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Slash Fan Fiction and the Canon

B.A. Major Thesis

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I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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Contents:

1. Introduction

Fan fiction (*aka* fanfic) is a term that first emerged in 1960s, in connection with the media fandom. However, as Abigail Derecho has documented in her essay on "Archontic Literature", fanfic belongs to a much older literary tradition, that of "derivative" or "appropriative" literature (63). Fan fiction "makes use of an accepted canon of characters, settings and plots generated by another writer or writers" (Pugh 25). With the advance of the internet and online fan communities in past two decades fan fiction has become a fast spreading literary practice. There are various sites all over the internet devoted to fanfic. They range from the large umbrella sites, such as <u>FanFiction.Net</u> (which hosts many archives for various fandoms and accepts stories of all genres, regardless of the fiction rating) to more specialized ones like for example <u>BritSlash</u> (slash fan fiction inspired by british TV shows), or <u>Annuonen</u> website (<u>Lord of the Rings</u> male-pregnancy fan fiction).

One genre of fan fiction that has received much academic attention is the so-called slash fanfic. The defining feature of slash is involving of canonical characters in (usually non-canonical) homosexual affairs and relationships. Slash first appeared in the Star Trek fandom, in early 1970s. According to Sheenagh Pugh, the first slash story was published in 1974 and featured Kirk and Spock as lovers (91). Since that time, slash has become quite a wide-spread phenomenon and there is a slash fraction in almost any fandom. One may even suggest, that slashers are now a fandom in itself. However, the opposition against slash is still rather fierce in many fandoms. One of the recurring anti-slash arguments is the claim that slash is a "canon violation" or a "character rape" - a claim that usually stems from prejudice and common stereotypes, rather than canonical evidence.

In my thesis, I intend to discuss slash in Tolkien fandom, with particular emphasis on the interrelations between fan fiction and its canonical source. I intend to advocate the view that, in relation to fan writing, canon should be perceived as an inspirative rather than

prescriptive entity and that fan fiction is not inferior or subordinate to the originative text. By addressing the complex problem of deliminating the Tolkien canon and by exploring the ways in which slashers rewrite, recontextualize and comment on Tolkien's texts, I would like to arrive at more general conclusions regarding the notions of canon and its interrelations with the fan texts.

In the theoretical introduction to my thesis, I am going to discuss some of the important theories on fan fiction and slash, using them as a foundation for my research on Tolkien slash fan fiction. In my discussion of Tolkien and Tolkien slash, I consider his three major "Middle Earth" texts; however, some emphasis is laid on The Silmarillion – which also includes all the related texts such as The History of Middle Earth volumes – and Silmarillion fanfic. This is partly because of the Silmarillion's ambiguous canonical status, partly because of its epic scope and the resulting generic and emotional shift in Silmarillion slash, and partly because most concepts of sexuality present in Tolkien's works have been established in Silmarillion related texts and stories. Most fan texts I am going to quote from or refer to can be found at the Library of Moria site (LoM). Although LoM is by no means the only Tolkien related slash fan fiction archive online, it counts among the largest and most comprehensive ones. In my discussion of Tolkien slash, I intend to consult not only the academic theoretical texts, but also several fan essays, which will provide some valuable insights into fannish interpretive discourses. Most fan authors publish their stories under a penname and their real names are not given, therefore I am going to refer to them by their chosen nicknames.

2. Expanding the Archive: Fannish Creativity

Before the slash fan fiction and canon issues related specifically to Tolkien can be addressed and discussed in greater detail, it is necessary to offer some insight into what fan fiction (or fanfic) is, how it works as literature and how it relates to its canonical source. It is also important to offer similar insight into the mechanisms and characteristics of the slash genre and its interrelations with both the canon and other fan fiction. This chapter will serve as an introduction into fan fiction and slash as literary genres, it will also briefly introduce some of the interesting theories (both older and recent ones) related to the topic, and discuss the common controversies associated with fanfic/canon issues.

Various definitions of fan fiction are available, but all of them agree on its derivative (or appropriative) nature and most of them stress the fact, that it is not written for profit. Many of them do not include derivative works based on non-copyrighted material. A precise, generally accepted definition of fan fiction probably does not exist, although the definitions available have much in common. Sheenagh Pugh addresses this problem at the beginning of the second chapter in her book The Democratic Genre:

> Some would take it all the way back to myth and legend [...] Some hold that it cannot predate copyright. Most, I think, would count in the Conan Doyle fanfic of the 30s and 50s, though some only reckon from the start of *Star Trek* fanfic in the 1960s. [...] Some will not admit "profic", i.e. fiction published for money like the sequels by Emma Tennant and others to Austen's novels; others would say it is so like in kind to non-profit fanfic that it too is a sub-category. (Pugh 25)

Other examples of works that could possibly be labeled as fan fiction that Pugh mentions are, among others, Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea or Will Self's Dorian. Pugh decides to "go along with those who define fan fiction as writing, whether official or unofficial, paid

or unpaid, which makes use of an accepted canon of characters, settings and plots generated by another writer or writers" (25). For the purposes of this research I decided to "go along" with Pugh. While her definition perhaps lacks the necessary emphasis on the role of fan communities and their interpretive discourses in the production of fan texts, it is designedly text-oriented and thus provides a good starting point for this thesis which aims to look at fan fiction mainly as a story-telling practice.

However, a brief insight into the motives and communities behind fan fiction seems necessary. Henry Jenkins aptly formulated, what is the nature of the impulse that drives people to write and read fanfic: it is partly an admiration of and fascination with the canonical text and partly a frustration with the text's inability to give the fans exactly what they want from it (162). Fans as consumers are devoted but far from uncritical. Fandom is a community whose patterns of consumption are based on critical reading of the canonical text, numerous interpretive and analytical activities and on active participation in the creation of their favorite myth. "Fan power" is a particularly prominent factor within the media fandom, where fans often appeal directly to the originator(s) of a source text in an attempt to exercise some influence on the future development of the canon. Especially TV shows, which are by their nature a collective effort, have been known to provoke this kind of response. This is of course possible (and sometimes succesful) with open canons. Closed canons do not allow such interaction and book-based canons rarely encourage it, certainly not as often or to such an extent. In terms of directly influencing the shape of the canon, "fan power" does have its limits. However, any canon can be explored, commented on, expanded or even re-shaped by means of fan creativity. In this sense, the "fan power" is almost limitless. Fan fiction is indeed probably the mightiest tool a fan has – it allows her to extend, bend and rework the canon in various possible ways, many of them deliberately subversive.

Jenkins's book Textual Poachers (1992) coined an approach that has greatly influenced fan studies in the years to come. Jenkins "borrowed" from Michel de Certeau the metaphor of active, interpretive reading as "textual poaching". He further elaborated on it, focusing on the "relationship between readers and writers as an ongoing struggle for possession of the text and for control over its meanings" (Jenkins 24). Fan fiction can be considered one of the manifestations of this struggle. And, until very recently, it has been almost exclusively perceived as such: one of the many intriguing manifestations of the dynamic relationship and the struggle for power between fandom and originators of canonical texts. In other words, fan fiction was usually researched rather as a cultural or sociological phenomenon, than as a full-fledged literary practice.

Only in the past few years have academics started to focus on fan fiction as literature, paying more attention to the texts themselves than to the counterculture that produces them. The focus has shifted from the "*relationship between readers and writers as an ongoing struggle for possession of the text and for control over its meanings*" (Jenkins 24, my italics) to "the construction of fan texts *as texts*" (Kaplan 135, my italics). Of course, the source text cannot be left out of view when dealing with fan fiction (or any other form of "derivative" literature), but now the interrelations between *texts* have finally got into the center of academic attention. It is not surprising that these interrelations are very complex. A fan text by definition refers to the source text, but it typically alludes also to other fan texts and it very often contains numerous references and allusions to texts outside the fandom to which it belongs. The last mentioned aspect of fan fiction's allusiveness has been pointed out by Sheenagh Pugh in her book The Democratic Genre:

> Because they are so used to basing writing on the shared material of their own canon, many fanfic writers become adept at using other shared material too. [...]

many titles of fanfic stories, and sometimes of fanzines, are themselves quotes

from books, songs or other sources. (Pugh 43)

Indeed, this is quite a common tendency in fanfic writing. A whole subgenre of fan fiction, the songfic, is characterized by drawing inspiration and quoting from popular songs. For example, Tell The Captain's one-shot "Shine on you Crazy Diamond" (archived at fanfiction.net) shows us Maglor, second son of Fëanor, living in modern day England, pondering about Pink Floyd and rock music in general and about how the lyrics of the Pink Floyd song remind him of his father. Quotes from and allusions to both popular and classical literary sources are fairly common as well. To offer another example from the Silmarillion fanfic community hosted at fanfiction.net, GundamWingFanatic90 has written a short fiction dedicated to the character of Fëanor, called "The Books of Danté". The story consists of three parts - Inferno, Purgatory and Paradise - in a rather superficial but obvious allusion to Dante's Divine Comedy. A brief look at the Silmarillion section at fanfiction.net reveals a number of allusive titles: "The Unbearable Smugness of Being Fëanor" by Ignoble Bard, "Let it Snow" by Rei-hime, "The Woman in Red" by Jack Lantern and "Crime and Punishment" by Avalon Estel, among others. These examples were given to suggest how essential and integral intertextuality is to fan fiction. Not surprisingly, most literary surveys of the genre address the issue.

In her essay called "Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction", Abigail Derecho has placed fan fiction in the context of a literary tradition she calles "archontic", using this new term to replace more traditional labels with somewhat pejorative connotations: i.e. "derivative" or "appropriative" literature. Derecho used the concept of "archontic principle" introduced in Derrida's work "Archive Fever" to describe how fan fiction works and what is its relation to the canonical, originary works that inspire it. The archontic principle is the natural tendency of every archive to change

and to expand: "[It] is that drive within an archive that seeks to always produce more archive, to enlarge itself. The archontic principle never allows the archive to remain stable or still, but wills it to add to its own stores." (Derecho 64) Fan fiction is this archontic principle put in practice. Drawing her inspiration and argument from Deleuze, Derecho claims that archontic literature, including fan fiction, "works by repeating with difference" and greatly relies on the principle of "resonance" for its force and meaning. Be it introspective, lyrical vignettes or speculative "what if" scenarios, fan fiction draws its meaning and its power to attract the reader both from "repeating" the original and deviating from it. "When one reads the work of archontic writing, in other words, one is really reading two texts at once." (Derecho 73) Another Deleuze's concept that Derecho mentioned in connection with archontic literature, was the notion of the "potential" and the "virtual" being just as real as the "actual".

> The virtual realm, the realm of possibilities, is no less real than the realm of the actual. Fan fiction, and all archontic narrative, permits virtualities to become actualized. Archontic literature assumes that every text contains a wealth of potentialities that variations of the text can make actual. (Derecho 74)

This "actualization of potentialities" is fan fiction's major appeal. Each text has at least as many potentialities as it has readers. An important notion introduced by Derecho is the dismissal of the traditional hierarchy that perceives the source texts as primary not only in terms of being the first, but also in terms of being the most relevant. Stressing that the actualized potentialities of a text are just as *real* as the originary text itself, Derecho substitutes the usual model of fixed hierarchy with a more dynamic, flexible and egalitarian model of "relation".

Similar claims are made in Mafalda Stasi's essay "The Toy Soldiers from Leeds". Although the essay focuses on slash in particular, Stasi's findings and conclusions can be

applied to fan fiction in general. Stasi refuses de Certeau's "poaching" metaphor popularized by Jenkins, on the grounds that

> ...the notion of theft may be misconstrued to indicate an inherent disparity
> between original text and [its] rewriting -- or at least to obscure the key
> point that there is no "legitimate" text (as opposed to "pirated" ones). De Certeau
> talks about writing in the margins, which implies a hierarchy where some texts
> are indeed "marginalized," and where fan writers are glossists rather than
> authors in their own right. (Stasi 119)

Instead, Stasi introduces a different metaphor, that of fan fiction as a *palimpsest*, stressing the importance of intertextuality, the principle of relation and resonance in (slash) fan fiction, pretty much as Derecho does, and laying some extra emphasis on the dynamics of the creative process within fandom and the diversity of meanings it affords.

Ika Willis, in her essay called "Keeping Promises To Queer Children", describes the process of fan reading as a negotiation of meanings between the reader, the text and the dominant culture, or as she puts it, "interaction between canon as made legible by dominant cultural knowledges and formulas for reading, and canon as reoriented by the demands and desires brought to it by the subjectivity of the fan/reader and her knowledge of the world" (Willis 153). While Willis acknowledges that there are dominant readings of the canon, she asserts it is greatly due to the dominant "social and cultural representational conventions and codes" (Willis 157), which she refers to with the barthesian term "doxa". Resistance against these conventions and codes is - according to Willis - not only legitimate, but even necessary. What she encourages is a dialogue between the reader and the text, as opposed to a "docile" reading dictated by the *doxa*. She claims that only this "resistive" mode of reading is capable of perceiving (or even creating) those gaps within the text that fan fiction is so often assumed to "fill in".

The three aforementioned texts focus on different aspects of fan fiction as literature, but they all have one important thing in common: while they acknowledge the indisputable position of a canon as the originative text within a particular fandom, they deny that it would be more relevant or more legitimate than the "archontic" texts inspired by it.

Sheenagh Pugh directly addresses some of the traditional notions of hierarchy that place fan texts into subordinate position. She is particularly concerned with the assumption that fan texts are somehow "not original" or "less worthy" because of their derivative nature. She points out, that the modern idea of intellectual property, "originality" and "individual genius" are relatively new concepts, remarking that "the idea that there is some intrinsic virtue in using an 'original' character or story would have puzzled most ancient or mediaeval writers" (Pugh 13). Fan writers are actually perfectly capable of making the texts they write "their own". The canon is essential, of course, and the writers' knowledge of it is necessary. Canon is the "source material accepted as authentic and, within the fandom, known by all readers in the same way that myth and folk-tale were once commonly known" (Pugh 26). While wide range of interpretations is always possible and deliberate alterations of the canon can be perfectly acceptable, it is quite essential that the author "does her homework" and is not only familiar with the source, but also capable of using that knowledge well. As Derecho has written in her essay about archontic literature, fan fiction works through repetition with difference and one must be careful about how she handles the "difference". In this case, too much of a difference (or difference badly handled) will prevent the "resonance" from happening. It should be noted, though, that too much repetition would have the same effect. The presence of the "difference" makes resonance possible and it is actually this difference that makes fan fiction relevant.

Sheenagh Pugh named two basic kinds of "difference" in fan fiction, dividing the fan texts into two large groups: stories that offer "more of" the canon and stories that draw "more from" it. (19) "More of" in this case means "more of the same". Such stories tend to be very much in the spirit of the original. Their authors are quite happy with the canon the way it is, they just cannot get enough. This is quite often (but far from exclusively) the case with closed canons, where fans have very little (if any) chance to get "more of" it from the originator(s). The "more from" stories are more daring in pushing the canon boundaries and limits, exploiting the given material in a more subversive manner and exploring the canon from entirely new perspectives and in ways that the canon itself would never offer. To give an example, a Silmarillion fanfic set in Beleriand of the First Age, telling a story very similar to the canonical ones, in a similar tone and with a similar moral and character focus, would be a classical "more of" story. A good example of a "more from" story is a short fic by Fili, called "I Can Never Go Home". It is told entirely from a first generation orc's point of view. It is written in The Silmarillion that first orcs were originally elves, transformed through dark magic and torture into servants of the evil demigod Melkor, but Tolkien does not pay them much attention once the transformation occurs. There is no such thing as a "transformed elf" in Tolkien canon, there are just orcs - and orcs do not deserve a voice of their own. Fili, however, seems to be of a different opinion:

> Something flashes through my mind: [...] I suddenly feel as if a knife has been twisted in my throat. [...] The memories - where did they come from? get stronger. I had a family [...] Where are they? What happened to them? [...] I am over a small hill, out of sight. I dare go no farther. A stream, faintly glistening, winds its way round the foot of the hill. I sink to my knees beside it, lean forward and look

at my reflection in the starlit water. I flinch back in disgust and bury my face in

my hands. (Fili)

This orc has a voice of his own and becomes quite conscious of what he used to be and what he has been transformed into. Fili succesfully manages to draw more *from* the canon, adding a new dimension, instead of adding more of the same to it.

The "more from" approach is usually regarded as the more individual, creative and innovative one. While there are of course many good, well-written "more of" stories, their general tendency is to be rather imitative of the source text's tone, formulas and style. For this reason and particularly for the reason of slash being a typical "more from" genre, the following passage will focus on "more from" approach in greater detail.

In <u>Textual Poachers</u>, Jenkins lists "ten ways to rewrite a television show" (Jenkins 162). They are ten typical ways of getting more from the canon, the "characteristic strategies of interpretation, appropriation, and reconstruction" (162). Although Jenkins's focus is on media fanfic, his list can be (with a few modifications) applied to fan writing in general (later I will elaborate on those strategies that are particularly important in slash): *Recontextualization* is filling in the "missing scenes", the off-screen (in case of literature the unwritten) events that provide a new context for the events and character behavior that appear on screen (or in the text). *Expanding of the canon's timeline* is a quite self-explanatory term. Such stories take place before or after the events of the original, often exploring the characters' backgrounds or speculating about the events that predated the canon or about the possible development of events after the original story's end. *Refocalization* is the shift in focus towards the secondary or even marginal characters or aspects of the canon. *Moral realignment* is, as Jenkins puts it, "perhaps the most extreme form of refocalization" (168). The villains from the source text become the protagonists in

some fan texts and the moral alignment of the canon is inverted. *Genre shifting* is yet another self-explanatory term. Such texts shift from the genre of the source text, using different generic conventions and traditions, while maintaining the original setting and characters. *Cross-overs* "blur the boundaries between different texts" (170), combining two or more canons within one story. The typical way is to have characters "cross over" from their canonical setting to another (for example, Kirk, Spock and McCoy suddenly finding themselves in Mordor would be a cross-over). *Character dislocation* is a "radical manipulation of generic boundaries [where] characters are removed from their original situations and given alternative names and identities" (171). *Personalization* is a means of connecting one's own life experience with the fictional setting of one's favorite canon. The usual ways of achieving that are either self-insertion of the writer into the canon setting in the form of an original character (this practice is generally frowned upon, as it often leads to the creation of so-called Mary Sues[1]) or by translocating the canon characters to the "real life" setting. *Emotional intensification* is a very popular strategy. Fan texts often tend to be rather character than action driven. This focus on the characters and their psychology often results in the emphasis of emotionally charged moments. Emotional intensification is typical of "angst" and "hurt/comfort" stories. Last item on Jenkins's list is the *eroticization*. Where the erotic dimensions of the lives of canonic characters remain unexplored, fans often decide to explore this "territory" themselves.

Jenkins's list of fan fiction writing strategies provides a good transition point to narrow the focus somewhat and, by highlighting those strategies particularly relevant for slash, move on from fan fiction in general towards the issues and theories related more specifically to slash writing. Out of the "ten ways to rewrite a [canon]", the four strategies

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[1] Mary Sue - "the generic name for any new [original] character (usually female) who's a ego-stroke for the writer: she's beautiful, has amazing skills/powers, gets into a love affair with an existing character, or (usually) all of the above" (The Fanfiction Glossary)

most commonly associated with slash are *recontextualization*, *genre shifting*, *emotional intensification* and, of course, *eroticization*. *Recontextualization* is one of the mightiest tools a slash writer has. The "slashy stuff" typically happens "off-screen". Engaging two same-sex canon characters in a non-canonical homosexual relationship definitely puts many on-screen (or explicitly mentioned) events in an entirely new context. For example, a "docile reading" of the Silmarillion scene where Fingon rescues Maedhros from Thangorodrim would be, that Fingon was motivated partly by the friendship he used to share with Maedhros back at Aman and partly by political concerns (an attempt to reconcile the houses of Fëanor and Fingolfin). A resistive, slash reading would explain Fingon's actions by his not so platonic love for Maedhros. Although canonical gay characters and canonical gay relationships have become more common in recent years, recontextualization is still an essential strategy in slash writing. *Genre shifting* and *emotional intensification* are very common in slash, although slash writers do not necessarilly have to employ these strategies where the canon itself is romance or relationship oriented and rich in emotional crises of all kinds (like for example some soap operas). However, where the canon is more action/adventure oriented, genre shifting is much more likely, since the focus of slash are the characters and their feelings. In Tolkien's sagas, the characters' motivations and relationships are often essential to the plot, but only very rarely elaborated on in greater detail. The narratives remain epic and focused on action and adventure. While it is possible to write a Tolkien slash romance in a tolkien-ish manner (similar for example to the tale of Beren and Luthien in tone and structure), emotional intensification and genre shifting from epic to for example romance, angst, or porn are more common. An integral part of the "slashing" process is the *eroticization* of the canon. On the basic level, it is the eroticization of originally non-erotic relationships. On the more superficial level, it is the eroticization of the text. While the

other strategies listed by Jenkins certainly can be used in writing slash stories (and some of them often are), they are optional and need not be employed at all; however, the four strategies that have been highlighted play important role in the "slashing" process itself.

Slash traditionally makes use of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick called "male homosocial desire" and of homosocial settings (Jenkins 203). Many (if not most) canons are male-centered and focus on relationships between men. Lots of them are set within a very "masculine" environment. Furthermore, until quite recently, most canons have failed to introduce strong and interesting female characters. Idealized male friendships are still a very common motif in popular stories. Some of the canons that are known to be particularly "slashable" share most of the aforementioned characteristics: "The Professionals", "Blakes 7", "Stargate SG-1", "The Sentinel" or Tolkien's books, to name at least some of them. All these canons have in common what may be called a high "homosocial factor". They "depend for their emotional power upon the suggestion of strong homosocial desire between men, even as they isolate that desire from any explicitly recognizable form of sexuality" (Jenkins 203). While most people tend to consider these canonical homosocial relationships as strictly platonic, slash writers are not afraid to transgress the "boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable forms of male friendship" imposed by the patriarchal society (203). Of course, the slash genre has expanded and developed since its beginnings in early 1970s. Eroticizing a canonical homosocial relationship is by no means the only way to slash a canon. On the contrary, writing a credible or at least somehow functional story about a very improbable pairing has become a popular type of challenge within some fandoms. However, canons with profound "homosocial factor" are generally more "slash-friendly" than others, as is the case with Tolkien's Ardaverse.

While exploration of the homosocial-homosexual continuum can be considered a defining feature of the genre, this fact should not obscure the considerable internal diversity of slash (which it often does). Slash is divided into a variety of subgenres and there are stories so different in scope, tone, and structure from one another, that one might possibly suggest that there are many more differences than similarities between them. Slash stories range from angsty one-shots and tragic romances to light-hearted "fluffs", hardcore porn and parodies. Most slash fics contain erotic scenes and imagery, but there are stories that do not include any sex scenes at all. Slash as a genre is defined solely by the fact that there is a same-sex relationship (or at least a homoerotic act) involved[2]. Usually, slash is male/male (m/m), but female/female slash (f/f or femmeslash) also exists, though it still remains relatively marginal when compared to m/m slash. A same-sex couple (or more such couples) is typically in the centre of a slash story, although threesomes, groups and love triangles are not uncommon.

It is impossible to introduce some universally applicable pattern in connection with slash. Nevertheless, there are some recurring patterns and formulas that should be mentioned. Jenkins has described four narrative strategies that typically serve to make the "transition between homosocial and homosexual desire" (Jenkins 206): *The initial relationship* formula has a story open with "[describing] and [re-establishing] the pair's basic relationship as it has been previously represented within the [canon]" (206). The story then goes on to introduce the homosexual aspect into the relationship (this can be dealt with in various possible ways). *Masculine dystopias* explore the barriers posed by the repressive institution of traditional masculinity. Either the protagonists have difficulties communicating their feelings to one another, for fear that it might damage the relationship

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[2] Opinions vary whether a fanfic about a *canonical* homosexual relationship can still be considered slash. However, as there are no canonical gay relationships in Ardaverse, this question can be left for others to answer.

they already share, or the male sexuality becomes a means and manifestation of "competition, dominance, and violence" (214); sometimes both these schemes combine in one story. The *confession* formula draws its emotional impact from describing the precise moment, when one of the characters communicates his feelings and desires to the other one. This moment can be followed by a masculine dystopia, if the "other one" in question is not happy about the news, or a *masculine utopia* in those cases, where the "confession paves the way for physical release" and towards greater intimacy, as the barriers between the characters dissolve (215). These "slash formulas" appear in most slash stories. Some stories contain only one of these themes, while others, especially the longer ones, may include more or even all of the formulas, as various stages of the story and relationship development.

Slash stories usually involve sex, but most of them also try to establish some kind of relationship or at least some sort of emotional and/or psychological background. For the majority of slashers, sex in slash is important but not paramount. The characters and their relationships are the preferred focus. Homosocial/homosexual desire between them can take many forms and slash authors are willing to explore all the possibilities. However, some types of relationships are particularly attractive to slash writers and readers: one of the most popular forms of homosocial bond in slash is the *intimacy*. It is the dominant motif in a slash subgenre Elizabeth Woledge named *intimatopia*. In intimatopic slash, the continuum between homosocial and homoerotic is very fluid and the traditional boundary between "acceptable and unacceptable forms of male friendship" (Jenkins 203) is not present. In intimatopias, the love between two persons of the same sex is characterized by the ultimate intimacy they share. Sex is only a means of intensifying and strenghtening this intimacy – a way of reaching and maintaining the oneness of both body and soul. Lovers in intimatopia are more than "just good friends" but also more than "just lovers" – the

emotional, physical and spiritual bond between them is complex and multilayered (Woledge 102). *Romance* in slash is more centered around the themes of sexual tension, desire and, of course, romantic love and the obstacles the central pair must overcome to be together. The continuum between homosocial and homosexual is disrupted in romances: the two guys (girls) are either friends or lovers. The transition from one stage of the relationship to the other is less smooth and less fluid and, unlike intimatopic love, the romantic love is not a mere culmination of a close and complex relationship. While different from one another in many respects, both *intimatopia* and *romance* deal with a loving relationship between the characters. Not all slash is about love or intimacy, though. There is a lot of dark slash out there, that explores relationships a lot more problematic. Usually, dominance and submission play an important part and in the most extreme cases, the relationship is that between a cruel master and an unwilling slave. It is usually these stories that are most often labeled with warnings such as "torture", "rape" or "violence". For example, "Fallen", a story by pippichick, is preceded by this warning:

> AU, M/M Slash, graphic sex, M-Preg, BDSM, D/s, Rape/Non-con, character death, horror, gore, violence, physical handicap - basically, if you can think of it, it's likely here somewhere. Generally dark, disturbing, and possibly bad for your mental health. You have been warned.[3] (pippichick)

"Fallen" is a somewhat extreme story and certainly darker than most. However, it is illustrative of the general tendencies in slash darkfics: the common motif is sex as a means of manipulation, domination or even torture. The relationship is that of submission and dominance or of struggle for dominance. If there is any love at all, it tends to be physical, unhealthy and either possessive or submissive, often accompanied by an equal share of hate.

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[3] AU - alternate universe; M-preg - male pregnancy; D/s - dominance/submission; Non-con - non-consensual sex

Of course, not all slash stories would fit perfectly within one of these subgenres and there are many that combine them. Especially the line between romance and intimatopia can be rather blurry. Then there are of course many "one night stand" scenarios, where not the relationship but rather a confrontation of two characters is the issue. However, the three "relationship patterns" mentioned above are very popular.

Probably more often than any other fan fiction genre, slash is accused of being "canon rape" or "character rape". Most characters in popular culture are not explicitly gay and the "mandatory heterosexuality" of our society establishes a rule observed by many: that a character is "straight until proven queer" (this is discussed at length in a fan essay "What is Slash?" by The Brat Queen, hosted at the <u>Fanfic Symposium</u> site). The "presumption of straightness" is the dominant approach within most fandoms and few people realize that it is a matter of prejudice rather than anything else. Although slash has become more popular in past years, it is still relatively marginal compared to gen and het, and there is a significant number of people who are actively (sometimes aggressively) opposed against slash, considering the whole concept wrong or even immoral. Leaving aside religious or "moral" objections, one of the anti-slash arguments is that slash is by definition a violation of the canon and a "character rape". Anti-slashers need not be religious or homophobic; however, they all abide by the "straight until proven queer" rule. Slash reading of a canon is, in our society, a resistive and sometimes deliberately subversive one, but even if we accept that there is such a thing as "wrong reading" of a text, one cannot simply dismiss slash reading as wrong just because it does not presuppose straightness.

With Tolkien, the situation gets even more complicated. In Tolkien fandom, it is sometimes particularly hard to separate the source text from its originator and his world views. This is partly due to Tolkien's strong authorial voice and partly due to the

fact that so much is known about JRRT himself. While Tolkien's texts themselves are very "slashable", the haunting vision of poor old professor spinning in his grave is ever present within the fandom and even slash writers themselves seem to care, as some of the less formal disclaimers indicate: "If I owned them…do you think I'd be WRITING what they were doing?! Nah. Not mine, all Tolkien's. Hope he doesn't come back from the dead…eeee…" (Deathangelgw, "The Sea Doth Wax and Wane") What exactly it is that makes Tolkien so "slashable" and whether we should really care about Tolkien spinning in his grave, that is going to be the subject of following chapter.

3 - Gaps in the Tolkien Canon

Fan fiction is typically viewed as a practice of "filling in the gaps" and the Tolkien canon is extraordinarily rich in such tempting gaps. Some of them come into existence due to resistive modes of reading and interpretation which Tolkien's works greatly encourage (for reasons discussed below). Others are connected with the huge amount of information that is implied but not given (this is especially true of characterization). And, not the least importantly, the unfinished status of the "Middle Earth" archive, with all its internal contradictions, generates the "aura of myth" that invites creative re-thinking and reworking of the source texts.

Ika Willis has written in her essay called "Keeping Promises to Queer Children", that "[the] gaps [in the canon] may only become visible – may only, indeed, *be* gaps – when the text is read from a position that refuses the illusion of continuity" (Willis 158). This "illusion of continuity" is created by an "ideologically obedient" reading. Applying the appropriate stereotypes and associations allows the reader to perceive the given text as "continuous". When we shift our perspective, applying associations and knowledge which create a "resistive intertext", gaps appear that can be supplemented. (157-158) Tolkien's

fiction is very inspiring, when it comes to the resistive modes of reading. One of the reasons for this is the fact, that parts of the cultural code, by standards of which Tolkien's texts would seem "continuous", are nowadays remarkably dated. Tolkien was a traditionalist and an old-fashioned man even in his own time. Exploring all the layers of Ardaverse's[4] moral framework and the ways in which they relate to the modern cultural codes would exceed the intended scope of this thesis. Therefore, I will leave most of the aspects of Arda's "moral code" aside, focusing only on those directly associated with slash: love, sex, marriage, and male friendship.

　　　As documented in an award winning essay on sexuality in Tolkien's writing by Tyellas[5], Tolkien's views of sexuality were apparently quite old-fashioned and idealistic and many modern readers find them hard to accept. If we examine the treatment of sexuality in Tolkien's texts, we discover some recurring concepts: *sex outside of marriage is bad*. (Tyellas 3) The strongest arguments to support this claim can be found in "The Laws and Customs of Eldar", published in Morgoth's Ring: "It was the act of bodily union that achieved the marriage, and after which the indissoluble bond was complete...it was at all times lawful for any of the Eldar, both being unwed, to marry thus of free consent one to the other without ceremony or witness." (Tolkien 212) According to this essay, among elves sex equaled marriage. Although this rule is explicitly mentioned in connection with Eldar in particular, one can assume that among the honorable peoples of Arda the standards were very similar. Tolkien apparently considered sex to be acceptable only when the "union of bodies" occured in accordance with "the union of souls".

　　　This brings us to another concept regarding sexuality in Arda: *lust is indeed a sin*. Disturbing displays of sexual desire usually mark a tainted character. Gríma Wormtongue,

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[4] Ardaverse or Arda - the fictional setting in which most Tolkien's fiction (like for example *The Hobbit*) takes place.

[5] "Warm Beds Are Good: Sex and Libido in Tolkien's Writing", won a 2003 Mithril Award for best critical essay.

the spy of Saruman, lusted after Éowyn, for example. Even better example comes from the Silmarillion, more specifically from the tale of Maeglin: Maeglin "loved the *beauty* of Idril and *desired* her, without hope" (Tolkien 167, my italics). Maeglin's case is particularly unfortunate because Idril was his first cousin and "the Eldar wedded not with kin so near, nor ever before had any desired to do so" (167). Thus, Maeglin comes across not only as someone not entirely in control of his libido, but also as a pervert (by elven standards, at least). And this image of him is only intensified by the mention of Maeglin "[watching] Idril, and [waiting]" as "the years [pass]" (167). This implies voyeurism and clearly indicates sexual obsession, especially as "his love [turns] to darkness in his heart" (167). Maeglin's unhealthy romantic interest is later partly responsible for the fall of the city of Gondolin and Maeglin himself becomes one of the relatively few elven villains. Two other characters that come to mind in connection with an "accelerated libido" are Fëanor and Finwë. Some more insight into elven "laws and customs" is necessary to shed some light onto this: the elves' interest in sex is closely associated with begetting of children. When the relatively short "productive" stage of marriage passes, their interest in sex is lost. According to "The Laws and Customs of Eldar", "with regard to generation the power and the will are not among the Eldar distinguishable. Doubtless they would retain for many ages the power of generation, if the will and desire were not satisfied; but with the exercise of the power the desire soon ceases..." (Tolkien 213). Fëanor's will and desire must have been exceptional, as it was within his power to beget seven sons, which was an exceptionally high number by elven standards. Fëanor's sexual activities remained confined to his marriage and cannot be considered improper; however, his remarkable (and renowned) virility, although certainly ascribable to the greatness of his spirit, seems conspicuous at best, if we look at it within the larger context of the treatment of sexuality in Silmarillion and if we consider what a problematic character he turns out to be. Finwë,

Fëanor's father, had issues as well. Elves were traditionally supposed to marry just once in their lifetime. (As the "Laws and Customs of Eldar" tell us.) Finwë was the first one to marry twice. His first wife decided to abandon life after giving birth to Fëanor and Finwë's "will and desire" were apparently not yet satisfied. He was granted an exception, married his second wife and had four more children. Finwë's decision to marry for the second time is perceived as an indirect cause of much evil and grief, as Fëanor's disapproval of this decision and his hostility towards his half-brothers played an important part in the subsequent course of events:

> In those unhappy things which afterward came to pass and in which [Fëanor] was
> a leader, many saw the effects of this breach in the house of Finwë, judging
> that if Finwë had endured his loss and been content with the fathering of his
> mighty son, the courses of [Fëanor] would have been otherwise, and much
> sorrow and evil would never have been. (Tolkien, *Laws and Customs* 239)

Finwë's sin was probably partly that of lust (among Eldar, wanting more children and wanting more sex is very close), but his transgression also points to another concept present in Tolkien's writings: *marriage should be for life*. This theme is present in the idealized romances of Beren and Lúthien, Aragorn and Arwen, Thingol and Melian and others. It is worth noticing that in all these relationships, the death of the husband is closely followed by the departure of the wife - Arwen and Lúthien both die and Melian the Maia abandons her elven form and leaves Middle-Earth. The relatively rare dysfunctional relationships (like that of Aldarion and Erendis or Aredhel and Eöl) tend to have dire consequences. Widows and widowers usually do not marry for the second time. Finwë is a remarkable exception to this rule and as has already been argued, his "divorce" from his first wife Míriel is deemed to be an ill-advised decision.

As is implied in "The Laws and Customs of Eldar", Tolkien's notion of sex is inseparably connected with the desire to reproduce. Although he acknowledges that there is no fault in enjoying sex between legitimate partners (in "The Laws and Customs" we can read that "the union of love is indeed to [the Eldar] great delight and joy, and the 'days of children', as they call them, remain in their memory as the most merry in life" - Tolkien 213), he nevertheless sees its primary function in the begetting of children. Sex purely for the enjoyment's sake would entail passion, desire and lust, and as has been already pointed out, lust is a sin within the moral and ethical landscape of Tolkien's Arda.

It is clear from the above mentioned examples that for Tolkien, love, sex and marriage were one. Casual sex and promiscuity were pretty much out of question, at least with the "good" peoples of Arda. His views in this matter show a considerable degree of idealism, traditionalism and of course, the strong influence of his Catholic world view. It should be also noted that although Tolkien does not exclude sexuality completely, he nevertheless marginalizes it, especially in The Hobbit (which is perfectly understandable, though) and in The Lord of the Rings. The Silmarillion and related texts are much less "deficient" in this matter, but the focus is still on the heroic and villainous deeds, perilous quests, war and adventure, and the sexual content is toned down. While many of Tolkien's readers are quite happy with the way sexuality is treated in his works, there are also many of those, who find it difficult to come to terms with Tolkien's prudery (Tyellas 11). Both the marginalization and the old-fashioned view of sexuality are at odds with the more liberated modern views and thus invite resistive readings of the text.

In Tolkien's works, the marginalization of standard sexuality is accompanied by the ever-present theme of very close male friendships. They are "romantic friendships" following the pre-20th century tradition of the ideal male companionship and camaraderie that has been present in mythology and literature for centuries. Just to name some the best

known examples: Sam and Frodo are an inseparable couple that shares an exceptional level of intimacy (including moments of physical - but not erotic - closeness); Maedhros and Fingon's friendship is stronger than the feud between their houses (it is chiefly on Fingon's behalf that Maedhros protests against the burning of the ships at Losgar and Fingon undertakes a journey to the very heart of Morgoth's territory to rescue his friend); the friendship between Legolas and Gimli is also legendary and Beleg Strongbow sacrifices virtually everything, including his own life, for the sake of his friend Túrin Turambar. The aforementioned friendships were particularly renowned, but even if we skip the popular "homosocial couples", there still remains a huge number of close homosocial bonds and situations (Finrod and Barahir, Bilbo and Frodo, the Fellowship, Bilbo and the dwarves, etc). The emotional depth, intensity and sometimes physicality of these friendships would hardly puzzle for example 19th century readers (Tyellas 6). Tolkien himself had many male friends with some of whom he was very close. Unfortunately, this notion of platonic but very intense romantic friendship is nowadays more or less a history, as there has been a severe disruption in the once fluid continuum between the homosocial and the homosexual (Jenkins 202) and the doctrine that separates the "acceptable and unacceptable forms of male friendship" dictates that the "acceptable forms" are free of "exaggerated" emotionality and excessive physical contact. For a modern reader who decodes the text according to the modern stereotypes, it can be difficult to read about Sam "[trying] to comfort Frodo with his arms and body" (Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings* 919) and not get funny ideas about what is happening. In her essay on "The Misguided Search for Homoeroticism", Heather Elizabeth Peterson tries to address the issue of the modern view of male friendship: she remarks that "we have ceased to believe that it is possible for a man to deeply love another man, unless that love is sexually based".

Tolkien's portrayal of male friendship, just like his treatment of sexuality, is archaic and dated, at least according to the mainstream interpretive standards of today. Although the ideals presented by Tolkien are not entirely alien to the modern reader (and many modern readers gratefully embrace them), they do not fit smoothly within the 21st century concept of love and friendship. The general lack of erotic motifs and of explicitly mentioned sexual interaction between characters of the opposite sex ("desire" or "union of bodies" is about as far as Tolkien is willing to go), combined with the strong emphasis on intense homosocial feelings between men, generates a tension between the text and the contemporary cultural code, which invites readings resistive to the text. Due to that tension, fissures within the canon are created that encourage the fan writers to "fill them in" in ways that sexualize and often "homoeroticize" the source text.

The above discussed aspects of Tolkien's works are not the only ones that make Tolkien so "slashable". Closely associated with the emphasis on homosocial relationships is the considerable marginalization of female characters. Most women remain confined to their traditional gender roles and do not actively participate in the important events, quests and adventures of Middle Earth. There are exceptions, of course, like Éowyn, Lúthien, Galadriel or Haleth. Nevertheless, however important these characters are, they still remain exceptions to the general rule. Most female characters, if they are mentioned at all, stay conveniently out of the way. This only heightens the already high homosocial factor that generates a remarkably "slash-friendly" environment.

Tolkien is also very epic and narrative, leaving most of the characters' psychology aside or only hinting at it. Generally, we are told what the characters say and do, but seldom there is a more detailed account of why they do it. This is especially true of The Silmarillion where the scope of thousands of years is compressed into a relatively short text. Many characters' psychologies, motivations, feelings and attitudes are left for the

reader to imagine. If we want to know what kind of person for example Glorfindel is, we have to create him from the sketched outline provided in the source text. This opens a wide range of possibilities and various characters can exist in many different "incarnations".

There is another feature of the Ardaverse that makes it considerably flexible regarding fan creativity. Tolkien canon is difficult to deliminate. Fans concerned with and respectful to Tolkien's intended vision more or less agree that only The Hobbit (with some reservations), The Lord of the Rings and other texts published in Tolkien's lifetime are truly canonical, in terms of being reliable sources of information about Middle-Earth as Tolkien imagined it. The Silmarillion, published after Tolkien's death and edited by his son Christopher, is regarded less reliable in this respect and therefore semi-canonical (as other post-humously published materials like The Unfinished Tales or The History of Middle Earth). However, in this case, fan writer's definition of the canon needs not necessarilly be the same as canonist's. For a fan writer, canon is "the source material accepted as authentic and, within the fandom, known by all readers in the same way that myth and folk-tale were once commonly known" (Pugh 26). Canon is the common source of reference for the Tolkien fan fiction community, not simply a source of "authoritative information" - and judged by these standards, The Silmarillion and other post-humously published texts are authentic enough (though to a varying degree), even with all their contradictions and loose ends. Most fan writers do try to "get it right" and as close to Tolkien's intended vision as possible (where that intended vision is known or can be guessed at). They indulge in intense study of the available material, trying to sort out the bits of information according to their presumed validity and to build a larger, concise picture. However, there are many fan writers who simply explore those concepts they are most comfortable with (although it is felt to be a common courtesy to state clearly that they

are doing so, especially if the concept they use directly contradicts what is thought to be the "intended vision").

Although there is some central concept and line of events in Tolkien's Arda, it is always somewhat blurry in the margins. Especially the various records of the events in the Years of the Trees and First and Second Ages often tend to contradict each other and contain hints of ideas never fully developped. The Silmarillion is usually considered the primary source of information about these eras of Arda's existence. It was the first post-humously published Tolkien's text set in Arda, and unlike The History of Middle Earth or The Unfinished Tales, it is relatively consistent and concise and functions well enough as a "stand alone" book. However, for this to be the case, much had to be left out (as some bits of the history existed only in the form of drafts or were written in a tone that did not correspond with the narrative style of the book). Some other concepts that were not supposed to be a part of Tolkien's intended vision made it into Silmarillion by oversight. Editorial changes were also made to avoid contradictions with the books already published. Christopher Tolkien then went on to publish the unfinished materials or materials that could not be included in Silmarillion. These books (The History of Middle Earth volumes and The Unfinished Tales in particular) not only document the development and earlier versions of the myth, but also contain pieces of information that were supposed to become a part of the canon (where these are contradicted by The Silmarillion, they are given preference over it by canonists) or concepts and ideas whose canonical status remains uncertain. This makes the Ardaverse a very special and dynamic archive. Its internal inconsistency, alternative accounts of events and number of contradictions, as well as our knowledge of various stages of its development, give it a very vivid feel of a living mythology that is always open to various interpretations. Tolkien died before he could complete his works and what he has left to us is an unfinished "work in progress".

Ardaverse is, in a sense, a closing archive. There is only so much material that Christorpher Tolkien (or his heirs) can release, the source will run dry sooner or later and considering the amount of material already published, it is likely to be rather sooner than later. However, the half-open status of Tolkien's legendarium will probably survive that day. Not only has it never been finished, but also – thanks to Christopher Tolkien – the creation of the myth became a part of the myth itself. In terms of the derridean "archontic principle" and archives' tendency to expand, Ardaverse is by its very nature one of the most expansive archives of popular culture, as the pattern of expansion is so profound and so deeply embedded in it.

Another trait of Tolkien's works that encourages creative re-writing is the notion of Bilbo and Frodo as "physical chroniclers" of the Middle Earth stories. The records of Middle Earth's history that are available to us have been mostly written by these two, in *The Red Book of Westmarch*: The Silmarillion and The Hobbit by Bilbo Baggins and The Lord of the Rings by Frodo. Thus, the perspective is considerably subjectified. We do not get Fëanorians', Morgoth's or Saruman's point of view, as *The Red Book of Westmarch* is – as any record of history - biased. (In his essay on "Historical Bias in the Making of *The Silmarillion*", Alex Lewis points out that Bilbo, the "physical chronicler" of Silmarillion, must have obtained most of his information from Imladris elves, and he goes on to document how for example Elrond's ancestry may have influenced the way the story is told.) This bias, once noticed, encourages the resisitive view that things could have happened slightly or completely otherwise. One does not have to take everything that is written in the books for granted – if a fan writer accepts this notion, she gains considerable creative freedom.

How we define the Tolkien canon, then, depends greatly on to what extent we consider Tolkien himself. When Christopher Tolkien decided to share his father's legacy

with the readers, he did his best to sort the material out and to indicate (where he could) which concepts were supposed to be included in the final version, which were ephemeral and abandoned and which concepts' canonical status was uncertain at the time of his father's death. It is everyone's choice whether they take Tolkien's own interpretation of his work into account. (Most fans do so.) For the purposes of fan writing, this is in my opinion not necessary. Tolkien himself has stated that he wanted to create a mythology for England ("...I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend [...] which I would dedicate simply to: to England; to my country." - Tolkien, *Letters* 144) and referred to his collection of Arda fiction as "legendarium" (like for example in Letter 131). If we accept the notion of Ardaverse as an artificial myth, we may just as well adopt a flexible view of it, embracing its dynamics and internal contradictions as an integral part and the essence of the canon. Tolkien's own voice works best if considered as the voice of a chronicler or an interpreter – a voice that has its considerable weight but can be questioned.

Due to the complexity and unfinished status of Ardaverse (not to mention the recent cinematic addition by Peter Jackson, which is usually considered separately, as a "movieverse", but keeps interfering with the "bookverse" nonetheless), an absolute, official definition of the Arda's canon will probably never exist and opinions will always differ. Ardaverse is pretty much the case of "to each their own canon". It is up to the reader/writer to decide whether she will follow the easiest path and be content with the three principal texts, or if she will attempt to reconstruct Tolkien's vision by tracking bits of it down across <u>The History of Middle Earth</u> series or if she chooses to pick those pieces of the myth that she likes best. For reasons given above, I opt for the broad definition of the Tolkien canon as an immensely rich, frustratingly inconsistent and internally dynamic archive. Although some concepts will always be considered central and given much more

validity, excluding the marginal ones would undermine the canon's appeal as being an extraordinarily dynamic and flexible one.

Having addressed some of the canon features that relate both specifically to slash and more generally to fan fiction and fan creativity, it is now possible to move on to the Ardaverse slash fan fiction, and to discuss its most common themes and strategies and, of course, its ways of relating to the source texts.

4. Filling in the Gaps

Strategies used by slash writers in Tolkien fandom are of course not exclusive to that fandom. They are mainly *recontextualization*, *genre shifting*, *emotional intensification* and *eroticization*, as Jenkins has described them. However, each source text is unique and determines the ways in which fan writers use these strategies. In Tolkien's case, there is another important way of rewriting the canon (not in Jenkins's list) and that is *AU – alternate universe*. AU stories deviate from one or more single aspects of the canon - for example, a story in which the One Ring does not exist or where Saruman has not become Sauron's ally, would be an AU. Tolkien has set some rules which would probably prevent many slash scenarios from happening if some "modifications" to the canon were not made.

Slash recontextualization in Ardaverse works similarly as in any other fandom. As was discussed at length in the previous chapter, the source texts from Ardaverse have remarkably high "homosocial factor" and women seldom get in the way. Slash writers very often take advantage of this, writing new contexts for the numerous male relationships - friendships and animosities alike. Many recontextualizations of canonical friendships do not go much further than simple eroticization or/and intensification of the relationship. Like for example in Landel's "Absence", a short story about Sam's grief following Frodo's departure: besides the understandable emotional reaction to Frodo's absence, there are

hints of a more "exclusive" feeling ("...Master has gone away. I cannot follow. He left me here, where all I can ever see is him. In every leaf. In every happy ignorant face...") and of sexual desire ("With a wistful look at the writing on it, he stroked the page with tender fingers, as if feeling for something else than smooth paper."), but that is it. While this treatment of canon does recontextualize the source text, it does so in a relatively uncomplicated way. Similar holds true for other pairings that are inspired by popular canonical friendships, such as those of Maedhros and Fingon, Merry and Pippin or Túrin and Beleg. Where the characters do not form such "obvious" couple, the degree of recontextualization depends on the canonical situation and chosen pairing. An interesting instance of recontextualization can be found in Esteldil's dark romance "Into Darkness", a tragic story of Tuor and Maeglin, sworn enemies in the canon:

> Maeglin spoke ever against Tuor in the councils of of the King, [...] Then the heart of Idril was turned to [Tuor] and his to her; and Maeglin's secret hatred grew ever greater [...] Tuor had won the hearts of all people, save only of Maeglin and his secret following. (Tolkien 289 – 291)

When Maeglin betrays Gondolin to Morgoth and the forces of Angband conquer and destroy the city, Maeglin "[lays] hands on [Idril], and on Eärendil" (293). Tuor fights him and casts him down from the walls of Gondolin. This is the story of Tuor and Maeglin in a nutshell, as presented in The Silmarillion. Esteldil kept the timeline and the basic plot, but introduced an element of mutual attraction ("And Tuor desired to know Maeglin thoroughly; mentally, physically, carnally"..." In his mind's eye, he saw Tuor's face again close to his, radiant and joyful,welcoming Maeglin into his embrace") and of Maeglin's futile struggle against his inner demons. In her story, Maeglin hopes that Tuor may redeem him, but it is his feelings for Tuor that Morgoth uses to lure Maeglin into treachery:

Morgoth would feed upon and engorge Maeglin's remorse [...] to allow darkness

to invade his entire soul. He would [...] fuel the flames of a base desire for Tuor

and twist the memories of that bittersweet night [into] a corrupt remembrance of

physical pleasure. Morgoth would make Maeglin forget that he had found peace

that night, would make him forget his gratitude to the Man, replacing it with a

seed of hatred. (Esteldil)

Esteldil's story is a good example of slash recontextualization, where the non-canon

relatioship sheds entirely new light on some events and actions that take place in the canon.

Genre shifting and/or emotional intensification are common in most slash stories

in Tolkien fandom. Being more character and relationship driven, with less emphasis on

the plot development, Tolkien slash is in most cases inevitably more emotional, adopts

more subjective vantage points and offers more insights into characters' minds than the

originary texts do. Although <u>The Hobbit</u> or <u>The Lord of the Rings</u> give some glimpses of

the characters' (especially the hobbits') thoughts and impressions, they seldom reach the

intensity and length typical of most slash stories. The passage of Sam and Frodo through

Mordor as described in the canon is probably closest to the usual slash standard in terms of

emotionality, characterization and character interaction. <u>The Silmarillion</u>, on the other

hand, is far cry from it: most Silmarillion based slash uses generic conventions different

from those of the source text, which is not surprising, since the intended goal and effect are

different. It is also typically more intense and focused on emotion and characterization.

There is a general shift from the almost "biblical" narrative of <u>Silmarillion</u> towards the

more intimate and more immediate, even in those passages that do not directly relate to the

slash aspect of the story, like for example in this description of the battle of Unnumbered

Tears (Nirnaeth Arnoediad) from a Maedhros/Glorfindel slash "Blood Sweat and Tears":

It became a matter of hacking one orc to pieces, only to be immediately assailed

by three more. When planning this battle, [Maedhros had] envisioned a great

stampede, Eldar and Edain pouring into Angband and sending its occupants

fleeing in terror [...] so as to avoid incurring the wrath of Iluvatar's Children. At

worst, he had at least hoped to deal a crippling blow to Morgoth's might. Instead,

it had been carnage, Elf after brave Elf standing and falling, constant retreats,

constant exhaustion and grim determination to keep fighting. (Enismirdal)

Such substantial subjectivization is quite typical of Tolkien fan fiction in general, but in

slash it is all the more important. Tolkien usually relies on *showing* the characters and their

actions (and in case of some characters the reader is shown relatively or very little), while

slash mostly relies on *telling* what the characters feel and what the motives behind their

actions are.

Eroticization (or, in this case, homoeroticization) is the next logical step. There

can hardly be any Tolkien slash without eroticization and sexualization of the originally

platonic relationships (e.g. Frodo/Sam in numerous slash fics) or without creating sexual

relationships where there are none in the canon (e.g. Legolas/Maglor, Legolas/Sauron and

Sauron/Maglor in pippichick's darkfic "Fallen"). Since homoerotic relationship is the

feature that makes a piece of fanfic a slash, eroticization on this level is quite inevitable. As

for the eroticism in the text itself, it takes many forms. Some slash stories contain very

explicit or even graphic sex scenes, while others merely allude to sex or do not mention it

at all. Most fan texts, however, tend to be very sensual in their emphasis on and suggestive

descriptions of physical appearances and intimate contact, even if sex does not occur

within the story. This passage from Talullah's pre-slash "A New Day Begins" is fairly

typical in its stress on physicality and senses:

"One cannot turn away from those in need of help," he said, lips brushing my hair

> [...] finally I accepted his embrace, burying my face on his shoulder and inhaling
>
> the permanent scent of sea about him. His hand ran through my hair for a long
>
> time. I could feel his lips on my hair, as if kissing me, and I wanted it so to be
>
> true, that someone could still feel anything but loathing and contempt for me.
>
> (Talullah)

Even such benign intimacy and moderate sensuality in dealing with romantic relationships is a shift towards more eroticism when compared to the almost asexual Tolkien's texts. Eroticization is therefore quite a principal strategy in Tolkien slash.

Many slash stories set in Ardaverse have to be labeled as AUs. Curiously enough, it is not because of the queerness (Tolkien never bothered to rule that out, probably because he took it for granted that his characters do not do such things), but because of casual sex and elements of promiscuity and incest in some slash stories. This concerns elves, above all, who were (alas) quite clearly stated to avoid sex outside of marriage, to be monogamous, and spiritual rather than sensual beings in matters of love. There is also the playful fraction of Tolkien slash fandom that likes to experiment with improbable pairings – and some of those pairings are not possible, unless number of "what if" modifications is done to the canonical source. And last, but not least – there are numerous M-preg stories, which feel radically AU in almost any canon.

Ardaverse slash fan fiction of course uses other strategies as well: *expanding of the canon timeline* is quite popular. Though of course, in this case it applies to expanding the timelines of individual books, rather than the whole canon. *Refocalization* can also be found, in stories that revolve around relatively marginal canonical characters or in femmeslash. *Moral realignment* is particularly interesting. There is a fairly intriguing subset of Tolkien slash that plays with this strategy: the redeeming quality of love is the recurring topic in this type of stories. "Into Darnkess" cited earlier in this chapter is one of

them. Similar fics, in which one character tries to "save" another and restore him to virtue or has the potential to do so, have been written about Irmo and Celegorm ("In Dreams" by Jaiden S), Fingon and Maedhros ("Deliver me" by Orchyd Constyne and others), Gildor and Maglor ("Wasting the Dawn" by Talullah), Finrod and Maglor ("Rebirth and Reunion" by Aduial), Maedhros and Sauron ("The Fire of Maedhros" by Cirdan) and others. Some of these stories have happy ending, others are rather dark and end with failure, but the theme of possible or desired redemption through love is common to them. The theme of good vs. evil and light vs. darkness central to Tolkien's works probably encourages this urge to "redeem" some of the "fallen" characters. They often represent the alluring palette of darker greys within a more or less black and white universe. Where Tolkien denies these characters redemption or sympathy, many writers are very much willing to grant them and the "redeeming love" scheme is one of the ways to do that. *Character dislocation* and *crossovers* are less common in Tolkien slash, but such stories are written (for example "Gohen: Redemption" by Orchyd Constyne features Maglor and Erestor as vampires).

As was discussed at length earlier, Ardaverse is a dynamic archive that has been rewritten and updated ever since the audience embraced it. Jenkins's remark about the conflict between fan's admiration of the canon and her frustration with it is especially fitting in Tolkien's case. Leaving aside other possible sources of frustration, Tolkien's notions of sexuality count among those aspects of his work that many fans today are not willing to accept. Tolkien's marginalization of sexuality appeals to the more conservative readers and does not offend most of the others, but there is a substantial minority of those who perceive it as a deficiency (Tyellas 11). Moreover, his policy of strict monogamy and sexual temperance and restraint seems outdated and unappealing to many, who prefer their elves, hobbits and rangers a little more "playful". Furthermore, Arda is a world of relatively clear gender distinctions, where males and females are (or should be) equal, but

mostly remain confined to their traditional gender roles. That is not to say that there are no strong women in Tolkien's books. However, there are complementary opposite ideals of masculinity and femininity, with quite a traditional distribution of "masculine" and "feminine" traits and occupations. It is also made quite clear that marrying a person of the opposite sex and having children is the "natural" thing to do. "Marriage, save for rare ill chances or strange fates, was the natural course of life for all the Eldar." (Tolkien, *Laws and Customs* 210) And "concerning hobbits" - the "houses and the holes of Shire-hobbits were often large, and inhabited by large families (Bilbo and Frodo Baggins *were as bachelors very exceptional...*)" (Tolkien 7, my italics). Some readers find it difficult to align themselves with the rules and views of sexuality and gender they see as restrictive. Some others just find the idea of Haldir and Legolas doing it irresistibly appealing. For political reasons or simply for the sake of pleasure, slash fan fiction subverts and updates the Ardaverse by liberating, sexualizing and homoeroticizing it.

Slash generally tends to be somehow gender-bending in one way or another. It is exceedingly rich in androgynous images and portrayals, like for example this short description of Maglor: "I love his dark hair, his dark eyes, and the pale pallor of his skin [...] I love his slim – not weak – figure and the soft, intricate robes he chooses to hide it under. I love his voice, *famed and melodic, near genderless in its tone..*" (S.F., my italics) Especially the elves are often described as possessing certain androgynous or even effeminate features. "Long eyelashes", "porcelain skin", "full, luscious lips" and "slender limbs" are some of the popular attributes. For instance, this description of Maedhros from Miss Andais's "A Matter of Pride" is rather typical: "*You're a beautiful thing, cousin,* I reflected. *A perfect mesh of feminine and masculine features, with that waterfall of dark-red silk to set off your porcelain skin and pewter eyes.* " The portrayal of elves in the movie trilogy only encouraged this trend. Playing

with androgyny and blending both traditionally feminine and masculine qualities in the characters helps – as has often been argued – to establish equality and "fluid" sexual identities in the relationship (Jenkins 193). In intimatopias and some romances, this sort of androgyny, where both partners have masculine and feminine traits, is quite common. The characters are often described as possessing features of both masculine and feminine beauty and their roles in the relationship tend to be more or less balanced. On the other hand, stories that feature a more masculine, active "top" and an effeminate "bottom" are not entirely uncommon, and in darkfics, androgyny or effeminacy is usually used as a means of suggesting fragility, vulnerability and is characteristic of the submissive, tortured characters. The ultimate gender-bending strategy in slash is M-preg, "male pregnancy" – a feature that is considered quite controversial and cringe-worthy by many slashers, though. In pippichick's AU darkfic "Fallen", for instance, Legolas is impregnated by Sauron and "gives birth" to two children. The subversion of gender lies not only in the pregnancy itself, but also in the roles that Legolas and Maglor later adopt in their relationship to the children, roles traditionally perceived as "motherly" (nursing, cherishing and playing), as opposed to the fatherly role of Sauron (authoritative and educative).

This subversion of gender is accompanied by the slashers' treatment of sexuality, promiscuity and sexual desire in connection with same-sex relationships. It is not too strenuous a task to perceive that Arda as described by Tolkien simply does not acknowledge homosexuality - it is never mentioned and it does not seem to exist. Slash writers, however, would beg to differ. There are various possible ways of introducing homosexuality to Arda. Some writers decide to follow an easy path, setting their fics in an alternate version of Ardaverse, where homo/bisexuality and casual sex are seen as normal, at least in some communities and societies. Oddly enough, it is often the originally

monogamous, spiritual and sexually restrained elves that should wed for life and stop

having sex after conceiving children, who undergo the most extreme change into sensual

hedonists for whom free love and happy experimenting with anything that walks on two

legs are the norm:

> Now that he was awakened to the possibility he noticed such things happening
>
> elsewhere among the dancers. Everywhere folk were drinking hard, and neri were
>
> kissing neri, nissi entwined about each other.[6] Couples disappeared among the
>
> trees, or lay, rolled in leaves, oblivious to everything but each other. (Celebdil)

This description of a festive night in Doriath is not very compatible with Tolkien's

insistence, that even when "many of the Eldar in Middle-earth became corrupted, and their

hearts darkened by the shadow that lies upon Arda, seldom [was] any tale told of deeds of

lust among them" (Tolkien, *Laws and Customs* 210). In a way, this straightforward re-

writing of the canon is the most honest form of updating the archive. Most such stories

have disclaimers with warnings about AU treatment of the canon or OOC elves, in those

cases where the author is aware of writing AU and OOC[7]. Similar treatment of elves as

sensual and rather liberated is quite common especially where movieverse is the dominant

influence. The above cited passage from "Climbing the Telperion" by Celebdil represents

the more extreme type of rewriting. Other authors re-write the societies in Arda less

radically, being content with similar concepts of sexuality and gender and similar degree of

tolerance that is considered to be the mainstream standard in our contemporary society.

Many authors feel differently about the proper methods of "slashing" the

Ardaverse, though. Unlike the source text, their slash fics admit that homosexuality exists,

but they try to maintain the overall feel of an environment that is at best uneasy when

confronted with it and at worst openly hostile to it. It is their attempt at updating the myth

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[6] *neri* – he-elves, *nissi* – she-elves
[7] OOC – out of character

without directly and openly violating the rules established by Tolkien himself. In such slash stories, the central couple has to face contempt and disapproval, like for instance Maedhros and Fingon in "A Family Affair":

"Don't pretend that's not a problem, Mother. It's hardly going to be _wonderful_ news to Father, or Grandfather for that matter, that the eldest grandson of the House of Finwë is about as likely to produce an heir of his own as he is to sprout wings. Even the Valar and Maiar are likely to look askance, though they do not view things quite as we Elves do."

...

She turned to her husband and said, "That was unwise, Fëanor."

"Unwise? _Unwise?_"

He was nearly choking with venomous anger. "You are abetting him in this – this iniquitous behavior, and you call _me_ unwise?" (Celandine Brandybuck)

In Dwimordene's fic "Not in Our Stars", Middle Earth is a diverse territory where degrees of enlightment and tolerance differ dramatically according to place and region:

There were some cities in the South, or north around Erebor, where it was a simple enough matter to find a quiet place where one could go about one's business without any undue questions or risks. Lasses and even lads were well-cared for, and a man need not be concerned about cleanliness or his reputation, so long as he was discreet. Then there were the villages, where one kept to oneself, for every word would be common news on the streets by dawn, with disastrous consequences. Towns like Aescing, at the edges of the Westfold in Rohan, Halbarad reflected, were somewhere in the middle of those extremes...
(Dwimordene)

The two stories cited above and other stories that adopt similar approach update the myth rather through criticism and application of modern liberated perspective, without changing the canonical setting too dramatically. They use to their advantage the image of Tolkien as a chronicler and an interpreter, probably biased and certainly not omniscient. Authors of these stories are more considerate of the canonical sources, but they try to imagine Arda as it may have been and homosexuality (and sexuality in general) is part of that image. They use the Ardaverse slash to directly address such issues as homophobia. Their slash stories are more politically aware than those that presume that homophobia in Arda does not exist. An interesting story in this respect is Aeneus' darkfic "Final Judgement". In this story, Finrod Felagund has to answer some questions and be judged before he is allowed to enter the Halls of Mandos. In many ways, the whole interrogation resembles witch trials. Finrod tells the story of his acquaintance with Beren, which eventually cost him his life. Mandos scorns and criticizes Finrod for his "perverse" feelings for Beren's father Barahir and demands detailed description of how Finrod was raped by Sauron. Mandos in this story comes across as a hypocritical bigot. While Finrod gives account of what was actually quite a noble and heroic behavior on his part, he is told that Valar "have turned from [him] and [his] actions long ago" and "[Mandos] is the only one who [decides] his doom". After hearing a description of Finrod's torture and sacrifice, Mandos tells him: "You died in disgrace with the traces of evil pleasures still on your body and in the arms of a Man for whom you lusted just the same." Mandos displays some signs of morbid, twisted curiosity and asks about obscene details every now and then. No matter what Finrod says, it is always used against him. After condemning him and calling him "a creature who mocks the Valar by its very existence", Mandos tortures Finrod by forcing him to retell the whole story again. "Final Judgement" is quite dark, quite ironic and one of the more politically aware slash stories out there, with a rather perverse Mandos condemning an innocent soul

from the position of power and prejudice. Since Mandos is the doomsman of the Valar and one of the greatest authorities in Arda, whose voice and judgement in the original more or less define what should be considered good and proper (reflecting Tolkien's own world views), this deliberately OOC treatment of him can be considered a direct assault upon the concepts of sexuality in Ardaverse and a perhaps even a criticism of Tolkien's own prudery. It is not a universally applicable rule, but Tolkien slash romances (or stories with elements of romance) tend to be more politically aware and deal with social restrictions and homophobia to a greater degree than intimatopic Tolkien slash, darkfics and subgenres like PWPs and fluffs. Romances require such elements of crisis and hardship which homophobic setting can easily provide (disapproving patriarchs are one such recurring motif).

As for casual sex and promiscuous behaviour, slash writers usually try to introduce more relaxed attitudes to sexuality in their rewriting of Ardaverse, though when it comes to elves, some authors try to remain as faithful to the "Laws and Customs of the Eldar" as possible, taking into consideration the fact that elves should bond with just one partner and for life, as well as the role of sex in the whole "bonding" process. Some writers, however, circumvent the "union of bodies" rule by introducing a slightly AU difference between "just sex" and "bonding". Here again comes into play the notion of Tolkien as a chronicler. The fact, that Eldar had their laws and customs does not have to mean that they abode by them. Sexualization in general is one of the popular ways of rewriting the Tolkien canon. Slash, in addition to simple eroticization, introduces more up-to-date notions of gender, sexual identity, and of acceptable forms of sexual expression. Whether politically aware and motivated or driven by the "normal female interest in men bonking" (Jenkins, "'Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking': Selections from The Terra Nostra Underground and Strange Bedfellows") slashers subvert and update Tolkien's myth

quite substantially. Either by simply rewriting it, or by commenting on the concepts and notions of sexuality that are taken for granted in the originary text.

However, even slash writers themselves seem to be sometimes haunted by the apparition of Tolkien spinning in his grave. Celandine Brandybuck (the author of "A Family Affair", quoted in this chapter) has written in her personal essay on Tolkien and slash:

> Tolkien was a fervent Catholic; [...] and it seems extremely unlikely that he would have considered homosexuality a valid form of love either in the real world or in his created world of Middle-earth. [...]
>
> I think that it needs to be acknowledged that such pairings are not within canon, [...] any slash story in this fandom is necessarily an AU, an "alternative universe" from the original. (Celandine Brandybuck)

This problem seems to trouble many fans. Tolkien slash "must" be AU, because Tolkien himself "could not have" approved of gay love. It is highly probable that Tolkien indeed did not intend for any of his characters to be gay. The trouble is that we can only assume, albeit with considerable certainty. Of course, arguing whether Tolkien slash is or is not AU is just a matter of clarification of terms, as AU is a perfectly acceptable form of fan writing. However, many fans use Tolkien's views as an argument to support their anti-slash stance, which is a good enough reason to point out that "presumption of straightness" simply should not count as a valid argument, not even when our knowledge of Tolkien's opinions supports it. Tolkien has never explicitly stated that this or that character was absolutely straight. To him, this probably was not an issue worth of explicit mentioning, but times have changed and so has Arda. Not very surprisingly, slash is more likely to be a "violation" of Tolkien's portrayal of Ardaverse, than some other genres of fan fiction. However dynamic or blurry in the margins, the canon does include some central events,

concepts and themes that are impossible to ignore or to explain away. For example, both elves and hobbits are explicitly described as forming societies where heterosexuality and traditional family are the norm. That does not rule out gay elves and hobbits; however, it renders the image of Lothlórien or Imladris as sexually liberated communities, where a heterosexual couple almost seems out of place, highly unlikely. Similar would hold true for some portrayals of elven incest, a fairly popular subject in Tolkien slash. However, although such notions might not fit within Arda as Tolkien wrote it, they are still legitimate updates of the archive.

At Stories of Arda fan fiction archive, one can find a list of submission guidelines, which is fairly illustrative of the attitudes of many Tolkien's fans. It disallows slash and femmeslash, crossovers, parodies or modern character insertion, among other things. Regarding sexuality, authors are encouraged to "bear in mind Tolkien's own beliefs and values" and to treat "sex as a subject [...] within the limits of Tolkien's canon and clearly expressed views". As for canon and AUs, the guidelines warn that "stories that distort the moral basis of Tolkien's world are not an acceptable form of AU" and that "[slapping] a label of AU on a story [...] to impose some modern topic into the story" is "not acceptable". Obviously, the authors of these guidelines, in defining canon, favor Tolkien's tone and his value system above the Ardaverse's inherent dynamic and expansive tendencies. In deciding between "more of" and "more from" the canon, they would probably opt for the "more of" attitude. As Sheenagh Pugh has pointed out, in book-based fanfic it is sometimes more difficult to develop an individual voice, than in TV and movie-based fan writing. (Pugh 194) This certainly holds true for the Tolkien fandom. The above cited guidelines discourage authors from weaving new themes into the rich fabric of Ardaverse. In this as well as in many other cases, Tolkien's authority unfortunately very often overshadows the potential for expansion inherent to the archive he has started.

Pugh has remarked about slash that "the willingness to subvert, to read subtexts and stretch the characters to that extent is indicative of the kind of writer who wants 'more from' her canon and feels she has something new to add to it" (199). The subversiveness of Tolkien slash consists not only in its subject, but very often also in what else it adds to the canon. To give a few examples from works that have already been mentioned in this thesis: the distinct, somewhat sardonic voice given to Halbarad and the grim realism in the depiction of the setting in "Not In Our Stars", the picture of war stripped of all its glory in "Blood, Sweat and Tears" or the captivating psychological study of a broken mind in "Fallen". At its best, Tolkien slash boldly goes where Tolkien has never gone before not only in terms of sexuality and homoeroticism: it also often adds new, distinct individual voices to the archive, offers intriguing insights into the minds of characters that the canon has taught us to love, but never to truly know, introduces new vantage points and in general, expands the archive without endlessly repeating what has already been told. Slash and the innovations it brings are a worthy addition to the ever growing Ardaverse archive and although they can often be discordant with the written canon, they are perfectly concordant with the archive's tendency to expand and to "upgrade" itself.

5. Conclusion: The Democratic Genre

In previous chapters I tried to establish several points: that archontic literature, including fan fiction, should not be perceived as subordinate or inferior to its originary source and that the source's authority over the texts it inspires should not extend that of a "mere" source of inspiration and reference; on Tolkien's example I tried to explain why it would be unfortunate to give too much consideration to how the author interprets his or her work, even if we have some knowledge of that interpretation; by stressing the dynamic nature of Ardaverse and making this dynamism a part of my own definition of Tolkien canon, I tried

to advocate the view that an archive's expansive tendencies should be placed above the author's tendencies to block that expansion. In other words, I attempted to argue for fan fiction's position as the democratic genre, where boundaries between producers and consumers of stories and images are blurred, and where the canon should function as a common source of reference, rather than some kind of prescriptive and restrictive entity which should not be "violated".

This is not to say that the source text does not matter at all. The source text is actually the alpha and the omega – everything points back to it and everything is judged according to the canon. If not, then it is not fan fiction we are talking about. Fan writers should know their canon, as the canon is the impulse and the motive behind their texts. However, if we accept the inspirative rather than prescriptive status of a canon, such practices as "OOC" writing can easily be perceived as legitimate forms of fannish creative expression – and indeed, many consider them to be so. For example Quellecristiel's story that involves a violent, abusive Glorfindel, contains this note in the header: "I really do rather like Glorfindel, [...] but I needed somebody to be the bad guy this time, and I don't like bringing in original characters. I'm sorry to all the Glorfindel fans out there!" Writing and appreciating fan fiction is to a great extent a matter of personal tastes, subjective interpretations and preferences. As the example of Quellecristiel's story shows, some people prefer to write a canon character radically OOC for the purposes of the story, rather than to introduce an original character. If done the other way round, the story would lose some of its "resonance" with the canon to them. For other people, on the other hand, it is the radically OOC Glorfindel that will reduce the "resonance" factor considerably, while an original character would not. As was already stated in the second chapter, fan fiction works through repetition with difference and an author must be careful about how she handles the difference. In other words, she should know what she is doing, especially if

there is more difference than repetition. For instance, pippichick's darkfic "Fallen" repeats very little and is far cry from anything Tolkien in most respects. However, pippichick is a skilled writer, she handles this "difference" well and uses it to achieve the desired effect (which is to make the reader very disturbed, quite depressed and occasionally aroused). Yet whether the "resonance" will take place or not, largely depends on the reader's attitude to slash and darkfic, preferences regarding characters, and her own vision of the canon. How we accept the difference (and there even needs not be as much difference as in the case of "Fallen") depends only partly on what the difference is and how it is handled; to a great extent, who we are, what we like and what is our subjective reading of the canon, is a factor equally or even more important. This is yet another argument that supports the definition of canon as not prescriptive. When we criticize others for violating the canon, it is very often our own interpretation of the canon that was "violated", rather than the canon itself. In Tolkien's case, definition of the canon as a mere common source of reference and inspiration has one more advantage. If we insisted that a canon should be seen as prescriptive, defining a Tolkien canon would be quite difficult. A more "relaxed" view of the Tolkien canon allows us to accept its inconsistency not as a "bug" but as a feature, and to use all its potential for creative rewriting more freely.

By rejecting the prescriptive status of the canon, Tolkien's personal views and "external" commentaries are excluded from the picture. Tolkien never explicitly addressed the issues involved, therefore a slash recontextualization of many of the situations, relationships and characters is possible without having to mark a story with an "AU" or "OOC" label. Some specific stories and scenarios would require them, but Tolkien slash is no more a "canon rape" by definition than any other slash. The "straight until proven queer" view is of course a legitimate subjective reading of a canon, but it does not possess greater weight or legitimacy than a slash reading of the same source text. After all, fan

fiction is the "actualization of potentialities" present in the originary text (Derecho) and there is a slash potential to any canon. As The Brat Queen has written in her fannish essay "What is Slash?":

> Non-slashers out there have from time to time geniunely asked where on earth the slash comes from [...] It comes from enjoying the picture of same-sex characters together, seeing the subtext, and not believing in characters that are straight until proven queer.
>
> Beyond that it's all a matter of personal opinion and what we like. One person's best slash/het/gen story EVAH is another person's out of character squick fic.
>
> (The Brat Queen)

"Slashing" a canon is one of the many ways of rewriting it and it does not violate the canon any more than stories about non-canonical heterosexual pairings. Dismissing slash automatically as a "canon rape" has hardly any rational foundation, whether we talk about slash in general or specifically about Tolkien slash. In Tolkien fandom, the originator's personal views may support anti-slash claims, but it has already been explained in the third and fourth chapters why taking his personal views into account should be considered merely optional.

In light of the aforementioned arguments, condemning slash as a canon violation is a stance that will not hold. Even if we acknowledge the prescriptive status of the canon (or if we prefer fanfics that remain consistent with the "source"), slash reading still remains one of the valid potentialities that can be written and read as consistent with the originary text – all that it takes is to realize that the "presumption of straightness" is an option, not a universal rule to abide by. However, I would call into question the very notion of "canon violation" as something worth condemning. To accept that notion, it would be necessary to acknowledge the prescriptive status of the canon. Furthermore, this prescriptive status is

more or less illusory. Fan fiction on-line archives host many stories that are admittedly AU or OOC and there is a number of crossovers and character dislocation fanfics out there, some of which have very little to do with their source text(s). Fan writers like to push the canon limits and boundaries, to question some of the canonical concepts and to explore various "potentialities" – in other words, they like to play with their canon creatively. To be able to do that, they often simply have to violate it. Strictly speaking, any fan fiction can be considered a violation of the canon. It adds to it, it changes it and it undermines its "given" and "fixed" status. Some people (Anne Rice, for example)[8] would argue that fan fiction as such is a synonym for "canon violation". It seems a good idea to put this concept to rest or at least reconsider it, and accept various forms of "canon violation" (AUs, OOC fiction, crossovers and the like) as legitimate approaches to the rewriting of canon.

Fan fiction and fan culture have been termed as "textual poaching" by Henry Jenkins. Mafalda Stasi's "palimpsest" metaphore is, I believe, more appropriate. However, the term popularized by Pugh, "the democratic genre", is in my opinion closest to the mark. In fan fiction communities there is no distinct line between writers, critics and readers. Anyone who knows the canon can participate, in any way she prefers, and anyone can write and read such stories that suit their tastes best. In these communities, it is the audience – the people – that controls and upgrades the archive, not the singular entity of the originator. This indeed makes fan fiction communities a very democratic environment. Imposing any restrictions and regulations on fannish creativity seems like an antithesis to what fan fiction is, even if those regulations are in many cases self-imposed – by fans on fans.

In the "Introduction" to The Democratic Genre, Sheenagh Pugh has described how she and her children used to play with a set of Robin Hood figures:

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[8] Anne Rice's hostility to fan fiction is legendary. Some information can be found at Vampire Chronicles FAQ at <http://www.thelittledrink.net/vampires/end.html>.

We would set them out on the floor [...] and I would act out the stories I recalled

from my childhood. When I ran out of stories, I and my audience would invent

new ones. Sometimes they were simple variations on the formula [...] Sometimes

we explored aspects the canonical stories didn't touch on [...] Now and then we

departed from the canon altogether to produce a "what if". [...] And every now

and then [the children] would want other toys to take part, and I would have to

find a storyline that could accomodate some spacemen or a polar bear. (Pugh 9)

There is no reason why fan writers should be less adventurous. Canon is a set of figures for

them to play with – and if it crosses their minds that Robin Hood going on a date with a

spaceman may be a fun idea to act out, there is no need to restrain themselves from

transforming the idea into a good story. Those who think it is terribly OOC for Robin to

date a spaceman can act out their own stories, to a like-minded audience. Over-protective

attitude to the canonical source is of course perfectly acceptable as one of the available

options. However, it usually bars the creativity, blocks the expansion and spoils the fun –

which is a good enough reason not to accept it as a norm.

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