



‘Except that Joss Whedon is god’: fannish attitudes to statements of author/ity

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Abstract

Early internet and fan studies theorists believed the New Media context and work of the active fan would bring theories like the Death of the Author to fruition. Contemporary fan studies scholars are more reserved, acknowledging diversity in fan attitudes. Through analysis of a LiveJournal article with comments on authors’ views concerning fanfiction, this article demonstrates the paradoxical investment in various forms of authorial authority espoused across fan communities, as well as defiance and repudiation of them. I argue that while the authors quoted are denied legitimate authority through various tactics, the concept of an originating, proprietary authorship, with attendant capitalist powers and rights, retains much influence. The concept of the author holds more power than the individual figures attempting to wield it, and fans attribute or deny the power of authorship to particular figures according to their public personas and cultural politics. In this sense, fans may withhold or bestow legitimation through the operation of Foucault’s author-function, interpreting text and statements of authority through the public persona of the author.

Keywords

audience, author, authority, Barthes, fan studies, fanfiction, Foucault

Premature excitement that the internet would bring about the ‘redemption of certain utopian promises from post-structuralism [...] under the slogan “the death of the author”’ (Hartling, 2009, 200), resonates with the celebratory promises of the first fan studies scholars (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992). Those eras are over, and work warning

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against too-easy celebration of resistance in both areas comes together in the recent work on online fan culture. Stanfil (forthcoming: 1) argues that we should resist temptations to laud fan culture as ‘a resistance to dominant culture whose pleasures will not be denied’ in light of the reverence for the author figure expressed in her interviews with fans. Fanwork tends to proliferate around transmedia properties, so singular authorship is more of a rhetorical attribution to the source text than a fact (Mittell, 2012; Steiner, 2012), but one that still wields a degree of power in fan communities. With the exception of Stanfil’s interviews, analysis so far has focused largely on construction of the author figure in text and paratext. Steiner (2012: 13) offers a diagram to illustrate (see Figure 1).

Now I want to explore Mittell’s (2012: 36–43) suggestion that reception plays a large part in the author function through analysis of fan and audience attitudes to authorship. Authority, by definition, must be accepted as legitimate to be valid (Giddens 2006: 1008). Thus the active audience’s part in negotiating control over texts’ work matters intensely for the future of media production and transformative work.

In April 2012, a unique opportunity appeared with the LiveJournal discussion in the community *Oh No They Didn’t!*: ‘Book Post: how authors feel about fan fiction’ (2012). The views given, from cult authors George R.R. Martin, J.K. Rowling, Anne Rice, Stephenie Meyer; Ursula K. LeGuin, Orson Scott Card, Diana Gabaldon, J.D. Salinger and Charlie Stross were generally negative and often condemnatory. The thread gathered 1582 comments between and 19 April 2012 and 26 April 2012: all fan quotations in this article are from that time-frame. Careful analysis of this thread allows a first step towards filling a gap in scholarship: we have heard how the industry views the Author (Mittell, 2012; Steiner, 2012) and how academics celebrate His/Her death, but now I address the attitudes of the audience itself, captured in microcosm on a relevant thread on the highly fannish platform of LiveJournal. First, to establish the precise claims at stake, I analyse the statements from the authors; then the fan responses to the authors and each other. Bearing in mind two strong cultural influences – the academic denial of the Author-God and Weber’s classic definitions of authority as legal-rational, traditional or charismatic (2004 [1922]) – I analyse the influence of these concepts.

Through this analysis, a paradox becomes evident. Though respondents were largely defensive and/or proud of fanfic, a marked reverence for the Romantic conceptions of original authorship, and a capitalist defence of the author’s right to profit from his or her work, remained as strong thematics. This did not, however, necessitate any reverence for the particular authors quoted, some of whose questionable politics and less-than-impressive output was wittily abused. The crucial finding here is that the *concept* ‘Author’ retains more power than individuals’ ability to wield it. Fans attribute authority to persons according to their cultural politics, rewarding left-leaning attitudes and liberal stances towards fanfic, and denying it to the opposites. In that sense, they may withhold or bestow legitimation through the operation of the author-function.

Modern academic work on ideologies of authorship is informed by Barthes’ dictum that ‘the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author’ (1977: 148). Barthes denied the Romantic theory of the creative author as a god-like fount of knowledge pouring meaning into the text which the reader discovers readymade, but rather conceived of the text as ‘a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture’ (1977: 146). Meaning resides in the act of interpretation and the intertextuality

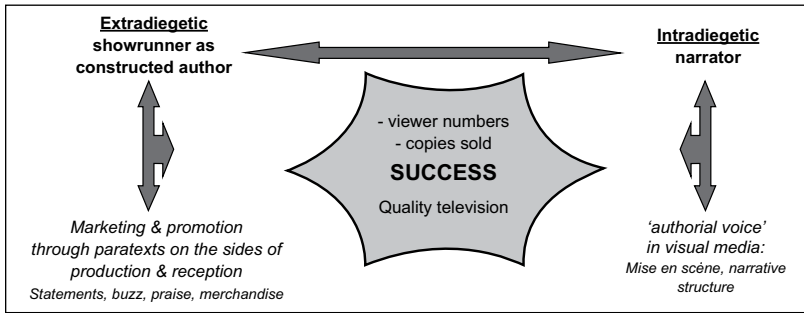


Figure 1. TV authorship in the case of *Game of Thrones*: relations
Source: Steiner (2012: 13).

of the work, every cultural echo drawing meaning from its past usage. Foucault (1991 [1969]) then argued that, rather than disappearing, the mythic Author is replaced by an 'author-function', a discursively constructed symbol through which a large amount of complex, collaborative text can be interpreted and organized. Many academics find this theory applicable to cult television programmes, which by the nature of the industry are multi-authored, but tend to publicly present a white male showrunner as the sole creative genius behind the project, assuring it quality and cohesion (Gray, 2010; Hills, 2002, 2010; Jenkins, 1995; Kompare, 2011; Scott, 2011; Wexelblat, 2002). This previous work has depended largely on analysis of authorial posturing by creative industry workers and the legitimation of authorship in and around the text. I use the thread responses to demonstrate that cultural tendencies to interpret and de/value work through the organizing figure of an authorial personality is still highly relevant. Despite the title 'book authors', many of these figures are now associated with transmedia properties including books and/or television, 'their' output dependent on a large number of creative workers.

Before the analysis, a word is needed on the definitions of cultural authority, which these authors are attempting to claim and the readers ascribe or deny.

The English words 'author' and 'authority' are both derived from the Latin '*auctor*', which can mean 'originator', 'initiator' or 'prime mover' (Glare, 1982: 205). Weber defined three types of authority (2004 [1922]: 133–45). The first is rational-legal authority: the framework of rules and laws that modern societies function according to. An author's assertion of legal ownership over her text is an example. The second is traditional authority: the learned structures of institutions like families and monarchies that require less rational justification and depend on cultural heritage. The third is charismatic authority, which resides in personas: the accepted right of a revolutionary leader or religious reformist, to instruct his or her followers. Scott (2011) recognized a type of media personality who wields charismatic authority, which she called the 'fanboy-auteur'. These men perform a self-abnegating, generous persona for their fans through New Media relationships, while retaining an economic and institutional position of control over the text. The fans quoted below seem to consider it their right to bestow charismatic authority and deny it where they choose, and performance of fanboy-auteurism seems a large factor in earning it. The gendered aspect of this authority-performance is noted by

Scott and upheld by the responders here studied: the authority of Authorship is granted primarily to white men.

Analysis I: assertions by the authors

The professional authors quoted attempt to lay claim to charismatic, traditional and legal-rational authority. Traditional claims are couched in terms of advice or persuasion from a position of accomplishment:

Every writer needs to learn to create his own characters, worlds, and settings. Using someone else's world is the lazy way out (Martin).

People pour out so much energy and talent into them... It makes me frustrated. I'm like, go write your own story. Put them out there and get them published. That's what you should be doing. You should be working on your own book right now (Meyer).

Other justifications are more emotional, drawing on the discourse of writer as parental creator. Martin claims, 'My characters are my children ... I don't want people making off with them.' Rice and Gabaldon seem unconcerned with justification. Rice simply asserts that 'it upsets [her] terribly to even think about fan-fiction with [her] characters'. Presumably the appeal is to a fan-author contract: the fan should not want to distress the person who has provided her with the works. Gabaldon is more forceful: her 'position on fan-fic is pretty clear'. She claims to 'think it's immoral', '*know* it's illegal', and asserts that 'it makes [her] want to barf whenever [she has] inadvertently encountered some of it involving [her] characters'. *Why* Gabaldon finds derivative work sickening is unexplained. By claiming to '*know* it's illegal', she attempts to assert legal-rational authority, but following this directly with the emotional final clause in a tripling effect leaves the stress on the latter.

Other justifications are more practical, relying strictly on legal-rational and economic arguments. Cross is 'not a precious sparkly unicorn who is obsessed with the purity of his characters' but 'a glittery and avaricious dragon who is jealous of his steaming pile of gold. If you do not steal the dragon's gold, the dragon will leave you alone.' The implicit critique of other, more 'precious' authors is achieved by juxtaposition: Cross is quoted last, after Gabaldon. It is interesting that the noun-phrase 'steaming pile', which has more connotations of excretion than wealth, comes before the modifier 'of gold': Cross's position is pragmatic and economic, both denigrating and valorizing money. Rowling permits fanfic, but her representative states she is concerned it remain PG-rated. The argument is not couched in terms of purity, but concern for readers' welfare, because 'if young children were to stumble on Harry Potter in an X-rated story, that would be a problem'. This might be understood as an appeal to traditional authority, wherein the author is a custodian of culture concerned to safeguard the youth.

The sample of writers is not representative. Many literary and televisual writers give fanfic their blessing (Fanlore, 2012). The selection of authors and quotations seems inflammatory: indeed, the very first comment reads simply, 'ooh. I'm ready for this' (prettywitch, 2012). The second is a gif of reality TV star NeNe Leakes pulling a childish



Figure 2. Ne Ne Leakes

Source: © 2013 Bravo Media LLC.

face and causing her hands to fight each other (Figure 2); the next four simply agree. The tone, then, is set as non-serious: the arguments over the permissibility of fanwork as silly. Nonetheless, it is clear that the authors quoted do *not* consider themselves dead, but alive and well and deserving of a large degree of authority over their work. From an economic perspective, most fans seem content to grant ownership, and legal-rational authority is largely respected. Other forms of authority are treated as more suspect, and explicitly denied to the persons of the authors.

Analysis 2: fan responses

The first theme I found in comments concerns author–text–reader relations. The inevitability of re-interpretation is cited in Barthesian terms: ‘I’ve never believed that the Author is God. If you want to remain the undisputed king of your sandbox, then don’t publish it for mass consumption’ (imnotasquirrel). A string of comments agree, but one modifies, ‘Except that Joss Whedon is god. Just sayin’’. Fanboy-ateur Whedon has already been quoted in opposition to the authors in the article, as stating: ‘All worthy work is open to interpretations the author did not intend. Art isn’t your pet – it’s your kid. It grows up and talks back to you’ (quoted by titsnteeth). This meets with much praise and approval, creating an interesting contrast between the revering of a male author and the disrespect those quoted above typically meet. Titsnteeth, whose username suggests aggressive femininity, quotes without comment, granting Whedon the authority to speak for her. Whedon, despite being a televisual and thus collaborative creator, is invested with great charismatic authority:

Joss Whedon, is once again the voice of reason in the universe (nilhenwen).

Amen (kniferomance).

Right arm, Joss. If these authors don’t want their ‘children’ to grow up and have lives of their own, they shouldn’t publish. or, as Kahlil Gibran would reply to George R.R. Martin: ‘Your

children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. They come through you but not from you, And though they are with you yet they belong not to you' (esteeffee).

Male authority – the authority of the fanboy-auteur – is quoted to combat authority, a paradox that does not overthrow the concept of the Romantic, originating author but denies it to people who censure fanfic. The ultimate irony is perhaps the use of Barthes to refute authority, according him the status of citable authority in the context of academia:

We did about Death of the Author in my Approaches to Lit. class and this is so on point. Everything is to be interpreted by the individual (gee_waa).

Henry Jenkins is also quoted.

Similarly, the practices of canonical authorities are cited in support of fic:

These people do realize that Shakespeare, the man responsible for the English language as we currently know it, wrote most of his plays based on other stories he read. His work was basically fanfiction.

TL;DR [too long; didn't read]: Fuck all these people, except JKR. If fanfic is good enough for Shakespeare's career to essentially be built on it, they have nothing to bitch about (bohemian_geek).

dante wrote self-insert fanfic about famous people praising him for being so fucking awesome, or being tortured because he hated them [...] bertolt brecht based his plays on other people's work and got money and fame for it, which most ficcers never do [...] shakespeare also based his shit on other shit [...] idt [I doubt] anyone would tell them to start writing their own stories. i mean, if they weren't dead (mingemonster).

The tone is humorous and levelling, particularly regarding the *Commedia* as the ultimate self-insertion fic.¹ Note also the lack of capitals given to proper names, which graphically places the canonical masters on the same level as Livejournal users. The lack of punctuation from a commenter with a high degree of cultural capital shows disrespect for traditional markers of literary propriety. Yet the fact that these white male literary icons are invoked to authorize the practice of literary borrowing remains an investment in the author function of the lone white male. Bees_beads explicitly retains the traditional hierarchy, listing, 'Paradise Lost? The Divine Comedy? The Aeneid? Troilus and Cressida? The Cantos?' as authoritative examples of practice, but then qualifying, 'I mean, obviously writing Harry Potter fanfic isn't the same as writing The Aeneid, but the principle still stands'. Fanfic – largely a female art form – is authorized by the practices of our white male literary betters. Mingemonster does comment concisely, 'everything is better when dead men do it'. The icon chosen for this comment is a picture of an unidentified young woman with her arm raised in and mouth opened in defiance. But this insight is a lone example and is not responded to, and mingemonster also uses it for his/her observations on Dante and Shakespeare. Morrison (2002: 6) noted an irony that 'claims by

authors that the author is dead seem to recapitulate the conditions of Epimenides' paradox: "All Cretans are liars ... one of their own poets has said so". The irony is more pronounced when the fan argues that the author is dead, because the author has said so. Outside academia, these masculinist Romantic conceptions are not dead.

Other commenters focus on the reader/user's end of the literary exchange:

Authors reap the benefits of public reaction, but they want that public to be a silent one? Um, idts [I don't think so]. A published book is not a diary [...] People interact with texts, as shitty as those texts are sometimes, not so they can make money, but because responding is part of the meaning-making. Duh (lunaisawhore).

All this is just a load, really. You put out a story for the world to see, people enjoy it, so they expound on their enjoyment (bokunojinsei).

You can't just put something out there and expect people to only respond in one way, like, politely clapping their hands. That's just not how the world works (winninghearts).

These statements deny that meaning exists in authorial intention, contradicting the Romantic conception of the author as a fount of knowledge. They utilize a common-sense lexis ('just a load', 'duh', 'how the world works') for postmodern conceptions of fragmentary meaning that have evidently penetrated beyond the academy. Not everyone agrees:

I just find the whole idea of fan fiction offensive because you're basically saying 'I know what's better for this book/these characters than the author did' and are basically just wasting a ton of creativity on someone else's creation when you could be writing your own original stuff (sapphybelle).

A lot of the time, I don't see people do justice to the characters – and a world like Westeros is hard to get right if you're not GRRM [George R. R. Martin] (sandstorm).

These commenters are invested in a discourse of paternity, wherein the Author-God knows His creation most thoroughly, and creativity that is not 'original' or 'own[ed]' is 'wasted'. Commenters who agree with the author's rights to control his creation to tend to utilize this discourse and lexis. Relatedly, they espouse the capitalist idea of text as property:

I just don't understand why anyone would spend time writing about characters that aren't even theirs(solestella).

I don't enjoy some people putting it on the same level as the original work. That pisses me off greatly and I've seen it happen (starchain).

These sentiments informed the 20th-century *auteur* theories that sought the 'freedom and originality' of a director's 'personal vision' (Schepelern, 2004: 104–5) in respected films, but are now academically unfashionable in treating both text and film. However, this

thread demonstrates that to pretend they hold no power, even in fannish spheres like LiveJournal, would be disingenuous.

The second category of responses addressed the authors as personas, which are treated with nothing like the respect that authority *as a concept* garners. George R.R. Martin is repeatedly instructed to ‘suck it’:

SUCK IT, GEORGE. I LOVE YOUR CHARACTERS. DEAL WITH IT (klmnumbers).

i don't even watch game of thrones/read a song of ice and fire and i support this kink meme. suck it, george rr martin. suck. It (yourlivewire).

The gendered insult casts the author in a passive, feminized role. Authority is appropriated by the reader, but still couched in terms of masculine aggression. A ‘kink meme’ is an extended thread wherein users post request for fic, usually short, that satisfies a particular kink. The definition of kink, in this context, is pretty much anything other than vanilla heterosexual sex: it could be as innocuous as cuddling or as extreme as gang rape. Fauxkaren finds the thread ‘AN APPROPRIATE POST TO PIMP THE AOISAF/GOT KINK MEME IN’ (ASOIAF and GOT abbreviate Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*). Capslock flaunts online etiquette, as a kink meme about Martin’s characters queers the lone masculine authority of the author.

In an explicit attack on claims to charismatic authority, protests are based on the perceived quality of the writer’s literary output. Cookinguptales suggests that Meyer’s protests stem from her internal response, ‘I WOULD NEVER HAVE SEX WITH EDWARD IN THAT POSITION. I MEAN BELLA WOULDNT. I MEAN’. The implication is that *Twilight* is a childish sex-fantasy wherein the character Bella is a thinly veiled proxy for the author, who imagines herself in a melodramatic relationship with the vampire Edward. This does not qualify as an authoritative position of accomplishment. Further, fanfic itself is not defended in these comments, so much as the right of these particular authors to protest it. The capitalist, legal-rational ideology of authorship is not criticized and the traditional authority of Shakespeare, whose work is holy enough to be ‘desecrated’, is upheld. Thus the author function works both positively and negatively: the personality of the author can value or devalue the work. Likewise, the concept of charismatic authority is if anything bolstered: if these authors were worthy to be authorities, we might listen. The arguments that one need not ‘take advice from Stephenie freaking Meyer on what [one] “should” be writing’ (youcantseeus) rely implicitly on excluding her from the category of true authorship, investing power in that concept. There is clearly a gendered dichotomy at work here – authorship is represented by a dead white man, and laughingly denied to a female writer of teen romance.

Likewise, Anne Rice is castigated for the quality of her recent work, characterized as ‘Bible fanfic’ (jasonbeast). Rice has published two books which purport to be fictionalized accounts of events in the life of the historical Jesus of Nazareth, from a Christian perspective. Bleed_peroxide ‘wonder[s] if God’s against fan fiction the way Anne Rice is. Just sayin’’. This humorous observation upholds the originating-creative model of authorship, casting Rice as the dubious writer of derivatives, as opposed to the ultimate Author-God, who may look upon her creative interpretations of Scripture with as much

perturbation and anger as she looks on fanfic. Her published reworking of *Sleeping Beauty* is also cited repeatedly as an example of hypocrisy. Her literary productions are linked to her mental state: she is called a ‘crazy bitch’ (i_have_no_style) ‘delusional’ (nyanko) and ‘unsteady’ (severalstories), her recent output a result of her having gone ‘batshit insane’ (themoonwithin). Clearly, these are not the properties of a charismatic author, Whedon’s ‘voice of reason in the universe’ (nilhenwen). Authorship as an authoritative concept stands, but it is far more easily attributed to a (reasonable, sane) man than a ‘crazy bitch’.

Stress is also laid on the moral character and cultural politics of the authors, as legitimating or de-legitimizing control over their texts.

LOL at Gabaldon calling it ‘immoral’. REALLY THO? REALLY? (ensemble).

Yeah, that was a pretty dumb comment (graemefaernes).

her saying fanfic is like selling your children into white slavery tops that one (greycoupon).

This statement from Gabaldon is not included in the article, because it has been judiciously removed from her website. However, the thread provides quotations and links to full copies which allow for dissection of the racist logic underlying it:

Because white slavery is different than any other kind of slavery? (mmdraco).

that’s the part i’m stuck on too. jfc [Jesus fucking Christ] (victoriabloom).

it’s cause white people aren’t meant to be slaves, duh! (sapitacherry).

Honeypants adds that ‘white slavery’ can be used to mean prostitution. Much as one might empathize with watermeloncholy’s desire ‘to push this person off a bridge’, commenters do not explain how Gabaldon’s arrogant racism equates to a lack of authority to police her text. Fans ascribe authority to figures whom they perceive as sharing their cultural politics, akin to the way Roddenbury’s public anti-racism and ‘celebration of cultural diversity’ helped construct his author/ity for his fans (Jenkins, 1995: 188–9). The writers cited here are denied this status on the grounds of cultural politics the commenters disagree with. Scott Card’s much-publicized homophobia incites derision:

Orson Scott Card can go fuck himself (titsnteeth).

With a broom at the fuzzy end (lucythedragon).

He can’t. His religion would frown on that for simultaneously being masturbation and gay sex (themoonwithin).

The implications crystallize when paparatti comments, ‘I didn’t even bother reading what that fuck [Scott Card] has to say. He’s a scumbag for life’. Scott Card’s politics, which are directly opposed to most left-majority fan communities, deny his authorial claims.

The third category of comments concern the nature of fanfic. Commenters frequently defend it as a learning process, a phase on the way to becoming a 'real' author, who is, once again, an originating creator. This theme accords with the tendency of some academics to view fanfiction as a learning aid in achieving literary competency (Black, 2007, 2008; Mackey and McClay, 2008; Shultz, 2011). Brittanias asserts:

being against fanfic is such a bullshit position for a professional writer, imo [in my opinion], a lot of writers these days started as fanfiction writers [...] it *encourages* people to branch out, to try writing in the first place – just like harry potter got children to read (emphasis original).

Reading *Harry Potter* is equated with writing fanfiction as a stage on the way to 'real' literary fluency. Perhaps the female Rowling is not quite a 'real' author either – but the category exists to be achieved. Likewise, vanmeeuwe 'think[s] fan fiction is a great way for young aspiring authors to sort of practice creating stories and having an audience' and rightxhere comments, 'my PUBLISHED!AUTHOR tutor says: everyone gets their start somewhere, and it is why she lists fanfiction in her list of accepted forms of story writing'. Note the capitalization and exclamation mark between 'published' and 'author', which graphically denotes their importance, and the lack of space, which suggests their inextricability. To be a real author is to be published, a capitalist concept. Fanfiction is a lesser form. Sometimes this judgement is explicit. La_petite_singe believes that 'If you really want to be a writer you've got to branch out beyond [fanfic] eventually', constructing the 'writer' as someone who produces original work professionally. This is a very modernist idea: a medieval scriptor or Elizabethan playwright, for instance, would not qualify, nor would a postcolonial author pastiching an established narrative. Likewise, rawr_balrog states that it is 'a shame a lot of [writers] don't live up to [their] potential by moving beyond fanfic', and while vanmeeuwe supports it as a learning tool, s/he continues:

The only downfall is when you see grown adults invest weeks/months/years of their time writing these intricate sagas that they can never publish. It's kind of lame once you're past high school, TBH. That time would be better spent writing original fiction ... or even work on a portfolio of speculative scripts and shoot for becoming a TV writer, if you'd rather play with somebody else's characters.

But posting angsty kitsch on DeviantArt and LiveJournal isn't really productive.

Productivity, proposed as a good itself, is conflated with publication or at least professionalism. This comment is invested in the strong metaphor of time-as-commodity (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 8–9), to be wasted or profited from. Some of vanmeeuwe's assumptions are contradicted, but the time-as-commodity metaphor seems too pervasive to deny. Deerlike would 'say a good percentage of adult fic writers I've read are writing fic as a respite from the daily grind of their lives, and who is anyone to call that a waste of time?' Fanfic is a necessary relief from the 'livelihood' such adults must make; thus their time is not being squandered. Lunaisawhore does place 'productive' in scare quotes when she responds, but defends fanfic as 'a hobby, not a life calling, and you can't make any claim to know what "productive" things they accomplish professionally'.

The need for productivity as a life value is questioned, however, when silly_izzy_me states that:

people who write fanfiction excessively and almost exclusively need to move on and do their own thing. There are some good writers out there that waste their time writing other people's stories it would be much more productive if they created their own characters and stories.

Again, time is a finite quantity being squandered. Fanfiction should not take up too much, or risk 'excess'. Kimberwyn replies 'they don't "need" to do anything and it's not about being productive, lmao'. S/he does not explain it was 'it' is about, but the signoff lmao (laughed my ass off) injects a carnivalesque refusal of this rationalizing, rationing discourse. Similarly, malarkey interprets Meyer's injunction that fans 'should be working on your own book right now' as basically "'omg why are you enjoying something when you could be making money!?!?!?'"

The fourth category of comments concerns the author's right to profit from legal ownership of his or her work. Commenters are adamant that no-one ought to be profiting from fanfic. Cassandra Clare is mentioned several times in disapproving terms. Clare, author of the bestselling *Mortal Instruments* series (2007–), is something of a mythical figure in Harry Potter fandom: she has certainly profited from fic, but her exact practices remain unclear. Some claim that *Mortal Instruments* is adapted from her fanfic, which work itself she has been accused of plagiarizing. She is sometimes said to have accepted money in return for producing fic on demand. The exact nature of Clare's crimes against fandom are rarely spelled out, but she has become a kind of symbol of bad practice:

With Cassandra Claire and the 50 Shades thing I can see a definite problem (it seriously disgusts me that CC is somehow successful because of her fanfic – not because her fanfic got her noticed, but because of the fact that, you know, she's a plagiarist as well as all the other fandom shit that went down with her (therealycats).

E.L. James, however, is specifically criticized for publishing adapted fanfic: 'The fact is, she took someone else's characters, wrote a fanfiction, and didn't have the imagination or took the effort to change it before she published it' (sugarbobbin). Creativity and effort deserve to be rewarded with money, and many commenters claim that while they hate *Twilight*, they would love to see Meyer sue James. Though ideally 'somebody should just sue them both for corrupting literature' (mjspice), and supporting either one would be 'like trying to decide whether you want to have a month-long bout of projectile vomiting or diarrhea' (sekhmet2), commenters agree that ultimately Meyer is in the moral and legal-rational right. No commenter clearly articulates exactly *why* it is wrong to make money from adapted fanfic, or even non-adapted fanfic. Some deep-seated cultural residue of Locke's link between first labour and the natural right exclusive ownership remains (1763, V: 27–8), and is evident in the arguments of legal defenders like Tushnet (1997) and Hetcher (2009), who are in favour of fanfic but not its commercialization. Other comments affirm this legal-rational authority in a common-sense tone:

seriously, who would be dumb enough to try and make money off their fan fic? (angelique_grace).

I really see no problem, unless someone tries to make money off fan fiction (blazinwolf).

Ofc [of course] they shouldn't profit off of it and they [the copyright holders] should go to town on those that do (antique_faery).

Commenters are willing to strike Cross's bargain: they will make no attempt to 'steal the dragon's gold'.

Cross goes on, 'offer to bring the dragon more gold and the dragon will be your friend', and in supporting the work of authors with liberal attitudes to fic, these fans effectively do just that. Respondents stress the economic benefit to the copyright holders of fanfic, and argue they should appreciate it for that reason:

if any of these authors who are so against having fanfiction made out of their works ever pass, in five-ten years who will remember them? Their fans will move in [typo for on?] because there is nothing left, and there will be no new fans because it's dead [...] I know many people (me included) that got interested into one fandom or another because of fan fiction. Authors/ Creators might want to take into consideration the commercial effect of that (uchiha_sister).

This accords with the arguments of Noda, who believes that derivative fan activity ought to be permitted as on balance it increases the body of work available to the public *and* economically benefits the copyright holder, *even* where the fan profits too (2008: see esp. 84, 2010: 151): a step the commenters were not prepared to make. Ogbu (2003) also advises that an over-restrictive regime is not in the copyright holder's interest, because it risks alienation and reputational damage. Fans make similar arguments in different language: seraphitta warns that 'if an author is going to go out of his/her way to stop/scare/shame fans, then that's how they permanently make their way to the library-borrowing list'. More power is attributed to the audience's economic power – to spend or withhold money – than their cultural transformational powers.

Some fans dismiss claims that fanfiction is illegal, undermining legal-rational authority claims by invoking their knowledge of the copyright system:

and as for 'it's illegal', that's lies, Diana Gabaldon can go drink some more of her own delusions [...] I've written papers on US copyright law so I KNOW it's a lie, all she's trying to do is scare/shame people (winegums).

At the request of a respondent, winegums goes on to explain the four-factor test for fair use in American law, and concludes, 'No one really knows whether fanfic, the freely available Internet kind [...] is illegal or not because no one's ever gone to court over free not-for-profit fan fiction, but it's a giant oversimplification to say that it's all illegal.' According to my understanding, and that of legal writers like Schwabach (2011), this is accurate. Lantagne (2011: 161) maintains that due to the flexible nature of the fair use doctrine, which must be applied case by case, 'a blanket proclamation is largely impossible'. She cites Gabaldon as an example of an author who seems 'entirely unaware of the doctrine of fair use' (2011: 173, 90n). On the thread, kirrst, who identifies him/herself as an attorney, takes a wary approach, arguing that 'fair use is a huge grey area and is completely unpredictable, and there are way too many people in this post waving the

term around like it's an infallible banner of protection'. There follows a debate between kirrst and other posters, who ultimately reconcile and agree that that they are arguing the same point: that fanfiction's legal state is indeterminate. Kirrst claims that personally, s/he 'certainly would never go after someone writing not-for-profit fanfiction for fun' but warns that it would 'naive to completely ignore the criticisms and possible issues'. S/he makes it clear that s/he is approaching the thread from a purely legal standpoint, agreeing with nightwing that anyone attempting to prosecute fanfic is 'selfish'. Kirrst positions him/herself as having a degree of learned authority in legal matters, and also as 'quite familiar' with fanfic. This is an interesting hedge. Excepting winegums, those commenters who position themselves as highly fannish are less likely to rely on purely legal arguments, instead making moral, common-sense and emotional statements. As *jeuexmacaron* puts it, 'jk rowling's legal bullshit puts a bad taste in my mouth, particularly how she'll shame the people involved even if they're ardent fans and didn't mean harm'. The author's *right* to prosecute is not exactly denied; instead a kind of *noblesse oblige* is suggested. Legal-rational authority, and the capitalist concept of an author's ownership, are maintained because rather than relying on legal interpretation to defend fanwork, these fans address the author's posited breach of a fan–author contract or relationship.

The final category of responses is amused dismissal of the idea that fanfiction could be so problematic, which casts a question mark over the importance of fiction generally. As noted, the first commenters perform eager spectatorship, waiting for an entertaining fight. Paparrati 'find[s] both fan fiction writers AND writers who can't deal with fan fiction [...] equally distasteful. So in short', and adds a gif of comedian Stephen Colbert eating popcorn (Figure 3).

The commenter prepares to be entertained by an argument about nonsense. Others perform cheerful responses or reactions aimed specifically at the authors: 'Sorry, George, I just started to fill a prompt on a lovely kinkmeme' (*margerydaw_s2*). This starts an embedded thread discussing the meme in question. Martin's claims to authority are so dismissed that a post of Martin's banning fanfic is appropriated into anticipation of what fans are planning to read and write. Fans do not perceive legitimacy in his statements, so they do not accept them. Traditional and charismatic authority are denied – only the tenuous claim to legal-rational remains. A discussion of the 'quality fic' (*jal80*) to come out of said meme commences.

The authors in general but Rice in particular are derided for pomposity:

She's delusional but I found her wording hilarious lol like 'It is absolutely necessary pertaining to my continued existence as an author of marvelous stories that you stop immediately' (nyanko).

She's so full of herself (*anna_drensevier*).

It seems Rice has tried to set herself up as a charismatic authority but failed, and is constructed as an object of mockery or pity. According to *dumpweeds*, all the authors 'need to get over it'. 'Cry harder tbh [to be honest]' remarks *mingemonster*. These comments dismiss the importance of the authors' claims – as *ensemble* puts it, 'LOL at Gabaldon calling it "immoral". REALLY THO? REALLY?' – but with it, places a question mark



Figure 3. Amused Colbert (popcorn.gif.com)

Source: © 2013 Comedy Partners.

over the importance of Gabaldon's fiction and fiction in general. Moral questions require gravitas or consequence to their outcome. The implication is that there is nothing worth that designation, at least in the work of the authors quoted.

Other commenters are amused by Rowling's custodial 'concern [...] that any Potter fan fiction remain PG-rated' because 'if young children were to stumble on Harry Potter in an X-rated story, that would be a problem'. Landwarinasia admits, 'this describes 50% of my internet activity from 2000 to 2005'. Eight commenters agree. Bodyline quotes Rowling's concern, then responds, 'LOOOOOOOOOOL'. Vanillateapot is 'pretty sure the first dirty fanfic i ever read (at the ripe old age of ten) was ron/hermione \o/'. The emoticon denotes a person throwing their arms into the air in glee, and is also utilized in the logo for the Archive of Our Own, a project by the Organization for Transformative Works. Fans refute Rowling with evidence that reading Potter porn at a young age did them no damage. Looking back on the experience is a source of great amusement in this thread. There is a broader argument here, about the dubiousness of adults telling children what they should be reading and what cultural activity is good for them. Batsubluie is a more reserved, acknowledging that 'In all honesty, I probably wouldn't have learned about sex and all their [sic] kinks if it wasn't for fanfiction', but adding that 'with that being said, 12 years old is waaay too young to learn about watersport and scat fetishes *shudders*', though luxis_lil is unconcerned: 'WHOOOPS. I learn [sic] about sex from H/Hr NC-17 fanfic at the age of 12. Sorry JKR'. Capslock again denotes flippancy; the colloquialism 'whoops' suggests a blameless and unimportant accident. Ellaellaehheh states, 'SORRY JK BUT WE NEED TO LEARN ABOUT SEX SOMEWHERE'. The apologies are of course disingenuous, but the implication here is more serious: that broader culture is failing to educate adolescents about the complexity and variety of sex.

The final type of dismissal is best summed up by el_jamon: 'Whatever. I love fanfiction.' These comments tend to be short and to the point: 'idec [I don't even care] i love



Figure 4. Pingu the penguin
 Source: © 2013 The Pygos Group.

fanfiction’, comments the_bluechannel. ‘I fail to give a fuck.*off to write more ASOIAF fics*’ adds aclanis_ivenill. Batsublu states, ‘lol I don’t care, fanfiction gives me life’, and follows the statement with an incongruous macro wherein the Claymation penguin Pingu slaps his own rear repeatedly (Figure 4). It is a carnivalesque, flippant gesture of unconcern. The implicit or explicit contract necessary for any form of authority is simply refused, and these comments probably refuse the capitalist/Romantic ideology of authorship most explicitly. The only way to stop these fans producing fanfic would be force, and that would be extremely difficult. As rouge_night puts it, ‘Cry all you want, it wont [sic] stop people from writing fanfics.’

Conclusions

Authorship is not dead. These fans might quote Barthes or other cultural authorities in theoretical support, but their very investment in these authorities, including canonical literature, belies the dismissal. Nor are fans necessarily unaware of the divide between these attitudes and those current in academia. Luxis_lil states that if s/he were a professional author, s/he:

would just be satisfied by 1) the money and 2) the fact that only the events I write are canon and nothing some 13 year old with Microsoft Word writes can change that (and I say this as someone that gets all Death of the Author all the time).

This commenter is aware that Barthesian theory would deny the discrepancy between the writings of a professional author and ‘some 13 year old with Microsoft word’; in fact, s/he often espouses (‘gets all’) those ideas. Yet s/he still believes, paradoxically, that ‘only’ the events the author writes are ‘canon’ – a word with a biblical genealogy – and ‘nothing’ the fan writes can be. Charismatic and traditional authority is denied to authors who attempt to ban fanfic, neither the quality of their work nor their public personas judged deserving of the investment. Maerhys invites those to ‘come down off the cross’,

denying them God-status by ironic association with the one of the most traditional examples of charismatic authority.

Though the *concept* of the Author lives, the fans play an important role in granting or denying it to particular figures. Author/ity is more readily granted rather to white male author-figures who perform a permissive attitude to fanfic and solidarity with fans, notably Whedon, which supports Ogbu's argument that draconian measures are rarely in a copyright holder's interests. Relatedly, authors whose cultural politics align with their fans' are more likely to be validated as author/ities. Foucault's author-function operates to influence interpretation of both text and the authority and seriousness of the author through his or her persona.

Legal-rational authority, and the capitalist right of the author to 'own' and profit from his or her work, are largely respected, though the fan can withhold patronage. As you-cantseus puts it, 'I don't buy books by authors who have taken extremely anti-fanfiction views. I don't give money to people who are trying to stop me from writing.' Arguments about the legality of fanfic are divided. In sum, then, to claim with Coppa (2006) that 'the author may be dead' is too simplistic. Fans' attitudes to authorship and authority are paradoxical and various, even as fanwork flourishes and proliferates. The Author is alive, but so is the scribbling fan, and the fans, en masse, may withhold or bestow legitimation through the operation of the author-function. The questions demanding investigation now are how particular author-figures and cultural authorities negotiate the productions of their fandoms, how authority is performed, and how it is accepted, legitimated or denied by the creative fan community.

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Note

1. Self-insertion fic, wherein the fanfic writer creates a proxy of him/herself and undertakes adventures in the given transmedia world, is generally frowned upon as self-indulgent and tiresome within fanfic circles.

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