

*Harry Potter* and Fanfiction: Filling in the Gaps

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**I.**

I believe that somewhere separated from me in space and time, Juliet died, Peter trembled, Robin Hood won and Harry Potter was eleven years old. At the least prompting, I form a plausible, autonomous being out of mere words. Of course, I know that none of these characters in which I invest so much imagination actually exist. I realize that this is fiction and that these minds I create are only imaginative constructs. But the temptation to “preserve the mimetic,” as James Phelan termed this phenomenon, is a tension that is constantly present in the endeavor of narrative interpretation (Phelan 25). Indeed, my desire to perpetuate the fictional into reality is not an artifact of stunted maturity or inadequate comprehension. It is not a shortcoming of my cognition, but rather a product of my cognitive inheritance. Lisa Zunshine explains that people need remarkably little prompting to infer the existence of a mind that persists beyond the descriptions provided (Zunshine 22). This very act of inference, which is so foundational to the way we imagine and understand characters and the stories they inhabit, implies the existence of fictional gaps. We bring our own memories, our own biases, and our own interests to the text in order to flesh out the narrative sketch we’re provided. We fill in the gaps. But these fictional gaps aren’t merely in the details. They can be large gaps too, and the slippage between fully textual readings and extratextual extrapolations means that the epistemologically indeterminable fictional world is almost infinitely open to interpretation. That’s where fanfiction comes in.

In this essay, I will analyze one work of fanfiction, *The Way Back to Daylight* by Kettle, for the way it negotiates and re-negotiates the “rules” of J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series in order to encourage us to read Rowling’s characters, Remus Lupin and

Sirius Black, in a new light. I will discuss Kettle's clever manipulation of Rowling's textual evidence, as well as Kettle's integration of *The Aeneid* as an allusive intertext thickening our interaction with her fanfiction. Kettle subverts Rowling's world even as she appropriates that world. In doing so, Kettle is drawing upon the languages of *Harry Potter*, *The Aeneid*, the fandom, and her own reading and experiential history. Such an endeavor points us not just toward thinking about intertextuality as a project of writing into gaps, but as evidence of our deep engagement with fiction. We love some stories so much we want to continue them beyond the last page.

### 1. Defining Fanfiction

Fanfiction is playing “what if” with existing stories. Basically, fanfiction is a story that is derived from another story.<sup>1</sup> Fanfiction is written and read by wide and diverse communities of fans, and these communities are based around fictional worlds from books, TV shows, movies, etc. The fans' allegiances and interests within those storyworlds further subdivide fanfiction communities. Much of fanfiction is published on the internet and websites for the publication of fanfiction perpetuate its thoroughly open nature—anyone with a computer and internet access may publish their fan texts easily.<sup>2</sup> I am concerned with prose narrative, but fanfiction can embody any number of forms: videos, music, art, poetry, essay, etc. As one would expect in such an open medium, the quality of writing in fanfiction varies widely. Perhaps because of this variance in skill and the medium's significant reliance upon another narrative, fanfiction is popularly derided as unsophisticated. But such an assessment fails to appreciate the enormous skill of

masterful fanfiction authors and neglects the lessons these authors offer regarding the mediation of narratives.

Much of fiction relies upon the essential elements of one author's storyworld for the construction and intelligibility of a new storyworld; fanfiction is a specific instance of this. A storyworld is the space, time and other boundaries within which the story takes place—it's the world we imagine when we read. As readers, we are prompted to imagine the storyworld through cues in the text, in greater or lesser detail depending on the information provided. The narrative from which the fanfiction is derived is called canon in the fanfiction world, however for my purposes, we will refer to the original narrative as "source narrative."

The communities of fanfiction, called "fandoms," and the kinds of fanfiction that are produced are extremely diverse, so I will be very careful here in delimiting what I am discussing. I am interested in a specific kind of fanfiction that strives to be congruent with the text from which it is derived while proposing ways to fill in "gaps" in that original text. By relying upon another narrative world for the intelligibility of a derivative narrative world that makes new connections and new arguments for the old story, fanfiction presents a fascinating opportunity for further understanding the way we fill fictional gaps. Fanfiction reinterprets the storyworld from which it is derived. Abigail Derecho writes that, when one reads fanfiction, "one is really reading two texts at once. The prior text is available and remains in the mind even as one reads the new version. The two texts resonate together in both the new text and the old one" (Derecho 73). In other words, fanfiction is a sophisticated interpretative "conversation" that requires fluency in several narrative languages. The kind of gap-filling, congruent fanfiction I am

interested in can dramatically change the way we read the original text and it is this power that I am interested in understanding.

## 2. Fanfiction and Intertextuality

Fanfiction is a thoroughly intertextual endeavor, and in this way it is not fundamentally different than the rest of literature. Intertextuality is the inevitable condition of all texts because every text consists of language and forms already available to us (Abbott 192, 2002). Intertextuality differs from allusion and imitation in that these are conscious, selective processes, whereas intertextuality is an inescapable condition. The term intertextuality has been appropriated for many theoretical goals, including elucidating the kind of allusions it was originally meant to displace (Abbott 812, 1997), but the main idea remains that no text exists alone.<sup>3</sup> No author, even the enviable Rowling, has penned a completely original universe. So, if we identify the main impulse behind fanfiction as derivative or appropriative—taking an author’s work and bending it to one’s own ends—arguably, all of literature falls in with fanfiction.<sup>4</sup> Any parody can be considered fanfiction. Any story that draws upon history or oral tradition can be considered fanfiction. Even Virgil’s *The Aeneid* can be considered fanfiction based on Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. What’s the difference that makes fanfiction, then? One difference that makes fanfiction special may be the way in which fanfiction relies upon the source narrative.

I am interested in meaning. I’m drawn, therefore, to Gerard Genette’s sense of “criticism’s ability to locate, describe and thus stabilize a text’s significance, even if that significance concerns an intertextual relation to other texts” (Allen 97, 2002). Thus, the

terms Genette provides are useful for me. Genette replaces intertextuality with *transtextuality* as an umbrella term (Allen 101, 2002). He defines transtextuality as “all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with another text” (Genette quoted in Allen 101), and he defines five subordinate kinds of transtextuality.

These five subordinate kinds of transtextuality are: intertextuality, paratextuality, architextuality, metatextuality, and hypertextuality (Chandler). Genette’s intertextuality is defined as quotation, plagiarism, and allusion (Chandler). Paratextuality consists of all that surrounds the text and is broken down into two constituent parts: peritextuality, which is the titles, epigraphs, book covers, dedications, and so on that surround the body of the book; and epitextuality, which is the authorial notes, the interviews, the commentaries that float outside the text, yet may still influence the way the text is read (Allen 103). Architextuality is the text’s relation to a genre or genres (Chandler). Metatextuality is concealed or explicit commentary of one text upon another text (Chandler). And finally, hypertextuality is one text’s reliance upon another text, the “hypotext,” whether announced or concealed (Chandler). Genette defines hypertext as, “any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary” (Genette quoted in Allen 107-108). Thus, the hypotext here is *Harry Potter* and this term is pragmatically synonymous with canon and source text. Fanfiction most obviously incorporates hypertextuality, but we will see that it takes advantage of all kinds of Genette’s transtextuality, none of which are mutually exclusive.

The fanfiction in which I am interested strives to be like the source narrative, or the hypotext, from which it is derived in order to gain authority and make new

interpretations of the old text. The hypertext of fanfiction is thus also metatextual. The highest praise of a well-told fanfic (a “fanfic” is one instance of a fanfiction story) is that “the story was really convincing” (Driscoll 88), in the context of the source narrative. Weirdly, fanfiction’s intimate imitation of the source narrative requires not only a complex understanding of the original text, but also a subtle subversion of that text. Indeed, Laurent Jenny, commenting upon Genette, writes: “the processes of transtextuality involved in hypertextual translation are never neutral and always involve a resignification or semiotic utilization of a previous formal structure for means other than those produced within the original structure” (Jenny quoted in Allen 113). Fanfiction does not endeavor to merely copy the source narrative. Fanfiction *interprets* the source narrative, and the kind of fanfiction in which I am interested does so by a kind of overreading that involves expanding the source narrative through pre-existing or proposed gaps.

### 3. Filling in Gaps

There are always gaps in the source narrative—spaces that are not and cannot be fully determined by information in the text. H. Porter Abbott writes that, “narratives are by their nature riddled with gaps” (Abbott 83, 2002). We always have to bring our own life experiences to reading in order to make sense of the narratives we encounter (Abbott 83, 2002), even if this sense-making is as “minor” as recognizing a description of an event from life in order to comprehend the scene (Gerrig 28). Richard Gerrig, a psychologist interested in storyworlds, writes: “Even when we interact with what seems to be a complete representation, we are hard at work filling in around the edges” (Gerrig

29). There is always something we have to infer in order to make language make sense. The narrative discourse gives us guidance in filling in gaps (Abbott 84, 2002), but the discourse can never be fully determinative. It can never describe everything in the storyworld in all the ways that we can potentially imagine it. We always bring our own biases, our own memories, our own predispositions and moods to the reading experience and these cause us to allocate more attention to some things in the discourse, and ignore other things. The ways we fill in the gaps with our own experiences makes our realization of the discourse—the specific way we imagine the story—entirely personal.<sup>5</sup> Abbott writes: “The reading of narrative is a fine tissue of insertions . . . that we make as we move from point to point. And though this can often lead to overreading, it also gives the experience of narrative much of its power” (Abbott 84, 2002). Fanfiction is an extended exercise in overreading.

Overreading occurs when we attribute qualities, motives, moods, ideas, judgments, even events to a narrative when there is no direct evidence in the discourse (Abbott 82, 2002). As I described earlier in this essay, our minds may be predisposed to overread in certain ways, such as inferring a mind where only a fictional construct exists. Indeed, Abbott writes: “Our minds seem to abhor narrative vacuums. We try to fill them in” (Abbott 82, 2002). These gaps are not “mistakes,” but are spaces that lend narratives their enthralling power. Wolfgang Iser writes: “it is only through the inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism” (Iser 280). In a fundamental way, these gaps contribute to the vitality of narratives, the kind of vitality that invites us to keep engaging with the narrative beyond the last page.<sup>6</sup> If we are interested in the intentional meaning of the text, our gap filling is constrained by the source narrative. Even with these constraints, there is

always some “wobble room” for fully textual interpretations. Thus, these gaps offer a tantalizing opportunity for fanfiction to re-negotiate the narrative, creating alternatives or extrapolations beyond the discourse as it is presented originally.

#### 4. “The Author Who Wouldn’t Shut Up”<sup>7</sup>

The kind of fanfiction I am interested in attempts to limit itself to congruency with the evidence of intended meaning presented in the source narrative. This brings up the implicit question of who or what has ultimate authority over the source narrative’s storyworld, and the meaning(s) that we infer from that storyworld. In the fandom, it is often accepted that anything J.K. Rowling says or writes about Harry Potter—in interviews, on her website, in supplementary books, in the *Harry Potter* series—is considered “canon.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, the fandom often turns to paratextual evidence as an authority—especially epitextual evidence. Thus, Rowling’s epitextual intentions are given credence even when those intentions are not necessarily represented in the text of the seven published Harry Potter books.

When Rowling specifies “facts” and meanings in her universe that have not been articulated in the books, it is an instance of intentional fallacy. Even as much as Rowling is the creator of the Potter universe, if her intentions are not instantiated in the text, they cannot, strictly speaking, contribute to the text’s meaning. In their classic article on the intentional fallacy, W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley wrote: “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of literary art” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 468). The reason that the real, living author cannot be trusted as an absolute authority on her work is because real people are always

changing. H. Porter Abbott explains: “The real author is a complex, continually changing individual of whom we may never have any secure knowledge” (Abbott 77, 2002). In other words: we can’t know Rowling’s mind, but we can know her texts. And her texts should exhibit a body of discursive evidence that realizes her intentions: “what is said or implied is relevant; what is irrelevant has been excluded, like lumps from pudding and ‘bugs’ from machinery” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 469). There are enough gaps to fill in Rowling’s world without her creating more outside the pages.

But Rowling speaks as an authority on the world she created, and much of the fandom treats her as an authority. As Genette’s paratextual project shows, things outside of the text routinely influence the way we perceive the text. Thus, it is important to consider some of her epitextual proposals, even if their authoritative status is questionable, because her comments often serve as a way to justify readings, and contribute to recurring motifs within the fandom.

A classic example of Rowling’s epitextual authority is her announcement on October 19, 2007 in Carnegie Hall that she intended Dumbledore to be gay (Edward). When asked by an audience member whether Dumbledore, who believed in the prevailing power of love, ever fell in love himself, Rowling answered: “I always thought of Dumbledore as gay . . . Dumbledore fell in love with Grindelwald and that added to his horror when Grindelwald showed himself to be what he was” (Edward). This announcement was surprising because there is no decisive textual evidence for Dumbledore’s sexuality. The only character that broaches the subject is the notoriously unreliable reporter Rita Skeeter who devotes “an entire chapter to the whole Potter-Dumbledore relationship” in her biography on Dumbledore (Rowling 27, *Hallows*).

Skeeter comments: “It’s been called unhealthy, even sinister . . . there is no question that Dumbledore took an unnatural interest in Potter from the word go” (Rowling 27, *Hallows*). Playing on cultural associations between homosexuality and pedophilia through Skeeter, Rowling alerts us in the seventh book, for the first time, to the idea that people thought Dumbledore gay. Harry is incensed at the innuendo of inappropriate attention: “Lies!” he bellows (Rowling 28, *Hallows*). If the assumption that Dumbledore was a pedophile is incorrect, as Harry signals us, we can just as easily assume that Rita’s assumption that Dumbledore was gay is also incorrect.

Is Dumbledore’s romantic relationship with Grindelwald in the text? Most of the description of Dumbledore’s relationship with Grindelwald comes from third parties. Bathilda Bagshot describes them as “brilliant young boys, they got on like a cauldron on fire” (Rowling 356, *Hallows*). But Bathilda Bagshot, who is very old, is also described as batty and later found dead in a rotting house. Rita Skeeter asks whether it was “lingering affection” for Grindelwald that caused Dumbledore to delay so long before embarking on the decisive duel that would destroy his “once best friend” (Rowling 359, *Hallows*). We know that Grindelwald and Dumbledore plotted together over a summer when Grindelwald was visiting his aunt. We know that they became very close, and that a horrible accident occurred in which Dumbledore’s disabled younger sister was a casualty. The death of Dumbledore’s sister was the greatest regret of Dumbledore’s life. After this tragedy, Dumbledore and Grindelwald split up. Grindelwald followed an evil path, continuing to plot on world domination. Dumbledore, after making the sobering discovery that he could not trust himself with power, turned away from these temptations.

There is nothing in the books that refutes the theory that Dumbledore and Grindelwald *were* just best friends, caught up in adolescent hubris and devastated by a horrible accident. We can only construct circumstantial evidence post-hoc for Dumbledore's sexuality. An already-dead Dumbledore expresses the hope that Grindelwald showed remorse for his horrific actions later in life, and Harry suggests that Grindelwald tried to stop Voldemort from breaking into Dumbledore's tomb (Rowling 719, *Hallows*). Whether Harry understood the nature of their relationship or not, Harry frames Grindelwald's redemption as a result of his affection for Dumbledore: Grindelwald tried to stop Voldemort in order to preserve Dumbledore's final resting place. In response, Dumbledore only wipes his eyes.

Dumbledore's love for Grindelwald is easily read into the scenes, but is not necessary for the comprehension of the narrative. Yet Rowling appears to believe her announcement regarding Dumbledore's sexuality was not at all extratextual. When she was asked why she didn't make Dumbledore's sexuality more explicit in the books, Rowling answered: "Because I really think that's self-evident . . . That was a key part of the ending of the story" (Ahearn). She elaborated: "It's in the book. It's very clear in the book" (Ahearn). But it wasn't very clear to everyone. In fact, Rowling apparently anticipated different readings of Dumbledore and Grindelwald's relationship. She said: "I think a child will see a friendship and I think a sensitive adult may well understand that it was an infatuation" (Ahearn). Acknowledging the diversity of her audience, Rowling may have purposely written Dumbledore's relationship with Grindelwald ambiguously.

The shock surrounding the "outing" of Dumbledore registered in newspapers and magazine articles around the world, but it was unsurprising to certain members of the

fanfiction community who had been positing queer readings of Dumbledore for a long time (Tosenberger “Dumbledore” 200). Indeed, the fandom was not so much shocked by the prospect of homosexuality within the Harry Potter world (queer readings of *Harry Potter*, called “slash,” are common), but by the idea that Rowling condones a slash reading (Tosenberger “Dumbledore” 202). Rowling even acknowledges the potential she is unleashing for further fanfiction when she comments, “Oh my god, the fan fiction now, eh?” after the revelation (Edward). At the very least, her comment reveals an awareness of her influence in the fandom.

How much one relies upon the real Rowling as the ultimate authority on her books is up to individual fans. There is, however, a construct that we can point to that accounts for the way the text is assembled, and the way these patterns create meaning. H. Porter Abbott defines the implied author as “that sensibility (that combination of feeling, intelligence, knowledge, and opinion) that ‘accounts for’ the narrative. It accounts for the narrative in the sense that the implied authorial views that we find emerging in the narrative *are consistent with all the elements of the narrative discourse that we are aware of*” (Abbott 77). The implied author is a totally textual construct, inferred by the reader from the reading experience.

The reason an implied author construct is useful is because we can never understand the intentionality of a real person—we can only, ideally, access the meaning of a text through the evidence presented in the discourse. But as we have seen, Rowling routinely flouts this. As newspaper columnist Jeffrey Weiss put it in an open letter to Rowling: “Is Dumbledore gay? He is for you, apparently. But unless you said it in the actual books, must he be so for me? Your saying so now makes it harder for me to

imagine anything different. Do you really want to limit your fictional world that way?” (Weiss). Granted, some readers will willfully ignore the real Rowling (and, possibly, Rowling as implied author as well) in order to construct their own fantasies based upon her world. But other readers rely upon her evidence because she is the creator of the fictional realm in which the rest of us are “guests.” This is a continual tension in the fandom: where does the text end? Where does Rowling’s creation stop?

Part of the difficulty in understanding flesh and blood Rowling versus implied author Rowling’s authority over the storyworld comes from the problem of writing a series. From 1997 to 2007, the series was “under construction.” Between each installment, Rowling was the only person who knew what would be written next. This period could last years and would often be accompanied by a drought of new information about *Harry Potter*. Thus, fanfiction authors looking to be inspired by some new tidbit would be titillated by every interview with Rowling during which she might let spill some new plot details. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse write in the introduction to their anthology of essays about fanfiction: “serial production is the ultimate writerly text. It invites the viewer to enter, interpret, and expand the text. In so doing, the open-source text in particular invites fan fiction as an expansion to the source universe and as interpretive fan engagement where the fan not only analyzes the text but also must constantly renegotiate her analyses” (Busse and Hellekson 6). Any comment Rowling made about the books during this time had the potential to turn up in the text, thus nothing she said was taken for granted because it could negate or affirm previous analyses.

But now that the series has finished, we've discovered that Rowling herself has a strong tendency to "preserve the mimetic" (Phelan 28). She created a world so detailed that not all the "facts" made it into the books. Rowling is able to describe characters and facts about the wizarding world that never appear in the published text. Rowling's whole website is populated with these details, details obsessively collected by fans and indexed in online lexicons. This is the paratextual apparatus that surrounds the source narrative. These details, in which Rowling "fills in the gaps" of her fictional world, show that she as an author is subject to the same psychological impulses to "read beyond" imaginary descriptions as her readers. Rowling is not imagining a textual construct when she writes. She is imagining Harry Potter and his peers as people existing in a world that is like our own.

When we imagine, we imagine a world that has the potential to be as detailed and complex as our own. Because of our tendency to imagine fictional worlds as alternate realities mostly like our own, we ask questions about the text that can never be fully determined. For instance, someone once asked Douglas Adams what kind of computer one of his characters used. Adams answered:

The book is a work of fiction. It's a sequence of words arranged to unfold a story in a reader's mind. There is no such actual, real person as Arthur Dent. He has no existence outside the sequence of words designed to create an idea of this imaginary person in people's minds. There is no objective real world I am describing, or which I can enter, and pick up his computer, look at it and tell you what model it is, or turn it over and read off its serial number for you. It doesn't exist. (Adams qtd. in Weiss).

Strictly speaking, Adams is right. Fictional figures and fictional worlds are not real; their existence is not like our existence. But what Adams takes for granted in his cut and dried response is that as readers we *infer* the existence of details beyond what is described in the narration.

When Rowling created the series, she imagined the world of *Harry Potter* as a world fully fleshed out. Even if a fact isn't stated in the series, Rowling can theoretically specify it because it *could* exist. Outside of the details she chose to narrate in her published novels, Rowling fills in her own gaps, the gaps that interest her. Sometimes she tells us about them, but we will never know the world in the way that Rowling knows her world because we are not Rowling. In turn, we've created our own subjective *Harry Potter* realities, fleshed out by the experiences we bring to the text. It's this tension between the determinable (the narrative "blueprint" Rowling provides in the seven *Harry Potter* books) and the subjective (the unique ways we each realize Rowling's stories in our imaginations) that characterize *Harry Potter* fanfiction. Add to this the apparatus of a network of communities continually debating interpretations of the text and augmenting that text with new ideas, new events, and new themes that get repeated, changed and shared, and we have a mere inkling of the diversity and complexity of the fandom.

##### 5. Canon, Fanon, and the Fan

Understanding fiction is at once a completely individual endeavor and a communal one because, although our individual rendering of the text will ultimately be personal, the implied author has assembled a narrative with certain intentional meanings meant to be accessible to all readers. The implied author implicates a certain kind of reader, and to a certain extent we all strive to fit into that ideal audience.<sup>9</sup> Further, we all exist in communities and our peers, our culture, and our time always contextualize our reading. The fandom is teeming with diversity, but communities of readers who share common interpretive arguments also constitute it.

The fandom perpetuates certain readings over and over again. Deborah Kaplan writes: “In the interpretive community of fandom, one individual’s interpretation in a work of fan fiction can inform another fan’s reaction to a later moment in the source text. Fans in a given community may accept as fact some of these shared interpretations and analyses. Thus *fanon*, the noncanonical knowledge about a source text, is the sum of the community’s shared interpretive acts” (Kaplan 136). These shared interpretive acts can be organized along the lines of justifications of a romantic pairing between characters in the source text (called “ships”), or popular ways of construing the source text. Busse and Hellekson explain: “Fanon often creates particular details or character readings even though the canon does not fully support it—or, at times, outright contradicts it” (Busse and Hellekson 9). Fanon is inspired by canon, but it takes on a life of its own as fans persuaded by these interpretation perpetuate those interpretations until they gain a status almost like that of canon.

An illustration of this is that fanfiction representations of Remus tend to be different from Rowling’s Remus. In fanfiction, Remus is often presented as more melancholy, controlled, and shy because, ostensibly, he has had to hide his lycanthropy and has struggled to keep friends because of this. In Rowling’s series, we see a more open and humorous Remus in book three, as well as a more assertive and angry Remus in books five, six and seven than the closed-off, angst-filled character encountered in fanfiction. This is just one example of many possible fanon phenomena that are constantly shared and are constantly changing.

With the advent of the internet, fanfiction communities have now become even more open: “An individual fan can now make interpretive statements about

characterization in a personal blog in a fan-saturated community such as Livejournal.com or Jounalfen.net, and the statements can become a part of the fandom's collective interpretation even if the individual makes no attempt to publicize them in a formal fan forum" (Kaplan 137). Thus, an individual reader's experience of the source narrative meets a community of interpretations upon interpretations of that source narrative that clash and complement each other to create a larger whole of understanding. As Busse and Hellekson write: "A fan's understanding of the source is always already filtered through the interpretations and characterizations existing in the fantext. In other words, the community of fans creates a communal (albeit contentious and contradictory) interpretation in which a large number of potential meanings, directions, and outcomes co-reside" (Busse and Hellekson 7). Fanfiction is consciously, inevitably intertextual, not just in the way that it spins out of Rowling's source narrative, but in the way that it interacts with the whole body of fan responses to that source text. In the comments of every fanfic published online you can see this collaboration in action: readers respond to fanfiction writers--inspiring, encouraging, disagreeing, correcting, creating. Together, they realize a fuller world of fictional understanding.

## II.

I will analyze one fanfic, *The Way Back to Daylight*, written by Kettle. My main purpose in this analysis is to trace the ways that Kettle negotiates and re-negotiates the rules of Rowling's source narrative—especially regarding romance and death—in order to persuade us to re-read *Harry Potter* in light of her interpretations. She presents the reader with scenarios that can potentially augment the source narrative, or at least offer

(plausible) fantasies of an alternative to the “reality” Rowling provides. In order to do this convincingly, Kettle must demonstrate an intimate understanding of the canon. As Busse and Hellekson note: “An understanding of canon is particularly important for the creators of fan texts because they are judged on how well they stick to or depart from canon” (Busse and Hellekson 10). So, Kettle starts with the cues Rowling has provided in the *Harry Potter* series for an ideal reader’s comprehension of her intentions, and adds to this some part of her personal understanding and experience of the source narrative, as well as some part of the fandom’s influence upon her personal understanding of that source narrative. Kettle’s personal realization of *Harry Potter* can never be the same as anybody else’s, but Kettle shares the experience of the same source text with her audience. Her unique perspective on that source text informs her interpretive re-writing of the books through fanfiction. She creates another story world, derived from *Harry Potter*, which we each comprehend communally and individually, just as we do all other narratives. This hypertextual interaction of storyworlds reminds us not only of the complex transtextual and intertextual structure that supports all our literary endeavors, but also of the complex human mind behind all comprehension.

Kettle’s fanfiction, *The Way Back to Daylight*, is a resurrection fic set in the time after Harry has left Hogwarts and the war has ended. It was published in 2006-2007 on the author’s livejournal after the release of the sixth book and before the release of the seventh book. Kettle is working with the uncertainty I noted before: the series is still “under construction,” and many of the characters’ fates in which Kettle deals are yet to be decided. Thus, her hypotext is open and not fully determined. It’s very important to keep this in mind because now, post-seventh book, the predictions Kettle made may seem pure

fantasy. At the time she wrote her story, though, her interpretations were made within a different framework of knowledge—the knowledge we had as readers of the series through the sixth book.

*The Way Back to Daylight* is about Remus Lupin and his quest to solve a prophecy, as well as visit Sirius, in the world of the dead. The story is premised on the theory that Remus and Sirius were in love. After Sirius died, Remus took up with Sirius' cousin, Nymphadora Tonks, but Kettle argues that no subsequent relationship could live up to the memory of Remus' love for Sirius. Tonks leaves Remus; and when the opportunity arises for Remus to seek Sirius in the realm of an underworld inspired by *The Aeneid*, Remus risks everything for the chance of seeing Sirius again. Kettle sets herself two foundational problems here. First, she must argue why Remus and Sirius were in love, and how Harry never knew about it during the series. Second, she must explain why and how it would be possible for Remus to seek Sirius in the land of the dead and bring him back. To do this, she must muster the power of evidence given in the source narrative and bend it in order to give her interpretations plausibility. As Deborah Kaplan writes: “The reader, before ever beginning a specific work of fan fiction, already knows the physical appearances of the primary characters, as well as their back-stories, their reactions to certain life events, their voices, their base characterizations, as well as fanon constructions of character” (Kaplan 136). Kettle is working with all of these variables and more as she strives to convince her knowledgeable reader that she is an authority who can be trusted regarding the source narrative.

## 1. Establishing Authority through the Source Text

Right away, Kettle addresses the “problem” of Remus’ romantic relationship with Tonks in the prologue. The first scene is focalized through Tonks as she rummages through Remus’ sock drawer intending to borrow a pair of wool socks and instead stumbles upon two letters and a photograph. The photograph, the earliest of Remus Tonks has ever seen, is of Remus and Sirius when they were young at a bar: “saluting the camera with overflowing mugs, grinning like they owned the world” (Kettle, part 1). Already, Kettle is making some complex interpretive moves. First, we infer that Tonks is living with Remus and that he is currently away from the house (thus, her ability to rummage through sock drawers unsupervised). Second, we understand that Tonks has never seen photographs of young Remus before, presumably because Remus himself destroyed them.<sup>10</sup> Why would the only thing Remus saves be a picture of him and Sirius?

Tonks examines the photograph:

She'd often wondered what their relationship had been like in their youth, and she couldn't help being interested by their behaviour in the photograph. Remus's arm was looped over Sirius's shoulders, his long-fingered hand dangling loose and open above his lover's heart. It could have been a gesture between friends, nothing more, until Remus turned to kiss Sirius's earring, his mouth curving with bliss. Sirius twisted in his chair and their lips met, wet and open. (Kettle part 1).<sup>11</sup>

Kettle puts forward the familiar idea that the nature of Remus and Sirius’ relationship was ambiguous, unspecified, but then specifies the nature of that relationship.

Kettle echoes the evidence from Rowling’s books here: everything we see regarding Remus and Sirius could be interpreted as just a close friendship. Remus’ hand dangling above Sirius’ heart “could have been a gesture between friends, nothing more” (Kettle part 1). But Kettle specifies the nature of Remus’ gesture in the photograph: “Remus turned to kiss Sirius’ earring, his mouth curving with bliss” (Kettle part 1). Not

only is Remus kissing Sirius (which in itself could easily be dismissed as playfulness), but also the kiss Kettle describes is “bliss.” Kettle takes it further when Sirius “twisted in his chair and their lips met, wet and open.” (Kettle, part 1). Remus’ comparatively chaste kiss might have been argued away, but Sirius’ baldy erotic kiss shows not just cool “bliss,” but desire. Indeed, the narrator anticipates her own conclusion by pre-empting Tonks’ discovery: “[Remus’] long-fingered hand [was] dangling loose and open above his *lover’s* heart” (Kettle part 1, emphasis added). Even as Kettle admits the ambiguity of their relationship, her narrator determines from the beginning that Remus and Sirius’ relationship is inevitable, and obvious.

How does Tonks react to this new knowledge? She turns the photograph over and sees the date: March 1979 and attempts to remember what she was doing then: “she couldn't remember anything about that year except her birthday party (fairy costumes and a purple cake) and a few Christmas presents (*The Amazing Agatha: Auror Adventures*, a box of sparkly hair-ties, and a puffskein she'd named Squeak)”<sup>12</sup> (Kettle part 1). Kettle invokes canonical evidence regarding the thirteen-year age difference between Remus and Tonks to implicitly argue for the corresponding differences in their histories and experiences; differences that she argues ultimately make them incompatible. At roughly nineteen, Remus had already fallen in love and is fighting a war. Tonks named her puffskein Squeak during the same period. Tonks initially tries to erase the differences between herself and Remus by ignoring them. She resolves to put the photograph away and return the letters without reading them.

But Tonks cannot ignore the obvious importance of these objects. She notices-- “the letter smelt of old ink and paper and faintly, strangely, of sweat. It was creased all

over; it had been scrunched and folded and straightened and pressed a hundred times. She couldn't put it away.” (Kettle part 1). The well-worn nature of the keepsakes Remus has hoarded signal their importance. Tonks opens one of the letters from Sirius and reads, among other things, this: “I love you. I know I said it before but I thought it was just love. I thought it was just like people normally mean but honestly I can't do anything without you.” (Kettle part 1). Among descriptions of battle, confessions of infidelity and pleas for forgiveness, Tonks reads the desperation in Sirius' call to Remus. Sirius ends the letter: “Moony, I love you. I belong to you.” (Kettle part 1), using the nickname with which Tonks has never addressed Remus, as all his friends who called him by that name are dead. Upon careful reflection, Tonks realizes that Remus has never loved her in the same way he loved Sirius. She realizes that he is occupying the “hastily written epilogue” of his life, while her story is only beginning (Kettle part 1). Finally, she resolves to seek the desperate love that Remus and Sirius have already shared for herself. Tonks leaves Remus.

This may seem like a romance novel, and indeed it should. Slash fiction, of which *The Way Back to Daylight* is a part, has genre antecedents in both romance and porn. Slash, which is written primarily by heterosexual women, means pairing any two same-sex characters romantically, and often involves sex. Fanfiction studies has generally understood slash as the intersection of porn and romance: “whereas porn transforms romance, romance subverts pornography's abstraction from and depersonalization of sex/gender relationships, ... fan fiction recasts sex in terms of intimacy” (Driscoll 83). Thus, slash is often seen as a feminist reworking of porn. Fanfiction does not necessarily involve slash, romance, or porn—although it is very rare to find a story that excludes any

of these three entirely (Driscoll 83). These “low” generic influences and fanfiction’s involvement with popular culture contribute to the way that fanfiction is perceived. Catherine Driscoll writes: “Fan fiction, like romance, is commonly represented outside its reading communities as immature because of its indiscriminating and excessive investment in popular culture” (Driscoll 85). *The Way Back to Daylight* is inevitably contextualized by generic and interpretive conventions within the fandom.

Imitation of the source narrative implicitly calls upon generalizations that easily translate into genre-like influences. As Genette explains, imitation of a hypotext is not easy and is not a neutral endeavor:

“For to imitate a particular text in its particularity first means that one should establish that text’s idiolect—i.e., identify its specific stylistic and thematic features—and then generalize them: that is, constitute them as a matrix of imitation, or a network of mimeticisms, which can serve indefinitely” (Genette quoted in Herman 1045-1046).

In striving to join Rowling’s narrative voice, the fanfiction author must generalize her themes, characterizations, etc. in order to use those elements for different interpretive ends. In doing so, the hypertext creates a sort of “genre” out of the hypotext. This is most obviously seen in the apparatus of interpretive engagements seen in the fanon. The construals of the source narrative that get perpetuated into fanon are often clichéd in nature—Sirius is wild, Remus is demure, etc. These generalizations arise out of repeated readings of the text, tweaked, and shared throughout the fandom. These readings become themselves like genre, and join and interact with the romantic and pornographic inheritances of fanfiction. But these generic inheritances do not preclude a fanfiction author’s ability to make sophisticated interpretive arguments about a same-sex relationship within the source narrative, no matter how much has been theorized about fanfiction authors’ motives for doing so. Kettle has specified Remus and Sirius’ romantic

relationship out of a web of possibilities. It wasn't chaste, but erotic. It wasn't just physical, but emotionally desperate. This is the kind of relationship Kettle projects for Remus and Sirius into the space Rowling provides.

## 2. Reading Remus and Sirius Together

There is no textual evidence in the *Harry Potter* series that refutes the possibility of a romantic relationship between Remus and Sirius. Although the relationship is still controversial in the fandom (as any “ship” inevitably is)<sup>13</sup>, many readers found Remus/Sirius<sup>14</sup> to be the most plausible homosexual coupling before Rowling made her announcement regarding Dumbledore.<sup>15</sup> As Catherine Tosenberger writes: “Prior to Dumbledore’s outing, the characters most likely to be read by fans as (possibly) canonically queer were Remus Lupin and Sirius Black” (Tosenberger 203). The reasons for this are many, but much of the evidence parallels the “close friendship” ostensibly shared between Grindelwald and Dumbledore. Kettle’s use of this textual evidence, and her further specification of the nature of Remus and Sirius’ relationship constitutes a metatextual commentary upon Rowling’s books. In making her arguments, Kettle is implicitly asking us to go back to Rowling and re-read in light of her analyses.

When we first see Remus and Sirius together in Rowling’s books, Remus walked up to Sirius and “embraced Black like a brother” (Rowling 344, *Azkaban*). It was widely believed that Sirius betrayed James and Lily to their death, but we soon discover that “little Peter Pettigrew” (Rowling 207, *Azkaban*) was the traitor instead. James and Sirius were best friends, “both very bright,” and an exceptional pair of “troublemakers” (Rowling 204, *Azkaban*). Their former professor, Minerva McGonagall, describes James

and Sirius as “ring leaders of their little gang” (Rowling 204, *Azkaban*), which included Remus and Peter. We learn through McGonagall that Dumbledore suspected a traitor in James’ close group of friends around the time he and Lily were murdered (Rowling 205, *Azkaban*). We can reasonably extrapolate the tension and distrust in that intimate group during that war-torn period, tension that probably tore at the fabric of the group’s friendship. Sirius, as James’ best friend, was thought by everyone to be the ideal secret-keeper for the young family. But Sirius convinced James and Lily to switch to Peter at the last moment without telling Remus or anyone else, thinking that Peter would be the last person anyone would suspect of being entrusted with so much power. When Remus finally sees Sirius again thirteen years later, we learn that Remus was kept out of the loop because Sirius suspected him of treachery. But years of distrust and misunderstanding are apparently elided in an instant with a brotherly hug and a forgiving phrase: “Not at all, Padfoot, old friend” (Rowling 373, *Azkaban*). This is the past that grays Remus’ hair and fills his smile with “secrets” in the fanon (Kettle part 1). It is against this dramatic backdrop—war, betrayal, death, prison—that Remus and Sirius’ relationship is contextualized.

As long as Sirius is alive during the series, Rowling often refers to he and Remus together. At the end of book four, Dumbledore orders Sirius to “lie low at Lupin’s for a while” (Rowling 713, *Goblet*). In *The Order of the Phoenix*, we see Remus and Sirius jointly parent Harry. Sirius refuses to explain the state of the war to Harry until Remus enters the room, and when heated argument erupts between Sirius and Ron’s mother, Molly, Remus is the only one able to control Sirius.<sup>16</sup> Rowling writes the scene: “‘Molly, you’re not the only person at this table who cares about Harry,’ said Lupin sharply.

‘Sirius, sit *down*.’ ” (Rowling 90, *Phoenix*). Later, Remus ends the conversation: “I think Molly’s right, Sirius. We’ve said enough” (Rowling 97, *Phoenix*). Sirius is Harry’s godfather, but Remus demonstrates that he has a say in parenting too. At Christmas, Sirius and Remus give Harry a gift from both of them (Rowling 501, *Phoenix*) and it is implied throughout *The Order of the Phoenix* that Remus frequently stays at Grimmauld Place. It is still possible to read profound friendship into these facts—after all, Remus and Sirius are the last (good) surviving friends of James and Lily—but one can also easily read a romantic relationship into an association that is clearly parental in nature. The two share a complicated past, and Remus is the only long-standing companion Sirius has left.

In Kettle’s fic, Tonks reflects on the difference between the Sirius Remus saw and the Sirius everyone else knew after Azkaban: “Remus always spoke of Sirius as though he’d been reckless, powerful and charming, but Tonks could only remember desperation and helplessness, and the sound of Sirius yelling at someone in another room, the words muffled . . . Everyone else had focused on the changes wrought by grief and Azkaban; only Remus had tried to bring Sirius back, to restore him” (Kettle part 1). Kettle makes Remus the only one who can *know* Sirius as he truly is. It has not escaped fans that Remus and Sirius are also the only characters whose animal forms are sexually compatible, and that the meanings of their names are also intimately related. Remus is a werewolf and Sirius’ animagus form is a large black dog. The name Lupin is related to the moon. The name Sirius refers to the dog and death star. Moon and star, dog and wolf: Rowling has made more out of lesser hints than this.

The obstacle for many readers to being convinced that Remus and Sirius could have been a couple is explaining how Harry didn’t pick up on it during the books, which

are entirely focalized from his point of view. Kettle accounts for this by arguing first that Harry was an oblivious teenage boy and second that Hermione, ever the wisest, told Harry about Remus and Sirius after they had left Hogwarts. Kettle writes Harry's explanation: "Hermione told me. She saw the two of you, years ago, when we stayed at Grimmauld place over the holidays" (Kettle part 2). Hermione accurately predicted how disconcerting the idea that Remus and Sirius were together would be for Harry, so she delayed the revelation. Kettle further argues that Remus and Sirius were not out, and that even James, Sirius' best friend, never knew about them. When Harry admits that it was hard for him to come to terms with this new knowledge about his godfather, Remus expresses regret that he never let Sirius be open: "The important thing is that Sirius wanted you to know who he really was, because James never got the chance. But I...I reminded him that you aren't James. I said we should wait" (Kettle part 2). Kettle echoes here Rowling's hint that Sirius, unstable after Azkaban and being trapped in his traumatic childhood home, confused Harry with James. Molly chides: "He's not *James*, Sirius!" (Rowling 89, *Phoenix*) in the books. So, Kettle creates a relational space for Remus and Sirius that is potentially congruent with Rowling's source narrative.

### 3. Renegotiating Death

The bulk of Kettle's plot involves Remus' quest to see Sirius again. Sirius is dead and it is widely known that Rowling does not play with death in her novels: death is not magically negotiable, despite what evil wizards like Voldemort have tried. Repeatedly, Rowling has stated that death is final in her books (Skinner). Sirius' death was especially shocking and disconcerting to many readers because of the manner in which he died—he

fell through a veil, leaving no body to bury and no final closure. Even when Harry witnesses his godfather's death, he refuses to believe it. Harry yells: "Get him, save him, he's only just gone through!" (Rowling 806, *Phoenix*). Remus himself holds Harry back, saying: "There's nothing you can do, Harry ...nothing. ...He's gone" (Rowling 806, *Phoenix*). Arguably one of the greatest themes of *Harry Potter* is coming to terms with death.

So, when Kettle has Harry ask Remus: "Remus, did you ever think about--?" (Kettle part 2), alluding to the possibility of bringing back the dead through magic, it is one of the more canonically controversial moments in Kettle's representation of Harry because the temptation of bringing back the dead is one of the most alluring, and scary, possibilities for Harry throughout Rowling's books.<sup>17</sup> Remus rejects the idea out of hand: "Please, whatever happens, don't. It can't be done without Dark Magic; it breaks every law of nature. Not only that, but it never works. Believe me, I've seen what happens. They come back blind and hairless and unable to walk or speak. I would rather die myself than..." (Kettle part 2).<sup>18</sup> Harry quickly confesses, "So would I" (Kettle part 2). Thus, Kettle initially upholds Rowling's hard and fast rule. The dead don't come back, and the dark magic necessary to even attempt such an endeavor is more dangerous than it's worth. Attempting to conquer death is a project for the likes of Voldemort and the Death Eaters—not for courageous Gryffindors like Remus, Sirius, and Harry.

While Remus is shopping for Harry and Ginny's engagement gift, he runs into his old colleague, Sibyll Trelawney,<sup>19</sup> and in the middle of exchanging polite niceties, Professor Trelawney makes one of her rare genuine prophecies:

*Two valued brothers have been lost; one roams the darkest region under daylight, while the other dwells in sunless lands. Only the wolf desires to follow the path of ancient heroes into darkness. He must seek the*

wizard who surpassed all others but could not fulfil his greatest wish. Together, they can petition the King to restore order. In three days...the wolf...will make...his choice... (Kettle part 3).

Remus hardly has time to process the prophecy's possible meanings when Sibyll wakes up from her trance quite a different person that he had previously known. The new Sibyll shrewdly asks Remus whether he's read the classics. At her prompting, Remus paraphrases the mythology surrounding Sybil of Cumae:

“‘She bewitched the god Apollo, and he promised to grant her countless years of youth and beauty, in exchange for her virginity. When she turned him down, he decided to give her those extra years of life, but with a terrible price; he didn't stop her body from aging as the years passed by. While she was young she accomplished some great deeds, but after hundreds of years she was reduced to almost nothing, and only wanted to die.’ Suddenly, it all clicked into place. ‘Wait a moment...are you saying that you are...? No, that's not possible.’” (Kettle part 3)

The Sibyll in front of Remus tells him there's more to the story than he already knows.

The god Apollo did not let Sybil die, even when the years he'd promised had run out.

Instead, he trapped her in the body of a peasant woman and she has been moving down the family line ever since, from girl to girl. Sibyll explains: “Every so often, Apollo has used me as a vessel to deliver his messages, as he did when I was alive. Very

occasionally, he allows me to speak, to act, as I'm doing now, because I'm required to fulfil one of his ludicrous tasks” (Kettle part 3). And, as Remus discovers, the ludicrous task currently assigned to Sybil of Cumae imprisoned in the body of Sibyll Trelawney<sup>20</sup> is the fulfillment of Remus' own minor prophecy. She is to guide Remus to the entrance to the underworld, and leave him there to figure the rest out.

Kettle prefaces every chapter of her story with an epigraph from *The Aeneid*:

“Night and day lie open the gates of death's dark kingdom: / But to retrace your steps, to find the way back to daylight-- / That is the task, the hard thing” (Virgil quoted by Kettle). This quote is excerpted from Kettle's secondary intertext--chapter six of *The*

*Aeneid*, in which Aeneas journeys into the underworld to speak to his father and see the past and future of Rome. The epigraph functions as a peritext to Kettle's fanfiction. Kettle's text relies little on *The Aeneid* for its intelligibility. Unlike *Harry Potter*, *The Aeneid* does not function as a hypotext. One needs not to have even read *The Aeneid* to understand Kettle's story. In this way, Kettle's use of *The Aeneid* is closer to Genette's concept of intertextuality: quotation, allusion. *The Aeneid* is a formal structure that shapes Kettle's story. She is inspired by elements of Virgil's storyworld in order to remake it anew in her own fashion, much like Shakespeare was inspired by his historical source materials. Unlike the fic's interaction with *Harry Potter*, though, Kettle is not attempting to expand the storyworld of *The Aeneid*. Her appropriation of *The Aeneid* is not as extended as with *Harry Potter*—she does not attempt to establish authority through Virgil's implied author like she does with Rowling's text. Instead, the *Aeneid* functions in relation to *Harry Potter* and the rest of the fanon operating in Kettle's text as a cue meant to help us predict Kettle's epic plans for the plot. It's peritextual relation to the fiction affects the way we expect to read. It is an additional way of understanding.

The theme that Kettle's two main intertexts share is death. Death is noble in *The Aeneid* and *Harry Potter*. But emerging from the underworld and thus, in a way, becoming resurrected, is the difficult task assigned to Aeneas and, in Kettle's story, Remus. Kettle's use of *The Aeneid* is sublimated to her larger interpretative project, focused upon *Harry Potter*. It is important to remember that Remus does not realize what the prophecy means throughout most of Kettle's plot—his mission is to figure it out in order to right the wrong that has been done. Initially, Remus' will to see Sirius again is only a corollary of this quest. "I've no intention of raising the dead," Remus tells Minos

(Kettle part 7). Only later does Remus discover that the prophecy speaks to his deepest wish: to bring Sirius back to the land of the living: “that is the task, that is the hard thing” (Virgil quoted by Kettle).

Rowling’s world is clearly spiritualist. Even before Harry glimpses the afterlife in the seventh book, Harry hears whispers of those who have passed beyond the veil in the Department of Mysteries, though he doesn’t understand what he’s hearing (Rowling 774, *Phoenix*). Only Hermione’s forceful reminder that Harry must rescue Sirius pulls him back from the temptation to “climb up on the dais and walk through [the veil]” (Rowling 774, *Phoenix*). Later, as Harry grapples with Sirius’ death, his friend Luna explains what drew him to the veil. Luna shares her thoughts about her late mother: “Anyway, it’s not as though I’ll never see Mum again, is it?” (Rowling 863, *Phoenix*). When Harry is unsure, Luna answers: “Oh, come on. You heard them just beyond the veil, didn’t you?” (Rowling 863, *Phoenix*). For the first time, Harry seriously considers what life is like after death. Nearly Headless Nick and the rest of the ghosts in Hogwarts represent the possibility of flouting death—though, as Nick explains, his choice to remain a ghost is ultimately cowardly. Nick confesses to Harry: “I was afraid of death . . . I know nothing of the secrets of death, Harry, for I chose my feeble imitation of life instead” (Rowling 861, *Phoenix*). To Harry’s great disappointment, Nick assures him that Sirius definitely will not come back as a ghost: “[Sirius] will have . . . gone on” (Rowling 861, *Phoenix*). Rowling’s world already offers multiple possibilities for life after death—one can become a ghost, one can go on. Into this space, Kettle projects an afterlife modeled on Virgil’s. She creates a new, but possible, setting for Remus (and Rowling’s readers) to understand Sirius’ death.

Kettle posits that Sirius is trapped in his own living mind in the afterlife. He is not truly dead. Sirius explains to Remus in the underworld: “The thing is, I fell through the veil, and I’m not completely ... well, my body is gone, obviously. I’m dead. But it’s different for me. I still feel the magic, crackling inside me, the way it always has” (Kettle part 10). While the rest of the deceased, like James and Lily, while their eternity happily away by shaping their own Elysium, Sirius is tormented by the fact that he is alive but not *alive*. Remus suggests that Sirius’ feeling of being alive might itself be a kind of the wish fulfillment of the afterlife, but Sirius has already done the research. He sought others who were thrown through the veil: “There were three men, two women, four house-elves and ten goblins, who’d all been thrown through the veil at various points in history . . . They were all in their own private hells. But they were here, in heaven, with me” (Kettle part 10). Eventually, Sirius explains that he, like the others, will go mad. Sirius explains: “My mind and my magic are still alive, while my body is dead. It would be enough to drive anyone mad” (Kettle part 10). The pleasures of heaven are only a torture to him because he is not truly dead.

Until Remus came, Sirius had decided that his last and most viable option would be wading into the River Lethe. Kettle writes: “The River Lethe would wipe Sirius clean of memory and emotion, and his spirit would be born again as an entirely new person. Sirius would be gone forever” (Kettle part 10). Sirius had decided that his only chance at resurrection is reincarnation. Remus is appalled at the thought of losing all the particularities of Sirius that make Sirius recognizable—he doesn’t want Sirius to be reincarnated, he wants Sirius to return to life. So, Remus’ mission gains another aspect:

he is not only seeking the answer to the prophecy, but the answer to Sirius' predicament. Luckily, Kettle allows these to be one in the same.

Sibyll Trelawney isn't the only Hellenic character intruding upon Rowling's British world. Cerberus the three-headed dog makes an appearance as well. It's Hagrid's dear "Fluffy" who is the key to Sirius' escape from the afterlife. When Remus and Sirius discover, through Dumbledore, that they are the "two valued brothers" referenced in the prophecy (Kettle part 3), they also discover King Pluto's predicament. When Remus passed into the underworld, the enormous three-headed dog he expected did not greet him. Nothing guards the gates of the underworld. And even if this security breach isn't enough to distress Pluto, Cerberus is Proserpine's beloved pet. Pluto laments: "Ever since [Cerberus] disappeared, [Proserpine's] been hounding me to find him . . . You can't imagine how much strife that dog's cost me" (Kettle part 12). Remus, Sirius, and Dumbledore leverage their knowledge of Cerberus' whereabouts against Pluto in order to barter for Sirius' life. Kettle writes the scene: "'So you'll make the trade, then?' Sirius pressed, leaning forward. 'Me for Cerberus?'" (Kettle part 12). And Pluto replies: "'I suppose it's only fair . . . A dog for a dog'" (Kettle part 12). When the deal is done, it's left to Remus to fulfill the terms. He must find and subdue Cerberus in the Forbidden Forest where Hagrid released him after his service in Rowling's first book, in the way that Harry, Ron and Hermione subdued Fluffy in their first year: with music. Then, it falls to Remus to transport Cerberus back to the entrance to the underworld to complete the trade.

#### 4. Renegotiating the Conclusion

When Remus successfully completes the task, Pluto follows through on his word. As Remus desperately yells for Sirius, afraid the exchange didn't work, Kettle announces Sirius' return in the same understated way Rowling did in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*: ““You don't have to yell, Moony,’ said a smiling voice beside him. ‘I'm here’” (Kettle part 13). What follows are romantic and thoroughly domestic scenes, reveling in the mundane pleasures cut off from Remus and Sirius in Rowling's world.

Was it just a dream? Kettle writes:

“ ‘I used to imagine you returning on a night like this,’ said Remus, when they were sprawled out on the grass, Sirius's hand pressed over his heart.

‘Afraid you're dreaming now?’

Remus smiled up at the stars. Then he shifted, grass tickling between his shoulder blades, and turned to smile at Sirius. ‘No. If I were dreaming, do you think we'd be so bloody cold?’ (Kettle part 13).

Kettle summons the uncomfortable details of daily life as evidence against the illusion of Sirius' resurrection. In the epilogue the issue of whether this is Remus' dream is resolved when we see numerous others interacting with both Remus and Sirius. They are real to the world and the after life becomes unreal again to them. Later, Remus reflects on his and Sirius' rapidly decaying memories of the last few months. Kettle writes: “Sirius had been dead – that was certain – and Remus had somehow brought him back to life; but Remus couldn't remember how it had happened, or where Sirius had returned from.” (Kettle part 14). Kettle allows the fantasy of Sirius' resurrection to be realized, but she cuts Remus and Sirius off from the knowledge of how they did it. They don't get to remember the secrets of the afterlife, thus she limits the reach of her fantasy.

Rowling would never allow such an ending for Remus and Sirius. Once a character is killed, Rowling does not bring them back. But we shouldn't entirely dismiss

Kettle's reading because her ending is not congruent with the Rowling's conclusions. Fanfiction serves more purposes than simply mimicking the text from which it is derived. In this case, Kettle is making a metatextual commentary upon Rowling's ending. Whereas Rowling determines that Remus and Sirius' fate must be tragic, Kettle's fantasy ending allows readers a relief from the darkness of Rowling's representation of Remus and Sirius.

If we look solely to the books, Remus and Sirius get no reprieve. Kettle has proposed a space in Rowling's source narrative that allows for the relationship of two of her most beloved male characters. If we accept this interpretation—if we accept that such a reading is a latent possibility in Rowling's story world—we are also forced to accept the ultimate tragedy of that relationship within the parameters of Rowling's source narrative. Sirius dies an illogical, sudden death. Remus moves on to a weirdly ambivalent relationship with Sirius' cousin, eventually marrying her and having a baby boy, only to die a death paralleling Harry's own familial tragedy. In the final battle, both Remus and Tonks are killed, orphaning their newborn son and Harry becomes the godfather he was never able to enjoy. One can easily see how a contingent of readers especially interested in Remus and Sirius' romance would desire a "happily ever after," even if "only" in fanfiction. Instead of focusing on the brutality and finality of death, Kettle's ending allows us to imagine an alternative where Remus and Sirius are rewarded for their struggles and service with the peaceful, domestic ending Kettle and her readers desire for them. This is an important way for readers to "correct" the text to serve their own needs, however temporarily. It creates a space, however controversial, in which the good are rewarded with good.

## 5. Conclusion: Communal Storyworld Building Through Fanfiction

Even as Kettle's text subverts Rowling's intentions by providing closure she would never allow, Kettle's text ultimately augments the interpretive world Rowling has created. Kettle and the rest of her peers are writing fanfiction in a way that rallies Rowling's evidence in the source narrative to their own ends. They are calling upon a variety of sophisticated languages in order to do so: they are calling upon their own personal engagement with the text, as well as a nuanced reading of the intentional meaning of the text. Kettle appropriates and manipulates Rowling's storyworld in order to expand that storyworld. She calls upon *The Aeneid* in order to thicken our relation to Rowling's text—to call attention to death and ideas of the afterlife. Kettle's writing beyond becomes a writing of desire. Her happy ending may seem sentimental, but the fanon engagements with the hypotext are not, on the whole, so simple. Taken as a body, they are evidence of readers becoming collaborative creators of the text they love so much. They are writing what they want into the indeterminacy of Rowling's gaps. They are helping to further *grow*, further *build* Rowling's storyworld out of their own reading desires and the potential latent meanings of Rowling's source text.

Instead of the structured relation, the always already layered interaction of text upon text talked about in post-structural approaches to intertextuality, the fanfiction I have discussed exhibits a conscious and explicit *goal* of a structural hypertextuality that “expands” an existing text, not independently, but communally. It is not merely an implied reflexivity of text upon text, it is not a background against which writers work, but an aim to *augment* the existing story world. Fanfiction authors implicitly

acknowledge that meaning is contested and unstable, but certain fanfiction authors choose to acknowledge authorial intention in an endeavor to expand upon latent possibilities within the text. The kind of fanfiction I have discussed appropriates in order to elaborate.

Fanfiction authors exploit our psychological tendency to imagine beyond what is written in order to specify and debate the events “behind” the text. Fanfiction squeezes into discursive gaps in order to build further, different interpretations. No fanfiction author does this completely independently because the community affects the reading and writing practices of any author who exists within the community. Fanfiction is a space for readers to become writers, to engage actively in the world the book has provided. Fanfiction negotiates with the textual and the paratextual, implicitly interrogating the borders of the creation in order to build further upon that creation. Fanfiction is thoroughly hypertextual and metatextual, but it is also basic evidence of something very fundamental to the way we read. Fanfiction is evidence of our imagining. It is evidence of how gripped, how moved we can be by these “mere” textual constructs, so much so that we work to persevere the text’s effects beyond the last page. In the end, this is one of the greatest gifts that fiction gives us: worlds with which to play.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Abigail Derecho objects to the label “derivative,” or “appropriative” literature because it implies a hierarchy of ownership, or authorship. Instead, in the thoroughly intertextual endeavor that fanfiction is, she prefers to talk about fanfiction as “archonic” literature—literature that supplements the “archive,” coined by Derrida in *Archive Fever* (Derecho 63-64).

<sup>2</sup> The legality of fanfiction is contentious; therefore most pieces of fanfiction have a “header” that contains a legal disclaimer acknowledging that the characters and universe belong to the source’s author, and that the fanfiction author is not making any money from this writing. The header also includes information about the story: title, author, author’s email address, romantic pairings (if applicable), and movie-like appropriateness ratings (Busse and Hellekson 10). These labels are used by fanfiction archivists to properly categorize and upload the story without reading it (Busse and Hellekson 10), but the headers also serve as flags to the readers within any given fandom as to whether this specific fanfiction story will appeal to them. Thus, to a certain degree, fanfiction self-selects its audience. Fanfiction is extremely common—almost all fictitious works have some kind of fanfiction written around them—but the communities built around fanfiction operate as a subculture with their own lexicon and cultural codes within larger society. Rowling knows about, has read, and condones fanfiction based on her series, as long as that fanfiction is not published for profit (Barnes and Noble chat transcript).

<sup>3</sup> Julia Kristeva proposed two axes of intertextuality when she introduced the concept in 1967 (Abbott 94, 2002): a horizontal axis connecting the author and the reader, and a vertical axis connecting the text to other texts (Chandler). Fanfiction exploits both of these. For the horizontal axis, not only are fan texts contextualized by the real author and real reader’s individual life experiences, but fanfiction adds the identifiable apparatus of a broad and diverse community of fans who shape the shared interpretive acts of the fanfiction corpus continually. This is further complicated by the fact that the *Harry Potter* fandom itself is not monolithic—even within these communities there are subdivisions upon subdivisions built out of the interpretive strategies readers find most appealing. For the vertical axis, we have fanfiction’s goal of outright imitating the source narrative in order to make new stories out of that storyworld. Kristeva’s post-structuralist project is well suited to highlighting the indeterminacy and pluralities often celebrated in fanfiction.

<sup>4</sup> Many theorists have argued that what makes fanfiction unique is the identification of the author and reader as a “fan” and their contextualization within a modern fan community (Derecho 62).

<sup>5</sup> For a fuller discussion on theories of how we may realize storyworlds, see chapter six of Patrick Colm Hogan’s *Cognitive Science, Literature and the Arts: A Guide for Humanists* and chapter three of Hogan’s *The Mind and Its Stories: Narrative Universals and Human Emotion*.

<sup>6</sup> At the same time, these gaps guarantee that our realization of the text can never be completely stable. Our minds often cannot deal with this very indeterminacy—therefore we take cues from the text in order to fill in the gaps in our own ways in order to make

the narrative “make sense.” Wolfgang Iser writes: “[O]ne text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled. In this very act, the dynamics of reading are revealed. By making his decision, he implicitly acknowledges the inexhaustibility of the text; at the same time it is this very inexhaustibility that forces him to make his decisions” (Iser 280). This gap filling makes the text both unique and understandable for us.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted from Weiss.

<sup>8</sup> Not all fans would agree to this. Driscoll writes: “there is no homogenous fan fiction community” (Driscoll 93). All fans would probably not agree to any one thing at all.

<sup>9</sup> Theoretically, we try to read the implied author’s intentions as intended, although some readers may reject the intended reading. In the way that we infer an implied author, so we infer an implied reader: the reader for which the implied author is writing (Abbott 191, 2002). When we read intentionally, we are assuming that our inferences should be in keeping with the sensibility that intended those effects (Abbott 95, 2002). The basic idea is that the text does have an intended meaning that is accessible, and that meaning can be communicated.

<sup>10</sup> The absence of childhood photos of Remus does not, of course, have to be because Remus himself destroyed them. But Tonks immediately jumps to this conclusion: “This, Tonks realised, was the earliest photo of Remus she'd ever seen. As far as she knew, there weren't any others, not even childhood albums. She'd never asked why. Actually, she'd never given it much thought, but now she wished he'd kept them” (Kettle part 1). Kettle reveals via flashback later that Remus did destroy all his photos himself (Kettle part 1).

<sup>11</sup> The subjects of wizarding photographs move, but only in limited ways.

<sup>12</sup> A puffskein is a small pet often given to children, much like a hamster.

<sup>13</sup> Catherine Driscoll writes: “Ships are forceful segmentations of a fandom or fan fiction community, and devoted followers of a ship will often be hostile to any other using one of their characters” (Driscoll 85).

<sup>14</sup> Remus/Sirius or R/S is the typical short hand for referring to a romantic pairing of characters within the fandom.

<sup>15</sup> R/S has been referred to as “HMS Wolfstar,” playing on the trope of “ship” (fictionalley.org). We could see the use of the term “ship” as an attempt to hetero-normalize R/S, which is interesting when we consider that R/S is arguably one of the better canonically supported slash pairings. If we accept this argument, R/S subverts the stereotype of slash readings being “against the grain” of the narrative because this pairing enjoys some degree of acknowledged canonical support (or at least, lack of contradictory evidence).

<sup>16</sup> Remus is often described as having eye contact with Sirius, or watching him in chapter five of *The Order of the Phoenix*: “Lupin’s eyes were fixed on Sirius” (Rowling 88, *Phoenix*). During Harry’s lecture, the bulk of the exchanges are between Sirius, Remus and Harry (Rowling ch. 5, *Phoenix*).

<sup>17</sup> Rowling’s full confrontation with death and dark magic occurs in the seventh book, which was not available to Kettle at the time. It is well understood even before the last book came out, though, that Harry would be sorely tempted by ways of bringing back the

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dead because he has been so deeply affected by death himself. Rowling ultimately shows us that Harry rejects this path, though. Kettle proposes that Harry looked into it, but when Remus rejects the notion outright, Harry apologizes: "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have brought it up. I just thought if there was a way, another way, you'd know about it" (Kettle part 2).

<sup>18</sup> Kettle extrapolates that Remus would have known about or have seen a way to bring back the dead. As we discover in the Rowling's seventh book, bringing back the dead is a much more complicated magical process that requires the grand ambitions and talents of the likes of Voldemort, Dumbledore or Grindelwald. Remus would have never seen the resurrected, probably only the creepily undead Inferi (animated corpses used by Voldemort in battle).

<sup>19</sup> The American books spell Trelawney's first name "Sibyll" and the British books spell it "Sybill." Kettle uses the British spelling.

<sup>20</sup> Sibyll Trelawney actually being the Sybil of Cumae is Kettle's possible explanation for how someone as bumbling and ignorant as Professor Trelawney could make such accurate and profound prophecies. Professor Trelawney made both of Harry's prophecies: the one concerning his birth and the one concerning his duel with Voldemort.