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The Ghost of J.K. Rowling: *Harry Potter* and the Ur-Fan

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Abstract: This paper is a speculative engagement with the Harry Potter fan community, which includes author J.K. Rowling as an active participant. We reconsider Rowling’s post-textual interventions into (re)interpretations of her work in light of Roland Barthes’ rhetorical questioning of the death of the author and suggest a conceptual framework to consider authors who enact this type of fannish behaviour. By participating in these communities, such authors repudiate Barthes’ supposed “death of the author”. In Rowling’s case, the authorial interventions occur primarily on Twitter, and it is the immediacy of social media channels that facilitates their impact. We draw on the concept of the “ur-text” to develop a description of the “ur-fan” to account for this fannish practice, suggesting that Rowling is the archetypal ur-fan. Ur-fans straddle two roles that are often artificially demarcated: expert and fan. While fans have immersed themselves in their respective storyworlds for decades, Rowling’s hyper-active media presences (especially on Twitter) position her in this role and sets the Harry Potter fandom apart from many other fan communities.

Introduction

In December 2015, the producers of the then-forthcoming West End play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* announced via Twitter (HPPlayLDN 2015) the three actors who would play the eponymous Harry Potter, and his friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. Hermione was to be played by black actress Noma Dumezweni, a fact that caused controversy amongst some sections of the fan community given Hermione has been portrayed in eight films by white actress Emma Watson (see Ratcliffe 2016; Percival 2016). Four hours after the original announcement, *Harry Potter (HP hereafter)* author J.K. Rowling (jk_rowling 2015f) responded to a fan's query, on Twitter, about her view on the matter:

Canon: brown eyes, frizzy hair and very clever. White skin was never specified.

Rowling loves black Hermione.

Rowling's statement of Hermione's canonical appearance intervenes in the controversy to such an extent that it effectively alters, or at least opens to reinterpretation, assumptions common to (some) fans of the long-published novels. Although she argued that Hermione's race was never specified – only certain aspects of her appearance – Rowling's response to the fan's question had the effect of repudiating what certain audiences thought they knew about the character. Thus Rowling's intervention becomes canonical in its own right.

Discussions of race in *HP* were already charged within its fandom. While Jackie C. Horne (2010, p. 98) described Rowling's 'antiracist pedagogy' embedded in the book series,¹ David L. Wallace and Tison Pugh (2006, p. 277) suggested the presence of minor non-white characters was "tokenism" and argued 'it does little to offset the overwhelming whiteness of the books'. In response to Rowling's tweet, many fans quoted *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban*, which described 'Hermione's white face ... sticking out from behind a tree' (Rowling 1999, p. 455). Others pointed out Rowling could simply have written Hermione as black without relying on codes or guesswork from the fans to read a non-white character.

Entering the discussion about Hermione's race is not the first instance of Rowling's post-textual authorial insertion into interpretations of the *HP* texts. Another famous example is her revelation that Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, is gay. When posed the question 'Did Dumbledore, who believed in the prevailing power of love, ever fall in love himself?' (Smith 2007), Rowling replied, 'My

truthful answer to you ... I always thought of Dumbledore as gay' (Smith 2007). This treatment of Dumbledore could be considered an example of queerbaiting, or 'homoerotic suggestiveness ... when this suggestiveness is not actualised' (Brennan 2016, p. 1). Catherine Tosenberger (2008, p. 201), in discussing Rowling's response to Dumbledore's "outing", explains that 'Rowling appears to believe that her announcement of Dumbledore's gayness is not, in fact, "extratextual"'. Tosenberger cites Rowling arguing: 'It is in the book. He had – it's very clear in the book ... I think a child will see a friendship and a sensitive adult may well understand that it was an infatuation' (2008, p. 201). Rowling had seven books to make Dumbledore's sexuality canon, but chose not to do so because she 'didn't feel the need to spell it out for readers' (Ahearn 2007). Rowling's queerbaiting has continued not only in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (Masad 2016) but also in relation to the forthcoming *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* films, as Rowling has commented 'As far as his [Dumbledore's] sexuality is concerned ... Watch this space' (Lee 2016).

In this paper, we consider Rowling's interventions in the reception of her texts, long after they were published, through the prism of questions posed by Roland Barthes in his essay 'The Death of the Author' (1977). In his essay, Barthes queried the practices and cultural position of the author as a figure who creates final textual meanings for consumption, and acknowledged instead that the interpretive space for meaning-making resides with the reader. He noted that to 'give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing' (1977, p. 147). The mooted "closure" of *HP* came with the publication of the seventh and final book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* in 2007.

In exploring Barthes' concept in relation to fan communities, Judith Fathallah (2016, p. 460) notes that he 'denied the Romantic theory of the creative author as a god-like fount of knowledge pouring meaning into the text which the reader discovers readymade'. Traditionally, the author dies, and the reader interprets the text that remains. We argue Rowling rejects both this closure and her Barthesian death by regularly expanding the *HP* storyworld: through the release of Warner Bros.' films based on the series; the *Cursed Child* play and book; the website Pottermore; video games; theme park sections; and a series of films based on the in-world book *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, beginning in 2016. Amongst all of this, Rowling has maintained a Twitter account from which she

frequently provides new pieces of information about the diegetic world the texts are drawn from. It is Rowling's use of this Twitter account to intervene in the reception of her texts with which we are most interested.

Barthes textually considered the interaction between reader and author as contingent, noting that 'as soon as a fact is narrated ... disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters his [sic] own death' (1977, p. 142). The effect of this "death", as Barthes describes it, establishes linearity between text and creator – the author 'is always conceived as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a before and an after' (p. 144). If the author stands as the past of their work, how do we account for the action of authors such as Rowling, recounted above, intervening and expanding upon a text's interpretation months or years after its publication?

Barthes suggests that in order to take meaning from a text, the author must be "killed", establishing a teleology where the author exists before the text. Because of the culturally dominant signification of the author as the originator of the text, any new textual production likewise positions their interpretation as prior to any audience reading. We argue that Rowling's interventions into the canonical meanings of the *HP* texts complicate the perceived barrier between the "before" and "after" of textual meaning, producing a situation in which fans who wish to read the texts through the dominant authorial lens established by Rowling must then reinterpret the meanings they had previously found in the texts.

The relationship between fans and authors

Matt Hills (2002, p. i) notes that the "everyday" definition of a fan is 'somebody who is obsessed ... somebody who can produce reams of information on their object of fandom'. Henry Jenkins (2007, n.p.) similarly describes how the 'process of world-building encourages an encyclopedic impulse in both readers and writers'. A fan-created website known as the Harry Potter Lexicon is exemplary of this process, where small facts and details about the text are systematically catalogued and displayed by fans. Jenkins continues, explaining fandom constitutes how 'we are drawn to master what can be known about a world which always expands beyond our grasp' (2007, n.p.). In part, this impulse to grasp all possible facts

about a textual world sets up a dependent relationship between the author – who is often the only person able to release this information – and fans.

The relationship between fans, texts, and creators is described by James Phelan (2007, p. 209) as a ‘rhetorical triangle’, a ‘recursive relationship among authorial agency, textual phenomena ... and reader response’. Functionally beyond this triangle sits the interpretive actor known as ‘the rhetorical critic’ (Phelan 2007), a position often occupied by what Jenkins (n.d.) terms the ‘aca-fan’ – ‘a hybrid creature that is part fan and part academic’. Within the rhetorical triangle textual model, the text itself is understood to be fixed (*finished*) even though it remains open to interpretation and reinterpretation by the audience. Rowling’s approach to re-casting certain aspects of the *HP* storyworld and the subsequent adoption of those elements by the fan community rejects authorial death and re-asserts the role/influence of authorial intent. Fans’ acceptance of Rowling’s revisions and expansions to the *HP* texts do not “kill” the author as such but provide us with an active “ghost” of the author who is still haunting textual meaning long after their supposed “death”. Rowling’s actions attempt to disallow the reader’s interpretive space by continually reaffirming hers’ as the legitimate authorial voice for meaning-making.

Here we develop a conceptual framework to describe how Rowling insists upon inserting herself into the interpretations of her work years after its supposed textual “closure”. We draw upon the concept of the “ur-text” – meaning the most correct, widely acknowledged, earliest or complete version of a given text – to argue that such authors play the role of an “ur-fan”. At present, Rowling is the only ideal ur-fan candidate we have identified. The ur-fan is active within and responsive to fan communities, acting as the source and authority from which new information is derived. These actions take place post-textually, as in the case of Rowling, and they are legitimated within fan communities through a rapid spread and adoption of the author’s interpretation into subsequent readings of the text/s.

The ur-fan is a (1) tech-enabled (2) originator of a given text who (3) uses a variety of means (especially social media) to continually expand and re-interpret aspects of that text (4) in response to demands or pressure from fans. Ur-fans sit at the pinnacle of fan communities, not apart from them, and, by their actions, complicate the meaning-making

process of textual production that traditionally relies on the linear model of the author-text-audience-meaning structure of interpretation. It is a role that combines authorial agency with fannish behaviour.

Rowling's post-textual contributions or interventions with which we are concerned in this paper can be understood through Jenkins' (2007) idea of transmedia storytelling, which:

represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience ... There is no one single source or ur-text where one can turn to gain all of the information needed to comprehend the [storyworld].

Although Jenkins suggests there is no *single* ur-text in the proliferation of a transmedia story, as we discuss throughout this paper, the ur-fan acts as this source, and feeds the 'encyclopedic impulse' of fans. Barthes argues that the reader requires space for interpretation, given 'the source ... is not the true place of the writing, which is reading' (1977, p. 147). Interventions on the part of Rowling, which feed fans' encyclopedic impulses, circumscribe the interpretive space usually given over to readers after a text is "finished"; for instance, in the creation of fan-fiction or videos. But in their continual reinterpretation and adoption of Rowling's authorial interventions into ostensibly "established" diegetic meaning, both fans and Rowling exemplify post-modern and post-structuralist accounts of textual production as requiring both a reader and author. Rowling's interventions disrupt the fixity of the *HP* texts suggesting they are not "finished" while the work of fans in continuing to read and solicit authorial knowledge from Rowling likewise points to the lack of linearity in reading as the site of meaning-making.

Rowling as Fan

There is a new interactional space emerging between authors, texts, and audience, facilitated by the use of technology such as social networking sites. Rowling's ongoing authorial legitimacy granted by fans allows her to frequently assert views on developments related to *HP*, largely but not exclusively on the social network site Twitter. The impact of this practice is that widespread interpretations of certain parts of the texts are rethought by fans. As demonstrated in the debates about the canonicity of Hermione's race and

Dumbledore's sexuality, such propositions do not generally go unchallenged by fans, but are nonetheless largely incorporated into future interpretations of the work. Rowling simultaneously occupies the role of an expert on the text (an authority derived from her position as "Author"), and the role of a fan, arguing about and contesting certain viewpoints actively inside fan communities. Clearly, J.K. Rowling meets the criteria used by some scholars to describe fans, as laid out by Jenkins and Hills, both by her own admission and her usage of Twitter to discuss the work. In May 2014, discussing the website Harry Potter Lexicon, Rowling said,

This is such a great site that I have been known to sneak into an internet cafe while out writing and check a fact rather than go into a bookshop and buy a copy of *Harry Potter* (which is embarrassing). A website for the dangerously obsessive; my natural home. (in Tan 2013, p. 98)

Rowling here describes the Harry Potter Lexicon as her 'natural home' – as a place for the 'dangerously obsessive'. By aligning herself as someone most at ease amongst other "fanatics" of the series, her dual roles as both author and fan, whom Hills describes as 'somebody who is obsessed' (2002, p. i), are amplified. Rowling later sued the owner of this site over the intended publication of a book based on its contents (discussed below).

Within her positioning as fan, Rowling also assumes a role that might be described as the "leading fan", or the most prominent leader of the *HP* fandom. Hills (2002, p. i) continues, 'Fans interpret media texts in a variety of interesting and perhaps unexpected ways. And fans participate in communal activities – they are not "socially atomised" or isolated viewers/readers'. Our basis for describing Rowling as fan, let alone leading fan, revolves around her usage of mediated environments (Twitter and the website Pottermore, for example) to reinterpret information from her own texts in these sometimes 'unexpected ways'. In these spaces, she is active in and responsive to fan communities. Additionally, these practices activate fan communities who clamour for, contest, and respond with vigour to her announcements.

The rhetorical triangle model of interaction between text-author-audience is pervasive – having originated with Aristotle – but overstates the extent of a direct relationship between audience and author. The figurative relationship between audience-

text-author suggested in the triangular model fails to describe any real relationship between the audience and the author, except that which occurs through the text. As such, rather than a triangle, the existing model of interaction between author and audience is better understood as a continuum, with the message always interceding between them. Figure 2, below, demonstrates this model more clearly than the common triangle, showing that interaction between author and audience that occurs only *through* the text. It is this mediation that allowed Barthes to describe the separation of author from reader/audience. Our presentation of Figure 2 also serves to highlight additional interstitial spaces (creator and receiver) operating at the intersection of author-text and audience-text, respectively. The arrows indicate reciprocal relationships between the three elements. In this case, the primary relationship between author and audience is *through* the text.

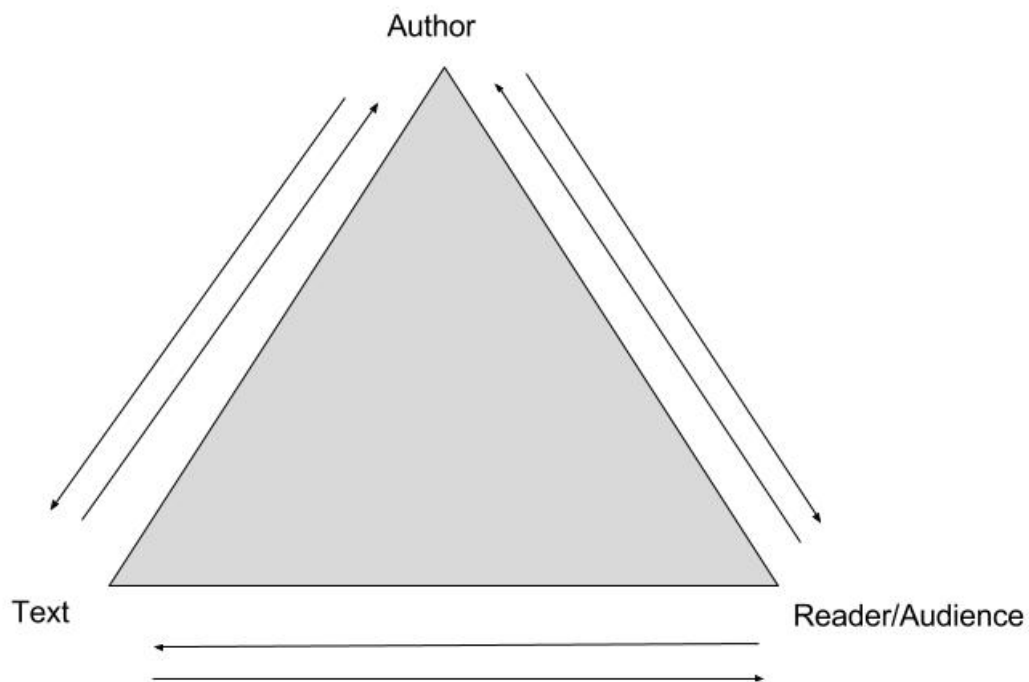


Figure 1. The Aristotelian rhetorical triangle, intimating relationship between author and reader independent of the text.

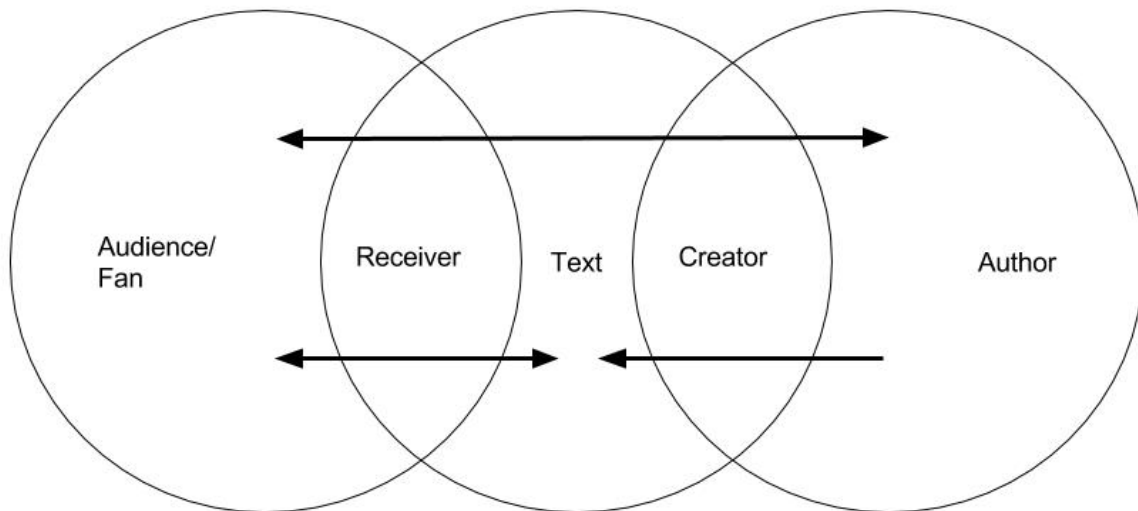


Figure 2. Traditional fan-text-author interactions as the rhetorical triangle model actually describes them, absent non-textual interaction between audience and author.

We propose the term “ur-fan” to describe the liminal space created by the intersection of text, author, and fan when the author refuses to die (in the Barthesian sense). We propose to label Rowling as the “ur-fan” of the *HP* community. Her pronouncements of detail received as fact, or canon, indicate her role as an authoritative source of information, similar to the role of an ur-text. We argue Rowling conforms closely to the ur-fan archetype and is presently the obvious candidate for this role.

The active and interventionist nature of the ur-fan calls attention to the need to once again reconsider the relationship between the three sides of the rhetorical triangle. As it currently stands, this relationship is poorly described as a triangle, but can be pictured as a linear relationship between author/text/audience with limited interaction (but no intersection) between the author and audience. But, when an author who has “died”, begins to interfere with interpretations of the text, as we propose Rowling does, new spaces of interaction are again created. Figure 3 (below) indicates these additional spaces of interaction, further re-working the triangular model to more accurately account for interactions and relationships between audience and author. Indeed, the space of mediation comes about directly from interactions between fans/audiences and the author. In the case of J.K. Rowling, this occurs most obviously on social network sites such as Twitter. The ur-fan is a necessarily post-industrial concept because of the rise and accessibility of social media

that opens up these spaces. Exploring the role of Twitter in fan communities, Athique (2016, p. 140) explains,

In the age of Twitter, it is a common expectation that the stars of sound, screen, sports and politics will maintain daily interaction with their fanbases. Fanbases, then, are distinctive forms of audiences. Their loyalty comes with heightened expectations of personal interaction with their chosen star.

Rowling is one 'star' who maintains an (almost) daily interaction with her fans, engaging with them frequently on Twitter by offering new tidbits of information and answering questions.

The second new space at the centre of this diagram is what we label "ur-fan". It exists as the juncture of text, audience/fan, and author. Rather than sitting outside the model, as in the case of the aca-fan, the ur-fan is situated in the very heart of these overlapping interactional spaces.

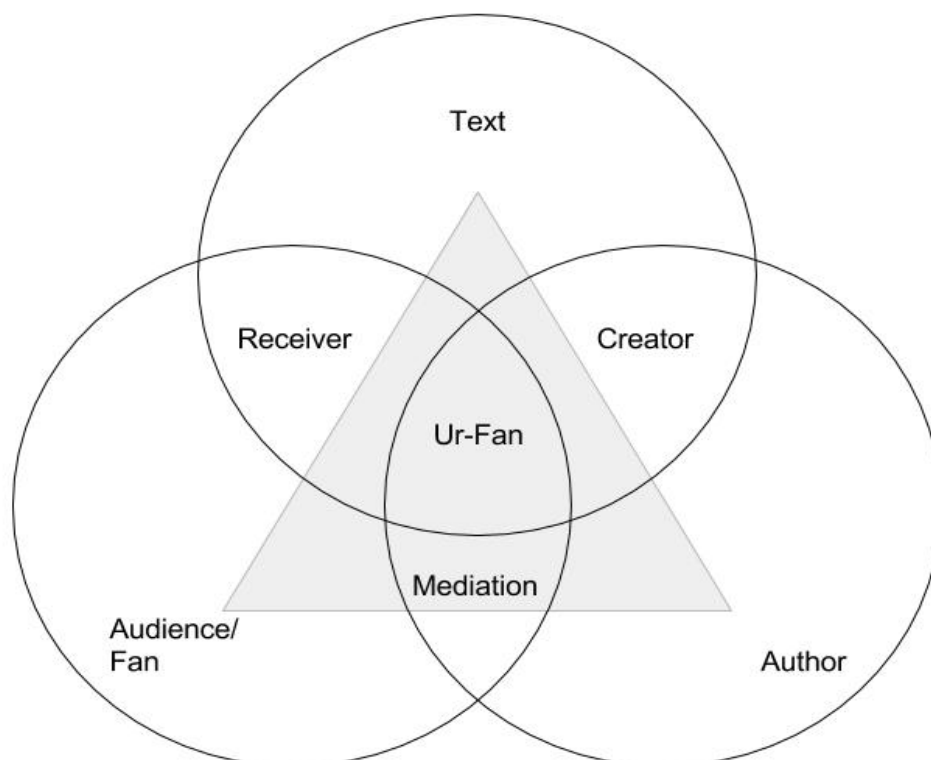


Figure 3. Fan-Author-Text interactions with an interstitial space occupied by the ur-fan, overlaid upon the traditional rhetorical triangle.

Thus the ur-fan operates simultaneously (1) as fan/audience, (2) as an extension of the text, (3) as the chief source of interpretations, and (4) as a disruption of previous interpretations

of the text. While Barthes might pose that the author “dies” at the moment a text is read, Rowling’s post-textual influences, particularly on social networking sites such as Twitter, demonstrate that she is not in fact dead, insofar as her interventions continue to provoke reinterpretations of the source text as an unfinished product of textual meaning-making. Generally, Rowling provides this commentary in response to fan questions, thus establishing the need for consideration of the other interactional space we have described: mediation.

Authorial and fannish practices exist on a continuum that accommodates a wide range of different levels of interaction. As such, we acknowledge that there are a variety of other authors/creators who could be considered ur-fans. While Rowling closely conforms to the archetype of ur-fan, she is by no means the only candidate. However, we are focussing on her as some other candidates do not meet the criteria as closely. A number of these examples are canvassed briefly below. We argue it is important for a candidate to meet all the criteria because each is essential to identifying how ur-fans operate in, and create, the interactional space we have identified between media, audience, and text.

Who is the ur-fan?

We propose five criteria for defining and describing ur-fannish practice.

An ur-fan is the *originator of the source text*. Because we are defining the ur-fan as someone who establishes a space that bridges author/fan/text, they need to necessarily be the person who created the product. The role of author is a modern concern in which the authority of both expert and creator is vested. As Jennifer Summit (2003, p. 91) notes, ‘the author carries an ideological function as the figure around whom ideas about literary tradition, authority, and creativity are organized’. It is in her role as originator of the source text, including her continued ownership of the intellectual property around *HP*, that Rowling’s authority is valorised when it comes to discussions about canonical fact by fans.

There are potential ur-fan candidates – that is, those who create certain texts and then go on to influence the reception of their texts – who nonetheless were not the originators of the material for which they are most well-known. Since the ur-fan is necessarily tied up with the authority of the textual originators, candidates such as J.J. Abrams (director of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [2015], and *Star Trek* [2009]) and Steven

Moffat (head writer and showrunner [2010-2017] of BBC Wales' *Doctor Who* [2005-present]) do not meet this criteria because they did not originate those works.

Secondly, *maintaining a unified authorial voice during the creation of the source text* is important for an ur-fan because of their positioning in the centre of the author/fan/text interstitial space. If there is a non-unified voice (as in the case of *The Simpsons* [1989-] creator Matt Groening, who works alongside a team of writers and showrunners to develop the storyworld, for example), then the ur-fan's claim to authorial legitimacy is diminished, which in turn reduces the effectiveness of their ability to propagate new information throughout the fan community. As such, the position of an author as a chief authority on the text should be unrivalled. Summit addresses both the idea of the author as sole originator and the idea of a singular, unified voice. She explains, 'what counts as an author has been historically variable. The idea that authors were the sole originator of their texts is a relatively recent one ... likewise the modern idea of the author as a single, creative individual' (2003, p. 91). Given the modernity inherent in concepts of authorship, the ur-fan too is a modernist concept in that their authority derives from Romantic notions of the author as the original creator of a text's meaning. But as this paper discusses, the ur-fan requires an audience to reinterpret the original text's meaning and to extend the process of textual meaning-making. The ur-fan then blends modernist conceptions of the author with post-industrial media cultures and poststructuralist and post-modernist notions of texts as unfinished and in process.

The third and fourth criteria of the ur-fan are closely intertwined. For one to be an ur-fan, one must *retain ownership or creative control over the work*. Rowling has not allowed unfettered creation or use of her work by external sources – nor has anyone else solely written an eighth *HP* novel or authorised companion book to the original source. Nonetheless, we acknowledge Rowling has ceded creative control over some aspects of the *HP* storyworld, specifically by granting film production rights to Warner Bros. for thirteen movies (eight based on the original books and five spin-offs), and allowing another production company to stage the two *HP and the Cursed Child* plays (Rowling et al. 2016). The script for *HP and the Cursed Child* was written in collaboration between Rowling and two other writers, Jack Thorne and John Tiffany. Regardless of these developments, Rowling has

consistently sought to maintain creative control over all of these properties and others, including fan-made work.

An example of Rowling's continuing creative control is Pottermore, a website immersing fans in the storyworld, sorting us into Hogwarts Houses and generally giving us more Potter, including early releases of new material and periodic rewards for "winning" the house cup. Rowling retains control of the site in partnership with movie distributors Warner Bros., indicating her role as ur-fan in controlling the flow of information and the direction of the creative work even as some of these aspects are shared. Details about the development of a non-European wizarding history have recently been released through Pottermore, indicating Rowling's role in constructing and shaping the ongoing reception of the *HP* storyworld.

Additionally, Rowling has sought to ensure fan activities are practiced only non-commercially, in order to keep fannish practices *amateur* and ensure that there is a distinction between the expert role of the ur-fan and that of other fans. In 2008, a lawsuit was launched blocking publication of a print version of the Harry Potter Lexicon, which had previously existed online. Christina J. Hayes (2008, p. 580) explains Rowling 'maintained that the support she had previously shown to the non-commercial website was never meant to endorse unauthorized commercial use of her works'. These examples demonstrate what we mean when we claim an ur-fan seeks to retain creative control over the work. In contrast, ur-fan candidate George Lucas (the creator of the *Star Wars* movies) ceded control of the entire *Star Wars* franchise by selling the production company LucasFilm to Disney in 2012.

The fourth aspect of ur-fannish practice is *operating as a leading fan* within the relevant fan community. Texts such as *HP* encourage what Jason Mittell calls 'a mode of forensic fandom that invites viewers to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a story and its telling' (2013, n.p.). Forensic fandoms are very active fan communities which obsess over seemingly small details. Rowling provides leadership and stimulation within this community by frequently sharing such detail on her Twitter account. For example, when asked by the Twitter user Pixies_Corner (2015) about the collective noun for the fictional pets Pygmy Puffs, Rowling responded, 'A poffle' (jk_rowling 2015e). One role of an ur-fan is to be the gatekeeper for seemingly unimportant

information and encouraging fans to seek it out. Twitter user shagdalen (2015) asked, 'Who would win in a fight, Mrs. Norris or Crookshanks?' to which Rowling replied 'It would be brutal and very close, but Crookshanks' Kneazle ancestry would bring him out on top' (jk_rowling 2015b).

Rowling's practice in feeding the encyclopedic impulse of fans extends to rewarding us with tidbits of information after we express support for her favourite causes. For example, in October 2015 Rowling told her Twitter followers, 'if lots of you tweet #AsOne to support Scotland, you can have Sirius's birthday' (jk_rowling 2015c). After Scotland won the game she tweeted, 'WE WON!!!!!! And Sirius Black was born on the 3rd of November' (jk_rowling 2015d). Rowling frequently uses her position within the fan community in this manner to rally fans to her causes and (re)generate interest in her work.

While George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire (ASOIAF)* book series, and the related *Game of Thrones* (2011-) television series, certainly inspire forensic or encyclopedic fandoms, it is rarely Martin himself who leads these efforts. Instead, these fan communities – most obviously at the website *Westeros.org* overseen by Elio Garcia and Linda Antonsson – operate more or less without Martin's leadership. Additionally, so long as Martin is still writing the main *ASOIAF* series, he primarily occupies the role of author and not fan of his work, unlike Rowling and the now closed *HP* original book series.

Finally, an ur-fan makes *ongoing post-textual contributions to the storyworld*. Having completed the work, the ur-fan nonetheless seeks to shape development and interpretation of the text. We note that Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* series still has forthcoming books, which would reduce her claim to be an ur-fan at this stage. One way Rowling acts as the ur-fan is through an encouragement of fans to tweet her questions. For example, Rowling answered a question asking which Weasley twin was born first, confirming that 'Fred was born first. I always thought that was obvious!' (jk_rowling 2015a). There is no real reason why fans would need to know who was born first, but Rowling, as the ur-fan, acts as the source of all the 'information needed to comprehend' the storyworld.

Each of the parameters outlined here is important to explain the ways in which ur-fans such as Rowling engage with their texts and fans long after the texts are finished. In doing so, Rowling establishes a new space of interaction largely unlike traditional modes of

author-fan interactions that take place through texts. Her ability to influence and shape interpretations of aspects of the *HP* universe is derived from her expert role as author, and from her ongoing post-textual contributions, which occur primarily via social media services such as Twitter.

Conclusion

Another of Rowling's famous interventions occurred in December 2014 when Twitter user LIVEFROMNEWYORK (2014) tweeted at Rowling: 'it's safe to assume that Hogwarts had a variety of people and I like to think it's a safe place for LGBT students'. Rowling replied with 'But of course', and an image saying 'If Harry Potter taught us anything it's that no one should live in a closet' (jk_rowling 2014). Painfully ironic in this statement is that Rowling *did* force Dumbledore to stay in the closet during his life in the book series, as he was outed only after his death in book six and the closure of the *HP* book series.

The debates around the canonicity of Dumbledore's sexuality and Hermione's race, amongst other matters, are interesting because they call into question *how* and *if* an author can claim a non-canonical aspect of a text as canon, especially post-textually. Rowling is attempting to make canon, after the fact of textual closure, relatively significant details about main characters in the series when she had already given similar detail on other characters. The ur-fan operates in a liminal space situated between the roles of expert and fan, and in relationship to the text by simultaneously leading and activating the fan community. It is only from this position as both deeply embedded in the fan community and exuding the authority derived from their role as author that an ur-fan can undertake these retrospective, media-intensive practices.

Experts (including authors) are seen as authoritative, knowledgeable, and serious consumers and creators of media texts. They might be critics or academics, or occasionally otherwise positioned within the media industries. Fans, however, are seen in more amateurish terms. Their practices are often derided as frivolous, and there is an expectation from both media makers and regulators that fans do not gain financial advantage from their fannish practice. This paper has described a practice whereby J.K. Rowling exerts influence on her texts after their publication through interaction with fans in mediated spaces. We are conscious of Jenkins' attempt to describe the relationship between expert and fan, which

resulted in the coining of the term 'aca-fan', for an academic fan. We find that this term does not adequately describe the multi-sectional position in which ur-fans operate.

Barthes (1977, p. 147) argued that to 'give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing'. The 'final signification' of the text is the point at which the reader enters the frame, as it opens up a space for interpretation by fans. However, some authors refuse to die. This juncture, where the textual possibility for open-ness is exploited by the author to re-direct readers' meaning-making, materialises the need for the description of the ur-fan as it is precisely because the author refuses to 'finish' the text, and readers continue to take meaning from that text, that the space in which ur-fans operate is created. Ur-fans use global media channels such as Twitter to conduct post-textual interventions into their own work and activate fan communities in discussion of these interventions which, in part, ensures their accepted canonicity and the rejection of rhetorical authorial death.

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Notes

ⁱ In a psychological study, Vezzali et al. (2015, p. 117) also found 'reading Harry Potter may effectively help in reducing prejudice directed at ... out-groups'.