

A Study of Readers' Power to Reconstruct Characters' Relationship in *Harry Potter's* Fan Fiction *Eclipse*

Jieling Fang, Humin Liu

Faculty of English Language and Culture, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China

Email address:

bluehouse0907@sina.com (Jieling Fang), 200010213@oamail.gdufs.edu.cn (Humin Liu)

*Corresponding author

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Abstract: In the age of what Henry Jenkins calls “convergence culture” [17] characterized by the development of new media, fan-based products, including fan fiction writing, cannot escape from scholars' eyes. As one of the best-sellers in the past two decades, *Harry Potter* series has earned countless devoted fans around the world, and its fan fiction, with its quantity and quality, has expanded its influence outside the fan community. Many attentions have been put on the producers and the consumers, but the fan-authored texts themselves have been constantly unnoticed. This paper is to explore the power of readers in reconstructing characters' relationship by a close textual analysis on *Harry Potter* and its fan fiction *Eclipse* from the aspect of narrative skill. By examining how internal and zero focalization are used in the *Harry Potter* canon and its fanon, it is clear that readers are able to justify the reconstructed relationship in the process of fan fiction writing. It turns out that fan fiction is not as “meaningless” as people might think; it can serve as a tool for fans to heal and educate themselves, and add more color and vitality to the world of literature by providing various interpretations to the source text.

Keywords: Fan Fiction, Focalization, Reconstructed Relationship

1. Introduction

Readers' roles as literary critics have been revalued with the rising popularity of reader-response criticism since 1960s. With this trend, fans, a group of very devoted readers, have been taken into account in many academic studies mainly regarding the formation of its community, its cultural phenomenon and production.¹ Stepping into the 21st century, scholars in the literary field can't help paying attention to the flourishing of a brand new literary form created by the fan community—fan fiction, since it has become an eye-catching phenomenon with the help of the Internet [1]. However, “Literary analysis of fan fiction texts for its own sake is still mostly unexplored territory”, for the study of fan fiction mainly puts emphasis on the social and cultural desire and effect of fan fiction writing [2]. Therefore, what remain largely undiscovered are the power of fan fiction as a narrative

discourse, as well as the literary talent of fans in the writing of their own literature.

This paper, by putting a fan fiction text (fanon) under a literary criticism lens, aims to reveal readers' power to reconstruct characters' relationships and to provide new interpretations to the source text (canon)². The focus of the textual analysis will be on the use of focalization in the analysis of the *Harry Potter* canon and its fan fiction *Eclipse*. By applying focalization in the textual analysis, it is clear that fans are capable of justifying the reconstructed relationships and shedding light on the development of the literary world. The success of the reconstructed fan fiction complicates the characters, and fans will take it as the new rule to re-examine the canon, thus allowing the diversity of the source text to be further discussed.

1 It is summarized from Hellekson and Busse “Work in Progress”, the introduction of *Fan Fiction and Fan Community in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006.

2 There is a very inclusive definition of fanon and canon. Generally speaking, canon is “the events presented in the media source that provide the universe” and fanon “the events created by the fan community in a particular fandom and repeated pervasively throughout the fan text” (Hellekson and Busse, 9). The form of canon and fanon can both vary from literature, movie, video, picture and song. In this paper, the analysis will focus on the literary text.

2. Vulnerable Canon: Internal Focalization and the Limits of the *Harry Potter* Narrative

The *Harry Potter* series provides a rich soil for fan fiction writing thanks to its popularity around the world. Its fan fiction accounts for the greatest amount in fan fiction.com—the world's largest fan fiction archive. Within the *Harry Potter* fan community, many fans devote their talent to reconstructing the relationship between Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy from two irresolvable rivals at school to friends, soul mates and even lovers. One way to complete this seemingly impossible task of paring enemy together, which will be examined in details throughout this paper, is to play games with focalization. Coined by Genette and further developed by Riommon-Kenan and other critics, it can serve more useful purposes than point of view in analyzing narration because this term has a great advantage of “dispelling the confusion between perspective and narration” than other terms like “point of view” and “angle of vision”. Kenan divides focalization into two types, one “internal” and the other “external”. In her definition, internal focalization is a “limited observer” with “restricted knowledge” and “subjective emotion”. Through a close examination of the fiction, it is obvious that *Harry Potter* is narrated through an internal focalization, and this niche in the narration of the canon invites fans to reconstruct characters' relationship according to their own interpretation [3, 4].

As Kenan illustrated, the observer of internal focalization is limited because “This type generally takes the form of character-focalizer” [3, 4]. That is to say, if the focalizer is a character inside the narrative, then what readers can see is limited through that character's eyes. The *Harry Potter* series, as the name shows, is about the growth of “the boy who lived”, so most of the time the focalizer is not Rowling's unnamed narrator, but Harry himself. The usual way for readers to perceive what is going on in the fictional world is through Harry's observation, thus lacking the possibility of knowing more than the character. In the first book, *the Philosopher's Stone*, lots of magical places are introduced to readers as they accompany Harry on his way to school and observe through his eyes. The first one is the famous Diagonal Alley:

Harry wished he had about eight more eyes. He turned his head in every direction as they walked up the street, trying to look at everything at once: the shops, the things outside them, the people doing their shopping. A plump woman outside an apothecary's was shaking her head as they passed, saying, “Dragon liver, sixteen Sickles and ounce, they're mad...” [5]

Narrated in this way, the only chance for readers to gain more information about this place is to wait until Harry “turned his head” to another direction. Focalizing on Harry, the characters and events in the books could only be described in the way he sees them. Being as innocent as Harry is, there is the risk for readers to be misguided by his subjective opinion and therefore misunderstand other characters. In the canon,

Harry does not bother to know more about Draco because the first time they meet “Harry was strongly reminded of Dudley” [5], his arrogant, unreasonable cousin who always treats him badly. Based on this impression, he always thinks that Draco is up to no good. In the second year, when some horrible attacks happen at school and the rumors of the Chamber of Secrets begins to spread, Harry does not hesitate to suspect that Draco Malfoy is behind all this and tries “darkly” to prove that he is right [6]. All along the school years, Harry's subjectivity prevents him from seeing Draco in a less emotional way, which could also affect readers' judgment about the Slytherin boy and cause them to fail to discover the possible inner good inside Draco.

Being as part of the presented world and perceived only from the specifically chosen angle, the knowledge of a character-focalizer narration is of course restricted because “he cannot know everything about it” [4]. So Harry, as a new-comer of the magic world, could not know all its history unless told by others. Therefore, his unwillingness to encounter Draco Malfoy caused restricted information about Draco's past in the canon, leaving his characterization plain and less convincing than other villains like Voldemort and Grindelwald³. Lacking the knowledge of Draco's childhood, Harry as well as readers would easily miss some similarities between him and Draco, even when there are some hints in what he has perceived:

“Though if his school marks don't pick up,” said Mr. Malfoy, more coldly still, “that may indeed be all he is fit for.”

“It's not my fault,” retorted Draco, “The teachers all have favourites, that Hermione Granger—”

“I would have thought you'd be ashamed that a girl of no wizard family beat you in every exam”, snapped Mr. Malfoy.

“Ha!” said Harry under his breath, pleased to see Draco looking both abashed and angry. [6]

From an outsider's perspective, this plot could indicate that Draco has been facing a massive pressure of meeting his father's expectation, and there would be no soft words from Mr. Malfoy even when they are presented in public. This is exactly the same experience Harry has when he stays with his aunt's family⁴, but misled by his first impression, he fails to see that and rather than having a sense of sympathy, he feels “pleased” with the fact that Draco is actually being humiliated by his own father in front of strangers, which is definitely not something a school-age child deserves.

With the previous restricted elements, there is no wonder that the emotive component of internal focalization will be subjective to the focalizer's feeling, creating space for re-characterization even during the narrating process of the canon. A very classic example of the focalizer's subjectivity in the *Harry Potter* canon is how Harry commented differently on the character Severus Snape. Knowing almost nothing about the early years of Snape and with the first impression of

³The two Dark Lords' past is revealed in *the Half-Blood Prince* and *the Deathly Hallows*.

⁴Lots of textual evidences could be found in *the Philosopher's Stone*.

"a feeling that he didn't like Harry at all" [5], Harry spends his six years at school trying to find evidence to prove that Snape is a coward and not trust-worthy, and shows little respect to him even as a freshman at school, calling his last name straightly rather than with the title "professor" [5]. However, after stepping into his memory during the war, Harry's attitude towards Snape and the Slytherin house goes through a drastic change, and he wants to pass down this change to the next generation. He names his second son after Snape and tells his boy "you were named for two headmasters of Hogwarts. One of them was a Slytherin and he was probably the bravest man I ever knew"; he also shows no biased opinion on different house any more by expressing "the Slytherin house will have gained an excellent student, won't it? It doesn't matter to us, Al..." [7]. This major shift in the way of perceiving people and things from the character-focalizer in the canon weakens the certainty of the narrative, and to some extent encourages the existence of other alternative relationships between characters in fan fiction writing.

It is not only internal focalization that makes the *Harry Potter* text "vulnerable" enough to lead the prosperity of the creation of fan fiction. On the one hand, Rowling bravely combines the wizard tradition with modern society and invents a system for it. That system, like the one in *Lord of the Rings*, is a new area for people's imagination, and even the author could not be sure about what would happen in the world she has created until she can figure out a clue; on the other hand, the fact that the main characters in the canon are all teenagers "is often treated as good enough justification for any variety of sexual activity: hetero, homo, or interspecies" [8], and because of this fluid sexuality of the characters, it is reasonable for two young boys to fall in love with each other like Harry/Draco slash fan fiction⁵ does. These two features also provide fans with freedom to pair any two characters as they want and to reconstruct their relationship as long as they can justify their stories.

3. Convincing Fanon: Zero Focalization and the Justified *Eclipse*

The niches of the internal focalization in the *Harry Potter* canon discussed above show a disadvantage concerning the characterization of Draco Malfoy, and thus leaving a vast space for readers to reconstruct his relationship with Harry in the fan fiction writing. *Eclipse*, as a well-recognized Harry/Draco fan fiction, enjoys great popularity among the fan community in the ways of receiving over 3000 reviews and 4000 favorites on the website and being translated into several languages, including Chinese. In the story, Draco captures Harry from school and intends to give him to Voldemort so as to restore Malfoy's family honor. But after spending days guarding Harry in the dungeon, Draco realizes he has done something wrong and decides to help Harry escape from Voldemort's hunting. During their journey back

to school, the two boys know each other better and gradually develop a romantic relationship.

The author Mijan manages to cover the canon's niches successfully through the use of zero focalization. In Genette's opinion, zero focalization is close to "the well-known viewpoint of God", "where the narrator knows more than the character, or more exactly says more than any of the characters knows" [9].⁶ Zero focalization allows the narrator to perceive everything freely in the narrative both from without and within; there will be almost no restricted information, and the emotive component will be as objective as possible. This serves well in reconstructing characters' relationship in the fan fiction writing, for the author would want this newly created story to be reliable and convincing. And for Mijan, an American *Harry Potter* fan who wrote this outstanding fiction, the flexibility of zero focalization helps her justify the reconstructed Harry/Draco relationship by providing unrestricted information, perceiving character's inner world and shifting focalizer from one to another.

Being an omniscient observer, the focalizer in *Eclipse* knows everything about the presented world in the narrative, so the background information of Draco Malfoy is shared with readers. Two convincing stories about Draco's childhood are constructed in the fan fiction based on the hints of him being mal-treated in the canon. When Draco is seven, he is thrown into a deep swimming pool, almost drowned to death by his father just because he doesn't obey Mr. Malfoy's words "not to play by the pool" [10]; At the age of eleven, just before going to school, he is locked in the family manor's dungeons by Mr. Malfoy because he tries to steal some items from his father's drawing room in order to show off before his friends when he gets to school. Strict as Mr. Malfoy is, he definitely wants to teach his son lessons through punishments, but his way is totally wrong for a pre-school child. Draco does learn something, but with pain and tear:

When the doors to the dungeons had slammed shut, leaving Draco alone for his night of contemplation, he had finally broken down, tears streaming freely where nobody could see him. [...] In many ways, it was a harder Draco who emerged the next morning, and perhaps that had been Lucius Malfoy's intention. [10]

The two incidents and their aftermath on Draco reveal the cause for his mal-behavior at school. In her way, Mijan provides a possible version of how Draco becomes the boy he is when presented in the canon. Later in the story, when Harry knows what has happened to his rival, he begins to empathize with Draco and understand why he would behave in such a bad manner, which he never has a chance to do in the canon: "...in a perverse play of psychology, the Malfoys had broken Draco [...] Willingly participant though Draco was, he was yet another victim" [10]. Realizing Draco actually has a more miserable childhood than his, Harry finally puts his prejudice

⁵Slash, a form of fan fiction genre, particularly refers to the homoerotic romance between characters.

⁶ There are some debates about Genette's definition on zero focalization. Some critics hold the idea that it can be treated as a variable shift between internal and external focalization (Köppe and Stühling, 2016). But since Genette's theory still takes the dominant position in the discussion of narrative, this paper tends to follow his three focalizations' assumption.

away and starts to treat Draco in a different manner. This information reverses their relationship from the very beginning, because the premise of their rivalry in the canon—Draco does not look like an actual human to Harry—no longer exists.

The omniscient focalizer in *Eclipse* can also frequently observe characters from within so as to vocalize the character's unvoiced thought; and readers would know that the character's action can be traced back to his careful consideration, not just out of emotive impulse. For instance, after witnessing the horrible scene of Harry being tortured by Voldemort, and listening to Harry's lecture about the nature of Voldemort's follower, Draco begins to question himself. At this moment, the narrating voice fluidly shifts to the character's thoughts, allowing readers to see the mind-conflicting process in Draco's brain:

Draco felt a flush of pride wash over his cheeks before he caught himself. He was not looking for Potter's approval, nor did he want it. His father's approval was his goal. [...] That's it. [...] Gryffindors are trusting. Potter would just become more open to future attacks, bait-and-switch. Draco was simply using a new predatory tactic.

Still trying to convince yourself, aren't you? The little voice was back.

I thought I told you to shut up. [10]

Readers could hear Draco's split thoughts fighting with each other: one finding excuses to convince him that he is not affected by Harry's words, the other urging him to give up and admit Harry is right. Likewise, when Harry learns about Draco's childhood and sees him actually crying for this, readers could know how he finds out they are not so different:

Don't listen to it, Harry, he told himself. This is Draco Malfoy. He handed you over to Voldemort. He's as rotten as they come. People like him don't even have a heart to break...

Harry sighed. People without hearts don't cry. [10]

Here, it is very obvious that Harry is arguing and reasoning, trying to hold his old judgement about Draco. However, the result of his reasoning is that he finally realizes Draco is not that different from him. By focalizing on characters' inner thoughts, the omniscient focalizer of *Eclipse* justifies the process of how the two rival characters become close; their attitude towards each other does not change out of blue but out of difficult mental fight.

More flexibly, in some part of the narration, the focalizer would shift from the God's point of view to a character-focalizer so as to provide multiple angles for the same story. Unlike the canon in which the events are restricted to Harry's observation, *Eclipse* introduces an interlude in the middle of the narration to retell the whole incident from Dumbledore's perspective. The interlude not only fixes the gap of what happens in Hogwarts during the two boy's missing, but also predicts the possible development of their relationship thanks to Dumbledore's wisdom:

"We must start a search at once, Headmaster," Severus said solemnly. "Notify the Order."

"Yes, yes of course." I spoke absently, for even as the

automatic responses to the crisis began to run off in my head like a laundry list, another thought had occurred to me. I couldn't say it in front of Hermione and Ronald. I wouldn't even say it to Severus, but I was sure he suspected the same thing.

...

If Harry Potter was to live, his only hope was Draco Malfoy. [10]

As a scholarly headmaster, Dumbledore always has a good sense of how to achieve the greater good. If he says that the two boys could make their way back by holding hands with each other, then it would add a strong footnote to their new friendship. This kind of third-party observation strengthens the objectivity of the narration, allowing the development of the storyline less emotional and the characterization more reliable.

Mijan's narrative shows the capability of readers (fans) to reconstruct a reliable character relationship in the fan fiction. To some extent, the convincing justifying process in it could even affect the thought of the author of the canon—"I suppose if I did spend all my time on there (fan fiction), pretty much my whole future plot would be on there somewhere", said Rowling in an interview [11]. Fans' love for the characters drives them to create new worlds different from but closely related to the canon, "blurs all the lines between different types of sub-creators and undermines the traditional preconceptions of how imaginary worlds can be built, inhabited and developed" [12]. Their writing not only provides multiple interpretations to the source text, but also benefits themselves in terms of literary intelligence.

4. New Interpretation, Self-healing and Self Education

In McCallum's opinion, fan fiction narration "enables the representation of popularity of narrative voices, social and cultural discourses, and the construction of a range of perceptual, attitudinal and ideological viewpoints" [2]. These fan-basing viewpoints not only stay in fan fiction, but also continue in the reinterpretation process of the canon when fan fiction readers bear the newly justified characters' relationship in mind to re-examine the canon. In this way, the source text could be very different for under this kind of re-examination, some previously hidden facts would be revealed and therefore leads to the reverse of some polarities in the narration.

With the wide spread of Harry/Draco fan fiction, Draco's reconstructed characteristics have been widely accepted among the fan community, and many people begin to question the all negative interpretation of Slytherin in the canon. In *the Philosopher's Stone*, the Shorting Hat's comments on Slytherin House "...in Slytherin you'll make your real friends, those cunning folks use any means to achieve their ends" [5], and many readers have interpreted these words as a stain in Slytherin's characteristic. However, after reading Draco's story of shifting loyalty in the fan fiction⁷ like *Eclipse*, readers

⁷This is a common theme in Harry/Draco slash fiction.

would realize that “any means” does not necessarily contain negative meaning; shifting loyalty is not cowardice but bravery because it needs to sacrifice everything, even themselves if necessary. Producing a Dark Lord does not mean that all Slytherins are bad people and they are capable of adjusting their mistake. With this new interpretation, the unpopular image of Slytherin could be reversed to some degree, and some hidden Slytherin heroes, like Sirius Black's brother, Regulus Black, could regain their reputation.

In the canon, Regulus Black is firstly described as “a Death Eater...he joined up when he was really young and then got cold feet and tried to leave—so they killed him” [7]. But this plain, simple, somewhat despised description is never the real image of Regulus. From the house elf Kreacher's tale, it is hinted that the direct cause for Regulus' death is because he discovers Voldemort's plan of trying to be immortal and killing out non-magic people, so he switches Voldemort's authentic Horcrux with a fake one and thus enrages the Dark Lord. His last words that “I face death in the hope that when you meet your match, you will be mortal once more” [13] further reveal his valor, indicating that he has been preparing for his death since he decides to fight against Voldemort. His contribution and sacrifice as the first one who finds out about Voldemort's evil plan has not been widely acknowledged in the canon because few would believe a Death Eater was capable of doing all this. Luckily, with fans' interpretation about Slytherin's spirit presented, Regulus' honor would not be missed when readers re-examine the canon.

Sometimes, fans' bold interpretation can actually coincide with the development of the canon. The *Harry Potter* series consists of seven books and they do not come out one night, but the creation of fan fiction can start at any moment as the fan author likes, so there is the possibility that fans' interpretation “predicts” what will happen in the next book. A well-known example of this kind of interpretation by fans is the relationship between Hogwarts' headmaster Albus Dumbledore and the first ever Dark Lord Gellert Grindelwald. In the *Harry Potter* canon, their relationship was described in the form of memoirs, mostly from other people's perspective and a letter from Dumbledore as the critical evidence:

“Naturally, I introduced him to poor Albus, who was missing the company of lads his own age. The boys took each other at once... Yes, even after they'd spent all day in discussion—both such brilliant young boys, they got on like a cauldron on fire—I'd sometimes hear an owl tapping at Gellert's bedroom window, delivering a letter from Albus! An idea would have struck him, and he had to let Gellert know immediately!” [7]

And Dumbledore's letter directly proves is neighbors' words: “*But I do not complain, because if you had not been expelled, we would never have met*” [7]. From the description, there was no doubt that Dumbledore and Grindelwald had a very intimate relationship, otherwise Dumbledore would not be that happy after losing his mother. But how exactly could this intimacy be? Expressions like “at once”, “cauldron on fire”, “immediately” and “would never” would sometimes be too strong for friendship, so some fans took their chance to

pair these two as a couple in the creation of fan fiction. This incurred some criticism, for interpreting major characters as homosexual is always a daring move because it is so different from the mainstream interpretation, not to mention they are both the representatives of two rivalry camps.

The turning point came when Rowling announced “Dumbledore is gay” in an interview in the year 2007. As a writer who started her writing career in the late 20th century, Rowling is well aware that the communication between authors and readers is unavoidable. Over the years, she has been showing a welcoming attitude towards fan interpretation and encouraging them to have different opinions. However, being aware of the diverse demographics of her readers and the ambiguity of the words she used when describing Dumbledore's relationship with Grindelwald, she had no intention to limit the characterization by delivering this “official definition” in the first place: “I think a child will see a friendship and I think a sensitive adult may well understand that it was an infatuation” [14]. Dumbledore's sexuality is an objective fact only for Rowling because she is the one who has created the character, and readers have their right to choose whether to accept it or not.

For fan fiction readers, fanon could mean more than diversity in interpretation; it also brings shelter to those who have suffered. Some scholars have done researches on how readers process information when reading, and have proposed that they will intertwine their daily experience with the fictional world, which can provide them with an “aesthetic experience which produces new knowledge” [15]. Based on Freudian's “ego-psychology”, N. Holland developed the theory of “identity”, suggesting that readers can re-create their identities through the process of DEFT (defense, expectation, fantasy, transformation) in reading [16]. This psychological process can explain why Harry/Draco slash and other rivals-reversed fan fiction gain their popularity. For instance, with some basic knowledge of pedagogy, nowadays people tend to believe that family education is more important to a child's personality than his genes, so readers will *defend* themselves from the assumption in the canon that “Draco Malfoy is born like this”; thus, the *expectation* that “there is good inside Draco Malfoy” is formed, and then develops into the *fantasy* that “Harry and Draco could be friends”. For people who have the same misguided-family experience like Draco⁸, the relationship between the two boys could mean more than a lovely story: it means that they have the chance and power to defeat their dark side, and there is hope for them to start a new life.

In the case of *Harry Potter* fan fiction, the benefits for fans could go even further because of its specified genre. Categorized as Young Adult literature, many children have grown up reading the books and have the impulse to play the role of one of the members in the magic world. With the help of the Internet, many talented kids had created websites for young fans to share their stories about *Harry Potter* and some

8 Rowling confirmed that there are misguided principles in Draco's family on pottermore.com

gradually become famous in fan community over the years despite their age. In this way, school age children “are passionate about writing because they are passionate about what they are writing about” [17]; they are learning literary strategies which would not be provided by ordinary class at school when writing fan fiction. Attention has also been given to teenagers’ slash writing, and some critics have read it as a bold attempt from young adults to remove the stereotypical portrait of mainstream homosexual characters, and a positive exploration through their own identity [18]. In the world that children’s voices are often easily ignored, fan fiction writing provides the little ones a chance to negotiate with the grown-ups. “[Adults] should see it as increasingly a space where children teach one another and where, if they would open their eyes, adults could learn a great deal [17]”. Fan fiction should never be treated as “inferior”; it should be taken as a serious object of study and deserves more recognition.

5. Conclusion

It is a long-time tradition that authors are considered to be the ones who are “in the lead”, and readers, in a negative position, should not have the chance to express their opinions, not to mention being welcomed in the eyes of critics. Starting with printing skills, the technological revolution helps educate people from different backgrounds. With more and more materials to read, the ability of critical and independent thinking does not remain as the privilege of literary critics, and authors find out that readers do not follow the rule of “do as I said” anymore. T. S. Eliot’s *objective correlative* lost its audience; the intensifying communication persuades people that *diversity* is the word more suitable for literature.

When *Wide Sargasso Sea* gained its reputation for a feminist and anti-colonial response to *Jane Eyre*, it occurred to no one that this re-writing is actually a fan fiction by definition. If that is what published fan fiction receives, there is no reason for fan fiction in the 21st century to be restricted on the Internet. As a literature genre flourishes in the process of globalization, nowadays fan fiction is a good representative of diversity. Just as H. P. Abbott points out that “to tell a story is to try to understand it”, fans’ interpretation shows their ways of understanding the source text, and their writing is not much different from other literary work—both are ways of perceiving different possibilities in the world. Being produced by amateurs does not necessarily mean that fan fiction lacks the basic literary requirements; on the contrary, it is these various voices that allow the dynamism of the canon to become possible and help to achieve its educational function. In this respect, fan fiction deserves better recognition. After all, “[Texts are vulnerable] to their audience... Without our willing collaboration, the narrative does not come to live.” [3]

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