PART I
DIFFERENT APPROACHES: FAN FICTION IN CONTEXT

1. Archontic Literature
A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction

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ABSTRACT.—This essay offers an analysis of fan fiction not as a cultural phenomenon (as fan fiction has been studied by most fan-scholars to date), but as an artistic practice. What is fan fiction, where does it come from, and what does it mean, in a philosophical sense? These are questions that need to be addressed if we are to think critically and seriously about fan fiction as an art form. The first part of the essay defines fan fiction as a subgenre of a larger type of writing that is usually called "derivative" or "appropriative" literature, but which I choose to call *archontic*, a term borrowed from Jacques Derrida's definition of archives as ever expanding and never completely closed. The second part of the essay traces the history of archontic literature from the seventeenth century to the present day, with an emphasis on how archontic writing has been often used by minority groups and women as a technique for making social and cultural criticisms. The third part of the essay uses concepts from twentieth-century poststructuralists Gilles Deleuze and Edouard Glissant to argue that fan fiction and archontic literature are ethical projects that oppose outdated notions of hierarchy and property.

Introduction

On May 30, 2005, on the LiveJournal.com community called fan-tasm: Adventures in the Study of Fan Fiction (one of several communities dedicated to *meta*—that is, meaning and historical, theoretical, and con-

ceptual issues of fandom), a poster named oblomskaya started a thread entitled "Pride and Promiscuity" asking whether a published book containing bawdy, sexually explicit parodies of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* can be called fan fiction or not. The post generated twenty-seven comments written by five posters. Of the five respondents, one lobbied for a broad definition of fan fiction, arguing that fan fiction has existed for thousands of years and includes, for example, ancient Greek and Roman literature, such as Homer's epic poems. Another poster argued that stories can only be defined as fan fiction if they originate in a self-identified fan culture, implying that the only fanfic is that body of work that explicitly labels itself "fanfic"—or at the least is composed by people who self-identify as fans. On the Fanfic Symposium, Laura Hale dates the origin of literary fan fiction to Jane Austen and Sherlock Holmes fan societies in the 1920s, and the origin of media fandom to *Star Trek* fans in 1967 (Hale 2005). Hale justified her preference for this narrower definition of fanfic by stating, "When anything becomes fan fiction, the distinction is meaningless and you might as well call it literature." Oblomskaya eventually took a middle position, asserting that "Of course, all literature IS one big Intertext where everybody is citing each other," but "Having established that all texts, including ff [fan fiction], have this same essence, one must make [*sic*] a step further and start looking for distinguishing particularities of each type of text inside of the 'field.'"

The posters in this fan-ta-sm thread articulated the three general lines of thinking on the origin and nature of fan fiction that I have seen and heard repeatedly proposed by fan-scholars,[1] not just on this site, but on other meta sites, in meta discussions on "ordinary" fan sites, and in conversations I have had. The three arguments typically made are as follows: (1) fan fiction originated several millennia ago, with myth stories, and continues today, encompassing works both by authors who identify themselves as fans and those who do not write from within fandoms (one commenter gave Tom Stoppard's 1967 *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, a speculation on minor characters from *Hamlet*, as an example of the latter); (2) fan fiction should be understood as a product of fan cultures, which began either in the late 1960s, with *Star Trek* fanzines, or, at the earliest, in the 1920s, with Austen and Holmes societies; or (3) the first argument may be too broad, but the second line of thinking may be too narrow; some other identifying traits of fan fiction might be expressed that would more accurately situate the genre within the larger field of literature. I am of the opinion that the third option is the correct one; but where would this third path lead? If fan fiction is to be defined neither as encompassing most of literature (because not all works that refer to other works can be called "fanfic"—

it seems more specific than that) nor as the consequence of a relatively recent trend in audience response (because connections between fanfic and older forms of storytelling surely exist, and fanfic does not seem to be a completely new narrative approach that sprung up, without precedent, in the twentieth century), then how should we characterize it?

Once we have attempted to answer the questions "What is fan fiction?," "When did fan fiction come into being," and "Where does it come from?," we must also ask, "What does it mean?" These are the issues for which we must try to develop a theoretical vocabulary if we are to think seriously about fan fiction as art. In the pages that follow, I will attempt to expand on fan-scholars' work at greater length (most posts on meta sites are succinct opinion pieces) and in a slightly different register. I draw on poststructuralist and other critical discourses to piece together a definition, a history, and several theories of fan fiction. In so doing, I focus on a different set of issues than those that most professional scholars of fan cultures have given their attention to. Academics writing on fan communities have concentrated largely on fandoms as cultural phenomena to be approached and analyzed by means of various techniques of ethnography; in contrast, many of the fan-scholars I have read are interested primarily in investigating fan-authored narratives as a type of art. From the research carried out by academics, we have both data and analyses of what types of fan works are being made, by whom, and with what intention. What we lack — and what numerous fan-scholars are striving toward in their meta discussions — are concepts that would enable us to think more critically about how this enormous amount of artistic output called fan production works *as art*, and what they signify for broader culture — not just on a political level, in terms of whether they serve as adequate forms of resistance to the culture industries or are merely forms of cooperation with media corporations, but on a philosophical level.

What Is Fan Fiction? A Definition of "Archontic" Literature

Although the term *fan fiction* was not used until the 1960s, it must be acknowledged that fan fiction is a subgenre of a larger, older genre of literature that is generally called "derivative" or "appropriative." I wish to replace these terms with a new one: I choose to call this type of writing *archontic*, which I think better describes what fanfic is and how it operates as literature.

Archontic relates to the word *archive,* and I take it from Jacques Derrida's 1995 work *Archive Fever,* in which Derrida claims that any and every archive remains forever open to new entries, new artifacts, new contents.[2] No archive is ever final, complete, closed: "By incorporating the knowledge deployed in reference to it, the archive augments itself, engrosses itself, it gains in *auctoritas.* But in the same stroke it loses the absolute and metatextual authority it might claim to have. One will never be able to objectivize it with no remainder. The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future" (68). Derrida ascribes motivation and action to archives, as can be noted in the way he makes "the archive" the subject of sentences ("the archive augments itself, engrosses itself, it gains ... it loses ... it might claim ... it opens...."). Derrida names the internal drive of an archive to continually expand: he calls it the "archontic principle." Without this principle or "function," or "power," as Derrida sometimes calls it, "no archive would ever come into play or appear as such." The archontic principle "gathers the functions of unification, of identification, of classification" and is "a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together" (3). The archontic principle 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.

The adjective *archontic* better describes the intertextual relationship at the core of the literature than the words *derivative* or *appropriative* do. Although *derivative* and *appropriative* both imply intertextuality, an interplay between texts—one preceding and providing the basis for the other—these adjectives also announce property, ownership, and hierarchy. *Derivative,* when applied to artwork, has a negative connotation in everyday speech; it usually indicates a poor imitation or even a corruption of an original, pure work. Calling a text based on a prior text "derivative" thus signifies a ranking of the two texts according to quality and classifies the secondary text as the lesser one. Similarly, *appropriative* connotes "taking" and can easily be inflected to mean "thieving" or "stealing." To label the genre of fiction based on antecedent texts "derivative" or "appropriative," then, throws into question the originality, creativity, and legality of that genre. I prefer to call the genre "archontic" literature because the word *archontic* is not laden with references to property rights or judgments about the relative merits of the antecedent and descendant works. A literature that is archontic is a literature composed of texts that are archival in nature and that are impelled by the same archontic principle: that tendency toward enlargement and accretion that all archives possess. Archontic texts are not delimited properties with definite borders that can be transgressed. So all

texts that build on a previously existing text are not lesser than the source text, and they do not violate the boundaries of the source text; rather, they only add to that text's archive, becoming a part of the archive and expanding it. An archontic text allows, or even invites, writers to enter it, select specific items they find useful, make new artifacts using those found objects, and deposit the newly made work back into the source text's archive.[3]

An archontic text's archive is not identical to the text but is a virtual construct surrounding the text, including it and all texts related to it. For example, we have Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (*P&P*) as a story that consists of several thousand specific words given in a specific order, and we also have a *P&P* archive, which contains such usable artifacts as Elizabeth Bennett, Fitzwilliam Darcy, the sprawling estate of Pemberly, and Austen's particular version of English manners and morals. Many writers, such as Linda Berdoll (author of *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife*, published by Landmark in 2004) and Pamela Aidan (author of *Fitzwilliam Darcy, Gentleman*, published by Wytherngate Press in 2004) have made withdrawals from the *P&P* archive, used their selections to make new texts, and deposited their new creations back into the *P&P* archive. The *P&P* archive thus contains not only Austen's novel, but Berdoll's, Aidan's, and the hundreds of other stories based on Austen's novel that have appeared in print both officially (issued by publishing houses) and unofficially (issued in zines and Web sites).

Given that what I am calling archontic texts are always open and have the potential for infinite expansion, one might say that in a sense, all texts can be called "archontic." Julia Kristeva (1980) argues for the inherent intertextuality of all literary works: "any text is a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (66). Roland Barthes (1981) calls intertextuality "the condition of any text whatsoever," noting that intertextuality "cannot ... be reduced to a problem of sources or influences; the intertext is a general field of anonymous formulae whose origin can scarcely ever be located; of unconscious or automatic quotations, given without quotation marks" (39). However, it is the specific relation between new versions and the originary versions of texts, the fact that works enter the archive of other works by quoting them consciously, by pointedly locating themselves within the world of the archontic text, that makes the concept of archontic literature different from the concept of intertextuality. All texts may be intertextual—that is to say, it is possible to argue that all texts are archives that contain hundreds or thousands of other texts—but for the purposes of my discussion, "archontic" describes only those works that generate variations that explicitly announce themselves as variations (see Stasi, this volume). Archontic texts definitely "use

quotation marks" by referencing characters and narratives in obvious ways. Fanfics tie themselves overtly to preexisting texts; this annunciation is a convention of the fan fiction genre, performed either in the identifying headers that precede and categorize individual fics, or by the location of each fanfic in fandom-specific zines or Web sites. Although no such convention exists for nonfan literary works—that is, readers do not expect a novel to state outright, in its first few sentences, that it is a revision of, a continuation of, or an insertion into, a prior narrative—nonfan works do explicitly mark themselves as revisions, continuations, and insertions through replicating titles (Isabel Allende's *Zorro*), using established characters (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Stoppard's play; Crusoe and Friday in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, Fitzwilliam and Elizabeth Darcy in Linda Berdoll's *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife*), and/or using plots and dialogue recognizable from the source text (Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*).

Where and When Does Fan Fiction Come From? A History of Archontic Literature

Several fan-scholars have written histories of archontic literature. They call them histories of fan fiction, although what they have really produced are lists of the kinds of archontic writing that preceded fan fiction. SuperCat's 1999 "A (Very) Brief History of Fanfic" (http://www.trickster.org/symposium/symp5.htm, accessed June 1, 2006) and Juice's 2004 "A History of Fan Fiction" (juice817, LiveJournal.com, August 6, 2004) summarize the best-known milestones in the evolution of archontic literature. Their examples of fan fiction that predate film and television include the Jewish exegetical tradition of midrash; John Lydgate's 1421 continuation of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, called *The Siege of Thebes;* Milton's *Paradise Lost;* and the entire body of Shakespeare's plays. Sheenagh Pugh's 2004 essay "The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context" opens with a compressed history of archontic literature and cites examples ranging from Robert Henryson's fifteenth-century variation on Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (itself a variant of a Greek myth) to John Reed's 2001 *Snowball's Chance*, a reworking of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

Because the broad history of archontic writing has been covered by others, I present a slightly different, more limited history, one that emphasizes the way that archontic writing has often been used as a technique of social, political, or cultural critique in the hands of what John Fiske (1992), drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, calls "the culture of the subordinate" (32).

Although Bourdieu and Fiske use *subordinate* specifically to refer to the proletariat in the modern (twentieth century) era of the culture industries, I choose to apply the term to earlier periods as well, because many subordinate cultures throughout history, especially women and ethnic minorities, have chosen to record and/or publicize their opinions by writing archontic literature. As a genre, archontic literature has had lasting appeal for subordinated groups seeking adequate means of expression.

Although writers have used archontic literature to critique patriarchy, xenophobia, and racism at least since the fifth century BCE, when ancient Greeks produced politically motivated retellings of ancient myths like Euripides' *Medea*, I begin my history of archontic literature as a medium of political and social protest in the seventeenth century, when the first original prose fiction by a woman in the English language was published. That text was a work of archontic literature. The same was true of the first published sequel by a woman, and one of the only known printed novels from the early modern period to contain a woman's (the book's owner's) handwritten additions to the story. These works were all based on Sir Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, and they were, respectively, Lady Mary Wroth's 1621 *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, Anna Weamys's 1654 *Continuation of Sir Philip Sydney's "Arcadia,"* and the 1590 copy of Sidney's *Arcadia* owned by Lucy Hastings (Hastings wrote her insertions and continuation in the book between 1624 and 1664). The first published play by a woman in English was also a piece of archontic writing: Elizabeth Cary based her 1613 *The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry*, on the midrashic scholar Josephus's story of King Herod's wife (Burow-Flak 2000), and also on a translation of Garnier's *Marc Antonie* by Mary Sidney (Philip Sidney's sister) (Weller and Ferguson 1994, 27–29). So archontic literature and women's writing, at least in the English language, have been linked for at least four hundred years, and from the first, the act of women entering the archives of male-authored texts and adding their own entries to those archives has generated conflict. Wroth, who was Sidney's niece, received sharp criticism for writing the *Urania* from fellow noble Sir Edward Denny, who lambasted her for producing a romance, a type of work unseemly for a woman — the only appropriate genres for women writers being, according to Denny, translations of scripture and other devotional material (Roberts 1983, 239). Wroth responded to Denny by parodying a poem that Denny had written to censure her. She adopted his rhyme scheme, including his exact rhyming words, and defended herself archly, demonstrating that a female writer could freely enter and add to any male-authored archive she wished, and that such archontic activity could be a successful technique for critiquing the style or message of the male writer's writing.

At the beginning of Weamys's *Continuation,* several prefatory poems by contemporary male poets and publishers give the reader to understand that Weamys was infused with the spirit of Philip Sidney, *Arcadia*'s author, downplaying Weamys's agency as an author by attributing her literary talent to spectral insemination by male genius. Ironically, the works of Wroth and especially of Cary are read today as examples of early modern feminism, because both works portray patriarchal aspects of English aristocratic society as ridiculous and unjust. Thus some of the earliest women authors who published in English chose to write within the genre of archontic literature, possibly sensing an opportunity to highlight the inequalities of women's and men's situations in their culture by creating new versions of earlier stories and producing a contrast between the old and new tales. Their efforts to add to male narratives were, for the most part, resented, minimalized, or ignored by their male contemporaries.

We do not have many instances of women's archontic writing published for more than a century after Weamys's continuation, although it seems unimaginable that women did not write their own versions of texts they read during this period. It is possible, even probable, that, like Lucy Hastings, women wrote their variations of stories as ephemera and marginalia in the pages of the books they read. In any case, the next instances I have found of women publishing archontic literature are Maria Romero's 1792 translation and augmentation of, and Madame Morel de Vindé's 1797 sequel to, Madame du Graffigny's *Lettres d'une peruvienne* (*Letters of a Peruvian Woman*). According to Theresa Ann Smith (2003), there are five known sequels to Graffigny's novel: two by anonymous authors who could have been either male or female, one by a man, and Vindé's and Romero's. There is also a copy of Romero's translation/augmentation of the Graffigny, which contains handwritten alterations/expansions of the text by an anonymous author whose gender is unknown. The markings are similar in style to Hastings's additions to the Sidney text. During this period of time in Europe, women sought publication in far greater numbers than in the time of Wroth and Weamys, but the path to public authorship was still difficult and dangerous. Smith writes, "'going public' could be a perilous prospect for female intellectuals in any nation during the early modern period, because publication involved a measure of transgression against social expectations of women's modesty, submission, and anonymity" (119). I am thus inclined to believe that the anonymous authors, including the author of the handwritten marginalia in the copy of Romero's book, were women.

Graffigny's novel, although popular, frustrated many readers by its ending, which does not unite the Peruvian heroine of the book's title, named Zilla, and her faithful French suitor, Déterville, in marriage, but has Zilla

rejecting Déterville's proposal and deciding to live a life of reflection in relative isolation. All of the sequels to Graffigny's work, including the handwritten alteration of Romero's version, rewrite the ending and marry off Zilla and Déterville. These are readers who, we can infer by virtue of their not wishing to alter the main body of Graffigny's text, enjoyed most of *Lettres d'une peruvienne,* but found the absence of a wedding at the ending to be so unacceptable — despite Graffigny's goal being primarily to critique institutions that limit women's opportunities, including marriage — that they wrote conclusions that went against the spirit of most of the originary text, conclusions that reaffirmed the institution of marriage as the ultimate happiness for women. The Graffigny sequels are therefore an interesting example of how women have used archontic writing to express their dissatisfaction and to voice their own desires, but that in some cases, their desires coincide with the values of dominant, not subordinate, culture. In the case of the Graffigny sequels — and we see this trend in much of fan fiction today (as well as in romance novels, as Catherine Driscoll explains in greater detail in this volume, and in many so-called women's films) — archontic literature allowed women to publicize their narrative desires, but what they wanted was a narrative that concluded in an idealized marriage, a desire that the Graffigny text refused to satisfy.

The nineteenth century saw a wide array of continuations and sequels authored by women, including many versions of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* books (these are collected in Carolyn Sigler's 1999 *Alternative Alices*), and Mary Cowden Clark's *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (Garber 1999). However, as a tool of social criticism, archontic literature has reached its most productive period over the last eighty years, with the explosion of postcolonial and ethnic American literature.

There is a massive amount of archontic postcolonial literature. The archive of Shakespeare's *Tempest* has been enlarged by many postcolonial variations, beginning with Aimé Césaire's 1968 *Une Tempête* and more recent works like Dev Virahsawmy's 1995 *Toufann,* the later texts following the lead of Fernandez Retamar's 1971 and 1986 essays proclaiming Caliban to be the archetype of an indigenous person forced into colonial subjection. The *Jane Eyre (JE)* archive has been expanded by Jean Rhys's 1966 *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Jamaica Kincaid's 1990 *Lucy,* and Bharati Mukherjee's 1999 *Jasmine.* The *Robinson Crusoe* archive has been augmented by works such as Carlos Bulosan's 1946 *America Is in the Heart* and J. M. Coetzee's 1986 *Foe.* The last fifty years have also seen a tremendous growth in the amount of ethnic American archontic literature published. Some of the most notable of these are David Henry Hwang's 1988 *M. Butterfly,* based on Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly* and on a newspaper account of a

French diplomat's unknowingly homosexual affair with a transvestite Chinese diva; Alice Randall's 2001 *The Wind Done Gone,* based on *Gone with the Wind,* narrated by Scarlett O'Hara's slave and half-sister; and Nancy Rawles's 2005 *My Jim,* based on Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* told from the points of view of the slave Jim and his wife. All of the works I have just listed are clearly intended to draw readers' attention to unjust power relations between dominant and subordinate subjects, to discriminatory policies, to psychological and institutionalized prejudices, and to the power of canonical texts to perpetuate stereotypes of race, gender, class, and nation. Although I lack the space here to adequately summarize all the scholarship issued by postcolonial and ethnic studies academics, I will try to indicate the high level of insight that this scholarship has brought to bear on archontic literature by quoting from one of the most prominent of this group of scholars, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Spivak (1999) comments that what Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* accomplishes is no less than a forced reevaluation, on the reader's part, of all that is taken for granted and blithely accepted as "necessary" in the *Jane Eyre* story:

> In this fictive England, she [Bertha, the "madwoman in the attic" of *JE,* daughter of Dominican plantation owners, and wife to Rochester] must play out her role, act out the transformation of her "self" into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction. I must read this as an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer. Rhys sees to it that the woman from the colonies is not sacrificed as an insane animal for her sister's consolidation [127].

Rhys' addition to the *JE* archive takes the older contents of the archive — Jane Eyre's goodness, innocence, and heroine status, Rochester's position as a tormented but deserving hero, and Bertha's role as the unreasoning animalistic shadow villainess— and changes them by refracting the *JE* elements through a mirror of her own design. By doing so, Spivak claims, Rhys critiques not just the fictive world of *JE,* but the project of British imperialism that gave rise to *JE* and other novels that depict the enslavement or dehumanization of colonial subjects, especially female ones, as necessary for the individual development of British subjects. To restate Spivak's point in the terms I've been using, every addition to an archive alters the entire archive.

Returning to the quantity of published archontic literature that serves as political, social, and cultural critique: So much archontic literature produced by postcolonial, feminist, and ethnic American writers has been issued recently that book critics at mainstream publications have begun to

speak of it as a genre. Helen Schulman, in a January 2005 book review for the *New York Times*, called Rawles's *My Jim* part of "the fiction of reaction," along with Randall's *Wind* and Sena Jeter Naslund's 2000 "feminist response to Melville," *Ahab's Wife*. Barbara Lloyd McMichael wrote in the *Seattle Times* in February 2005, "In a fascinating development of the past decade or so, contemporary American writers have revisited some of the best-known works in America's literary canon and have engaged in some audacious revisionism. They're resurrecting characters that had been marginalized in the original stories and positing voices that had been muted." Although McMichael is wrong about this type of revisiting and revising being a recent development in literature, she is correct about the volume of production of ethnic American and feminist archontic literature trending upward.

Thus, since at least the early seventeenth century, archontic literature has been a compelling choice of genre for writers who belong to "cultures of the subordinate," including women, colonial subjects, and ethnic minorities. This body of work, this long tradition of archontic literature, is the heritage of contemporary zine and Internet fan fiction.

Fan fiction, too, is the literature of the subordinate, because most fanfic authors are women responding to media products that, for the most part, are characterized by an underrepresentation of women. The *Media Report to Women 2002* (Gibbons 2002) stated that although 51 percent of the U.S. population was female at the time of the report's writing, 37 percent of characters on prime time television shows were female, and 28 percent of characters of the 250 top-grossing domestic films were female. Only 17 percent of behind-the-scenes jobs in the motion picture industry were held by women. Over 20 percent of the highest grossing domestic films employed no women in top jobs (as director, executive producer, producer, writer, cinematographer, or editor). The same report predicted that by 2005, over 60 percent of Internet users would be women. Therefore, a disproportionately small percentage of women have positions of power and visibility in mass media organizations, and a disproportionately large percentage of women have (and use) access to the Internet. If, as Henry Jenkins (1992) claims, fans write fanfic out of a combination of fascination and frustration with their favorite media products, the *Media Report*'s employment numbers indicate that women consumers are very likely frustrated and disappointed by mass media, perhaps feeling that media narratives to do not fulfill their desires or give them the programming that they want.

Even if a great deal of fan fiction, as I mentioned in the earlier discussion of the Graffigny sequels, tends to reinforce traditional gender roles and social norms, fan fiction on the whole qualifies as a resistant artistic practice because, if nothing else, it is the means by which women write *against* the

media corporations whose products they consume by augmenting or sometimes replacing the canonical versions of media texts with their own texts. Fanfics that adhere to heteronormative ideals of social and sexual interaction, that privilege "romance" as an ideal narrative form, are also subversive of patriarchal culture in the same way that Janice Radway argues, in her 1984 *Reading the Romance,* that print romance novels are subversive. Radway, building on José Limon's analysis, claims that what patriarchal society does not give women "enough of," such as "emotional gratification," "attention" and "nurturance," women writers tend to supply for women readers, allowing readers to experience vicariously through narrative what they do not experience in sufficient quantities "in the round of day-to-day existence" (212). These female-constructed worlds, Radway states, often posit a value system, one privileging "love and personal interaction," that is significantly different, even opposite, from the value systems of male-dominated "reality."

Historically, writing archontic literature has been a risky undertaking for women, and this is as true of contemporary fanfic authors today as it was for the first published women authors. Today, women who write fan fiction write under threat of legal prosecution. Writing fan fiction is commonly regarded by copyright holders (the rights to films and television shows are held, in most cases, by large media corporations) as a violation of Title 17, and many moderators and administrators of fan fiction sites have received warnings or cease-and-desist letters from studio lawyers demanding that content be removed from the Internet. So even the most socially conventional fan fiction is an act of defiance of corporate control and a reclamation of women viewers' rights to experience the narratives they desire by creating them for themselves.

What Does Fan Fiction Mean? Theories of Archontic Literature

The reason I chose to focus, in the previous section, on archontic writing as the writing of subordinated groups was that I believe the larger philosophical import of this type of writing is that it undermines conventional notions of authority, boundaries, and property. In other words, archontic literature is inherently, structurally, a literature of the subordinate. I have pointed out that members of subordinate groups have gravitated toward this type of writing in different periods; now I will make the claim that the attraction that archontic writing holds for women and minorities may have something to do with the fact that the genre is intrinsically against "cul-

tures of the dominant." I will explain this idea further by using concepts and terms from two twentieth-century poststructuralist thinkers to assist my explication.

Archontic Literature "Works" by Repeating with a Difference

Gilles Deleuze, in his 1968 *Difference and Repetition,* argues that "repetition" need not mean "physical, mechanical, or bare repetitions (repetition of the Same)," but can refer to "the more profound structures of a hidden repetition in which a 'differential' is disguised and displaced" (xx). In other words, repetition can be something other than a strict, exact replication — there can repetition with a difference, repetition that appears, at first glance, to be a repeating of the same, but in fact contains differences that make the second iteration to be completely new and distinct from the first. These repetitions, says Deleuze, "do not add a second and a third time to the first, but carry the first time to the 'nth' power" (1). Deleuze believes that this type of repetition could be found anywhere, and can certainly be found in texts. Although he speaks in this passage of scholarly commentary, consider how apt a description it is for the relationship between works of fan fiction and originary works: Commentaries, Deleuze states, should have "a double existence and a corresponding ideal: the pure repetition of the former text and the present text *in one another*" (xxii). When one reads a work of archontic writing, in other words, one is really reading two texts at once. The prior text is available and remains in the mind even as one reads the new version. The two texts resonate together in both the new text and the old one (with the old text, it is a retrospective resonance, in the way that *Wide Sargasso Sea* forces us to regard *Jane Eyre* with new eyes), and the reader thus notices the similarities and differences, however great or small, between them.

Deleuze's interest in making this argument, in redefining repetition and difference, is in part to enable us to rid ourselves of notions of hierarchy. "There is a hierarchy which measures beings ... according to their degree of proximity or distance from a principle" (37), Deleuze writes, and automatically I think of how narratives based on prior narratives are denigrated or dismissed as lesser because they are "unoriginal," they did not come "first," they are "derivative." "*The smallest becomes equivalent to the largest* once it is not separated from what it can do" (37) Deleuze continues, which leads me to think of how short works of fan fiction, or of any other kind of archontic writing — which can also mean short in stature in comparison to originary works, being written by unknown writers and lacking the cultural

capital that has already accrued to the prior work—can have as much weight and affect as the originary texts, once preconceived ideas about what constitutes a complete, whole, or original work are forgotten. When we conceive of the "smallest" work as a repetition, with a difference, of an earlier work, we understand that the smaller work can have a great deal of resonance with the previously existing one. The resonance is what gives the smaller work meaning and significance, and no longer does its length or stature matter.

ARCHONTIC LITERATURE IS ABOUT THE REALITY OF VIRTUALITIES AND POTENTIALITIES

Another concept that Deleuze introduced was that of the "virtual" and "potential" being just as real as the "actual": "The virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. *The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual*" (208). Deleuze claims that there is a set of virtual realities, or possibilities, or potentialities, that exist at the same time that our actualities exist. The virtual is that which *could* happen, what we *could* become, at any given time; the actual is that which *is happening*, how we *are*, at any given time. Because both the virtual and actual exist, they are both real. 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 then make actual. Print culture allowed anywhere from a handful to a few hundred possibilities within texts to be actualized by fanfic writers; the Internet has enabled thousands of potentialities within single texts to be actualized and circulated (witness the number of *X-Files* or *Buffy* fanfics accessible on the Web). Alternate universe stories, stories that pair different characters than are paired in canonical texts, stories that posit interstitial material (that is, that fill in missing scenes—what takes place in the cut from one scene to another), stories that ignore large parts of the canon—all are examples of virtualities or potentialities within the originary texts becoming actualized thanks to fanfic authors.

ARCHONTIC LITERATURE IS CHARACTERIZED BY RELATION

I take the concept of "relation" from Edouard Glissant's 1990 *Poetics of Relation*. Glissant, a Caribbean intellectual, grounds his critical theory in the history of the Caribbean Islands, marked as it is by slavery, plantations, and creolization. For Glissant, the only viable ethics in a world trau-

matized by humanism that led to colonialism is to attempt to get rid of individualistic identities as such, and start defining ourselves and our world through relation. Relation can and should take place, Glissant claims, not only between people, but between nations, between objects, between ideas, between words. Relation gives equal privilege to parts and wholes; it never allows itself to be fixed into identity. Rather, changes and shifts are critical for relation; if relationship ever stabilizes into an "ideal relationship," a concept that stays permanently defined, the result can be totalitarian thought: "ghouls of totalitarian thinking might reemerge" (131). Relation thrives on chaos: "The way Chaos itself goes around is the opposite of what is ordinarily understood by 'chaotic' and ... it opens onto a new phenomenon: Relation, or totality in evolution, whose order is continually in flux and whose disorder one can imagine forever" (133). In chaos, the beings that have entered into relation never make a stable whole. They remain in constant flux with each other, as an "accumulation of examples" that "never complete[s] description of the processes of relation, not circumscribing them or giving legitimacy to some impossible global truth" (174). Archontic literature, with its parts and wholes that never stabilize into one definable text, with its texts in constant expansion and motion, its archives endlessly expanding, generating more texts that in turn generate more archives, exemplifies Glissant's theory of relation. Archontic literature, which does not privilege new variations over originary works and which does not aim to limit creative production to authoritative or canonical versions, enacts Glissant's ethical program at the level of literature.

This concept of relation is quite different from Kristeva's and Barthes's concept of intertextuality, although relation expands on the earlier idea. Intertextuality assumes a writer unconsciously under the sway of influences; it assumes texts have interplay without any conscious intervention on the part of the writer. Relation acknowledges this interplay to be possible, but it also requires that people be conscious of the play and remain vigilant, guarding against the possibility that the play will cease and become fixed and rigid. Relation requires humans to take responsibility for keeping objects in play, whether they be stories or racial categories or languages or geographical boundaries. The nature of fan fiction, the way that fan fiction operates, adheres to this requirement automatically. To write or read or study fanfic is to admit that the text is never stable, that virtualities inside source texts are perpetually in the process of becoming actualized, that between texts within a given archive there is repetition with a difference, and that the interplay between the texts can never be solidified and stilled, for fear of losing the difference, the spark, the chaos that is invention and innovation.

All three of the concepts just discussed — Deleuze's "repetition/difference," his "virtual/actual," and Glissant's "relation"— are all attempts to initiate new ways of thinking ethically. They all seek to do away with outmoded perceptions and categorizations. Deleuze sought to overcome the notion that all repetition must be mechanical and identical, that virtualities and potentialities do not count as real; Glissant aimed to discard the humanist project of defining identities and valuing totalizing systems and wholes. Both thinkers wanted to replace these older concepts with ones that allowed objects and beings without size or stature or conventionally defined identities to be regarded as powerful, creative, inventive, and worthy. This is why I stressed the fact that archontic literature and fan fiction are the chosen means of expression for so many subordinate groups over so many centuries: because archontic writing, the archontic principle, seeks to empower and elevate what is subordinate. The archontic genre suits the desires of cultures of the subordinate perfectly.

The larger import of fan fiction, then, is significant. Fan fiction is a genre that has a long history of appealing to women and minorities, individuals on the cultural margins who used archontic writing as a means to express not only their narrative creativity, but their criticisms of social and political inequities as well. Fan fiction is not a genre of "pure" resistance; as Fiske (1992) and others have pointed out, there are elements of pacification by and cooperation with the dominant culture in fandom. But fan fiction and archontic literature open up possibilities— not just for opposition to institutions and social systems, but also for a different perspective on the institutional and social. In the realm of the archontic, in the multiverses of fan fiction, there is a recognition of the valuable innovations that occur in the process of repetition: one scene from a film or television show can be rewritten in fifty, or five hundred, different ways, with each repetition elucidating some different aspect or dynamic of the scene (as Francesca Coppa also observes in "Writing Bodies in Space," this volume). In fan fiction, there is an acknowledgment that every text contains infinite potentialities, any of which could be actualized by any writer interested in doing the job: fic authors posit the question "what if" to every possible facet of a source text (asking "What if these two characters became romantically involved?" "What if this significant event had occurred earlier/later/never?" "What if this entire narrative arc took place in another era, in another country, on another planet, in an alternate reality?") and explore situations that the makers of the source text simply cannot, because of the need for continuity and chronological coherence in the source text's universe (and the lack of such a requirement in fan productions). In fan fiction, there is a constant state of flux, of shifting and chaotic relation, between new versions

of stories and the originary texts: the fics written about a particular source text ensure the text is never solidified, calcified, or at rest, but is in continuous play, its characters, stories, and meanings all varying through the various fics written about it. Fan fiction is philosophically opposed to hierarchy, property, and the dominance of one variant of a series over another variant. Fan fiction is an ethical practice.

Notes

1. I borrow the term "fan-scholars" from Hills (2002). Hills argued that "fan-scholars are typically viewed within fandom as 'pretentious' or not 'real fans,'" but currently, there are several sites dedicated to fan-scholars' theorizing, including the Fanfic Symposium (http://www.trickster.org/symposium, accessed June 1, 2006) and the LiveJournal.com communities fan-ta-sm, metafandom, and fanthropology.

2. Archives often contain internal stratifications and divides. For example, both academic and fan discussions of fanfic often contain implicit assumptions about the "professionalism" or "canonicity" of source texts as opposed to the "amateurism" or "ephemeral" nature of fanfic texts. Thus, I do not claim that the work of "gathering together" performed by the archontic principle ever amounts to a utopian equalizing of the cultural status/hierarchy/capital of the works within an archive. The archontic principle's "consignation" does not do away with entrenched systems of qualitatively evaluating texts; it refers only to the quantity of texts generated. The archontic principle seeks to place many works under the sign of a single name (*con-sign* texts), such that, for instance, a multitude of texts (fan art, fan vids, fan slideshows, fanfics), not just a television show and movie and video games, exist under the one archival name, *The X-Files*.

3. Some scholar-fans (in Hills's usage, these are academics who study fandoms) may object to my use of the term *archontic* as counter to the aims of fan criticism (Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins [1998], for instance, claim that fan criticism differs from academic criticism in its "rejection of specialized technical language and theoretical authority" [13]), and therefore potentially alienating to fan-scholars. However, as Hills states, many fan-scholars enjoy using "the theoretical approaches of academic media studies and literary criticism" to analyze fan activities (2002, 18). The term *archontic*, as well as the term *intimatopic* suggested by Elizabeth Woledge (this volume), are not words in common usage, but they are theoretically descriptive and useful.

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