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“The stories we love best”
Slashing the canon by exploring gender, sexuality and identity

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Abstract

Members of online fan-communities are a highly diverse crowd of people. These people are brought together across age, nationalities, genders, sexualities and class because of a common interest in items of fiction. These communities thus become platforms where enormous amounts of information and knowledge is shared between the different members, creating outlets for marginalized groups and voices to be heard and recognized. It is on these online fan-communities that fanfiction is written, and more specifically, also slash-fiction. Slash-fiction are stories written by fans that portray homosexual relationships and sexual intimacies in works of fictional canon. This paper looks at three works of fictional canon that have all been made into slash-fiction – the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the *Harry Potter* series, and the Disney-movie *Frozen*. It will make use of Henry Jenkins' notions on participatory culture and analyze these stories with a queer-theoretical approach, aiming to see whether these stories can be seen as a type of activism and if this activism might be bearing fruit in the current mainstream-media landscape.

Introduction

“No story lives unless someone wants to listen. The stories we love best do live in us forever. So, whether you come back by page or by the big screen, Hogwarts will always be there to welcome you home.”¹

These words are spoken by J.K. Rowling at the premiere of the final Harry Potter movie. One would think that the final movie about the Boy Who Lived marked the end of the Harry Potter universe. However, Rowling’s words ring true in the sense that, as long as someone wants to listen, stories live on. The stories live on in fans, although it may be several to tens and even hundreds of years since their initial release. The hardcore fan-communities keep them alive by continuously revisiting, rereading and rewatching. Exploring the storylines, the themes and the characters. As society constantly evolves and is shaped by political landscapes, so do the hardcore fans keep the stories up to date, by implementing ideas into the gaps of the stories, that match with, or encourage, a desire for a structural or political change within the global society. This they do by writing fanfiction.

The motives behind the creation of fanfiction are thus often inspired by political activism. It is here that the original stories of *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* or even Disney classics, such as *Frozen*, are challenged and rewritten to include themes that reflect a societal desire for change in current political landscape. The genre of slash-fiction within fanfiction is particularly interesting in this regard. The 21st century has undergone massive change regarding rights of the LGBT community. Milestones are still being reached all the time, but it is evident that there is a demand for more representation of the LGBT community within mainstream media and popular culture. Slash-fiction is one way of trying to incorporate LGBT themes and stories into already written literature.

This paper will dive into the world of slash-fiction. It will in particular look at stories written around various characters in the *Harry Potter* series, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and the character of Elsa from the Disney-movie, *Frozen*.

The main-reason that I have chosen to look at the Disney-movie *Frozen*, is because of the fan-participation the movie initiated online, after its release. Many fans interpreted Elsa’s character as homosexual, and shortly after a hashtag started on Twitter, where fans urged

¹ J.K. Rowling’s *Emotional Speech at the Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows part 2 London Premiere*, [online video], 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QnyKZe6VBA>, (accessed 11 April 2017).

Disney to give Elsa a girlfriend in the *Frozen* sequel (#GiveElsaAGirlfriend). This can, as earlier mentioned, imply that there is a demand for better representation of the LGBT-community in mainstream media. Representation of LGBT-characters seems to slowly become all the more common. For example, the character of the transgendered woman, Sofia Burset in the Netflix-show *Orange is the New Black* was a milestone for representation of transgendered people in popular media. Another milestone was recently reached, when *Moonlight* won the “Best Movie” Academy Award in 2017 – the first movie about homosexuality to win a “Best Movie” award. In the recent Disney-remake of *Beauty and the Beast* there is a homosexual character featured, and so there is in the newest *Power Ranger* movie. These different examples here all reach different crowds, and so this can indicate that normalization and improved representation of the LGBT-community in mainstream-media is slowly becoming a reality. The anticipation to the sequel of *Frozen* would, however, be a big leap for Disney. The earlier mentioned character from *Beauty and the Beast* was a support-character, but to make their main-character – a princess – lesbian would be a big milestone for the LGBT community. This is what fans are advocating for, and this is the reason I included *Frozen* in this paper.

This paper will try to look at slash fiction from an activist angle, therefore both studying the sociocultural approach of fanfiction, and the literary queer-theoretical perspective of the stories I choose to examine. The aim of the paper is to see whether the underlying motives of slash fiction are bearing any fruit in the current mainstream popular media landscape, and if the normalization of LGBT characters represented in popular culture is within the near future. I have in this paper chosen to examine three different canons of literature or popular media, that have all been made into slash fiction in the various online fan-communities, such as fanfiction.net or AO3 (Archive of Our Own). I chose these three works of fiction because they have proven to have a very large and solid fan base, the amounts of fanfiction written about *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*, in particular, are an example of that popularity.

This paper seeks to look at slash fiction as a subgenre of fanfiction and the underlying motives of writing slash within the online fan communities. To discuss this subject I will make use of Henry Jenkins’ theories about convergence and participatory culture to understand the motivation of fan communities, and make use of different articles from the book “Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet” by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, to support my arguments. When dealing with online fanfiction and rewriting of literature and popular media the notion of discourse becomes relevant and here I will make use of Michel

Foucault's ideas about power and knowledge to support my arguments. I will also make use of various theories within queer-theory, with focus on, among others, Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler, to discuss the literature I have chosen to examine. Here I will mostly focus on the notion of gender binaries, gender performativity, homosociality and sexual identities.

The melting-pot of online fan-communities

Fanfiction is today mostly an online phenomenon. The writers are fans that write stories about their favourite works of fiction. They can be written in the form of prequels, sequels or as so-called “plotheole-patchers”, which are stories that fill up the gaps of the original canon. They can vary in length, from a few hundred words, to hundreds of pages and they can vary in quality from very good writing to very bad writing.

Writers of fanfiction are fans who respond back to their favourite cultural items. Lev Grossman notes in his article “The Boy who Lived Forever”, that these fans are not “couchbound consumers”, but members of a strong fan-community who engage actively in the items of their interests,² and who feel, that their opinion and thoughts, as fans, matter to the original canon.

There are mixed opinions of fanfiction. While some authors feel that they are being robbed of their original ideas of characters and storylines, other authors welcome the interest and the participation of the fans. Fanfiction can thus initiate many debates and questions, such as: Is fanfiction literature? What is the purpose of writing fanfiction? Who are these people who write fanfiction and what do they write about? Media scholar, Henry Jenkins, agrees with Grossman, and further notes, that writers of fanfiction – fans in general - are highly engaged members of a participatory culture, who learn to think politically, through their participation as fans.³

Slashfiction is a subgenre of fanfiction, and these are stories that mainly focus on implementing homosexual characters and storylines into already written literature. A lot of the slash-fiction that is found online contains very graphic sexual scenes. This might give many readers a very silly image of slash-fiction, causing them to dismiss its other literary qualities. Elizabeth Woledge argues that slash-fiction, although indeed often sexually graphic, is not in its essence about sex, but about intimacy: “One of the many intimate slash fans that I have spoken to about their interests expressed this distinction very well: She claimed, in a comment that drew

² L. Grossman, ‘How Harry Potter Became the Boy Who Lived Forever’, *Time Magazine*, 7 July 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,2081784,00.html>, (accessed 28 March 2017).

³ *Henry Jenkins on Participatory Culture (Big Thinkers Series)*, [online video], 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgPm-clwRsQ&t=1s>, (accessed 28 March 2017)

applause from her audience, that “K/S has not been, and never will be, about the sex.”⁴ As this paper will also later argue, the notion of intimacy is one of the cornerstones of slash fiction. The stories this paper deals with presents a lot of explicit sexual content and thus it could be argued that they are basically erotica or pornography. Catherine Driscoll however notes, that slash fiction is a fusion of genres – pornography and romance – bringing romantic intimacy and explicit sexual scenes together, where these two otherwise have usually been kept apart. According to Driscoll, the thing that allows this fusion to take place is the notion of love, and thus intimacy is one of the vital things that separates slash-fiction from pornography.⁵

Jenkins notes that members of a participatory culture learn to navigate and understand the world through play.⁶ With the rise of the digital age and thus online fan-communities, the members of these communities connect with other people from all over the world, across nationalities, genders, sexualities and class. This creates a melting-pot of ideas and knowledge being constantly shared. J.I. Barnes notes in her article, “Fanfiction as imaginary play”, that because of the diversity in these fan-communities, it provides a platform for marginalized voices.⁷ The members therefore learn about inclusivity and understanding differences. Grossman cites this interview in his article: “Fanfic became my English teacher, my sex-ed class, (...) It also provided me with a crash course in social justice and how to respect and celebrate diversity, both of characters and fiction writers.”⁸

When the fans participate with so much motivation and exchanging of knowledge it is fueled by a combination of things. First, their love and devotion as fans, and second, what can be understood as the Foucauldian idea of the dominant discourse that surrounds them. This paper’s aim is to look at the genre of slash-fiction within fanfiction, and the discourse within

⁴ E. Woledge, ‘Intimatopia: Genre Intersections Between Slash and the Mainstream’, in K. Hellekson and K. Busse (ed.), *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, London, McFarland & Company, Inc, Publishers, 2006, loc. 1383-1602. Available from Kindle, (accessed 10 March 2017).

⁵ C. Driscoll, ‘One True Pairing: The Romance of Pornography and the Pornography of Romance’, in K. Hellekson and K. Busse (ed.), *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, London, McFarland & Company, Inc, Publishers, 2006, loc. 1119-1380. Available from Kindle, (accessed 17 March 2017).

⁶ *TEDxNYED – Henry Jenkins – 03/06/10*, [online video], 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFCLKa0XRlw>, (accessed 2 May 2017)

⁷ J. I. Barnes, ‘Fanfiction as Imaginary Play’, *Poetics*, vol. 48, 2015, p. 74

⁸ L. Grossman, ‘How Harry Potter Became the Boy Who Lived Forever’, *Time Magazine*, 7 July 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,2081784,00.html>, (accessed 28 March 2017).

current western-society is currently focused a lot on the issue of rights, representation and normalization of the LGBT-community. Foucault speaks of this kind of discourse as a force of power that is exercised and produced by individuals⁹, and this shines through in the genre of slash-fiction, where online fans rewrite their favorite stories to include plotlines or characters that reflect the LGBT-community. The dominant discourse is constructed by a combination of various things, Foucault argues, among others that the power of knowledge shapes our language and thus also our discourse. When looking at the power of knowledge, Pierre Lévy's theories on the knowledge society are also introduced. When such large groups of fans get the opportunity to come together to discuss and share their love for this one item of their interest, the sharing of a great deal of knowledge is inevitable. This is what Lévy calls "collective intelligence". As Jenkins puts it: "Collective intelligence expands a community's productive capacity because it frees individual members from the limitations of their memory and enables the group to act upon a broader range of expertise. Lévy writes, that within a knowledge community, "no one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity"."¹⁰

Since fan-communities bring people together from what seems to be all walks of life, it can be concluded that it creates a good platform for writers of fanfiction to try to explore themes that may not be so well-represented in mainstream media and literature. This is, among others, where slash-fiction is introduced. As earlier mentioned, slash-fiction can be easily dismissed because of the graphic, sexual scenes that are depicted. However, there are two things that are worth remembering when reading slash: First, that fan-communities are a playground, and the writers of slash are messing around, playing with new ideas for their favourite stories, just as other fans mess around on guitars and pianos making covers for their favourite songs.¹¹ Second, what the writers are trying to say *between* the graphic sexual scenes.

Barnes touches in her article upon the notion of aesthetical reading. "When reading aesthetically (as opposed to reading for the purpose of extracting information), the reader's imaginative contributions to the text depend not only on the words on the page, but also on the

⁹ M. Foucault, 'Two Lectures', in Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1980, p. 93.

¹⁰ H. Jenkins, 'Interactive Audiences? The "Collective Intelligence" of Media Fans', *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, New York, New York University Press, 2006, p. 139.

¹¹ L. Grossman, 'How Harry Potter Became the Boy Who Lived Forever', *Time Magazine*, 7 July 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,2081784,00.html>, (accessed 28 March 2017).

life experiences, personality, values, culture and expectations of the readers.”¹² As Barnes notes here, readers mirror themselves in the text they read and look for representation. Catherine Tosenberger notes, that heteronormative reading practices are the most common in our reading culture, and therefore LGBT-stories are underrepresented in mainstream storytelling.¹³ However, writers of slash-fiction use “slash-goggles”, meaning that they are actively looking for holes in the canon which can mirror members of the LGBT-community. Tosenberger notes, that “heterosexuality can be assumed, while homosexuality must be proved.”¹⁴ The goal for slash-writers seems therefore to be, to prove and point out alternate sexualities in works of fiction, until they also can be assumed – and thus normalized – in mainstream media.

The stories I have chosen to analyze in terms of slash-fiction all use different means, but serve the same purpose which is to normalize representation of LGBT characters and relationships in mainstream media. The stories use different approaches, whether it is to unapologetically and unquestionably depict homosexuality as something completely natural, or if it is to shed light on the lack of accept in our current society and the emotional trauma and complications this gives members of the LGBT community. Although some might argue that the explicit sexual content is over the top or unnecessary, the bottom line for this sexual content is the notion of intimacy and love, not the sexual drives. It is evident that slash-fic writers are shedding light on the complications that members of LGBT community are currently facing. By writing this kind of fiction, they are also advocating for better understanding and normalization of LGBT representation in popular media. Slash-fiction can therefore in many ways be interpreted as activism and the interesting thing is to see whether this activism is bearing any fruit in the current landscape of popular culture. This paper is looking at slash-fiction revolving *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the *Harry Potter* series and the Disney-movie, *Frozen*. These first two works of canon have been rewritten thousands of times into slash-fiction and are among the most popular works of fanfiction on the internet. Their approach in depicting homosexuality will therefore be examined later in this paper. The last work of the canon, *Frozen*, is among the most popular movies made in history, and is being widely interpreted as depicting underlying LGBT-themes. Fans all over the world are encouraging Disney to include an LGBT-character in the sequel. Due to the anticipation around the *Frozen*

¹² J. I. Barnes, ‘Fanfiction as Imaginary Play’, *Poetics*, vol. 48, 2015, p. 70

¹³ C. Tosenberger, ‘Oh my god, the fanfiction! Dumbledore’s Outing and the Online Harry Potter Fandom’, *Children’s Literature Association*, 2008, p. 202.

¹⁴ C. Tosenberger, ‘Oh my god, the fanfiction! Dumbledore’s Outing and the Online Harry Potter Fandom’, *Children’s Literature Association*, 2008, p. 202.

sequel, the notion of representation of LGBT-themes in mainstream media is dealt with. The question is then, if activism in online participatory cultures and fan-communities might have something to do with it.

Species and sexuality - *The Lord of the Rings*

When looking at the works of slash fiction revolving *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, there are a few things that are useful to bear in mind. The original stories are written and inspired by Tolkien's own knowledge about male relationships that arose during the 1st World War, where contact between men and women was little and where men under certain circumstances were forced together which created a special relationship and intimacy. This, according to Anna Smol's article "Readings of Male Intimacy" is what partly inspires Tolkien to portray the relationships in *The Lord of the Rings* as intimate and homosocial. However, Smol argues, since the release of the books was in 1954 and 1955, well after the 1st World War, this perception of male intimacy had changed a lot in the current British society and was thus rather perceived as strange and unnatural.¹⁵ Society has, however, also changed a lot since the release of the novels and male intimacy, and homosexuality is becoming increasingly more visible and normalized in society of today. This is where the slash fiction of the canon of *The Lord of the Rings* comes in. I have chosen three stories found on the internet that all deal with certain characters and storylines from *The Lord of the Rings*, and which focuses on homosexual love and desires between the various characters.

The stories "A Beautiful Braid" by Saraste, and "An Unspoken Attraction", by Marie Noire, focuses on the relationship between Legolas in Gimli, who, both in the original story and film, share a very friendly bond, which might in popular terms be called a "bromance". The first story "A Beautiful Braid", by Saraste, is only focused on Gimli and Legolas braiding each other's hair. This story is what you can call "flash-fiction", meaning that it is the type of story that is very short, only a few hundred to a maximum of one thousand words.¹⁶

Gimli's fingers tremble when he braids Legolas' hair for the first time. He feels like blushing, his fingers awkward and fumbling as they weave one golden strand over another, creating a delicate pattern which declares things only he is able to read in the company he currently keeps. Legolas' fingers are reverent, gentle, as they feel the pattern, bring the hanging tail-end of the braid in front of his green eyes to scrutinize it. 'What a beautiful braid, Gimli.'¹⁷

¹⁵ A. Smol, "'Oh... Oh... Frodo': Readings of Male Intimacy in *The Lord of the Rings*", *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 50, no. 4, Winter 2004, p. 957.

¹⁶ SFE, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, [website], 2013, http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/flash_fiction, (accessed 29 April 2017)

¹⁷ Saraste, *A Beautiful Braid*, [website], 2017, <http://archiveofourown.org/works/10182836>, (accessed 19 April 2017).

The scene is intimate and portrayed elegantly. This portrayal is interesting, because it very much corresponds with the traditional Tolkien-portrayal of elves, but completely clashes with the portrayal of dwarfs. Elves are typically described as almost unearthly fair creatures, with long shining hair, elegant movements, beautiful features and graceful behavior. Dwarfs on the other hand are the exact opposite. Their appearance is coarse, rugged and their hair and beard is long and rumped. Their behavior is loud, rude and they are very strong. The portrayal of dwarfs is a very excessive description of coarse and blunt masculinity. The portrayal of elves on the other hand is not as easy to distinguish on the gender-binary scale and thus elves can be perceived as more gender-fluid creatures. The two genders of elves both encompass masculine and feminine traits. Therefore it is particularly the portrayal of Gimli in this story that is interesting – Gimli is here described as being “awkward” and “fumbling”, which refers to the general notion of dwarfs’ coarseness, but despite the awkwardness, Gimli is also presented as caring and gentle as he works on Legolas’ braid. This latter presentation of Gimli being caring and gentle is what clashes with the traditional image of dwarfs presented in the original series.

In the story “An Unspoken Attraction” by Marie Noir there is more dialogue and more of a plot, but the bottom line is the same mutual attraction between Legolas and Gimli. In this story, we see more of the typical portrayal of the species, Gimli is blunt as usual and Legolas his usual fair and gentle.

Gimli narrowed his eyes. “Stop coddling me, Elf. You are confusing me with the Halflings.” Legolas sighed, muttered under his breath about the stiff neck of Dwarves. It was Gimli’s turn to tease. “Must we start that again?”, “If you did not persist in being so stubborn, we would not need to bring it up once more.” Legolas stood, crossing his arms over his chest and assuming a stance befitting a prince. “I am a Dwarf... what would I be if not stubborn?” Gimli shrugged.¹⁸

What these two stories however both have in common is how gender is depicted and, in Judith Butler’s notion, how the genders are performed. It might seem that Legolas is in his more natural surroundings and performs his gender as per the norm of elves. However the “fumbling” and “awkwardness” of Gimli indicates that this is not how Gimli is used to perform his gender. Butler notes, that gender is not a singular “act” – like one could say that this is the

¹⁸ Marie Noire, *An Unspoken Attraction*, [website], 2002, <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/771563/1/An-Unspoken-Attraction>, (accessed 19 April 2017).

case for Gimli – but a continuous exercise of your gender as per the norms that you are raised in.¹⁹ As earlier mentioned, Legolas, being an elf, is raised in an environment with much more fluidity and can thus easily float in between the gender performances. Gimli on the other hand is performing the blunt, masculine role that has been laid upon his gender and, also his entire species as a dwarf.

The depiction of these relationships exemplified in this chapter are of a natural and unquestionable sort. There is no discussing or questioning the homosexual desire or love. This can be interpreted as a utopian approach to depict homosexuality. It is evident that our current society has not yet reached the place where homosexuality or other members of the LGBT-community are perceived as the norm. One can thus say, that the relationships depicted here are a utopian attempt to normalizing this kind of love, and according to Henry Jenkins, to normalize homosexual love and relationships is one of the main goals of slash-fiction.²⁰

The third of *The Lord of the Rings* story focuses on the relationship between Aragorn and Boromir, who in the original story setting also share a friendship that gives readers room for further interpretation. It is written from Boromir's perspective and only takes place inside his head. The reader follows Boromir's train of thoughts, as he discusses with himself what to make of his obviously fond feelings for Aragorn. Boromir is discussing his inner doubts and insecurities that follows coming to terms with your sexuality. As opposed to the stories about Legolas and Gimli, Boromir considers the fact, that homosexuality is frowned upon in his community or society, and that this makes it even harder for him to accept or to dare "coming out". This story thus ends unresolved in Boromir's case:

I am falling in love with him; this I am aware of, but it haunts my mind to know it is so. I should not have these feelings for him (...) Not only that, but he is male. Such thoughts are often considered impure in Gondor; my people are not as lenient and open-minded as, say, the elves.²¹

¹⁹ J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 12.

²⁰ H. Jenkins, "Welcome to Bisexuality, Captain Kirk": Slash and the Fan-Writing Community, *Textual Poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 195.

²¹ xGloryHartx, *Drums in the Deep*, [website], 2009, <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/5003507/1/Drums-in-the-Deep>, (accessed 3 April 2017).

This quote indicates, what was earlier noted, that elves seem to have a different stand on the gender scale than maybe other species that are portrayed in *The Lord of the Rings* universe. It is evident from these three stories; in “A beautiful braid”, “An unspoken attraction”, that Legolas is always portrayed as his normal self from the original series, and in “Drums in the Deep” it is stated, that the elves have special position regarding viewing sexuality and performing gender. Boromir confirms to himself, that the people of Gondor – who are of the species men – are not as “lenient and open minded” towards same-sex relationships as the elves. It seems clear here, that Boromir, as a man, of the species man (human), is from a culture that expects of him to perform his gender, per their norms. It is evidently this notion that stops him from acting on his feelings towards Aragorn. This story, as opposed to the two others, does not use a utopian approach in its depiction of homosexuality, but rather focuses on highlighting the struggle of performing a norm laid on your gender, that you are unable to fully fulfill or “act”. Eve Sedgwick notes, that there is a constant boundary in patriarchal society that divides what is regarded as acceptable and unacceptable in how far male friendships – or homosociality can go – and that this patriarchal system is rooted in homophobia.²²

Elves are creatures of fantasy, and so are dwarfs in the universe that Tolkien creates. Men (humans) however, are not fantastic, literary creatures, but a real species. The real world of humans is, as Sedgwick notes, still very affected by homophobia, and thus this might be the reason for Boromir being the one in conflict with himself, while the elf and dwarf are depicted as seemingly more flexible, fluid and untroubled when it comes to performing gender. The reason for this could be, that it is easier to depict fantastic creatures and species as queer, because our real society obviously does not have any prejudice or norms laid on beings that do not exist. Utopia literally translates to “the place that doesn’t exist”, and by depicting fantastic creatures that do not exist in untroubled homosexual relationships, one might argue that the writer is implicitly saying that queer relationships that are depicted as untroubled and accepted are not yet a reality in our current society. As the story about Boromir also shows, he is the only character from *The Lord of the Rings* who is debating his sexuality, because as a member of the human species he would not be accepted as anything else than heterosexual. It can therefore be argued that there is a clear difference between how the different species of *The Lord of the Rings* are depicted in these three works of slash-fiction. Jenkins notes, that although erotic and romantic depictions are important for writers of slash-fictions, their underlying

²² E. Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1985, p. 89.

motive is to portray the restrictions that are laid upon traditional masculinity, and to attempt to “reconfigure male identity”.²³ It is evident that Boromir, and not Legolas or Gimli, is the one that embodies the image of “traditional masculinity” and thus we see that he is the most restricted of the three species when it comes to perform, or not perform his gender. And that his male identity is the hardest to reconfigure, because the real world has restrictions and norms laid upon his gender, whereas there exists no real restriction regarding elves and dwarfs, since they are not real species.

²³ H. Jenkins, ““Welcome to Bisexuality, Captain Kirk””: Slash and the Fan-Writing Community, *Textual Poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 196.

Healing through intimacy - The *Harry Potter* series

This last chapter touched upon Judith Butler's notion on gender performativity and Eve Sedgwick's notion on the restrictive patriarchal heteronormative society. This was in relation to how Gimli, Legolas and Boromir all had different standpoints when it comes to performing their gender, Boromir being depicted as the one with most restriction laid upon his gender. This chapter will look at some of the same notions.

In the story "He who must not be normal", the author has chosen to focus on the relationship between Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy. Throughout the original series, the relationship between these two characters has been a tense and longstanding feud. The author, Lettered, has here chosen to give the point of view to Draco Malfoy, which gives insight to the completely other side of the story provided by Rowling. Malfoy's point of view is the "evil" side, the side that sympathizes with Death Eaters and Voldemort. It is also the loser's side of the original, and this work fan-written story gives insight to the deeper, inner psychological state of both the winner and loser side of the original canon. It is therefore a hurt/comfort type of story, where Harry/Draco act as comforters for each other, as they both suffer different traumas from the same war²⁴. The characters of Malfoy and Potter embody the winner and loser side of the argument and the trauma and psychological scars that follow.

Potter's shaking hands swept down the bare skin of Draco's back, down to his hips. Then Potter was reaching between them, over Draco's stomach. Softly, Potter started touching the scars. The scars from the Sectumsempra were long and jagged, no longer red but gone pale and white with time. Draco went still. "I did this," Potter said, and Draco couldn't protest because it was true.²⁵

This quote refers to an incident in the original canon, where Harry hurt Draco badly in a duel. As this quote, however, shows, the characters are united in a love or that helps them deal with their innermost issues, which wouldn't have been dealt with if it wasn't for the sexual intimacy they share. Draco is dealing with feelings of guilt and shame of his past as a Death-Eater. Currently living a depressive life, where he is shunned by other people of the magical community, because of his past as a Death-Eater. Harry stands as the exact opposite of Draco

²⁴ K. Busse, and K. Hellekson, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* [Kindle Edition]. Loc. 236–244.

²⁵ Lettered, *He Who Must Not Be Normal*, [website], 2013, https://archiveofourown.org/works/1104020?view_adult=true, (accessed 30 March 2017).

- he is being praised as the hero of the magical society, and he is constantly being reminded for his role in the war against Voldemort and celebrated for his bravery. Harry, however, feels that he has also done harm to other people, and being constantly praised for that, he feels, is wrong and undeserving. Draco and Harry are thus direct opposites in this story - they embody a world, that even in the aftermath of Voldemort's death, still is heavily divided in two, a childish view on "good" and "evil". When Draco and Harry thus begin their relationship, the societal situation becomes more nuanced, and they both help each other realize that neither of them are completely to blame – nor completely blame-free. This they realize through the intimacy they share through the love that develops between them and the sexual acts, which the story also focuses a lot on. This intimacy helps them deal with their scars, being either physical or psychological, and both Harry and Draco benefit from and deal with trauma they both have faced, in the aftermath of Voldemort's death.

The interesting thing about this work of slash-fiction is, that the homosexual acts of the story between Harry and Draco are never questioned or debated, they proceed as naturally as a heterosexual relationship would do in any other story. What the story instead deals with is psychological, mental trauma and it also portrays an image of gender that is not necessarily masculine nor feminine, but rather neutral or fluid. A non-binary image of gender, where the characters are acting and performing freely and not accordingly to socially constructed gender-set values or attributes. Although the characters indeed have suffered many traumas throughout their lives, the fact that they engage in homosexual activity is not troubling them, and is portrayed naturally and unquestionably. Therefore this story rejects traditional gender performances and this is what, according to Jenkins, is what slash does best. "Slash throws conventional notions of masculinity into crisis by removing the barriers blocking the realization of homosocial desire; Slash unmask the erotics of male friendship, confronting the fears keeping men from achieving intimacy".²⁶ Slash-fic can thus, as it did with the examples of *The Lord of the Rings* work to highlight certain problematics such as gender performativity and the homophobic structures and hindrances in a patriarchal society. Or it can completely reject those notions, and depict it unapologetically and naturally, as if this is how it has always been.

The story "An Excess of Emotions" by EarlGreyTonight, is written from Harry's viewpoint in a way that begins to describe a fondness for the character of Dumbledore. This story is, like

²⁶ H. Jenkins, "Welcome to Bisexuality, Captain Kirk": Slash and the Fan-Writing Community, *Textual Poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 210.

the previous one, also an example of a hurt/comfort story – this time it goes one way, and Dumbledore acts as a comforter to Harry. This story contains no sexual scenes, nor romantic love. It begins with Harry wondering about Dumbledore. Harry can't understand his feelings towards Dumbledore, and is confused whether he feels attraction or if this is how you feel towards the only parental figure you have in your life. This story thus both introduces the reader to a homosexual undertone in the story, but it also puts into focus the notion of Harry's lack of role-models, or parental figures in his life, and offers a discussion on what consequences this might have had on Harry's character. The story is a so-called "plothole-patcher", meaning that it takes place as a side-story to the original series and fills out a plot-hole of the canon. Harry is a student and still lives at Hogwarts and Dumbledore is still the headmaster. The story draws on the notion, that in the canon Harry and Dumbledore have an unusual relationship, and that the canon indicated a close, yet, undefined, relationship between Harry and Dumbledore. This story tries to nail down this relationship, by drawing on how the canon left it undefined, and by the fact that Harry's character has experienced little parental love in his life. Thus, this story tries to repair that.

The story ends with Harry and Dumbledore sharing an intimate moment, with Harry opening to Dumbledore about him feeling lonely, although having friends who love him.

The two stand together for a long time. They sway very slightly back and forth, holding each other tightly, until Harry can't contain all the emotions that are fighting each other anymore and they come flowing out through his wet face, his trembling hands clenched in Dumbledore's cloak, his heaving chest, and he's still being held through it all. The hand atop his head pets him lovingly and he chokes out the last of his tears, feeling emptied and hollow and... warm. And loved.²⁷

Although the story might have started out with implying that Harry was sexually attracted to Dumbledore, the story concludes with a confirmation that Dumbledore is the closest Harry has ever had to a parental figure, and that they become closer to each other in a family-like intimacy, with Harry feeling parental - as the quote above shows - love and affection, for the first time.

Opposed to the other story about Harry/Draco, where there are many explicit sexual scenes, this story has none. This introduces the question whether this latter story can be regarded as

²⁷ EarlGreyTonight, *An Excess of Emotions*, [website], 2015, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/3858166>, (accessed 30 March 2017).

slash-fiction. Not only did it not depict sexual scenes, it didn't even depict homosexual love. However, what it did depict was intimacy between two male characters, and that is what Elizabeth Woledge argues is at least one of the important themes of slash-fiction.²⁸ As earlier mentioned, Jenkins also notes that reconstructing male identity is one of the main goals of slash-fiction, and depicting intimacy between two men, whether it is romantic love or parental love, is one way of doing that.²⁹

This chapter has sought to look at how slash-fiction can be defined with a bottom line of intimacy, and not explicit sexuality. The two stories both provided different takes on how intimacy can be portrayed and how it can arise, and still be categorized as slash-fiction. Elizabeth Woledge argues, that sex is not the primary motivation for reading or writing slash-fiction, what is more important to the readers, is the notion of intimacy³⁰ and how it can serve a healing purpose for the characters involved.

²⁸ E. Woledge, 'Intimatopia: Genre Intersections Between Slash and the Mainstream', in K. Hellekson and K. Busse (ed.), *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, London, McFarland & Company, Inc, Publishers, 2006, loc. 1509. Available from Kindle, (accessed 10 March 2017).

²⁹ H. Jenkins, "'Welcome to Bisexuality, Captain Kirk": Slash and the Fan-Writing Community, *Textual Poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 196

³⁰ E. Woledge, 'Intimatopia: Genre Intersections Between Slash and the Mainstream', in K. Hellekson and K. Busse (ed.), *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, London, McFarland & Company, Inc, Publishers, 2006, loc. 1533. Available from Kindle, (accessed 10 March 2017).

Making LGBT-stories mainstream - The case of *Frozen*

“Since its release, “Frozen” has earned \$1.2 billion worldwide, becoming the fifth-highest-grossing film of all time and by far the highest-grossing animation. That’s not to mention two Academy Awards, a BAFTA, a Golden Globe, a soundtrack that’s garnered more than a million album sales and seven million Spotify streams, official YouTube video views in the hundreds of millions, and a DVD that became Amazon’s best-selling children’s film of all time based on advance orders alone.”³¹

As this article, by Maria Konnikova from the *New Yorker* sums up, the Disney movie, *Frozen*, instantly became a global hit. At first glance, the movie might not seem like it is radically different than any of the other princess movies that Disney has earlier produced. What is then the reason for the extreme popularity of *Frozen*?

Konnikova explains in her article, that although the movie, at first glance, might seem like the typical Disney-princess movie, there are some fundamental differences in *Frozen* that makes it stand apart from other Disney production. The main-character, Elsa, is unable to control her magical powers and therefore she numerous times ends up hurting people and causing chaos in her own kingdom, although wanting to do good. Thus, her character stands out as flawed – and therefore also relatable. The mere fact that she is struggling is something viewers and fans all over the world can relate to, and interpret on numerous levels. “For some it was about emotional repression; for others, about gender and identity; for others still, about broader social acceptance and depression. “The character identification is the driving force,” says Wells.”³² Here J. I. Barnes’ notion on aesthetical reading immediately becomes relevant again. Since *Frozen* is enjoying so immense popularity it is evident that viewers all over the world are mirroring their own experiences and personalities onto Elsa’s character, which they can do because of how relatable and flawed her character is.³³

Especially the notion of Elsa’s sexuality is a topic that has been widely discussed since the release of the movie. The fact that she has magical powers that she tries to oppress, but eventually “let’s go” of has been interpreted by fans all over the world as a metaphor of coming

³¹ M. Konnikova, ‘How “Frozen” took over the world’, *The New Yorker*, 25 June 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/how-frozen-took-over-the-world>, (accessed 2 May 2017).

³² M. Konnikova, ‘How “Frozen” took over the world’, *The New Yorker*, 25 June 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/how-frozen-took-over-the-world>, (accessed 2 May 2017).

³³ J. I. Barnes, ‘Fanfiction as Imaginary Play’, *Poetics*, vol. 48, 2015, p. 70.

out of the closet. And since the movie did not end with the typical happily ever after between a prince and princess or king and queen, fans are advocating all over the world for Disney to give queen Elsa a girlfriend in the *Frozen* sequel. The hashtag #GiveElsaAGirlfriend first started in May 2016 and instantly spread like wildfire all over social media.³⁴ While fans are waiting in anticipation for what Disney decides to do with the *Frozen* sequel, other fans have taken matters into their own hands and have started writing about Elsa's homosexual love-life on the internet.

The story "Unconditionally" is written by the online user Celdarion, and is a so-called AU-story. This means that it portrays the same characters as the original story, but the setting is in an Alternate Universe. This story is set in a modern-day setting, technology is as up to date as today, and the characters, the sisters, Anna and Elsa, live a normal family-life, and are not royal in any way, nor do they possess magical powers. However, just as in the original, Elsa is dealing with issues of loneliness and low self-esteem. She is described as an outsider, a girl who enjoys gaming and is not very social. When she first meets, and begins her relationship with the character of Rachel, these issues of hers get dealt with, because of an intimate relationship that develops between Elsa and Rachel. In the original movie, Elsa feels lonely because her magical powers scare her, and therefore she isolates herself from other people because of the fear of hurting them. However, when she learns to embrace her powers instead of rejecting them, she finds a way to connect with people (e.g. her sister, Anna) again and beats the loneliness.

In the story "Unconditionally, the notion of magic is taken out, and thus Elsa's character is left with only the insecurity and loneliness that is due to her "outsider"-status. The relationship with Rachel however, makes Elsa embrace and accept herself as she is, and thus the fan-fic follows the canon in the manner that Elsa is originally struggling with accepting parts of herself, but eventually learns to embrace it and therefore also heal. This story is also an example of a so-called hurt/comfort story.³⁵ In the case of this story the characters of Elsa and Rachel both benefit and heal from the intimacy that develops between them. The scenes are graphic and sexual for the major part of the story, but it is the intimacy and mutual love and affection that keeps the story moving forward. The intimacy that develops between the girls

³⁴ E. Hunt, 'Frozen fans urge Disney to give Elsa a girlfriend in sequel', *The Guardian*, 3 May 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/may/03/frozen-fans-urge-disney-to-give-elsa-girlfriend-lgbt>, (accessed 27 March 2017).

³⁵ K. Busse, and K. Hellekson, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* [Kindle Edition]. Loc. 236–244.

helps them deal with their issues, such as depression, anxiety, and coming to terms with yourself and your sexuality. This quote here shows, that the character of Rachel is especially troubled:

That was last year,” Rachel replied. “I was in a really, really, dark place then. Thankfully, my depression is mostly under control these days, but back then it was rampant. That night in the bathroom I found the biggest fucking blade I could and dug it in deep. As my arm ran red with blood, I knew in that moment I needed some serious help. I ran screaming to my mother (...) And there we have it, the story behind the scar.”

Elsa was silent. She simply brought Rachel into a tight hug, crying along with her.

“Thank you”, she whispered in her ear, “for telling me all this. It can’t have been easy.”³⁶

Besides the general notion of “coming to terms with yourself” as I have mentioned before, the story, “Unconditionally” also focuses on the more concrete issues and fears of coming out and coming to terms with your sexuality. This fear is also mostly embodied in the character of Rachel, who has a mother who does not accept her as homosexual. This lack of accept is part of Rachel’s psychological issues, which, as the quote above shows, have resulted in depression and self-harm.

Articles by both Henry Jenkins and Elizabeth Woledge have focused on how one of the goals of slash-fiction is to break down restrictions and barriers on male sexuality and gender performance.³⁷ However, this story here deals with a female homosexual relationship. Is the goal then not the same, as when it deals with male homosexuality? If we look at this story, it depicts a homosexual relationship, where sexual intimacy and love helps the characters to deal with psychological and emotional problems like loneliness, depression and lack of accept – regardless if they are male or female.

The fan-fic follows the canon in this regard, that by coming to terms with yourself and accepting yourself leads to psychological improvement, and thus Woledge’s notion on intimacy is also relevant when reading this work of slash-fiction. That intimacy serves a healing purpose for the characters involved.

³⁶ Celdarion, *Unconditionally*, [website], 2015, <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/11090852/5/Unconditionally>, (accessed 30 March 2017).

³⁷ H. Jenkins, ““Welcome to Bisexuality, Captain Kirk”: Slash and the Fan-Writing Community, *Textual Poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 196.

This work of slash-fiction has taken the notion on intimacy seriously, and used it as a foundation for the relationship between Elsa and Rachel. As earlier mentioned, since the character of Elsa in the original canon turns out to be an extremely relatable character, fans all over the world have seized the opportunity of making Elsa's flawed and relatable character a symbol of various struggles. One of the most notable interpretations is the struggle of "coming out" and accepting yourself and your sexuality. Since this debate arose among fans whether Elsa's character might be homosexual, it can be speculated that this is one of the reasons behind this work of slash-fiction.

Conclusion

With Henry Jenkins' notion of participatory culture in mind, fanfiction – and therefore slash-fiction – can be seen as tools of activism. Tools for promoting real societal change. Online fan-communities are enormous melting-pots of people with diverse backgrounds who come together and connect over fictional items of their interests. These communities are thus, first of all, interest-driven, and can be compared to online playgrounds, where fans can play with ideas and share them with each other. Through this play, enormous amounts of knowledge are shared, and thus these fan-communities provide their members with knowledge they otherwise may not have attained through traditional education. Through aesthetical reading, fans mirror themselves and their personalities onto the stories they read, and this can turn some readers into writers. Writers who want to change “the stories they love best” into stories that also represents them – and this is, among many other things – what slash-fiction does. Represents the still marginalized voices of the LGBT-community.

This paper looked at various works of slash-fiction written around *the Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the *Harry Potter* series, and the Disney-movie *Frozen*. It concludes, that these different works of slash-fiction all use different approaches to portray the LGBT-community. They seek to normalize homosexual relationships, and to highlight the struggles members of the LGBT-community are facing in our current society. Both of these approaches can be seen as forms of activism.

It will indeed be interesting what Disney decides to do with the *Frozen* sequel. The release date has been announced for 2019 and it is exciting to see if Disney feels that the world is ready for a lesbian Disney princess. However, representation of LGBT characters and communities are becoming more visible in current society. As the introduction mentioned, the character of trans-woman Sofia Burset in TV-show, *Orange is the New Black*, played by the transgendered woman Laverne Cox was a big leap in the right direction. As was the case when the movie *Moonlight* won a “Best Movie” Academy Award this year, the first movie ever to win best picture that focuses on the LGBT community. Disney would however be on another level. If Disney would dare to make a such a statement, then we could maybe begin to talk about LGBT-community becoming normalized in current popular culture and society.

Thus, we wait for the big guys to take the big step, slash-fiction is the small guy who has already taken several huge steps. Writers of slash-fiction are promoting the normalization of the LGBT community, along with countless other enthusiasts out there on the internet. Their

activism seems to slowly bear fruit in popular culture. It will be interesting to see if the release of the *Frozen* sequel in 2019 will be a victory for that activism.

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