, they are accepting. In Gallagher’s *It’ll All Turn To Dust And We’ll All Fall Down*, the world has ended, but Sam and Dean are still ‘hanging around to watch’ (2012a). The Romantic stakes are reduced, as the long-lived demon Crowley puts it, ‘the earth’s population, animal and human, has been decimated before. Sometimes through natural circumstances, sometimes, in the case of humans, through their own stupidity’. This one ‘was just your run of the mill regular people with a taste for destruction’. The earth is stripped of angels, demons and monsters, and Sam and Dean settle down in a town of survivors called Page. The name invokes the colloquialism, ‘to turn over a new page’, which is exactly what they do. Dean admits to Sam, ‘don’t need other people. But you do. No, no, don’t give me those eyes, you know what I mean. You need contact, connections, company. Not just mine. There’s nothing wrong with that’. In defiance of the Romantic bond, they may love each other most, but not to the exclusion and sacrifice of community. When the denizens of Page find out, they are accepting. These altered moral codes are attributed to the absence of religion:

Things have changed, priorities are different, and I sure haven't heard a single mention yet about God or the Bible or our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, nothing like that. Hell, for all we know, they could all be atheist by now.

In an assimilationist statement, the denizens of Page assert that 'we want the same thing. We want to live'; but what they want even more, as it turns out, is the prosperity of their children. Sam and Dean are not required to break their monogamous bond, but they are asked to donate sperm and do so. They take full part in raising the community's children, educating and building houses, and offer, as Edelman would put it disdainfully, their lives in service of the Child (2004). Dean's biological offspring is named Hope. Eventually, they are married.

Commenters take this as a (neo)Liberal morality tale:

[This story] made me wonder if, after facing the almost END, people will become more tolerant, or even forget for good all their prejudices and misconceptions ?! (ramona4jake 2012)

It would be nice to think that if a few had to start over, they would keep the good stuff and leave the bad behind (Gallagher 2012b)

The fic is moderately well received, with 135 LJ comments, a link from Tumblr, and a recommendation on Story Finders for futurefic.

The (neo)Liberal justification constructs a morality in which the highest good is the right and responsibility of the individual to pursue what is perceived to promote happiness in specific contexts. Older forms of morality must be sloughed off:

On the one hand, this was way wrong. This was what they taught you was one of the major sins in Sunday school wrong and you'd [go] straight to hell. On the other hand, Dean was pretty sure we was already going to hell again



and was pretty damn sure the only person he could ever see himself spending a sufficient amount of his life with being Sam. So after a few moments, Dean made his decision, "We're going to hell I hope you know that." Sam gave Dean another one of his classical grins and crawled back up Dean's body to place a searing lusty kiss upon his big brothers [sic] lips. "At least we're going together. And you've already been there once so I'll have a tour guide" (calhale 2010).

Posted on Ff.net, this receives 24 reviews. The idea that one could have a 'tour guide' in Hell, and highlighting the fact that Dean has already been there, denies with canon the existence of moral absolutes, of a Hell that is pure permanent torture and a Heaven of pure permanent reward. *Supernatural's* Heaven is at least as bad as Hell, represented as a dystopia of brainwashing, illusion and blind obedience to a corrupt angelic hierarchy. God either does not exist, or is on permanent holiday. In the absence of moral law or the right of a centralized government to dictate one's choices, doing what 'feels right' becomes a plausible guideline.

The idea of moral absolutes is blatantly mocked in TheResurrectionist's comedy *It's a Sin*, wherein the prophet Chuck is tormented by endless visions of 'hot gay incestuous sex'. The first time, he had 'fallen off his bed in ecstasy' (2012), but it has now become too much for him, so he marches up to the Winchesters' present residence intending to put a stop to it. His plans are thwarted:

A white light flashed onto both brothers, then to Chuck. "Chuck." a deep, disembodied voice grumbled. "God?" he asked, shocked. "Yes. I understand you came here to discourage the winchester's night time activities?" Chuck paled, suddenly sober. "Yes." "I don't want that." God said. "it's the hottest thing ever."

God proceeds to request a threesome – technically foursome – using Chuck as his vessel, which Chuck avoids by pushing all of his memories into his mind at once, ‘flooding God with the equivalent of a nuclear wincest bomb’.

By contrast, xxsnapppplexx’s *The Painted Horse* is a serious meditation on sexual ethics in the modern world, and a neo(Liberal) context specifically. It appears on LJ and A03 only. In this AU, Castiel is a celebrated artist specializing in body painting, an amoral innovator who perceives his work as ‘an image made to sell the illusions of intimacy’ and ‘give capitalism a little prestige’. He observes with detachment as ‘men and women came in droves for that image and left pliant, satisfied in the arms of one another without realizing the secret to it all’ (2012). He recruits Sam and Dean as models. They have been raised apart and are unaware they are brothers. Though impotent, Castiel has a sexual relationship with Sam and eventually initiates Dean into it, though Dean is initially concerned that ‘Sam seemed more like a commodity than a lover’ to Castiel. In a hyper-capitalist, post-religious context without an overarching moral framework, sex and consent are in a fraught relation: Bay-Cheng and Arras argue that the ‘sociopolitical discourse of neoliberalism shapes sexuality at the individual level’ (2008, 386), whilst Wood and Skeggs (2008) and Ouellette (2009; 2011) criticise the fetishization of individual ‘responsibility’ in bodily self-governance without attention to the surrounding structures of power, wealth and knowledge. In this fic, Castiel is rich and pays Dean and Sam excessively to model for him. He uses mind-altering substances, and dispenses them to his models in situations where their consent and awareness is deliberately left ambiguous to the reader. Sam and Dean enjoy both their work for and sexual relations with Castiel, though Dean is never entirely comfortable with him. Castiel learns of the brothers’ familial relationship before

they do, and chooses not to tell them, for ‘what would it accomplish? It was what it was, confessions were for Christians and lies for sinners but silence was just the easy nothing of an unpainted page’. He certainly sees nothing wrong with the situation, believing ‘genetics weren’t designed to segregate or moralize’, though when Sam and Dean eventually do find out, they are horrified and betrayed. Castiel challenges them for ‘a reason that doesn’t rely on some vague social idealism that history has time and again proved inelegant and insufficient’, and questions whether ‘normalcy at all cost’ is preferable to breaking a taboo in the name of happiness. There are Romantic statements here too, as there are in Castiel’s painting of the boys as sexual, colourful animals. However what keeps them together at the end is ‘genuine affection’ rather than earth-shattering love. The three-way relationship survives *despite* the fact Sam and Dean are related, not because of it. Sam does not think of Dean as ‘family’ or a ‘brother’. The fic raises profound questions about what right and wrong could *be* in a hyper-capitalist, neo(Liberal) world, and whether ‘happiness’ is enough. The characters were happiest before Sam and Dean knew they were brothers. Does that mean Castiel was right to withhold the information? What are the implications of that for consent, which up until now has been the conditional statement of the (neo)Liberal justification? It might be said that the ambiguous relationship between power and consent is the fundamental theme here, as it is for Bay-Cheng and Arras.

*The Painted Horse* has an interesting reception. It is not particularly popular on LJ, with only 20 comments, but makes a great impact on A03, with 40 (recall that the A03 average is 5).

Reviewers approve of it technically, and find it extremely accomplished, even on anonhaven, but many find it a hard read, with Cas particularly being difficult to like (anon. 19 2012). This seems to be an ethical judgement: manipulation of consent is wrong in the (neo)Liberal discourse

formation. *The Painted Horse* does not structure consensual incest as wrong, or return to an invocation of moral absolutes, but asks us to think carefully about the meanings and limits of consent in a hyper-capitalist, neo(Liberal) context.

By introducing statements from assimilationist discourse into a formation where incest is normative, this branch of the formation opens significant moral questions. If the best the detractors can say is, ‘it’s wrong’ (like biracial marriage, like homosexuality), we must ask ourselves why we consider consensual incestuous acts between adults wrong. There is no space here for a real discussion of this fascinating and difficult topic, but the legal and psychological professions have done and continue to debate it: as Law lecturer Paul Behrens explains in his summary of issues for the *Guardian*, to frame any good rationale for a law against all forms of incest is actually very difficult (2012). Bailey and McCabe were arguing in *Criminal Law Review* as early as 1979 that ‘the offense of incest should be removed from the statute book, and consensual incest between adults of 18 years and over should be legalized’ (1979, 749).

According to Westermarckian theory, the origin of the incest taboo is simply distaste caused by observation of genetic detriment. Yet not all incest results in reproduction – homosexual incest being the obvious case – and as Professor Eugene Volokh argues, we hardly outlaw other cases of reproduction that are not genetically optimal (2010). Abuse is of course a major factor (Bell 1993), but if incest is genuinely consensual between adults, are there, outside of tenuous religions moralizing, any solid justifications for the categories of moral ‘right’ and ‘wrong’? It is a question that has ramifications for the field of ethics as a whole, and a clear example of how fiction’s properties of stating ‘what is not’ cause us to see the flaws in the basic assumptions of our dominant discourses.

#### IV. Conclusions

Fandom, then, follows canon in constructing sibling incest as Romantic, yet tempers that construction with heavy criticism and opposing statements from other discursive contexts. Unsurprisingly, no conclusions are reached, and fandom's construction is strongly regulated by site and Author-function. Nonetheless, as opposed to transgressing canon, what fandom has done here is form a complex and thoughtful construction from canon hints and denials, with some emergent statements that raise questions for sexual ethics in a (neo)Liberal context. In some ways they hint at the Foucauldian calls for an embrace of non-conformity, of bodies and pleasures, as resistance to normative schemas of sexuality (1992); yet these calls are criticised as complicit with a wilful neoliberal blindness (Winnubst 2012), reifying choice and the individual at the expense of sociality and structural inequalities. These tensions are played out in *The Painted Horse*, which structures incest in some ways as a lifestyle choice, yet whose narrative turns on a power and wealth imbalance that criticises the 'freedom' of (neo)Liberal choices.

Fandom changes the discursive formation of incest by frankly naming it. It removes the division between what 'Others' do and the relations between the protagonists, as 'darkness' was removed from a property of Others earlier. In both cases, when the property of the Other is shifted to Sam and Dean, it is legitimated, gains prestige and acceptance. It is questionable whether their privileged status as White men is what allows this, or their status as canon heroes. Probably, it is both, and each reinforces the other: their status as White men massively improves the odds of

their being canon heroes in the first place; and their status as protagonists reinforces their status as the default human that is the White man. Fandom's move of utilizing them to legitimate the properties of others may be progressive; but it is not radical. The legitimation and revaluation of the Other are made possible via the capital of the White male, and in fandom's reconstruction of the incest formation, this paradox goes largely unchallenged. However, the legitimation process itself is not automatic, as the cases of rape and abuse show: statements of action outside the moral framework of consent are illegitimate, and *The Painted Horse's* depiction of dubious consent plays uneasily at the boundaries.

The legitimation paradox is most literal in the next and last research chapter, which deals with a structure linked not so much to the horror context of the show as the cult TV one: Authorial presence, and the relationship of the fan to the author (Jenkins 1992; Hills 2002; 2010a; Wexelblatt 2002; Gray 2010; Kompare 2011; Scott 2011). Its findings should therefore be taken to inflect those of the chapters that have come before it. Fandom's constructions, however transformative or conservative, still exist in a subordinated power relation to what can and cannot be 'aired', and to the Name of the Author from which cult TV derives some of its cultural capital. I will now explore how the writings of fans, both incited and denied in the show like the relationship of the brothers they are (re)writing, relates to the author-sanctioned, far-reaching and official power of the canon.

## Chapter 5: 'I'm a God': The Author and the Writing Fan

### I. Introduction

Cult television makes frequent use of symbolic auteurs. Though TV shows are, in reality, a product of many people's labour and dependent on a multi-level network of financial and industrial support, individuals in the horror/drama/sci-fi genre are often constructed as the primary creative force behind a program (Mittell 2012). Inherited from 20<sup>th</sup> century film theory, and the singular model of Romantic authorship before that, these figures help imbue the text with an aura of value (Gray 2010, 99-102). *Supernatural's* is Eric Kripke, who conceived of the text, plotted the initial 5-Season myth arc, and served as chief writer and showrunner until the end of that fifth season. Because the text tends to be read *through* such figures, in terms of their intentions, aims, and symbolic guarantees of quality, they are often understood in terms of the Foucauldian Author-function (1991). Foucault was responding to Barthes' polemical call for the 'death' or irrelevance of the author, and view of the text as 'a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture' (1977, 146). Foucault contended that the author has not vanished, but serves as a principle by which the meaning of a text is constrained, and the text valued.

Henry Jenkins began the application of the Author-function to fan studies, with an analysis of Gene Roddenberry's function in the original *Star Trek* series. He concluded that the figure of 'Gene' helped fans 'classify the relationships between texts, explain textual events (or neutralize discrepancies), and to demarcate a text's value through his authorship or approval' (1995, 188-91). Since then, Hills (2002; 2010a); Wexelblat (2002); Gray (2010); and Kompare (2011) have discussed the function in *Doctor Who*, *Babylon 5*, *Lord of the Rings* and *Lost*. Scott is concerned with the gendered institutional power and strategic self-presentation of cult TV figures who wield an Author-function, whom she calls 'fanboy-auteurs'. These men – and they are, still, White men - perform self-abnegation and liberality to their fans through text and paratexts. At the same time, they retain an economic and institutional position of control over the text:

Borrowing a term from Jonathan Gray, we could frame the fanboy auteur as an 'undead author,' or an author who understands that metaphorically 'killing himself' is an ideal way to engender fannish solidarity, and [to] 'fashion himself as "just one of the fans", when he is decidedly privileged in the relationship' (Scott 2011, 168, quoting Gray 2010, 113; 112).

Kripke consistently presents and is presented as such. Paratextually, Kripke professes his love for and loyalty to fandom (Ausiello 2007), and claims to 'love' and 'welcome' fan production (Zubernis and Larsen 2012, 214). He was written in as a character to a meta-textual Season 6 episode, wherein his sole plot function was to die, a comic slow-motion sequence set to a mock-Western soundtrack. Kripke declared himself delighted with the scene, thanking director Charles Beeson 'for letting [him] die in such a manly way! With none of the urinating or begging or crying' (Bekakos 2011). The definite article self-effacingly delineates the verbs 'urinating', 'begging' and 'crying' as actions which Kripke would expect to take place at his own death. For



the construction of 'Eric Kripke' is split and maintained between his paratextual self-presentation and his proxies in the text. The death is performed by an actor, not by himself, thus simultaneously maintaining an extra-textual presence as the *real* author *and* performing abnegation for his fans. The practice of fanboy-auterism is thus refined to an art.

But Kripke's primary textual proxy is the Prophet Chuck, alias Carver Edlund, a hack writer who receives divine visions of the other characters and writes them into a series of pulp novels also called *Supernatural*. Chuck's books develop a cult following, including slash-writing fangirl Becky Rosen (Emily Perkins). Her first appearance, in 5x01, 'Sympathy for the Devil', is a remarkable instance of a televisual writer writing fan fiction about his show into the show itself. Fans responded with a range of approval and approbation to this destruction of the fourth wall (Felschow 2010, 6.3; Schmidt 2010, 2.8-9), and Chuck, Becky and other canonical fan-representations have been re-appropriated into fanfic. Further, *Supernatural* fandom now exists in a post-Author-God era: at the end of his projected five Seasons, Kripke stepped down. In a gendered distinction, his successor Sera Gamble was never been imbued with an Author-function, received by fans as chief fangirl at best and a talentless fumbler at worst (c.f. Zubernis and Larsen 2012, 216).

Zubernis and Larsen (2012) have made an extended study of boundary-crossing in relation to *Supernatural* and its fandom. But their interview-dependent work has a different orientation to mine: they are concerned with the attitudes and responses of fans and producers, not the establishment of discursive formations and their alteration by writing. Their project fits more into the socio-psychological branch of fan studies, and thus, where they do attend to fanfic (83-115), it is from the perspective of trauma and healing that Bacon-Smith inaugurated (1992).

Nonetheless they present much useful data on Kripke's paratextual presentation of himself as showrunner, some of which will be utilized in this chapter.

Here I seek the statements constructing the discursive formation 'The Author and the Fan'. Originally, I had intended to study 'The Author' alone, but it quickly became clear that the canonical dyad was inextricable, the two constructed in terms of each other. Chuck and Becky are introduced in parallel circumstances, their writing compared and contrasted (Cherry 2011, 212), and though the canonical author remains in control and privileged, the characters become romantically involved for some time. As Zubernis and Larsen read it, 'that Kripke/Chuck is literally in bed with his fans can be seen as indicative of the fact that we – the creator, the actors and the fans- are all in this together' (170). This rather overlooks the inequality of the power relationship: both between the characters, and between Kripke and fandom. Moreover, the dyad is problematically broken during Season 7, where Becky has been dumped by Chuck and crosses new lines of pathological behaviour. However, fanfic also intercedes with statements that separate the discourse formation 'fan' from 'author', reconstructing them in ways that shift the balance of power.

At the conclusion of Season 5, the series suggests that Chuck may indeed be God, a literal manifestation of the originating deity Barthes recognized as standing behind the authority of the Author (c.f. Busse 2010; Scott 2011, 296-97). If Chuck is not God, then God is definitively absent or non-existent in *Supernatural's* apocalyptic storyline. Garcia argued that the Author-God/fan relationship was further complicated by Chuck's direct address to the audience and discussion of writing the series before he vanishes (5x22), leaving the series and the fans to carry on without, if not his presence, at least his leadership (2011, 158-59). However, Kripke remains

an executive producer (Ausiello 2010), and notably, wrote the critical Season 6 finale himself rather than leaving it to Sera Gamble. Gamble's proxy in the text is fannish publisher Sera Siegel, who in a problematically gendered distinction is ultimately a gatekeeper rather than a 'real' author – the characters must prove their fan credentials to her before she directs them to him (Scott 2011, 304).

## II. Canon

In the text of *Supernatural*, I found that statements constructed the author as a fanboy-auteur quite specifically: as a geek and a fanboy on one hand, and a visionary or God on the other. The fan, meanwhile, was constructed variously as excessive, excitable and feminine: characteristics that date back to some of Jenson's descriptors in the 1992 piece on pathologization (see p. 48). On the other hand, fan activity is permitted, even valorized to an extent by the Author-God, and in a sense they are shown as parallels. Chuck and Becky both speak their first lines sitting at their computers, writing about Sam and Dean and reading their work aloud. But the grounding statements of the dyad define a consistent power relation:

- 1) That the Author-God's text is canonical truth, and
- 2) The fan's text, though permissible, is secondary, derivative, false.

This canonical discursive formation 'Author and Fan' is more coherently iterated in the text than

‘Race’ and ‘Incest’, and might be best illustrated thus:

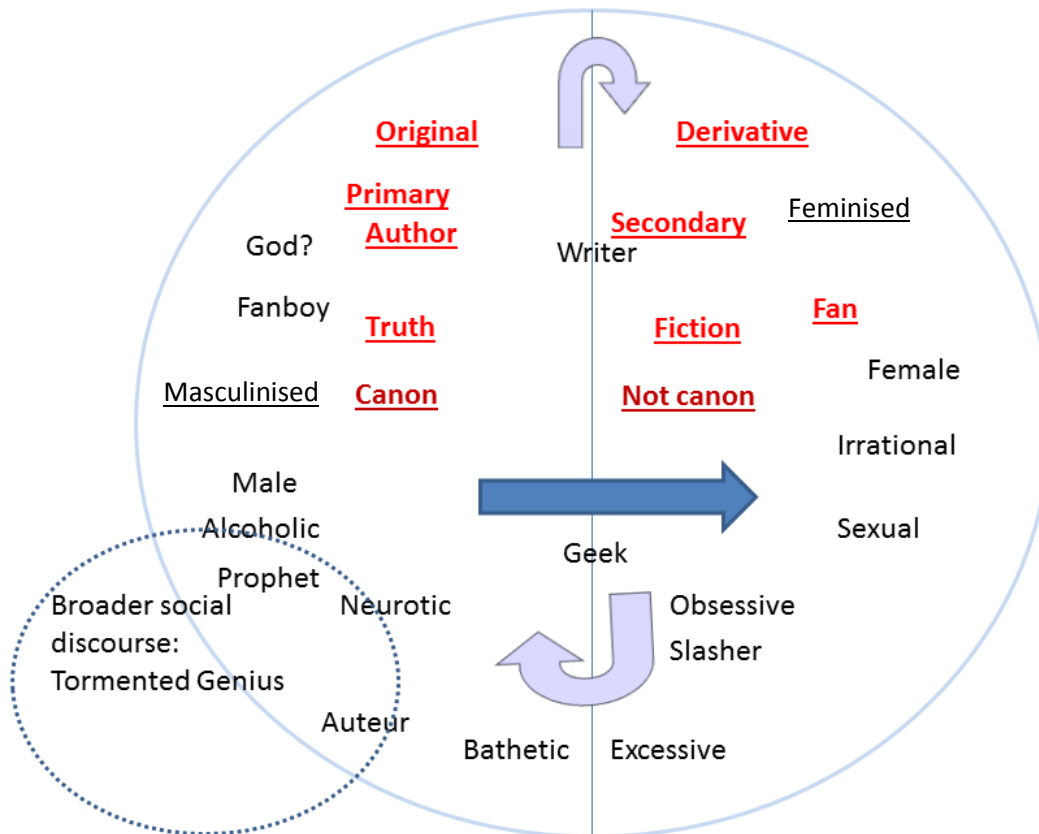


Figure 17: The Author and the Fan in canon.

Grounding statements are underlined. The straight arrow (one-way) represents legitimation, which flows only from the author to the fan. The curved arrows represent love and need, which are constructed as reciprocal, though the flow from the fan to the author is greater.

Our introduction to Chuck Shurley comes in the midst of a vision. At the opening of episode 4x18, 'The Monster at the End of this Book', he sleeps restlessly in his bathrobe and boxer shorts, despite the clear sounds of daytime outside. His house is in disarray. Zubernis and Larsen write that 'the tongue in cheek portrayal of Chuck here is one of the things that saves the episode from slipping into a mean-spirited parody of fans' (160). I agree, though it must be acknowledged that statements which construct the author as nervous, distracted, disorganized and at least semi-alcoholic 'hook' (Carabine 2001, 269) into a broader discourse of the author as tormented genius. Though his publisher describing him as 'very private...like Salinger' (4x18) is obviously played for laughs, humour does not negate this hook. Where Chuck is constructed as bathetic, fans are constructed as excessive. They display excess of love, excess commitment, excess deviant sexuality: some of the oldest and most conservative connotations of pathological fandom (Jenson 1992; Jenkins 1992). Johnson names this practices 'fan-tagonism': a form of discipline by discursive containment, in which the text displays the fan to herself in controlling forms (2007). Fan-tagonism supposedly de-legitimizes certain kinds of fandom – notably the excessive and feminine – by exposing, exaggerating and shaming (295-99), but the construction of Becky particularly is complex, somewhere between celebration and censor, and moreover, probably renders the production of *Supernatural* fic legal until further notice (McCardle 2003, 449-50). Re-appropriations of her in fic alter the construction with new statements. Discourse incites as well as represses, and thus, I prefer the term *textual provocation* to describe the construction of fans in *Supernatural*, with a double meaning: the inclusion of fans in the text can be provocative in the sense of baiting, but also it also provokes the production of more text, which potentially alters the formation.

The danger of fans is first established in the text when Sam and Dean confront Chuck: taking them for role-players, he claims to appreciate their enthusiasm, but advises, ‘for your own good, I strongly suggest you get a life’ (4x18). ‘Get a life’ is of course the original insult to fandom, provocation in the first sense, made famous by William Shatner’s *Saturday Night Live* sketch (Jenkins 1995, 1). When his protagonists forcefully enter his house, Chuck wails, ‘Is this some kind of *Misery* thing? Ah, it is, isn't it? It's a *Misery* thing!’, referencing the novel many King fans took as an insult (Palko 2009, 119, 4n).

In 5x01, Chuck Shurley contacts Becky Rosen via Skype, requesting that she ‘get a message to Sam and Dean’. The author is thus constructed as needing the fan (c.f. Zubernis and Larsen 164). Becky responds with initial skepticism giving way to hyperventilating excitement, before finding Sam and Dean and sexually harassing Sam. She later organizes the *Supernatural* convention (5x09), where she and Chuck fall in love with each other, visually sealing the dyad as they stand together at the end. However, this positive if unbalanced fan/author binary was separated by new statements in 7x08, ‘Season Seven, Time for a Wedding!’, still provocative in the first sense. Here, Becky admits that Chuck dumped her, probably because he was ‘intimidated by [her] vibrant sexuality’. Fan excess can overstep boundaries and harm relations. Indeed, that is rather the theme of the episode, wherein Becky briefly kidnaps Sam with the aid of a love potion before realizing the error of her ways and assisting the Winchesters in a hunt. Most serious objections to the construction of Becky concern the kidnapping, with fans finding her funny and charming up to a point but considering that episode to cross a line of pathologization. ‘Becky was awesome and now she’s just ruined’, objected rossettaslair (2011), whilst blogger Lady Geek Girl also stated that it ‘ruined’ the character for her (2012). Hells\_half\_acre argued that ‘Becky worked as

an inside-joke about the fans before, because she was confident, crazy, but, most importantly, completely unashamed', but this episode 'undermine[d] the character' (2012). Separated from Chuck, and in the meta-textual absence of Eric Kripke, the fan seemingly devolves.



**Figure 17: Becky (Emily Perkins) is delighted by the 'firmness' of her formerly-fictional hero.**

Once convinced that the narrative of his books is real, Chuck concludes, 'Well, there's only one explanation. Obviously I'm a god' (4x18). Again this is played for humour: Chuck is still in his bathrobe, and has just been thoroughly petrified by his imposing protagonists. Sam returns, 'You're not a god', but Chuck insists: 'How else do you explain it? I write things and then they come to life. Yeah, no, I'm definitely a god. A cruel, cruel, capricious god'.



**Figure 18: Chuck (Rob Benedict) reluctantly concludes his own Godhood (4x18).**

Later, it is established that Chuck is a prophet, tasked with writing ‘The Winchester Gospels’. Even granted Chuck’s less-than-impressive character, this could be perceived as an audacious meta-textual positioning on Kripke’s part, as a ‘conduit of the inspired word’ (Castiel, 4x18). Yet criticism of this is pre-empted. Chuck admits that though he had a vision revealing this role, he did not write this into the books because ‘It was too preposterous. Not to mention arrogant. I mean, writing yourself into the story is one thing, but as a prophet? That’s like M. Night-level douchiness’. The Chuck/Kripke division is thin here, the implication being that though Kripke is loath to be as arrogant as director M. Night Shyalaman, with his penchant for ‘auteurist cameo’ (Hills 2010b, 110), the trope must in this case be excused, for he is, despite himself, a visionary. He is not constructed here as an originating author, but ‘a passive subject who brings to the role whatever the Creator dictates’ (Garcia 2011, 156). These statements do not necessarily reduce



the cultural capital associated with the role: canonical authors from Homer to Milton depicted themselves as the conduit of a muse (hence ‘prophet’ overlaps with the broader discourse in figure 16). It does, however, inflect the meaning of a diner logo displayed earlier in the episode, which reads, ‘Kripke’s Hollow’. Cleverly upholding his textual proxy in his place, the author performatively kills himself, empties himself out, whilst gesturing to his text as truth.

Gestures such as this, culminating in his staged ‘death’ in Season 6, construct Kripke as creatively open-handed. Paratextually, he performs a great deal of fannish allegiance and affection. He claims to ‘love our fans to death’, ‘love how passionate they are’ (Ausiello 2007); ‘like Supernatural.tv’ and ‘pop around the various LiveJournal stuff’ (Zubernis and Larsen, 178). He ‘love(s) and ‘welcome(s)’ fan fiction, including slash (214). He stresses his receptivity to fan opinion, and willingness to moderate the text in anything ‘apart from the main storyline’ (180). There is then, a limit – he retains ultimate control over the story, but claims subplots are ‘completely negotiable’ (180). Perhaps Kripke’s performance of all-embracing permissiveness is enabled through the use of his other, textual, half to delegitimize - though not ban - unruly practice. Not only does Chuck fear that his fans are insane, but in a deleted scene to 5x09, available as a DVD extra, Chuck answers implied questions from his fandom. Shaking his head, he states, ‘Uhhh no...I can’t read your LiveJournal short story. No, I get it. Sam and Dean really *love* each other. I just don’t need to see that’. Hills calls this kind of paratext ‘fanagement’. Directed not at the casual viewer but the active fan, ‘expectations and dissatisfactions are problematically engaged with, and disciplined and contained, at the level of niche paratexts rather than in the TV show’ (2012, 409). Again, I prefer the term textual provocation. The paratext is provocative in the sense of deliberately aggravating, because it suggests there is

something wrong with a popular fan practice. But on the other hand, by acknowledgement and tacit affirmation that Chuck/Kripke has no intention of attempting to ban incest fic, it provokes further fan production.

This leads us to the first grounding statement: that the author's text is canonical truth. Chuck is not a good writer. His first extended scene shows him reading aloud as he types at his computer, and the text is over-written and melodramatic. Tautology is used for comic effect. But as he types, 'with determination, Dean pushed the doorbell with forceful....determination' (4x18), before throwing his manuscript down in disgust, the camera cuts to the character Dean doing just that. According to Garcia, this creates 'a disturbing impression of a work in progress as it reveals its structures and mechanisms' (156). I disagree. The objective camera angle is utilized for the Chuck/Winchesters/Chuck sequence, which as Dancyger notes, 'provide(s) information about what is going on without choosing a distinct point of view' (2006, 90). Chuck may be a bad writer, but what he writes is constructed as objectively true.

More statements consolidate the construction in 5x22, 'Swan Song'. As conceived by Kripke, this would have been the final episode of the show, and framed *Supernatural* as a classical five-arc tragedy ending in the death and/or devastation of its protagonists. This kind of conclusion 'hooks' into the cultural capital of tragic drama (c.f. Carabine 2001, 269), rather as Lopes recognized comic books 'emulat[ing] the conventions of literary works' in a bid for cultural capital (2007, 132; see also McCabe and Akass 2009, 89-90). Some fans consider this the real, Author-ized end of the series, with everything that happens afterwards a kind of 'visual fanfic' (kongjingying 2012). 'Swan Song' is narrated by Chuck. At the opening, he provides the following voice-over:

On April 21, 1967, the 100 millionth GM vehicle rolled off the line at the plant in Janesville -- a blue two-door Caprice.

There was a big ceremony, speeches. The lieutenant governor even showed up. Three days later, another car rolled off that same line. No one gave two craps about her. But they should have, because this 1967 Chevrolet Impala would turn out to be the most important car -- no, the most important object -- in pretty much the whole universe.

He goes on to describe the first owner of the car, which has been iconic throughout the series, until it comes to the Winchester family, adding 'I guess that's where this story begins. And here's where it ends' (5x22).

The camera cuts between Chuck, typing at his computer, and images of 1960s-quality film affirming the veracity of his statements. They are again objective shots, and the flashbacks are muted, Chuck's voice and the clicking of his keyboard carrying over them in a split-edit that constructs his writing as an accurate record of history. Chuck displays emotional knowledge and insight into the characters that was lacking in his earlier comic characterization, describing details of Sam and Dean's daily existence that the viewer is privy to for the first time. His narration also concludes the episode, as he ruminates over a series of emotionally-charged flashbacks that whilst it's 'hard to say' what 'it all adds up to', he believes his protagonists 'did alright':

Up against good, evil, angels, devils, destiny, and God himself, they made their own choice. They chose family. And, well... isn't that kinda the whole point?

The characters are intermittently muted, and the extra-diegetic music accords with the tone of Chuck's statements, constructing the Winchesters and friends for the first time as characters in his narrative rather than independent individuals whose lives we witness through suspension of disbelief. An Authorized interpretation is thus placed, within the text, on the narrative, and the boundary between Chuck and Kripke is thin, especially as he laments the difficulty of endings and impossibility of pleasing all the fans. It would be just as logical to conclude that the moral is, in the Greek tradition, that we should struggle to do the right thing simply because it is right, though we will suffer and be punished anyway. Chuck types 'the end' under his manuscript, and admits, 'No doubt - endings are hard. But then again... nothing ever really ends, does it?', and with a wink to the camera, disappears. On one level, this could be read as the Author-God writing himself *out* of the text, to continue without him; but it also imbues what Chuck/Kripke *has* written with the aura of magic and omnipotence, a statement which is never contradicted in *Supernatural* itself.

Conversely, the fan's text, though permissible, is constructed as secondary, derivative and false. As Cherry notes, our introduction to Becky parallels our earlier introduction to Chuck (2011, 212): she is alone at her computer, writing about Sam and Dean, reading aloud and correcting herself as she goes. She, however, is writing bad slash: 'And then Sam touched— no —caressed Dean's clavicle. "This is wrong," said Dean. "Then I don't want to be right," replied Sam, in a husky voice' (5x01). Becky's fic employs the conventions of small-r romance, which SPN and its fans often denigrate and Other with implicit or explicit reference to *Twilight* (c.f. Bode 2010; Pinkowitz 2011; and see p. 54 and 249 above). Though this is Authorized in the sense that Kripke literally wrote it, there is no visual parallel to confirm the truth of her words. Indeed, Sam

and Dean have already discovered their slash fans (4x18), and declared their texts 'sick' (on grounds of incest, not homosexuality).

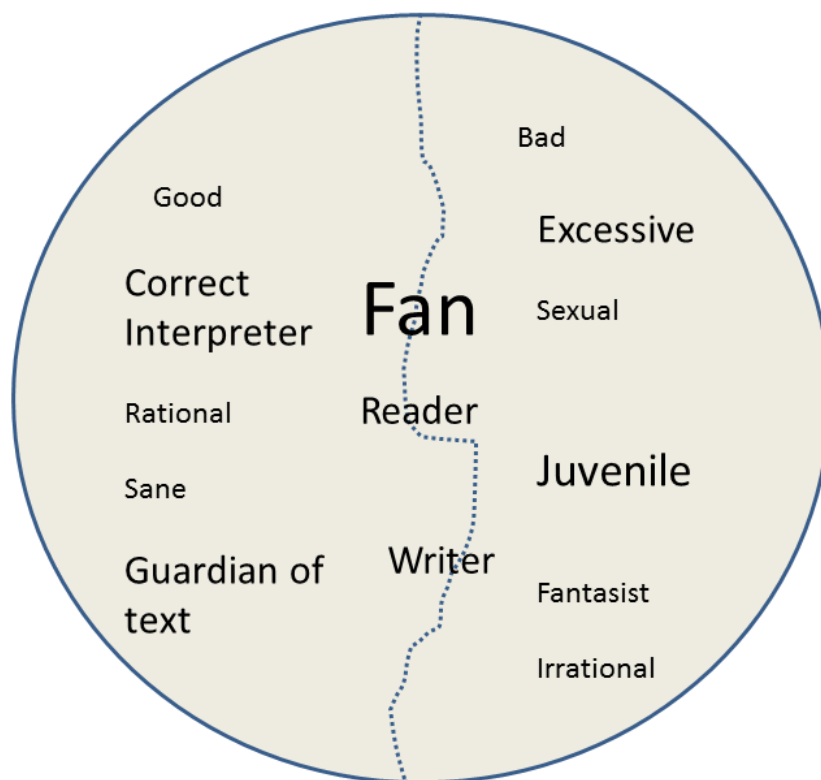
Moreover, when gay fans Demian and Barnes role-play Sam and Dean, they repeat lines from earlier seasons with comically bad acting, interrupting themselves and each other and slipping out of character. Dean particularly is horrified at this travesty of his life, this citation with difference upsetting him by the loss of authenticity. The convention puts on a hunt – a role-playing game – where participants receive instructions from 'Dad's Journal'. The 'real' journal, which Sam and Dean inherited, was an oblique collection of newspaper clippings, abbreviated notes and research which Sam and Dean attempt to decipher for aid in hunts, in the best gothic tradition of an obscure manuscript. The 'journal entry' they receive at the con reads, 'Dear Sam and Dean, this hotel is haunted. You must hunt down the ghost. Interview witnesses, discover clues, and find the bones. First team to do so wins a \$50 gift card to Sizzler. Love Dad' (5x09). This is played for humour, with an edge of despair at the crude commodification of the Winchesters' tragic lives.

I will argue that fandom reconstructs the discursive formations of fandom and authorship separately, as follows:



**Figure 19: The Author construction reconstructed by statements from fanfic.**

Figure 20: the fan, reconstructed by fanfic.



Notice that the canonical dyad of author and fan is gone, and with it, the primary/secondary binary. The author's relationship with truth is brought into question, for he is constructed as a participant and collaborator rather than originating God. On the other hand, many of the

statements constructing the fan pathologically in canon have not been removed, but simply been placed onto the Other side of a new binary: that of the Good Fan/Bad Fan (c.f. Stanfill 2013).

The divide, however, is which in itself is fragmented and uneven, each half mixing into into the other rather than statements that specifically compromise other statements.

### III. Fandom

Pursuing the flow chart given in the methodology (p. 107), I found an extraordinary amount of fanfic to affect the discursive formation ‘The Author and the Fan’. Eventually, I was forced to limit the search to the major archives, and was still left with 707 works and 32,025 comments to code. Fortunately, a brief search of peripheral archives revealed in this case no significant deviation from the discursive formations established:



Key to Sites

Ff.net = Fanfiction.net LJ = LiveJournal DW = Dreamwidth AO3 = Archive of Our Own

|                                     | Site: | Ff.net | LJ   | DW   | AO3 | Other |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--------|------|------|-----|-------|
| Number of fics:                     |       | 217    | 337  | 87   | 492 | 33    |
| Highest number of comments on a fic |       | 458    | 2741 | 822  | 130 | 163   |
| Lowest number of comments on a fic  |       | 0      | 0    | 0    | 0   | 0     |
| Average number of comments on a fic |       | 22.4   | 63.7 | 31.8 | 5.1 | 12.2  |

Once again, many fics appeared in more than one place, hence the sum of the top row is 1166, and very few reviews were entirely negative (9 total).

Following the methodological flowchart also put me in the position of coding my own fic, and discovering that I have largely contributed to consolidating the discourse established by the text itself. Thus, one outcome of constructing a rigorous methodology was forcing me to engage in

what Bourdieu and Wacquant called ‘reflexive’ practice: removing myself from the ‘know-how’, or learned practice (1992, 228), of writing fanfic, in order that this research is able to investigate a social world which my writing is the product of and contributes to (c.f. 235). It is not some special insight or capacity that enables me to map these discursive formations, but the construction of a systematic method enabled by my academic position. If social behaviour is, as Giddens has it, an essentially reflexive practice (1984, especially 1-9), this explains how the same ‘me’, whilst caught up in and reflexive of the culture of writing *within* this discourse, produced statements which, through the tool of my methodological framework, I later fitted into specific discursive categories established. The step of ‘locat[ing] [one] self in the picture’ (Fook 1999, 11) that research produces is missing from Zubernis and Larsen’s investigation. The lack of a methodology which would reflect on their own actions and positions as well as demonstrate how the evidence for their chapters is selected means that their account sometimes slips into the anecdotal. It is not enough to state that one is both a fan and an academic: the implications for what is then presented must be explored. As a fan, I contributed statements that shored up a discursive formation through learned practice; later, my position as an academic and the method I constructed from academic sources then allowed me to recognize it. Placing my own text in the discursive formation is an act of ‘assembl[ment] using hindsight’(Ellis et al 2011, 2), enabled by my position in an academic network, a ‘culture of research production’ (May and Perry 2011, 176) as opposed to a fannish culture of fic production.

In an illustration of Foucault’s principle that formations can solidify by arbitrary processes, most of the fics of high impact were so for reasons unrelated to Chuck and Becky. Typically, they

were long; of high literary capital; written by big name fans; set in the Endverse<sup>39</sup> and featured the pairing Dean/Castiel. Thus statements constructing the author and the fan set in this context gain the most weight. The discursive formation ‘The Author and the Fan’ was quite definitively transformed by fic statements, though the primacy of the ‘real’ text was still respected in the majority of cases (c.f. Stanfill forthcoming). This suggests that though fans may alter the construction within the spaces and boundaries of fandom, they may retain a sense of fandom’s limited ability to alter hegemonic discourse in the wider media archive. Former PR worker David Garner writes that media producers often ‘let fans (and some popular academics) believe they have more of a voice than they do’ (2012, 51), and even Kripke in his most generous mode comments that fans may overestimate their power (180). Conversely, this investigation found that fans are not deluded as to the extent their statements in fic alter discourse, and are frequently prepared to defer to the televisual writers.

Due to fandom’s tendency to treat Chuck and Becky more separately than canon does, the remainder of this chapter is divided into two halves. The first concerns the author and his text; the second, the fan and hers. There is more fic constructing the author without the fan than vice versa. This is partly due to the fact that Chuck was introduced before Becky in canon, so fanfic about Chuck was produced for a time before the dyad was obvious, but it nonetheless helps consolidate the primary/secondary binary.

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<sup>39</sup> A dystopian future world revealed canonically to Dean by the angel Zachariah, in an attempt to manipulate him into following the angels’ plan. The name derives from the episode title, ‘The End’ (5x04). In this world, Sam is unavailable as a partner for Dean, having given himself to Lucifer as a vessel, and Castiel is no longer an angel, but a drug-addled faux-spiritual guru outcast from heaven.

a) The Author and His Text

In some fanfic, the author Chuck is literally God. *Supernatural* does not explicitly state this, so these statements definitely consolidate the construction of the Author-God. They are most popular on Ff.net, rendering this part of the websphere less critical and more reverential towards the text. The writer will often assume God's point of view with an apology like, 'this fangirl owns nothing and would like to humbly apologize to the Big Man upstairs for this blasphemy' (PwnedByPineapple, 2012). Paradoxically, the fic-writer *is* assuming the right to speak from God's perspective. As PwnedByPineapple continues, 'what's the point of believing if you can't have some fun with religion, eh?' Chuck – the male Author-God – is the *tool needed* for the fic writer to assume this voice. Sometimes this is played 'straight', and God directs the narrative in traditional manner:

[Castiel] looked up in surprise as he felt another hand on his head and was even more startled to find Chuck smiling down at him. "Chuck?" Cas asked in wonder. "Cas you are on your way to redeeming yourself... Now go save your family" (iamtryN 2011).

This fic received 12 reviews on Fanfiction.net. Though below average where average is taken as mean, the mean here was raised by a few fics with hundreds of reviews. The median number of Ff.net reviews is 5, so these statements constructing the author as literal God are not insignificant. On the other hand, another fic depicts God-Chuck as rewriting the story to remove all misery with the following revelation:

Dean, I am God. I am not Chuck the prophet as you know me. I can change the course of time. Alter realities and change history. I have made it so that your mother never dies in a fire. You never become a hunter. Your daddy dies in his bed, an old man next to your mommy. Mommy dies an old lady surrounded by her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Sammy marries Jess and has babies. [...]As for all the evil in the world...I can make it so that it doesn't exist. I am God. I created all the beings on this Earth, be they good or bad (harakal1, 2011).

This fic is blanked, receiving no reviews on Fanfic.net or anywhere else. The statements fail to impact the formation, but this evidently has more to do with the un/acceptable construction of God, and/or the removal of the premises on which *Supernatural* is based, than the attribution of divinity to the author.

Other times, Chuck is constructed as God in a comic mode, and the fan uses him to correct the ending of Season 6. Here, Castiel suffers a psychotic break, releases the many-headed monster Leviathan from purgatory to take into himself, and declares himself the new God. Some fans were unimpressed, considering the twist unjustified, out of character, and a cheap trick on behalf of the un-Authorised post-Kripke writers. As msormanti6696 put it,

This is the moment that completely ruined Supernatural for me. And then just when I thought Cas going dark side was the worst mistake the writers ever made, they kill off Bobby, Dean has become a cynical, hopeless drunk, and Sam is mental. Sera Gamble what are you doing to our show, do you care for these characters at all? (2012).

Chuck, as Kripke's proxy, is utilized by fan writers to correct matters. In Krissy7490's fittingly titled, *How season 6 should have ended, or how season 7 better start*, Chuck descends in a 'bright flash of light' at the critical moment to command:

"Alright. This is how it's gonna work. We're going back a year. Castiel, when you were thinking about talking to Dean while he was raking the leaves, you're gonna talk to him. I'll bring back Sam, soul way more intact than anyone else could. And, Bobby. Well, you just keep being kick ass, alright?" And that's what happened. Because this writer made it so (2011).

The tone is flippant and comic, and reviewers acknowledge that this fic is not the 'real' text, much as they might wish it:

WHY DIDN'T THIS HAPPEN! (Sheridan Holmes 2011)

Oh...if only (Frannie-pants 2011)

I AM BOICOTING THE LAST EPISODE AND MAKING THIS STORY CANNON IN MY OWN BRAIN.:D  
(LastBishop 2011)

Canon in one's 'own brain', accompanied by a manic smiley face, is not quite legitimate canon. Such statements consolidate the paradox established with Becky's canonical license to borrow Chuck's characters: that the fan, a 'writer', has power, but that power is legitimated and sourced from the Author-God, and rejects his female successor. The fan's authorial position is necessarily ironized by the context in which she writes in.

Herzog has demonstrated how authors' notes on fanfic register a tension between the individual fan's authority over the text and the communal authorship model demonstrated in fan practice, and 'varying fannish interpretations provide a more nuanced perspective' than simple fruition of Barthes predictions (2012, 2.5). She argues that 'attempt[ing] to actively direct the story's audience into a certain, premeditated reader position[, some fans may] curtail the very sort of

interpretive and agentive practice they themselves are engaged in while writing fan fiction' (2.7). I found that conversely, where paratextual author's notes existed in this formation, they tended to be brief thanks to other fans whose input helped shaped the fics. This would indicate a communal concept of authorship; but strong authorial positioning could be found in the fics themselves. Strong positioning, I argue, is enabled through the legitimation paradox: the same process by which blackness and incest are moved from a property of Others to a celebrated property of the canon heroes. Otherness is empowered by and thus to an extent dependent on the capital of those who are empowered already. This paradox is central to fan activity. Johnson notes a similar response to the departure of Joss Whedon and installation of Marti Noxon as showrunner in Season 6 of *Buffy* (2007a, 292). The legitimation paradox is simultaneously deconstructive of the Author-God's role and consolidating of it, and it is the authorial signature rather than the text which constructs truth. This accords with Stein and Busse's observation that though fanfic is a recombination art, in practice it often displays adherence to older models of cultural author/ity (2009, 205). The comedic Chuck-as-God fics, where he descends to repair Season 6 and 'the random stuff we've been getting from Gamble' (angel\_gospel 2011), gesture toward a notion of the hypothetical 'true text', informed by the Author-function: the true text would be faithful to the ordered, coherent vision of the originator, not the haphazard attempts of his stand-in. Romirola's review articulates, 'love this, and I totally agree. Castiel would never, ever do that. It was stupid. I feel used, as if the show only exists to keep up ratings. RIP original supernatural' (2011).

Chuck-as-God is less common off Ff.net. A03 contains a vast number of AUs, most of which depict him as a geek and struggling writer, consolidating the other side of the geek/God

formation. On LiveJournal, canon tends to be more popular than AU, and Chuck is typically depicted as a man, prophet and mouthpiece ‘in all his lovable, neurotic glory’ (thevinegarworks 2009). The fanboy-auteur strategy succeeds here, as the textual guidance to love and pity Chuck, to take him as our friend, is wholeheartedly followed. The phrase ‘poor Chuck’ occurs 93 times in reviews, rendering the construction solid. I have written it myself, because those were the feelings the fic called up in me, and because I had unconsciously learned that the response was appropriate. Later, I understood these statements as part of the pattern consolidating the fanboy construction of the author. It is this depiction of Chuck that tends to turn up in the most popular fics, and thus these statements make the most impact. In tracy\_loo\_who’s legendary Endverse epic, *And I Will Walk on Water* (2009), which has 2741 LJ comments and 2791 total, Chuck turns up at the end to greet the conquering heroes with ‘a huge banner hanging from the low ceiling that read, in large, colorful lettering, *Happy End of the End of the World!*’ to which he has ‘added some sparkles’. He still drinks, has visions, and is guarded/trapped by the angels, though permitted a ‘pet hedgehog’ named Frodo. But other LiveJournal texts construct him, if rarely as a serious God, certainly with more weight and cultural capital.

‘Death of the Author’ (Barthes 1977) may have been an earnest attempt to deconstruct the cultural capital attached to the figure, but if the author is constructed in the process of dying, as writing enacts ‘the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin’ (142), this capital is rather restored. Proxydialogue’s *The Winchester Revision* (2011a) is quite significant, with a total of 105 comments between LiveJournal and A03, a circulating recommendation on Tumblr, 4 recommendations on LiveJournal; one on Dreamwidth and one on an external site. This fic is the story of a desperate re-write, in which ‘a recently de-deified Chuck, dying in Italy, decides to



revise the story of Sam and Dean and Cas to give it the fairytale ending it deserves'. The fan utilizes the voice of the author to legitimate her desires, composing a story in which the characters

fuck the system and live happily ever fucking after and die of natural causes like weak immune systems and old age and too much happiness. In Chuck's version of the story, Dean and Cas and Sam live the lives a fangirl would have written for them.

Fuckin-A right they do.

He centers the cursor and types:

*The Winchester Revision*

It's a God-damned fairytale (proxydialogue 2011a).

Chuck opens his story with the ironic and bitter declaration, 'here "bigyneth" the total and utter fucking tragedy of an older brother'. In a further example of the legitimation paradox, proxydialogue uses Chuck to rewrite the authorized interpretation placed on 'Swan Song' by Chuck in canon. Canon is re-structured not as a trial by fire that makes heroes of the protagonists, but the cosmically unfair and undeserved ruination of a small set of characters defined by their family bonds. On the other hand, though utilizing the author-character and the discourse of authorship goes a long way to legitimate the plot as authentic, Chuck here is no longer a prophet. This is only a 'version' of the story. For God had been using him as a vessel, and has now departed. Chuck finds that 'the side effects of divine possession are a bitch' with 'his body falling apart from the inside', and the 'sudden onset of acute existential uncertainty'. In between sparsely-written episodes of physical deterioration, Chuck continues to write the story 'how it would have been done if God wasn't such a mean motherfucker', and the reader has

access to his text. He finds himself unable to create the fairytale he intended, learning as he goes that ‘The moral is not: *They lived happily ever after*; but just: *They lived*’, which is more justice than the conclusion of ‘Swan Song’ at least.

Defiant in the face of impending death, determined to write in spite of God, there is definite cultural capital attached to this construction of the author, held in tension with the story’s ambiguity about if, when and where Chuck’s rewrite has any effect on ‘reality’/canon. The value of fiction’s specificity, to write ‘what is not’, is in question. Chuck’s voice legitimates the fanfic, but constructing his writing as ‘a fangirl would have written it’ may de-legitimize the text-inside-the-text, which he produces. Absent from Ff.net, polished and elegantly phrased, these statements give the impression of a writer speaking to writers, playing upon our self-perception and vacillation between faith in fiction’s specificity and despair of its futility. Though half of the story is devoted to the text Chuck writes, the alternate universe for his protagonists/friends, the dying author is very much the hero of the story. Proxydialogue comments, ‘I guess of all the characters in the canon I find Chuck the easiest to write and the easiest to extrapolate with. And I always felt that, if he were himself, human, and used as a tool, he would be rebellious against his role’ (2011b). Here then is another way in which the author Chuck legitimates the fan as writer: by providing a model of self-conception. It also adds potential statements like ‘hero’ or ‘protagonist’ to the discursive formation ‘author’, existing independently of the fan.

However, these are not grounding statements, as a limit case demonstrates. *I’ll Take My Chances Here and Now* by HappyFunBallXD explicitly undercuts the elevation of the author. It is a fairytale AU, wherein the *Supernatural* protagonists find themselves in a mysterious land.

Chuck, in a role approximating the Wizard of Oz, is a psychic who lives in a castle, and is rumoured to be able to help Sam and Dean get home. Chuck first appears as a dragon, accompanied by smoke and light. But when Dean loses his temper with the dragon and hits it, his fist goes

straight through , until he was shoulder- deep in Chuck's side [...] Instead of blood and guts that should be pouring out of a wound that size, there was nothing. [...] The younger hunter stepped in closer, pushing back a scale to see the hole more clearly. It was hollow. Mostly. There were a few gears inside, turning the head and joints, but for the most part, it was just scales over a frame. It wasn't real (HappyFunBallXD, 2012).

These statements inflect the meaning of the ‘Kripke’s Hollow’ pun in the source text. The construction of the author is ‘Lights and smoke and all that [...] more chemistry than magic’. In other words, it is showmanship, fakery, a para/textual spectacle without substance. What is needed to break the illusion is an act of violence – here physical, but a para/textual parallel might be the Tumblr blog titled, ‘Fuck the canon, old man’ (<http://crowleyshouseparty.tumblr.com/>), which collects subversive fic recs and commentary.

That said, Chuck – whose true form is as usual, a small scruffy man in a bathrobe – does have prophetic insight, and utilizes the dragon illusion in the hope of making people listen to him. He is enabled by Becky, who lives at the castle with him: an interesting reversal of the source text’s dyad. He needs *her* legitimation, whilst she just ‘thought he was cute, trying to be all authoritative’. Before meeting Chuck, Sam dreams about him, and since he has no mental reference point, Chuck is ‘represented by a floppy rag doll, which Becky held up on a silver platter’. This fic reverses the construction of the fan as dependent on the author for authority – here, the illusion ‘Author’ is dependent on the fan for construction, just as Foucault describes an

Author-function as dependent on the institutions that maintain the fiction of the author, and Mittell considers reception the vital constituent of a televisual Author-function (2012, 36).

Despite its 90, 000-word length and high literary capital, this story is less well received, with 36 total comments. The statements that maintain the author as legitimately special, then, whether as Author (primarily LiveJournal/A03) or God (primarily Ff.net) can be contradicted, but still have more impact in the discursive formation. Chuck's authority legitimates the voice of the fan, just as Kripke's paratextual statements legitimate fanfic. However, the possibility of writer as constructed by audience, with a critical slant, is opened by fanfic in a way excluded by the source text. Moreover, when the writer is explicitly constructed as writing like a 'fangirl', the relationship of his writing to truth is ambivalent. In these ways, though the legitimation paradox dominates, it can be subverted to an extent - as with the fics that gave voice to the racial monster, questioning the omissions of the source, constructed the Author-function as dependent on audience critiques the primacy and originality of authorship.

It is fair to say that the grounding statement that the author's text is canonical and true is largely consolidated in fanfic, though this is complicated by the fact that the fan writer assumes control of the in-text author, and thus *her* version of what Chuck writes becomes 'truth'. Some comedic fics explore this as a meta-textual realization, with the writer realising that the pen is mightier than the sword. In DarkLady's *Making a Prophet*, Chuck happens upon Matt. 26:56, 'But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled'. He takes this to mean that prophets are not merely witnesses and recorders, but that their writing influences events. As *lex\_rhetoricae* comments on an Endverse fic, this is actually closer to the Biblical meaning of prophecy than the passive visionary construction:

So, Martin Buber has this essay in *On the Bible* about the difference between the "prophetic" and the "apocalyptic" modes of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic literature. And in the prophetic, the prophet has an actual chance of saving people through his message, while in the apocalyptic, it's a "put your head between your knees and kiss your ass goodbye" kinda prophecy (lex\_rhetoricae 2010, referring to Buber 2000, 172-87).

In the comedic pieces, this tends to be taken literally. In *Making a Prophet*, Chuck saves the day by grabbing a computer and hastily typing:

Chuck 32:6 - \*\*So verily it came to pass that Lucifer slipped on a banana peel [sic] and slid arse-first down to the depth of the fiery pit, and took Zachariah and all his snot-nosed angels with him. And there was peace upon the land, and rejoicing, and also fresh apple pie. And the Righteous Man and his brother and the good folk who hung with them ate of the pie and also mostly got laid (DarkLady 2009).

At other times, the appropriation of Chuck as prophet allows the fan to affirm her and other fans' desires. Quite often, the fan writes Chuck writing fanfiction, which comes true whether he intends it to or not. Again, Chuck is the device by which the fan's writing is legitimated, but she controls what he writes. Maskedfangirl's very popular *Chuck Verse* – which sparked the creation of *Making a Prophet* – contains three main stories: *The Apocrypha of Chuck* (2009); *The Code of Chuck* (2010a); and *The Tribulations of Chuck* (2010b). The overarching plot is that Chuck travels, lives, and eventually undertakes the adventure to stop Lucifer with the heroes, despite knowing that were this the Council of Elrond, he would be 'background Elf #3. Or maybe the pack mule' (2009). He is a thorough and unrepentant geek, thinking in terms of Joss Whedon programs and admitting he would 'rather write slash fiction than deal with real life'. When life gets hard, he retreats into his 'Happy Verse', an extended fanfic he is writing about his friends, wherein Sam and Dean hug, Dean and Cas get together and the apocalypse is averted. Again, he

is constructed as writing like a stereotypical fangirl. However, over time, reality and the Happy Verse begin to overlap, until the main points of Chuck's fantasy become reality.

Maskedfangirl uses a Chuck avatar as her icon, and in the many celebratory comments (670 total for the trilogy), a now-deleted comment asked, 'Like, holy shit, Ben Edlund, is that you!?!?!?!' Ben Edlund is the *Supernatural* writer most known for comedy and meta-textual cleverness. Maskedfangirl is delighted with the attribution, claiming that made her week. Although Chuck's writing, in the hands of the fan, becomes the tool by which the fan can alter the 'truth' of the text, the highest legitimation still comes by association with the male professional writers. On the other hand, falcytan\_dream compliments, 'I like to think that you had the true prophetic gift for the show, and the telly series we all know is just an elaborate fanfic off of this' (2011). This statement structures the fanfic as truth. Yet notice the caveat, 'I like to think', which recalls the kind of approving review claiming fics are 'personal canon' (oximore 2011); 'my official post season 5 canon' (ataratah 2010) or 'cannon in my own brain' (LastBishop 2011). 'Personal canon' is something of a contradiction in terms, suggesting that the transformative power of fic on discourse is real, but limited to individual psychical pleasure rather than influence on the text itself.

Two popular fics depict the author's word as truth and the entertainment industry as a threat to that. This accords with the Author-function popularly attributed to cult TV showrunners in contrast to the mechanisms of industry. In *Thursday's Child* (strangenessandcharm 2009) and *Amen to That!* (Mardy Lass 2010), Chuck's novels are to be adapted by Hollywood and a television network respectively. *Amen to That!* is primarily a comedy, concerned with the exploits of Sam, Dean, Chuck, Cas and Becky as they run around a television set attempting to

prevent or dictate the production. Whilst Dean is worried about the further exploitation of his life, Castiel is concerned for the damage a TV show will do to the authenticity of the prophet's word. This fic makes above-average impact, with a total of 64 reviews. Conversely, Chuck's work is not a major plot point of *Thursday's Child*, but this is one of the most famous fics in the formation, one of those Dean/Castiel Endverse epics with several hundreds of reviews. It would easily have broken the thousand-mark, perhaps even overtaken *And I Will Walk On Water*, but it has been deleted from its original home on LiveJournal and resides only on Dreamwidth, with an exceptional 822 reviews there. Set post-apocalypse, the Winchester Gospels have been recognised as religious texts, and the government invests in their conversion into blockbusters as a public morale booster. The distortion of truth by Hollywood provides a great deal of the comic subplot, including the casting of Lindsay Lohan as Castiel before she is fired for unreliability.

In the end, it is up to Chuck to insist on the truth of his text against industry economics, which here entails legitimating the pairing Dean/Castiel when Castiel is played by a male actor. Dean reports that 'Chuck went to the studio and told them about our big gay love and demanded they put it in the next movie. They told him no, but apparently he threw a fit. Dean explains that 'a gay relationship [...] won't play well for some audiences' of what are essentially religious texts in the fic, and Castiel insists, 'It's not anything to do with it 'playing well'. It's just how it is'. This is why Chuck 'played hardball' and 'told them they could find another prophet unless they made the films true to life'. The true text then, the author's text, would legitimate Dean/Cas: it is only the present climate of homophobia that censors it. The fact that these statements become some of the most influential via context rather than content is illustrated by a contrast.

Amorremanet's snippet fic, "*It's Not That Kind of Show*", is focused entirely on this theme. In

this fic, Dean is really a girl named Deanna, and Becky is her girlfriend. They go to the cinema to see the adaptation of Chuck's word, and Deanna endures a 'painfully inaccurate' account of her life portrayed by 'some weird white dude'. They resolve to 'post subversive fanfiction on Tumblr' and go home. Becky explains that Chuck had to sell all the rights to his manuscript because he had no money for rent. The fic receives no comments. Seven people have pressed the 'kudos' button, so it is not completely unacknowledged, but the impact is hardly comparably to statements of Chuck's true word triumphing over industrial imperatives made in the popular fics. If it were better received, it might post a significant challenge to the legitimation paradox, eschewing the figure of the straight White male, and substituting a lesbian couple as the figures of revaluation.


On the other hand, there is a significant set of fics which deliberately undermine the construction of the author's text as the only legitimate truth, as compared with the comparatively small impact of *I'll Take My Chances Here and Now* which debunked him as a figure. As noted above, *The Winchester Revision* constructs the truth-status of Chuck's writing ambivalently. *The Chuck Writes Story: An Unauthorized Fandom Biography* (2011) deals specifically with this theme. It is a verse divided into six fics on LiveJournal/Dreamwidth/A03 which receives a total of 140 comments. Most fics dealing with the matter of text and truth are on these platforms – the few that appear on Ff.net tend to be in the light-hearted mode, including *Making a Prophet* and *Amen to That*. *The Chuck Writes Story* is both light-hearted and serious, its subject matter being the location of the 'real' *Supernatural*. Chuck writes a fanfic under a fake identity, posts it on LiveJournal, and receives just a single review. Thrown into an existentialist crisis, he begins to explore the world of fic, making increasingly desperate attempts to be noticed within his own




fandom, including posting an unpublished *Supernatural* manuscript. Failing to realize the indispensability of the name to the Author-function, he is driven to increasing distraction by this evidence fans could love the text and not the author:


if they liked Carver Edlund so much, why wouldn't they like his sock [pseudonym]? Because if they didn't . . . was it really the writing they loved, or was it the marketing, (the covers with their shirts ripped off, the models, the *hair*)—or was there actually some other *Supernatural*? Was there some amorphous, non-text, non-content driven *Supernatural*, a zeitgeist!*Supernatural*, some über *Supernatural*, a *Supernatural* that was his *Supernatural* and yet his no longer—now part of the collective mind, now part of the cultural maelström, or other words with umlauts, some *Supernatural* that belonged to the world and to the fans and no longer to the mind of the creator? A meta!SPN? Was it that *Supernatural* that they really loved—or was it Carver Edlund? (lettered 2011).

The series subtitle, 'an unauthorized fandom biography', implies that this is the work of fandom in action, the communal creation of a text without an Author-God, rather than one with an Author-God as a source of legitimation. When it becomes known that the LJ user 'chuck\_writes' is in fact Carver Edlund, the fictional fans engage in just such a debate. There is really no way to describe these statements other than to quote at length:


 [demian\\_dean](#), 2011-06-03 8:06 pm, UTC ([link](#)): We are all Chuck.

[...]

 [parks\\_the\\_car](#), 2011--06-03 8:12 pm, UTC ([link](#)): Do you remember the uber Supernatural? The one with umlauts.


 [spnfangirl](#), 2011-06-03 8:15 pm, UTC ([link](#)): I remember the über!Supernatural. The meta!SPN. It was another Supernatural.


 [bobby\\_sing\\_it](#), 2011-06-03 8:15 pm, UTC ([link](#)): But does she mean ... we were all writing the same thing.

 [glass\\_family](#), 2011-06-03 8:28 pm, UTC ([link](#)): How do we know what's canon now?

 [long\\_seige](#), 2011-06-03 8:28 pm, UTC ([link](#)): How do we know what's real?

 [demian\\_dean](#), 2011-06-03 8:29 pm, UTC ([link](#)): Same way you always know.

 [twop\\_barnes](#), 2011-06-03 8:29 pm, UTC ([link](#)): Create.

 [watsonian](#), 2011-06-03 8:30 pm, UTC ([link](#)): Do you think we're all a part of something?

Notice the coding, which imitates how actual conversations appear on LJ, blurring the distinction between Chuck's *Supernatural*, which these fictional fans discuss, and Kripke's *Supernatural*, which is discussed in the same format on LiveJournal. Some of the fictional fans remain convinced that 'books are canon. Fanfic isn't. Supernatural is concrete, finite. The SPN in our heads isn't', which raises the question of whether 'chuck\_writes' or only Carver Edlund can produce canonical text. The debate recalls Foucault's argument that the unity of the Author could not merely be replaced with the unity of a 'work', for the concept 'work' has no pre-existent unity (1991, 103-04). Writing on *Skins* fan production, Hunn asks,

What is the original and what is the copy? Is there really an authentic and authoritative *Skins* text, a *Skins* essence? Or, is it all really just skin deep – a series of competing textual performances made more ontologically unstable by the overlap between official and fan productions that an embrace of participatory and collaborative practices inevitably engenders? (2012, 94).

These are exactly the questions enacted by the *Chuck Writes* saga, yet in the format of fanfic, and conducted through the social and technological codes of fandom rather than academia. Thus *Chuck Writes*, with its sophisticated intertextually and irreverent humour, enacts a mode of “good”, rational fandom on behalf of its own author, inclusive of the enlightened reader and exclusive of “bad” crazy fans, like Becky.

For Becky appears in this fic to support the authority of the author with her canonical pseudonym, ‘samlicker81’:

Sorry all you haters . . . but CW is canon . . . the writer is canon . . . C.E. is canon . . . in the time of our writer . . . the Creator is God. I know it might be hard for some of you to recognize . . . some of you wish you were him . . . but you’re not . . . we’re all in his hands (lettered 2011).

Once again the author is legitimated by the fangirl – but the definition of ‘fan’ is here reconstructed to include the whole range of responses. Not all fans are Becky, and not all fans accept the authority of the author. The most famous fic in the fictional fandom is a rewrite of Chuck’s series, intensifying the emotion between the brothers and hinting at the possibility of a sexual relationship between them. This writer of this epic is known as ‘lord\_kripke’, an epithet of Kripke’s in real fandom. Possibly then, though it contributes statements which greatly destabilize the primary/secondary, author/fan binary and indeed the legitimation paradox, *Chuck Writes* re-instates the Author-God in the end through manipulation of the Chuck/Kripke divide. The *real* author may well be ‘Lord Kripke’, hiding in plain sight, he who has written the series as we know it. For Chuck’s work in the fic is not our *Supernatural*, but a series of badly-written pulp novels. Our *Supernatural* – the real *Supernatural*? – is (Lord) Kripke’s.

This statement is complicated by an iconographic coincidence. The abbreviation of ‘chuck\_writes’ is CW. CW is the name of the network that *Supernatural* airs on, including now, in the post-Kripke era. This means that statements like ‘CW is canon’ or ‘CW isn’t canon. Just another fanfic’ cut two ways: they could *either* refer to the text written by the author *or* to the productions of an industry in the post-author era, whose concerns are economic. The text is held in negotiation between CW – with the referents of Chuck’s fanfic, and the network; and the revered ‘lord\_kripke’ – with the referents of a slash-inclined fan and Eric Kripke. Lettered claims not to have noticed this until she began typing up the fic, which illustrates the profound impact happenstance has on discursive formations.

So statements upholding Chuck and/or Kripke as author, and his text as original and true, retain a strong influence in fandom’s construct. But the appropriation of Chuck empowers fans to utilize some of that authority, even reversing the terms of the legitimation paradox by demonstrating that fans enable the Author-function as much as the other way around. Moreover, fanfic contributes statements that question connections between the author and the ‘real’ text, notably *Chuck Writes*, whose graphical-lexical density and instability of referents complicate the attribution of truth to an author. Though not the strongest statements, constructions of Chuck as fanficcer and contributor to the ‘meta-SPN’ destabilise his relationship with truth, as well as his construction as God. His ‘truth’ also modifies the statements ‘fanficcer’ and ‘collaborator’, raising those attributions to by legitimation. The Author-function remains strong.

### a) The Fan and Her Writing

The re-appropriation of Becky into fanfic is theoretically significant, recalling Fuery's recognition of a 'post-panopticism of new media in which we are so aware of being watched that part of our strategy of transgression is to incorporate the very acts of surveillance' (2009, 141): responding, in other words, to textual provocation. But the figure of the fan is still problematic, even reclaimed and re-constructed by the fans themselves, placing a question mark over Fuery's 'transgression'. I prefer to substitute 'negotiation'; for some fics make statements that construct the fan even more pathologically than 7x08, 'Time for a Wedding'. Hills (2002, 61-4) theorized a Good Fan/Bad Fan imagined dichotomy in the self-construction of most fan cultures, and Stanfill found a similar discursive structure at work in her interviews with Xena fans (2013). Though her interviewees 'accepted negative portrayals of fans as valid', they 'refused to take on that meaning for themselves, instead bracketing themselves out of it and shifting it off onto others' (2013, 117). As Stanfill comments,

This simultaneous acceptance and refusal of stereotypes suggests that being a fan is a subject position fraught with baggage from historical and contemporary media representations, which troubles triumphalist renderings of a new media order centered on the fan (2013, 117).

Stanfill points out that research into other non-normative groups, including lesbians and Black women, has shown that members

will subdivide their group into (a) themselves and others like them, whom they classify as normal, and (b) a deviant subgroup they declare actually deserves the stigma or pathologization to which the entire group is subjected (Ault,

1996; Collins, 2000; Fanon, 1994; Ferguson, 2003), a process that Ault (1996, p. 314) terms “split subjectivity” (2013, 121).

In other words, we fans are normal, because we are not like ‘those’ fans, the crazy ones that give us all a bad name; that behave, in the worst case scenario, like the Twihards. Zubernis and Larsen also document the tendency for fans to construct dualisms between Good and Bad fan practice (2013, 28-31; 38-39; 145; and c.f. Hills 2002, esp. 61-4 and 101-03).

The discursive formation ‘fan’, as conceived by fans, clearly includes attributes deserving of stigmatization, to an even greater degree than the source text would posit. Adrenalineshots’ *Bean Stalker* is well received, with 245 reviews, and constructs the non-canonical fan Alexa as entirely insane. Based on *Misery*, this is a story of a girl who, dissatisfied with Chuck’s ending to the series, means to kidnap him and discovers by happenstance that his characters are real. Thus she instead kidnaps Dean, her love object, and tortures him for her psychosexual gratification, drawing clear parallels with torture and hurt/comfort. Indeed *Supernatural* itself offers plenty of opportunity for voyeuristic pleasure in the tortured male body. Adrenalineshots has Dean observe of the fan:

Her eyes were glittering like beetles in the back drop light, lustful of pain and misery. Was his torture that much of an entertainment for her? Was this why people liked Chuck’s books, because they enjoyed reading about all the suffering that he and Sam had endure their whole lives? (2009a)

Reviewers are privy to the game. They use Alexa as a model of Bad fanship to construct their personas *against*:

... She is our crazy mirror! (chiiyo86 2009)

The difference between some crazy thoughts and some sane ones is the way we act upon them \*g\*(adrenalineshots 2009b).

Marlowe78 rationalizes the investment in seeing our heroes hurt in terms of restoration:

for me, reading the fanfiction that bloodies our heroes is about fighting the odds, surviving even though that seems impossible, staying alive even though the world wants you to die - and stick together for better or worst [...] I don't get off reading about bloodied noses (or shoulders) but it is a fine line, I admit (2009).

'Crazy' is retained as a property of fannishness, but not *our* kind. Statements like this displace it onto a hypothetical Bad Other, an Other who will not be legitimated but on the contrary further pathologized through the capital of the White male.

In related statements, Becky is redeemed in fic by being 'educated out' of some Bad (excessive) aspects of fandom and displaying some Good (rational) ones (c.f. Hills 2002, 61). For instance, in sothereyogo's *We Are All Made as an Afterthought* (2009a), she apologises to Sam for groping him and explains that she needs time to process that Chuck's books are real, rather than an extended use of Campbell's journey-metaphor for the development of the individual, and justifies her slash habit with the rationale that 'commercial porn is almost all crap'.

Sothereyogo describes the fic as an attempt to 'show a little more of Becky that gave her back a bit of her dignity' (2009b), and the commenters appreciate it as such. Similarly, in M.D. Jensen's *Little Wet Tears on Your Baby's Shoulder* (2011), Becky learns from experience that having Sam cry in front of her is not pleasurable as she finds it in fic, and she wants him to feel better, not 'prolong it'. In Gatergirl79's *At His Side* (2012), she attempts to get over Sam and 'close[s] down her website, her forum groups, clear[s] her Twitter account and Facebook'. For learning to

curb her excess, she is rewarded, and actually ends up in an adult relationship with him.

MajinBakaHentai compliments the author for having Becky ‘get past some of the worst of her fangirliness, and move on into genuinely caring about Sam and worrying for him’. So Becky is constructed as inhabiting a stage we must outgrow.

Sometimes Becky’s lesson is harsh: in kasey8473’s *Killing the Fandom* (2012), Becky meets Sam’s pregnant wife and is at first horrified, but comes to understand that she is behaving badly and ought to apologize:

He'd looked happy before she'd interrupted them. Becky recalled that touch to the woman's - *Gwen's* - back. It had been gentle, caressing, and loving. He seriously cared for the woman, like in a 'love for Jess' way, and Becky had pretty much spit on that.

Embarrassment for her own behavior welled up. Here she'd been trying to be mature and adult and she'd acted like an idiot teenager. Apparently, she hadn't managed to leave those days behind.

Later, she is briefly turned into a vampire, unable to control herself, and faces the prospect of execution by her heroes before she realises their lives are not so glamorous after all. The title refers to an exclamation by Becky – that Sam and Dean getting married and having children is ‘killing the fandom’- but the statement also constructs Becky’s experience as killing some of the fandom in her, the “bad” part we must resist. Still, her gleeful excess is not quashed: she transfers her joy to the imminent arrival of the baby. Exuberance is not extinguished, but it does have to be contained, and the characters will not permit her to host her planned ‘baby shower’.

Becky is also celebrated in fic, often in flippant style that flouts the Good Fan/Bad Fan construction. In girl\_wonder’s *How Becky Totally Saved the World Without Becoming a Mary Sue or: PLEASE R&R OR I'LL NEVER WRITE ANOTHER CHAPTER* (2009), the title at is a



playful employment of bad practice. ‘R&R’ means ‘read and review’. Threatening to withhold a continuation unless people review is a classic example of bad fandom and an open invitation to mockery if done in earnest. Here it is compounded by Capslock, considered a breach of netiquette. Context inflects the statement parodically: the demand to ‘R&R’ is associated with Ff.net; but this piece appears on LiveJournal/A03, where ‘we’ older fans know how to read it (c.f. Hadas 2009 on inter-fandom divisions between age/experience and youth/naivety). In between writing fan fiction and editing Chuck’s new draft, Becky and her fan friend stop Lucifer by trapping him in a ring of holy fire. Becky considers that he ‘is actually taller than Chuck had written him, and looks like all he wants is a hug’. She ‘couldn’t resist giving him some of the chocolate she was saving for the after-party’. Hugs, chocolate, flippancy and humour are the properties structuring the fan here, and all are slanted positively. Chuck loves her, as he does in many fics, but that is not presented as a condition of her legitimation. *How Becky Totally Saved the World* is also high impact, with 227 comments. There are shorter examples with less impact on Ff.net, such as *Lucifer Meets Crazy Becky* (DeanFan 2010). In this series, Becky encounters characters she did not meet in canon, including Castiel and Lucifer. She so annoys Lucifer that he returns to hell willingly to get away from her, resulting in reviews like, ‘YAY! Becky saves the day!’ (DjinnAtwood 2012). The construction is not likewise self-reflexive, but Becky is certainly more sympathetic here, so these statements open the possibility that ‘we’ have a little of the “bad” fan in us too, and are not ashamed of it.

Usually, though, Becky’s redemption in fic is legitimated by Chuck. She is constructed as an apostle of the Winchester Gospels, whose task is to spread the message. In both trinityofone’s *Writing (And Other Things that Are Hard)* (2009) and twoskeletons’s *Restore From Saved Draft*

(2010a), Castiel informs Becky of her role as an apostle. Twoskeletons admits that Becky-as-apostle is one of her favourite fan innovations, and the comments express much love for the character. Both these fics are high status, particularly considering they are short, not cross-posted, and mostly concern minor characters, gathering 97 and 231 comments respectively. In twoskeletons *Peanuts*, the metaphor is extended as Chuck reflects on Becky's evangelical role:

I think our side can really use someone like Becky [...] We can use someone who believes so hard and is so joyous in her faith, even if her equivalent of singing hymns is writing gay incest porn [...] There have been hundreds of religions that have died out for want of believers, but Becky? She mods nine Livejournal communities and five exchanges, and has a novel-length Wincest pirate AU WIP that she's writing the eleventh chapter of.

[...]

It's like that guy Matt said one time in some testament somewhere: "You are Becky, and on Livejournal I will build my Church, and flame wars will not prevail against it" (twoskeletons 2010b).

This fic is also high status with 82 comments, and the description of Becky has been copied and pasted in comments, solidifying the construction through repeatable materiality. Moreover, Chuck does not set himself up here as the origin and source of legitimation, but admires Becky because 'she has a sense of purpose and a lot of drive, and these things are hardwired into her instead of copy-pasted in by God's divine ineffability'. There is a God, but it isn't Chuck. It might, however, be Kripke, another example of how the Chuck-avatar allows Kripke to retain control over the text whilst avoiding 'M. Night-level douchiness' (4x18).

The fan is sometimes constructed as guardian and/or interpreter of the Author-God's truth, as opposed to the rampant fantasist of *Bean Stalker* or *Killing the Fandom*. For instance, in

scaramouche's *A Judicious Application of Free Will* (2011), Chuck has vanished, and Becky owns his last manuscript. Though multiple gods vie for the text, this manuscript is divinely protected, and only its rightful owner can read it. Becky is kidnapped and the gods demand she read it in their presence, censuring her for inserting 'personal comments'. In a variation of the legitimation paradox, this maintains the primary/secondary statement hierarchy, though it empowers the fan by her access to and definition of the 'right reading'. As the deity Baldur grudgingly admits, Chuck's text is meant for her, not them. Similarly, in earis's *Draw Back the Curtain*, Chuck disappears post-apocalypse, leaving a note:

Bex-Sorry about us. Take care of these, make sure they find a home. I'm going away for a while, it's your turn now.  
L, Chuck P.S. Take my house. I don't need it anymore (earis 2010).

But though Becky moves into Chuck's space, she does not become the new prophet. Her turn is not to write gospel but become the 'guardian' of Chuck's stories, as Sera Siege was in the canon. Unable to find a publisher, 'she launches [www.winchestergospel.com](http://www.winchestergospel.com)', where 'every single book is available as a downloadable pdf' and 'there is an apocrypha link to fanfiction communities and archives'. Apocrypha are by definition non-canonical. Moreover:

She looks at all the stories that she has become the guardian of, that she has protected. They're pretty grim. She can't make anything better for real, but she can still come up with a potentially better scenario. They boys gave everything to the world, so that it might live. The least she can do is write them one crappy, fake, fan-fiction happy ending. After all, didn't Chuck tell her, 'It's your turn'? (earis 2010).

Her turn is not to write the new Book but protect and preserve it, empowering her through that secondary status.

This brings us to the second part of the grounding statement recognised in the canon formation: that the fan's writing, though permissible, is secondary and derivative. Though there are statements that uphold this, there are also significant statements that challenge and deconstruct the binary, as already broached in *The Chuck Writes Story*. If a discursive formation is defined by what is thinkable and sayable, rather than united by agreement, it must be concluded that statements from fic have altered the formation of The Author and the Fan significantly.

Fan-writing, and Becky's writing specifically, is utilized in fic in a number of ways. Sometimes, her voice is appropriated for comic purposes, as in LolaAnn's *In the Arms of an Angel -- by SamLicker81*. The fic is a mashup of clichéd self-insertion on the 'Mary Sue' model (p. 67, 15n) and is prefaced by parodic author's notes referring to an implied flame war:<sup>40</sup>

Pre-emptive Warning to DeanSam4Evr69: If I get any flames from you for this fic, I will be banning you from the site (permanently this time) [...] I am NOT 'selling out to the hetero-normative majority' by writing Sam as having a soulmate that happens to be a woman. It does NOT cheapen what he has with Dean. So, save it and stop being such a narrow minded hater. If you don't like het, then don't read my story. Personally, I think you're suffering from some severe internalized misogyny and I pity you (LolaAnn 2012).

It is difficult to explain how funny this is to fan outsiders, but essentially it condenses several long-worn fannish arguments over self-insertion, misogyny and homophobia into one high-minded paragraph. The 'author's notes' continue with the bad-taste bargain: if Samlicker does not receive at least ten reviews, she

will NOT be continuing [her] *Brothers: Forbidden Love and Burning Desires* series. Which means you'll never get to find out if Sam is able to save Dean from his most recent bout with pneumonia/hypothermia by the power of his

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<sup>40</sup> Combatative exchange of online messages.

love and body heat alone.

The rest of the fic skewers fanfic clichés with equal wit and precision. The main character is Becky, who after a hard day’s work counselling suicidal orphans, learns that her true identity is that of a ‘half-angel’. For some reason, she is ‘the only one’ who can save Sam from another ‘dark haired Jezebel’ placed in his path by Lucifer, defeating her with the power of her goodness and purity before assuring Sam and Dean that even though she and Sam are in love, she is perfectly happy for the brothers to continue to have sex with each other. After all it is ‘completely normal’ for them to be ‘only gay for each other’, due to their mutual attractiveness and the great adversity they have endured together. Again, this refers to a debate around slash regarding the improbability and latent homophobia of the only-gay-for-x trope (see p. 68, n16).

This fic sets up a parallel to the Good Fan/Bad Fan dichotomy: good fic (which ‘we’ write) and bad fic, (which “they” write in earnest and “we” parody: c.f. Carruthers 2004). LolaAnn appropriates the form of author’s notes to disguise her own authorial position, passing off bad writing to that other kind of fan. The portmanteau ‘badfic’ already has currency, and can refer either to fic that is actually bad, or fic like that this that parodies it. The reviews continue this: Defincupark found this hilarious but ‘can’t wait to read [LolaAnn’s] *real* post’ for the challenge this fic is submitted to (2012, my emphasis). My own review, submitted after I had finished hyperventilating with laughter, salutes the author, ‘well played’ (reading\_is\_in 2013a). We understand LolaAnn as a “good” writer appropriating a “bad” mode. Unlike Stanfill and Hills, however, I found that fans sometimes choose to present themselves on the “wrong” side of the dichotomy. LolaAnn states that she finds it ‘strangely fun to be Becky’, but JohannaMK warns her not to stray too far into the bad fan side, reviewing ‘thank you. (Please don’t do it again! ☺)’

(2012). Thus the parodic author's notes on one hand mock the concept of an originary genius, and the privilege of a writer to direct the reading of the text. Yet on the other hand, they subtly reserve it to the *real* writer, who constructs a model of good versus bad fanfic and fanfic writers.

In other fic, Becky takes over from Chuck to write in a secondary mode, paralleling the departure of Kripke and installation of Gamble as showrunner. This is another manifestation of the legitimization paradox, in which the newer female showrunner is authorized by the fanboy- auteur. As gabehorn puts it, 'Kripke could have made any one of the bigger male names on the show the runner, but he chose Sera' (2012). His choice authorizes her. Arguments circulate in fandom over Gamble's authority, hinging on the consensus that her tenure as showrunner *did* see a decrease in writing quality, combined with an awareness of the gender issues inherent in the legitimization paradox. Crowleyhouseplant argues that without excusing some of Gamble's writing decisions, we should bear in mind that focusing criticism purely on her as showrunner perpetuates the misogynist context of the entertainment industry (2012a); whilst quarterclever 'can't help but think that if Sera Gamble were a man the fandom wouldn't have half the complaints about her they do [...] Because we can complain about the show being misogynistic all we want but so often that's a matter of pots and kettles' (2012).

My own fic fits into the formation by contributing statements of this sort, in which the secondary female writer is authorized by the author. It is an AU, set in a world where the characters are pitted between a totalitarian state and a terrorist resistance movement, rather than Heaven and Hell. The Resistance's chief weapon is bioengineering, of which Chuck is a failed product, leaving him with erratic visions and alcohol problems. Whilst Chuck is alive, Becky persistently believes that her heroes will overthrow the State and save the world, considering it her job to

‘spread hope’ to the people. After he is killed, Becky takes over his role, salvaging his journal from the wreckage:

“I’m going to carry it on,” Becky said. “I mean, I may not have visions, but I can still write down what’s happening. I could be like a chronicler of the revolution.”

Sam put his hand on hers. “I’m sure Chuck would be proud.”

“No he wouldn’t.” She smiled, a little wobbly. “He’d tell me I was wasting my time, that there wasn’t going to be a revolution, and try not to make it obvious he was looking at my boobs.” She sighed. “I miss him,” (reading\_is\_in 2013b).

This demonstrates my internalization of learned practice. I did not plan to contribute statements that constructed Becky in this way and solidified the legitimization paradox, but according to my ‘know how’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 228) it seemed appropriate at that point in the story. Moreover, *Western Rising* is a sequel I produced by request, gratified that people liked the first novella in the series and eager to continue my performance and validation as a “good” fan and good writer. I perform to my strengths and respond to what my audience approves, hence I could not resist using a passage of ‘Becky’s’ chronicle to open the epilogue in comic mode:

*And that is the story of how Dean killed Lilith. (Although really, in the opinion of the writer, it was mostly thanks to Sam. I mean Dean fired the actual bullet, and he did turn out to be pretty awesome when he wasn’t being a dick. But it was totally Sam who heroically used himself to entice and trap her despite knowing it was him she wanted to kill). And so, like the great teachers of old –*

Becky frowned, crossed out *old*, and wrote *antiquity*. Then she crossed out *antiquity* and wrote, *historic times*. She huffed, and dropped the journal (2013b).

Thus I contributed to the formation of Becky's writing as secondary, derivative, and improper, being unable to omit her bias for Sam from a historical chronicle.

*Western Rising* was modestly successful, but a major contribution to this aspect of the discourse, which makes explicit the Gamble/Becky parallel, is Tenoko1's *The Path We Choose* (2012).

After the disappearance of Chuck, Becky is enraged by the 'new books', which represent Season 6:

Have you read the new books? You know: the ones after Sam saved the world- no thanks to you, I might add?" [...] "They're terrible! The stupid stuff the two of you pull? The obvious plot holes? The bad writing? It's defamation of character is what it is. There's no way Chuck wrote these, even at your worst, he still tried to protect your images in the eyes of the fans, and he certainly never would have made you look silly! It's all bad filler written by someone who doesn't care!

The Author-function operates to de-legitimate Season 6 and the 'new books' by spanning the Chuck/Kripke binary: the author would never have produced it or them. The 'new books' are 'false prophecies', produced by ghost writers under contract to the publisher. Horrified at the travesty the series has become, the characters help Becky get a job as the new writer, and though she admits that she cannot 'compete with the end of the world' they judge that she has done a good job with the new books, keeping everyone 'in character'. She is not the prophet of the Apocalypse, but she does know how Sam, Dean and Castiel ought to be portrayed: the fan writer is secondary and faithful to the author, thus ranked above industrial production. The reviews shift



this construction onto Tenoko1, judging her fic ‘much better than [sic] current canon’ (kojonoyuri 2012). The objections are to Season 6 directions that fans believe ring false: the ‘truth’ of matters was established by Chuck/Kripke, and fan writing is legitimated by portraying it as more authentic than post-authorial a production that ‘only exists to keep up ratings’ (romirola 2011).

Occasionally, however, statements that construct the writings and persons of the Author and the Fan are juxtaposed to undermine the primary/secondary, original/derivative binary, and the paradox it creates. Consider crowleyshouseplants’ *B. Rosen and C. Shurley Are Dead* (2012b). This fic is based of course on Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*; which is in turn based on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, itself based on Saxo Grammaticus’ version of the Amleth legend, which is based on an earlier chronicle, whose sources are lost to history. These statements open an ‘anti-theological’ (Barthes 1977, 147) perspective: there is no primary text, only an endless series of repetition with difference (Kristeva 1980). In this story, Chuck and Becky are summoned by the angels to investigate the mysterious changes in Castiel. Becky is placed in the role of Rosencrantz, and in Stoppard’s text, Guildenstern becomes angry that Rosencrantz is always copying him. Rosencrantz, by his own admission, ‘can’t think of anything original’ and is ‘only good in support’ (Stoppard 1968, 78). But in *B.Rosen*, when Chuck asks, “‘Don’t you ever wish, Becky [...] that you had written anything original. Instead of just silly fan-fiction?’” She coughs, huffs, seethes. “‘I have written original things. Besides, just because it’s fanfiction doesn’t mean it’s not original’”. Everything may be fan fiction, but every citation is also an original statement. Compare her admonishment to Chuck in *Writing (And Other Things That are Hard)*: ‘everything anybody writes has a chance of making you see the characters, the

people, in a whole new way. It can transform them and their relationships and the world and you into something new and amazing' (trinityofone2009). The original/derivative binary is challenged. Becky's writing does not need to be legitimated by Chuck, nor ours by Kripke. In *B. Rosen*, Chuck attempts to tell her that the things she has written, notably resurrecting dead female characters, 'never happened' and are 'not canon', but 'fanfiction'. Becky replies, 'I reject your canon and substitute my own' (crowleyshouseplant 2012b). Her work is not constructed as better than Chuck's, or truer, but equal because 'all the words are important'. She suggests that the angels, who think Chuck can rewrite Castiel's floundering story, do it themselves: 'Write your own stories. Instead of doing what someone says. Instead of having someone else do it for you. If you don't like what's going on, just write your own'. Though the angels and Chuck continue to insult her fic as not real, it is ultimately she who frees herself and Chuck from the nooses of their execution, and begins to narrate to him as they walk off and end the story: "'It's a wonderful universe [...] Full of adventure and bravery-'" Her voice is lost as they continue to travel east, towards the ribbon of blue sky and a rising sun'.

Interestingly though, these statements which would alter the discursive formation quite radically, constructing the fan's writing as original truth receive no comments, and just 7 kudos on A03, so have not had the impact they could. *The Path We Choose* gets 212 comments total. So the stronger statements with most impact tend to uphold the secondary position of Becky's writing.

On the other hand, xenoamorist's *Tons of Feels* (2012) receives a respectable 48 comments, and this fic is a clear illustration of how mixing statements from two or more discourses results in a new kind of text. 'Feels' is fan slang for feelings: to have tons of feels is to be overwhelmed with emotions. It is tagged as a crossover with Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), and mimics the

novel's mixed-media layout, excessive footnotes, notes from unknown editor(s), and pastiche of texts from supposedly different sources. *House of Leaves* is a difficult book to make sense of: the first words, on an otherwise blank page, are 'this is not for you'. Essentially several narrators contribute versions of events, mostly linked by the first narrator's obsession with a dead man's account of a documentary film. Chanen suggests its subject is 'the creation of and search for meaning in a remediated narrative' (2007, 163). It is a text about a text about a text; about obsession with text; and as Woodcock (2009) suggests, a satire on academia. Each 'contributor' has a different font. *Tons of Feels* is also a text about a text that deals with the location and creation of meaning; it is also about obsession with text, and a satire on academia. It takes the form of an essay written by Becky for a university English class and sent to Chuck, which has been prefaced and appendixed by him, and variously annotated by unknown 'eds'. Again, the contributors each have their own font, and the opening statement, 'this is not for you', appears to be written by Chuck to himself, an attempt to separate the writings of the fan from his own. The discourses that clash here are academic, fannish, authorial and literary-academic.

The fannish and authorial discourses are in conflict with each other – Becky and the editors appear to be Wincest and Dean/Cas fans respectively, and xenoamorist's authorial statements are rather different to Chuck's, positioning her outside the text as an orchestrator. Her author's notes advise us that 'neither Becky's feels nor Chuck's feels reflect my own' and meta-textual jokes of which none of the characters can be aware construct the fan-author's overarching presence. For instance, the word 'minotaur', wherever it appears in *House of Leaves*, is crossed out: one of the editors remarks that a previous contributor has 'attempted to systematically eradicate the "Minotaur" theme' (Danielewski 2000, 336). In *Tons of Feels*, every instance of 'Cas' or

‘Castiel’ is similarly struck through, referencing a long-standing fan division between those who wished for the series to remain with the relatively simple formula of the early seasons, before Castiel was introduced, and those who appreciated the introduction of angels, heaven and the apocalypses. Xenoamorist, the fan author, is thus subtly constructed as master of ceremonies, and the “good” fan-reader as the enlightened audience. In that sense, the Good Fan/Bad Fan divide is maintained between us and Becky: she is a character in the text, helping to produce the mingled discourse, whilst we overlook it from a privileged position.

In *Tons of Feels*, Chuck’s statements form a discourse of Romantic authorship, heightening and satirizing the ‘prophet’ and ‘God’ constructions of the original. He reads Becky’s essay, and is horrified at the violation of his ‘creation’, the ‘artistry’ of his ‘vision’. Desperate to believe he is a ‘God-chosen genius’, fanfic is forcing him to confront this as an ‘illusion’. Chuck wanted to keep his vision pure and unsullied, textual analysis being ‘almost the same as this fanfic abomination’. He resorts to quoting Barthes in academic style, but then footnotes that footnote: ‘Look ma, I know how to cite bullshit that people spew and publish for more people to regurgitate. Only article that ever stuck with me after three semesters of English classes’. The imagined purity of academia is brought into conflict and conjunction with both fannish discourse and outdated discourses of authorship, so that each shows up the cracks in the other. The author is alive enough to reject his own death, but in doing so, shows himself out of touch with the workings of text. He can *claim* the right and desire to control meaning, but not cannot carry out his will. Meanwhile, Becky’s essay, which begins conventionally enough, breaks down with an apology:

i'm sorry prof daniels but i just

cannot with my feels

(xenoamorist 2012)

'Feels' is in blue font. The absences and limitations of academic discourse are revealed in its clash with statements from fandom: with its prescribed style and format, it fails to account for the emotional, passionate, anti-rational aspects of our relations with text, the 'emotional rush' explored by Zubernis and Larsen (2013, 1) in their articulations of their positions as both academics and fans. The Good Fan/Bad Fan divide is also flouted, as the rational mode, which as *Chuck Writes* demonstrates can come very close to academic writing, may not account sufficiently for our 'feels' either (c.f. Hills 2002, 16-21). The next page is a series of twitter hashtags, series of letters approximating the random smashing of keys, and a text-boxed excerpt from Becky's canonical fic. Even the fanfic eventually breaks down into the bare letters, spaced out across several pages on individual lines, which spell out 'goddamit wincest'. Ultimately, this fic enacts the collision and mutual undermining of statements from varied discourses, in a style only possible in this space, culminating in the final statement, *gar nichts muss sein* (nothing must be), answering the opening, and the opening of *House of Leaves*, '*muss es sein?*' (must it be?).

This undermining of the author's writing/fan writing binary, and the fan writer/academic writer binary in addition, is of moderate impact. The comments also enact the collision of fannish and academic, or Good Fan/Bad Fan registers: I commented myself that 'I was srsly having lit-crit

squees' (reading\_is\_in 2012). The fan/author dyad has been replaced, and many of the statements constructing the fan in canon have simply been placed onto the 'Bad fan' side of the dyad. However, self-identification sometimes straddles the divide, which in itself is broken and uneven, each half blending into the other rather than statements specifically destabilising other statements (fig. 20). Fics like *Tons of Feels* suggest that "good" fan discourse does not properly account for the sexual/emotional aspects of fandom.

#### IV. Conclusions

Thus, in this sense, fanfic *has* transformed the grounding statements of the source, the author/fan primary/secondary binary; but the most popular and influential statements in the formation are still those which uphold it. Chuck's writing is usually upheld in fic as canonical and true, even whilst the figure of the fanboy-auteur is mocked. Paradoxically, the female fan writer can utilize the figure of Chuck to author-ize her own writing, though when he is constructed explicitly as writing "like a fan", then the non-canonical construction of fan writing consolidated from the source text may actually work *backwards* to de-legitimate writing attributed to Chuck. Moreover, though Becky and her writing are redeemed and revalued in fic, it is frequently in relation to Chuck and legitimated by him, in the same way the fan and her fic is canonically legitimated, within boundaries, by Eric Kripke. Finally, though specific fannish interventions in the discourse open a space for the positive constructions of *some* kinds of fandom, we seem unable to eschew

the shadow of the other, “bad” fan, constructed largely as broader culture would have it (c.f. Stanfill 2013; Zubernis and Larsen 2013, 28-31; 38-39). Sometimes we acknowledge the artificiality of the Good Fan/Bad Fan divide, or construct our own personas as overlapping it, but the divide itself, and the ‘split subjectivity’ of fandom created by it, is apparently indispensable. Nonetheless, in fics which negate the divide, the legitimization paradox begins to be tentatively deconstructed. Whilst what is Othered is redeemed in the name of the (rational, authorial, and proper White male), it cannot be valued on its own terms.

This thesis has established that statements from fanfic *do* alter the discursive formations of canonical media in fundamental ways, contradicting grounding statements. However, fanfic’s legitimization of Othered properties frequently depends on the capital of the already-empowered White man. We established this in the first chapter, where fanfic legitimated the construction of darkness via the figures of Sam and Dean, problematically removing darkness from a property of skin to one of soul. This can be criticized as a performance of what Duvall (2008) calls Whiteface: the ability of white characters to masquerade darkness whilst reserving the essential capital of Whiteness which Black characters have no access to. However, fandom also undermined the grounding statements from canon that the Black man exists to construct the White, via counter-narratives. These may be implicated by the problem some postcolonial critics recognise, of counter-narratives as ultimately reaffirming the primacy of the canonical author’s voice through citation and reference (Caminero-Santangelo 2005; Jacziminski 2009; Singh 2012); but equally, they may be taken in a more postmodern spirit as undermining that primacy by showing up the gaps and absences of the ‘original’ (c.f. e.g. Kraus 1985; Hutcheon 1988; Bhaba 1994; Anyinefa 2000; Bannet 2011), thus questioning its status.

This is the means by which the legitimization paradox might begin to be deconstructed. We saw less illustration of this in the incest chapter, where deviant sexuality attributed canonically to the Other is shifted to Sam and Dean, breaking canon's implicit divide between Incest (that horror of Bad Others), and [incest], the unspoken bond between Sam and Dean. That chapter also demonstrated that legitimization does not function automatically: rape and abuse are not legitimated by the capital of White men, and pornography is only accepted where it carries high literary capital. In this sense, fandom construction is influenced by feminist and broader cultural discourse, and is in some ways more conservative than canon, which flaunts and celebrates the Romantic bond between the sibling-protagonists unreservedly.

Fandom's re-construction of the Author and the Fan is both the clearest expression of the legitimization paradox, and goes furthest to undermine it. Fics like *The Chuck Writes Story*; *I'll Take my Chances* and *Tons of Feels* suggest, the primacy of the author and his text is an illusion to be deconstructed. However, the quantitative aspect of my methodology demonstrates that fics which uphold the author's text as primary and the fan's as secondary tend to be of highest impact in the formation. Nonetheless, fanfic is tentatively starting to de-construct the legitimization paradox, and in this way, the statements which fandom has contributed in *all* formations may begin to compromise the legitimization paradox, and the authorial position of the fanboy-auteur begins to be undermined.

I now conclude with a summary of my main arguments, an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this thesis, and its implications for further study.



## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### I. Summary of Findings; Implications for Further Study

By methodical attention to how fanfic transforms and upholds the discursive formations of a cult text, I have established a paradox that undermines both overly-celebratory readings of fandom (Jenkins 1992, 1995, 2006; Bacon-Smith 1992; Costello 1999) and understandings of fandom as co-opted by industry (Andrejevic 2008; Russo 2009). By adding its own statements to discursive formations, undermining, contradicting and consolidating canonical constructions, fandom can and does work to legitimate what is culturally Othered, including and especially itself. Through the collision of statements from varying discourses, fanfic begins to create new knowledge in fictional spaces, utilizing the possibilities of ‘what is not’ in canon and reality to reveal basic assumptions and the possibilities they exclude. But, by the very fact that those transformations depend on a canonical source, the legitimation becomes paradoxical. The characters that *Supernatural* fic appropriates, like most cult TV characters, are White men. Fan writing is legitimated through the word of the author. However, in some cases, we are beginning to question and deconstruct that process of legitimation in terms of what is already legitimate, thus revaluing Othered properties like irrational fan-attachment on their own terms.

The implications of this paradox and its development are applicable to all text that it is self-confessedly transformative, derivative, or secondary. Scholars could analyse how those texts are positioned in relation to their temporal predecessors, and whether their modes of citation are such that shore up the primacy of the original, or question the construction of that primacy and the concepts of authorship and originality inherent in it. Fiction's specific ability to state 'what is not' may afford it a certain advantage in addressing gaps that canonical texts elide, though how this operates in different genres and contexts will be various, and require the study of scholars familiar with their histories and conventions. In the case of fanfiction, addressing absences and elisions in the 'original' might take the form of constructing perspectives for Othered characters (e.g. pp. 175-79); or addressing gaps canon elides (e.g. pp. 170-71); or, from a more explicitly theoretical perspective, mix discourses that draw attention to the constructs and constraints of both authorial and fan production (e.g. pp. 311-314). Shoring up the concept of primacy might take the form of legitimating an Othered property via a White male character; or explicit deference to the originating author (e.g. p. 280-82). We must be careful, though, not to fall into a false binary of 'text that subverts original authority' versus 'text that confirms original authority': *all* derivative or transformative text is, by its very form, *both* legitimating *and* critical of the primacy of its sources. This is why I have suggested we can 'begin to deconstruct' or 'compromise' the paradox, rather than employ liberatory terms like 'break free' or 'overcome'.

Different genres and contexts of production will produce their own possibilities; though, as the counter-narrative of *The Wind Done Gone* exemplifies, they may have distinct similarities to the context of fanfic. In a sense, the paradox is applicable to all text, being citation with difference, but has particularly relevance in contexts like fandom, women's writing, and postcolonial

studies, being forms of text that have been Othered until relatively recently. The paradox and the issues it raises can be immediately applied to other fandoms and their fic for, as noted, cult television in general still privileges White male author-figures and characters. Scholars could attempt to ascertain if there are factors in particular source texts and/or fan spaces which influence fanfic's tendency to shore up or deconstruct the paradox, and how statements play out in different settings and arenas. Scholars might attend particularly to the kinds of statements I have theorised as *textual provocation*: acknowledgements of active audienceship that, though implicitly or explicitly derivative, provoke the production of more text.

As assessed below (pp. 320-21), fan subjectivities are not addressed by the orientation of this study. Scholars more comfortable and accomplished in psychoanalytic theory could explore fans' interpretations and awareness of the legitimization paradox in ways I have not done so. Fans' private *reception* of statements, and how they uphold or subvert textual authority and constructions, could add another qualitative dimension to the analysis of statement-impact that goes beyond a strictly textual study. As has been noted, Foucauldian methodology up until now has lacked analysis of reception. This project goes some way to amending that lack, but scholars trained in psychoanalytic or other extra-discursive modes of analysis may be able to supplement the picture with an ethical analysis of fans' perception of statements, documenting effects that do not leave textual evidence. Moving beyond fic, the legitimization paradox could be used to explore how fans affirm and accept Othered aspects of their identities, activities and desires through relation to and appropriation of their canons and author-figures. The concept might be usefully applied to a whole range of fan activities sourced from favoured texts, from role-playing to game modification.

## II. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Thesis

Foucauldian discourse analysis helped inform a method that has been attentive to the literary, televisual, fannish, academic and broader cultural discourses that inform fanfiction, an explicit practice of mingled citation with difference. This enabled me to note where the impact of statements from one discourse impacts the meanings of others, such as the complications of Romantic incest from a sociological perspective, or the critique of rational academia from fannish statements of ‘feels’. Foucauldian theory has helped me to identify the conditions of existence of discursive formations, formulate their rules of possibility, and perceive the grounding statements that make further statements possible. This has been very useful in demonstrating where and how a practice as varied as fanfic alters canon’s constructions and where and how it solidifies them. On the other hand, there is a danger that the frames I have drawn may artificially separate one formation from another, or connect them in ways biased by my personal and intuitional context (such as race to gender, which I read from the perspective of a woman raised partly according to non-White gender constructs). The impact and meaning of statements may be differently perceived by a different researcher, or by fans themselves. Indeed, some may question my choice to bracket out the psyche and intentions involved in fan production.

As I have noted, this choice is partly informed by my learned suspicion of interpretation following my experiences of subjugation by the psychiatric profession. It seems evident to me

that the fundamental problem with mainstream psychiatry is its blindness to the active properties of discourse and the politics of knowledge creation, and its own key role in the creation of the insane subject.<sup>41</sup> The transposition of fan texts into an academic context can be ethically conducted where a) permission is sought and drafts shared and b) the researcher accounts for her position in an academic network as well as a fannish one, especially the power imbalance that may be entailed therein, and draws attention to fact that research and presentation of discursive formations to an academic audience itself plays a role in their consolidation. But I have yet to find a way of writing which I am ethically comfortable that would theorize the psyches of fans in and for an academic context. A similar process of reciprocity, reflexivity and transparency might alleviate some of my concerns, but in any case, I do not believe that theorization of fans' psyches or a psychological orientation were necessary in this particular project. If the founding principles of CDA - that language is taken active and effective, and that a statement is material event, an 'incision into a discursive field' (Young, 402; c.f. Foucault 1989, 28), then intentions and motivations behind said statements are irrelevant. What matters is effect, and the range of possibilities that is enabled or closed down. Discursive formations deserve study in their own right, for as Fairclough and Fairclough have written, discourse is 'on the one hand an effect of social life, and on the other, ha[s] effects on social life, both helping to keep existing forms in existence and helping to change them' (2012, 79). The psyche of the individual contributor would not benefit the investigation of this particular process. Regarding *my* the influence of my perspective on the statements and discursive frames, I cannot of course pretend objectivity, but hope that the account of my cultural, institutional and fannish situation will render me sufficiently accountable for what I have learned how to see (Haraway 1988, 583).

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<sup>41</sup> I have recently learned that the Critical Psychiatry Network was founded in 1999 on more or less this exact mandate: see Bracken and Thomas (2005); Double (2006); and Cohen and Timimi (2008).

Relatedly, I hope that I have demonstrated that it is possible to conduct a full scale research project into fanfic with full knowledge, awareness and consent of the fans quoted, and that this consideration is appreciated by fans. There were cases in which the writer could not be reached, but in every case I made a good-faith effort, as described in the Ethics section. I respected all requests for anonymity and the omission or inclusion of links; and conversely, honoured some fans' requests to be quoted by their real names. Academics who choose to quote texts intended for limited circulation, without permission, must work harder to justify that choice, and with it, the fannish identity they afford themselves.

Finally, taking precedent from internet studies and network analysis, the methodology of this study demonstrated a quantitative and qualitative way to read texts in a networked, new media context, enabling the researcher to make definitive statements concerning impact and alteration without loss of attention to the specificities that make fiction fiction. I have not attended only to fanfic, but the contexts in which it appears, the number and type of responses, and the ripples of impact it makes in other sites. Demonstrating the range and average number of comments/reviews, I have been able to evidence what is meant by terms like 'high impact' or 'insignificant'. I have attended also to the qualitative aspect of responses, as mockery and derision can reduce the status of fic as much as praise can raise it. There was a slight margin of error here, due to a) some fic being locked, and b) the fact that, as described on p. 105, common author-names and titles had to be searched in only one pair of quotation marks. A researcher with better computer literacy than I may be able to improve upon this. In addition, the precision of impact measurement would be improved if software became available to count links and recommendations for fic from Tumblr, a platform that was increasing in popularity at my time of

writing. The overall method should be transferrable to other fandoms, as fic is typically archived and networked in similar ways, according to social and technological structures that existed before *Supernatural* and will exist after its cultural moment is over. It will need adaptation for studies of fan production other than fic: researchers wishing to read the fanart, vids, and music mixes that exist within these same networks will need to bring their own academic background to reconceive my reading of 'statements'. For a final potential weakness of this thesis is that it is very much the work of a literary scholar. Whilst in my situated experience, *Supernatural's* fanwork is strongly invested in literary capital and conventions, it is still part of a multi-media network involving other kinds of text. This limitation could only be overcome by a team of scholars trained in reading various arts; lacking that, the present researcher can only be explicit concerning her biases, and hope that the example provided in this work can stimulate further study.

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N.B. Anonymous fanfic/comments with links were anonymized by the author, thus untraceable.

Those without links were anonymised by myself, at the author's request.

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