

“I Need You to Pretend to Date Me”
Tracing Fanwork from Source to Its Furthest Extreme

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Abstract

Contemporary media fandom and fanwork have a significant impact on the reading and critical habits of millions of fans around the world. Fandom is unique in its adaptational practices and community-based forms of creation. Without a profit motive, fan creators have different priorities for their works, exploring personal issues and even utopian ideals. As an insider in fandom, I am well positioned to describe these cultural practices.

Previous studies have amply discussed the racist systems fans have transplanted from mainstream culture into their communities, but few have focussed attention on when fans intentionally expand the scope of representation in their communities, when fans construct utopias based on the ones they see in the media. In this thesis, I will use a novel methodology to trace these practices through different types of musical theatre fanwork during the 2010s, focussing on the large and creative fandoms surrounding *Les Misérables* (1985), *Hamilton* (2015), and *Hadestown* (2019), interpreting fanwork to describe the creative process underlying the coherence of *World Ain't Ready* (2014-15), an example of fanwork that bears very little resemblance to its source material.

In this thesis, I will follow the development of a set of ideas from the source musicals through many pieces of fanart to *World Ain't Ready*. This will support a discussion of fanwork as an inherently communal, rather than individual, product, and act as an introduction to this kind of fanwork for non-fan scholars.

I hope that this thesis will help contribute to discussions of race, gender, and sexuality in fandom by showing how fan creators can engage in radically inclusive representations of diverse people, as well as show a methodology that promotes easy understanding among readers unfamiliar with the fandoms in question.

Abrégé

L'univers et les créations des fans s'inspirant des médias contemporains ont un impact considérable sur les habitudes de lecture et de critique de millions de fans à travers le monde. Les communautés des fans sont uniques dans leurs pratiques d'adaptations et de formes de création communautaire. Les systèmes de valeurs et motivations des *fans-créeurs* sont différents de ceux des grands médias publics : ces fans créent, pour eux-mêmes et leurs communautés, des médias d'évasion, qui dépeignent simultanément leurs vies uniques et un monde imaginaire ou utopique leur offrant un sentiment de bien-être, de libération, et une catharsis. En tant qu'initié aux univers des fans, je suis bien positionné pour décrire ces pratiques culturelles.

De précédentes études ont amplement démontré comment les systèmes racistes issus de la culture dominante sont adaptés par les fans au sein de leurs communautés, mais peu d'études se sont attardées sur les cas où les fans élargissent intentionnellement la portée de la représentation dans leurs communautés, lorsque ces derniers édifient les utopies basées sur celles qu'ils voient en les médias. Dans ce mémoire de maîtrise, j'utiliserai une nouvelle méthodologie pour retracer ces pratiques à travers différents types d'œuvres conçues par des fans de 2010 à 2019s, en se concentrant sur les univers des fans entourant *Les Misérables*, *Hamilton*, et *Hadestown*, qui interprètent les créations des fans dans le but de décrire un processus créatif sous-jacent de la cohérence du *World Ain't Ready*, un exemple d'œuvres de fans qui ne ressemble pas à son matériau d'origine.

Dans ce mémoire de maîtrise, je suivrai, à travers des créations de fans sur *World Ain't Ready*, le développement d'un ensemble d'idées provenant de plusieurs comédies musicales. Cette méthodologie permettra de soutenir une discussion sur les œuvres de fans en tant qu'élément communautaire inhérent, et non en tant qu'objet individuel, et permettra aussi à ce mémoire de maîtrise d'offrir une introduction aux œuvres des fans pour les chercheurs ne se considérant pas comme fans de ces dernières.

J'espère que cette recherche contribuera aux discussions sur la race, le genre et la sexualité dans l'univers des fans en montrant comment les *fans-créateurs* peuvent faire les choses correctement, ainsi qu'en proposant une méthodologie qui favorise une compréhension intuitive pour les lecteurs qui ne sont pas familiers avec les univers de fans étudiés tout au long de cette recherche.

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For Bea Egger

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandma, Bea, who won't have the opportunity to read it. Her quiet perseverance and legendary independence are lessons that I did my best to apply while finishing this thesis. No matter what life threw at her, she found a way to enjoy it and make it her own. No matter how weird my musical activities and creative writing got, she always complimented me and encouraged me to march to my own beat. I never imagined outlining my thesis on printer paper in a hospice, but I'm grateful to have had that time with her. Thank you, Grandma, for being yourself until the very end.

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Introduction, or

“Fic Can Be Very Good, But It Is a Whole Different Genre”

outsiders and boring normal people and fandom newbies always think that buckwild kinky porn fanfiction is the strangest fandom hobby but they are wrong.

the strangest fandom hobby is plotty fanfiction, the kind that requires research, because engaging in this hobby makes no goddamned sense.¹

Contemporary media **fandom** (see Appendix for definitions of bolded terms) is a digital phenomenon and a significant part of many people’s lives. Millions of fans of all ages, all over the world consume **fanwork**—the media created by fans deriving from a source media—as a significant portion of their media consumption.² As a result, fandom and the ways fans create and interact have a significant bearing on the way they read all media. Fans are informal, communal creators, not necessarily driven by profit motives. Instead, they are motivated by insular community trends and a set of idiosyncratic aesthetic norms that have emerged especially in the last 60 years, some of which include a focus on queer characters, positive romantic stories, and recapturing the aspirational or utopian potential embedded in media. Particularly in musical theatre fandoms, this utopian potential takes the form of a nonspecific utopian performative embedded in the live theatre experience and expressed through the interactions of fans’ creative works. This is not to say fan creators are altruists or countercultural paragons. At the very least, though, fans’ creative and critical work reflects an understudied art form whose aesthetics bear on the media preferences and interpretive practices of millions. Fanwork is often a way for fans to syncretise the source media with their own life experience, dreams, and how they wish they could escape from reality.

¹ majesticortoise, “outsiders and boring normal people...” Tumblr post, text, October 22, 2022, <https://thebigpurplebook.tumblr.com/post/698815858329468928/majesticortoise-majesticortoise-outsiders-and>.

² Eskici, “The Archive of Our Own Reaches Ten Million Fanworks!” *Organization for Transformative Works*, last modified October 15, 2022, <https://www.transformativeworks.org/the-archive-of-our-own-reaches-ten-million-fanworks/>.

The complexity of fan culture as a whole is beyond the scope of any one thesis, but I aim to explicate one way of looking at fanwork which, as a corollary, allows for non-fans to gain an understanding of how fans communally adapt source media to their needs. Using source media as one among several resources, fans contribute ideas to an interdependent constellation of fanworks, all of which contribute to the creation of further works. By describing the progress of a certain set of ideas across many kinds of fanwork, rather than focussing solely on fanwork that executes these ideas in a unique way, I can build up evidence to show how fanwork that appears from outside to be extremely divorced from the source media is easily understood as fanwork within the community. These works exist in a space defined by other fanwork and are understood best when well contextualised.

To explore this topic, I will approach musical theatre fandom, with a special focus on the flawed on-stage portrayals of utopic liberalism and racial justice on Broadway. These utopic ideas are transformed by some fans, creating fanwork that revives and expands the on-stage dream of a more connected and compassionate world. Fans reconstruct the delicate uncertainty of utopia through their creative work, incorporating marginalised bodies underrepresented in mainstream media. The musicals I have chosen, *Les Misérables* (*Les Miz*, 1986), *Hamilton* (2015), and *Hadestown* (2019), are three that have or had significant online fandom communities, and these communities share many cultural markers that make them comparable fandoms. While similar practices operate in a multitude of other fandoms, each has a specific culture and develops in unique ways. The culture I describe may not be general, but the methods for analysing that culture are. In this case, I will follow the development of a set of ideas from the three source musicals through many pieces of fanart to *World Ain't Ready* (2014-15), a 180,000 word fanwork that bears very little resemblance to its source material in *Les Miz*.

~

A Brief Introduction to *World Ain't Ready*

In *World Ain't Ready*, Jessica Mary Best (screen name idiopathicsmile) captures something true about many people's experience of high school, and also a fantastical, escapist dream of what that experience could be.³ Manipulating a pair of conventional narrative structures for romance novels and fanwork (fake dating and enemies-to-lovers) combined with the core themes of *Les Miz* (that a better world is possible, even inevitable, through love and compassion) Best creates a work that validates the experience of many queer and marginalised young adults who went through the American public school system, while also showing the characters resisting repressive systems that many real teenagers were forced to accept. She also shows her readers that there is a better world possible outside of the high school experience, in collaboration with a community of other people who wrote *Les Miz* fic around the same time.

Here is a brief "trailer" I've composed for a hypothetical *World Ain't Ready* teen film which shows some of what I mean.

~

FADE IN:

INT. A HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM IN THE MIDWESTERN US - AFTERNOON

GRANTAIRE, a young man in a green beanie, walks into the classroom.

GRANTAIRE (V.O.)

If you ask, I'll tell you my favourite subject is detention.⁴

³ idiopathicsmile is the screen name of Jessica Mary Best. "Pre-order my queer sci-fi/mystery YA novel STARS, HIDE YOUR FIRES." idiopathicsmile, Bio, Tumblr, retrieved June 20, 2023, <https://idiopathicsmile.tumblr.com>.

⁴ All dialogue quoted or paraphrased from idiopathicsmile, *World Ain't Ready*, Archive of Our Own, updated April 12, 2015, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/2306315>, Chapters 1 and 2.

GRANTAIRE

Sup, Miz P. How's business?

He slumps into a desk.

GRANTAIRE (V.O.)

You'll probably assume I'm being a little shit, because, well, me. But the thing is, it's also not far from the truth.

He pulls his beanie over the top of his face.

GRANTAIRE (V.O.)

If you play your cards right, detention is just a somewhat uncomfortable nap.

ENJOLRAS, a blond boy in a red hoodie, enters the room. He stands next to GRANTAIRE.

ENJOLRAS

Hey.

(pause)

Hey.

GRANTAIRE

(grumpy)

Hey. What?

ENJOLRAS

How does this work?

CUT TO:

MONTAGE OF SCENES OF ENJOLRAS READING, SPEAKING TO TEACHERS.

Music begins: "Shake the Sheets" by Ted Leo & the Pharmacists.⁵

GRANTAIRE (V.O.)

Enjolras believes that the separation of church and state is vital to a truly free society. He maintains that

⁵ Ted Leo & the Pharmacists, "Shake the Sheets," October 19, 2004, track 9 on *Shake the Sheets*, Lookout Records, digital.

both the two-party system and the campaign finance system need aggressive overhaul, and that America's shrinking middle class is creating "a kind of neo-Feudalism"—that's a direct quote.

ENJOLRAS

You don't believe a single thing I'm saying, do you?

GRANTAIRE

Not a goddamn one of 'em.

MONTAGE CONTINUES

GRANTAIRE (V.O.)

He's going into poli sci, and when he talks about it, he smiles like someone remembering a private joke or a secret love.

(pause)

I'm not jealous of an entire field of study, don't be ridiculous.

FADE TO:

INT. GRANTAIRE'S ROOM - NIGHT

GRANTAIRE and EPONINE, a teenage girl with a goth aesthetic, listen to music on a boom box while GRANTAIRE draws. EPONINE is colouring GRANTAIRE's drawings.

EPONINE

Got anything to smoke?

GRANTAIRE

Cigarettes. Nothing else. When's your dealer getting out of prison?

EPONINE

Five months.

GRANTAIRE

God, we might as well just get a hobby or something.

EPONINE

You could always join that new club they're doing. It's like a charity, activism-y.

(pause)

The guy who started it is, like, terrifyingly determined to recruit people.

GRANTAIRE

(eager)

Blond kid with a weird name? Wears a lot of red?

EPONINE

Yeah.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM

All the chairs have been put in a circle. The members of the ABC⁶ are sitting and talking to each other. GRANTAIRE sits a little apart.

GRANTAIRE (V.O.)

Half the ethnic diversity in Columbus High goes to Enjolras' club. It's like a 90's cartoon.

Jehan has a lot of feelings about school funding, and also single moms for some reason. Courfeyrac can wax poetic about minimum wage. Bossuet is big into animal rights. Cosette is passionate about the environment, and Marius is passionate about whatever Cosette is passionate about.

In a school where even most of the pot heads are conservatives, Enjolras has managed to find ten allies.

ENJOLRAS glares at GRANTAIRE

⁶ A reference to Les Amis de l'ABC, the student organisation led by Enjolras from Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. Isabel F. Hapgood (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2018).

ENJOLRAS

Why are you here.

GRANTAIRE

(joking)

Like, on the planet? I don't know, I think I'd rather leave that one to the philosophers. Oh hey, Combeferre! Just in time. Help a bro out, we're getting existential over here.

GRANTAIRE spends his time drawing the group members.

FADE TO:

INT. GRANTAIRE'S CAR

GRANTAIRE and ENJOLRAS sit in silence for a moment.

ENJOLRAS

Courfeyrac wants to ask Jehan to prom.

GRANTAIRE

(confused)

And he wants my blessing?

ENJOLRAS

He hasn't asked yet. He's afraid to. People have been harassing Jehan at school.

GRANTAIRE

Have you seen how that kid dresses? If high school was a savannah, Jehan would be a gazelle with no legs.

ENJOLRAS

If it wasn't just Jehan and Courfeyrac, maybe it would diffuse their anger. At the very least, create some solidarity.

GRANTAIRE

So, you want me to go around outing people?

ENJOLRAS

Are you doing this on PURPOSE?

GRANTAIRE

Usually, you have no problem thinking
I'm an idiot.

ENJOLRAS

Okay, look. I need you to go to prom
with me. I need you to pretend to date
me.

FADE OUT.

~

This introduction should provide a good initial sense of the tone and content of *World Ain't Ready* and similar fanworks and establish what sort of fanwork I want to build up a discussion of in this thesis. While the character archetypes may be familiar to someone who knows *Les Miz*, the Enjolras, Grantaire, and Amis de l'ABC presented in this excerpt are very, very different from those in Hugo's novel. And while some of the radical revolutionary values Enjolras represents are preserved and updated to the 21st century, the expression of these values and the methods to achieve radical change represented bear little in common with Hugo, and instead model small-scale, grassroots change and solidarity.

~

On the History of the Author as a Fan

Before I learned to tell the difference between fiction and reality, I was a fan. My dad is a lifelong *Star Wars* fan who saw *Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977) multiple times in theatres. New *Star Wars* film media is a common conversation topic over family dinners. He also collects sci fi/fantasy novels and memorabilia like LEGO. My mom read the *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) books aloud to my sister and me as they came out and cried multiple times while reading (and

rereading) *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007). My parents were and remain primarily **acquisitive fans**, who view and re-view their favourite media and collect information and memorabilia. While they consume criticism, they don't have a great interest in negotiating their understanding of their favourite works among other fans. My sister is farther along the spectrum towards creative work: one summer during our childhood, she watched the film *The Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* (2007) at least once a day. She consumes huge amounts of supplementary information on her favourite media, like *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Terror*, and forms nuanced critical opinions that she shares within her social circle, but not usually beyond.

Meanwhile, I made the transition from more acquisitive to more **creative fandom** when I played *Pokémon Diamond Version* (2006) and began to write my own story based on the games. Before this point, I had obsessively reread Brian Jacques' *Redwall* books (1986-2011) continuously for at least two years. In my **fanfiction** of *Pokémon Diamond*, original characters (OCs) based on my sister and I went on adventures together, similar to the make-believe playground games that I performed with my friends during recess. My writing style has always been iterative, and I remember writing tens of different variations on the story, starting and restarting whenever I had a new idea. Sometime around 2010, years before I realised I was gay, I solved a difficult problem with the tension curve in my story by resolving that the OC based on me, a man, and the main villain, another man, were exes. Not only was I writing fanfic all unawares, but I had also begun to write **slash fic**, where characters of the same gender are in queer relationships. In high school, friends introduced me to the fanfiction archive website FanFiction.NET, which became the jumping off point for ten years of intense engagement with fandom as an activity and a community.

My journey has been idiosyncratic, just like every other fan's. My entry point was a video game fanfiction with an East Asian story structure, a community where the overwhelming competence of the main cast was a draw. From FanFiction.NET, I transitioned to Tumblr and then Archive of Our Own, transitioning from Japanese video game fandom to western TV, film, and novel fandoms, where characters are expected to be flawed and the focus is on **shipping**. Another major idiosyncrasy in my fan experience is that I have unconsciously insulated myself from major fan dramas and debates over representation. The internet space that I curated for myself has always been quite sex- and queer-positive, meaning that my online experience does not encompass one of the major contemporary threads of fan studies and fan discourse, that of the intense racism and exclusionary practices in some fan communities. This curation has resulted in me gaining skills for understanding the relationship of a fanwork to the source media—I come to many of my fandoms late, after major fights over representation and demographics are over—and for developing my relationship to source media independently—due to my late arrival, I need to independently replicate a developmental process that the rest of the community has already undergone. As a result of these, combined with my fondness for small, insular fan communities, I know the norms and developmental patterns that communities are likely to follow.

~

On the Academic History of Fandom

In recent years, fanwork and fandom have become more mainstream subjects for academic criticism. The weakening hold of the work-concept in the last several decades has allowed for fandom to act as a lens for audience studies. Simply compare early studies in the 1980s, when fan scholars approached fans with an ethnographic tone, rhetorically holding themselves apart to

preserve their legitimacy, to contemporary fan scholars like myself, who proudly claim their fannish background in order to establish their credentials. Fan studies has abundantly shown the popular origins of fanwork, with some scholars comparing fanwork to folk art, a form which claims hegemonic art forms for countercultural purposes.⁷ Prior scholarly work on fanwork has also provided several theories for the prevalence of gay male slash in a female-dominated community, including titillation and identificatory practices.⁸ Fan scholars have been instrumental in theorising the independence of the work from its creators, while retaining an expansive understanding of how fans actually approach the author's ideas as valuable to their work. Here, I will provide both a discussion of previous scholarship on fandom and a general history of relevant parts of fanwork.

As fandom and fanwork have seen more scholarly attention, they have also been folded into various theories of art and creativity. In the initial edition of Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation*, she states directly that fanwork is not a form of adaptation, but in the 2013 second edition Siobhan O'Flynn convincingly argues for the inclusion of fanwork as a legitimate form of adaptation.⁹ Given the variety within fanwork, I would extend this and argue that often, fanwork is a repetition with a critical difference, matching Hutcheon's definition of parody rather than adaptation.¹⁰ Thus, different pieces of fanwork can be adaptation or parody, or fit Hutcheon's initial categorisation, where there is neither an adaptational nor a parodic element. Furthermore, some fanwork, such as meta discussions of themes and performance details, better match conventional definitions of criticism than any adaptational drive.

⁷ Henry Jenkins, "Textual Poachers," in *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, eds. Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 26-29.

⁸ See Joanna Russ, "Pornography by Women for Women" in Busse and Hellekson, *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, 84-89.

⁹ Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 9, 179-185.

¹⁰ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 6.

The first fandom to see major critical attention was the fan community surrounding *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966-1969), which is often considered to have inaugurated contemporary fan culture.¹¹ Groups of female fans of *Star Trek* associated in person and by correspondence based on their shared interest, sharing their fanwork—fan theories, art, and stories—with each other. Starting with the Season 2 episode “Amok Time,” in which Kirk, the ship’s captain, fights Spock, his first mate, to resolve Spock’s species’ physiological need to breed or die, fans became very interested in portraying the relationship between the two characters, often in a sexual form, as a slash ship.¹² Slash has remained important in fandom ever since, for various reasons.

By the 80s and 90s, creative fan culture had grown into a community with its own conventions and social dynamics, but also drew negative attention. Many copyright holders, most notably George Lucas (*Star Wars*) and Anne Rice (*The Vampire Chronicles*) perceived new creative works in their settings to be infringement of their intellectual property and attempted to stamp creative fandom out using legal threats. Partly in response to this movement, fan-scholars like Camille Bacon-Smith, Henry Jenkins, and science fiction author Joanna Russ applied academic critical methods to fan creation in its defense. Jenkins, in particular, argued that fans perform countercultural “poachings” of the source material, quoting Michel de Certeau’s theory that ordinary people appropriate and make meanings from texts that are independent of the text’s original purpose.¹³ This work launched fan studies as a sub-discipline of audience studies, though later scholars have criticized Bacon-Smith, Jenkins, Russ, and other 80s and 90s fan-scholars for their wholehearted adoption of a “fandom is beautiful” model.¹⁴

¹¹ Busse and Hellekson, *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, 6.

¹² Ibid. 11-12.

¹³ Jenkins, “Textual Poachers,” 28-9.

¹⁴ Rukmini Pande, *Squee from the Margins: Fandom and Race* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018), 3-4.

That early fan-scholars focussed so much on *Star Trek* has resulted in a perception that the *Star Trek* fandom is a model for all fandom, though it might be more accurate to say that it is a primary nucleation site for many of the cultural and aesthetic preoccupations of contemporary Western creative fans. This is a specific subgroup of the people who are often called “fans” in a generalised way. Some of the elements of fan culture inaugurated by the *Star Trek* fandom are many, many narrative premises, value relationships between **canon** and **fanon**, and the demographics and representational norms of many fans. Fandoms in the West are often expected to contain mostly cisgender white women who create slash fanwork, that is, fanwork in which men are in romantic and sexual relationships with men.¹⁵ Many conventional fanfiction narratives draw on *Star Trek* episodes for their inspiration, like the “fuck or die” premise, in which a character must have intercourse/intimacy or experience negative consequences, drawing on the episode “Amok Time” mentioned above. Alternate universe fanwork, in which the characters from a piece of media are portrayed in a new setting, draws on various *Star Trek* episodes as well, particularly “Mirror Mirror.”¹⁶

The mainstream perception of creative fan culture has undergone a massive shift, beginning in the early 2000s. Many fantasy and science fiction authors, especially women like Mercedes Lackey, Diane Duane, and Anne McCaffrey, spoke openly about creating fanwork in addition to their published work.¹⁷ Two of the most consequential copyright holders of the decade, J.K. Rowling and Stephenie Meyer, publicly supported the rights of their fans to create transformative works.¹⁸ Major media corporations like Disney and Warner Bros. also realised

¹⁵ Joanna Russ, “Pornography by Women, for Women, with Love,” in *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, 82-3.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ bronwynn, “... (laughing softly) Oh yeah?” Tumblr post, text, January 30, 2023, <https://www.tumblr.com/dduane/707899373131005952/dduane-laughing-softly-oh-yeah-look-over?source=share>.

¹⁸ Darren Waters, “Rowling backs Potter fan fiction,” *BBC*, updated May 27, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/3753001.stm>.

that creative fans and fanwork were vectors for grassroots promotion of their media properties, and started to view them as an exploitable market. Fandom was always compromised by the biases and preoccupations of mainstream culture, like consumer capitalism, racism, and misogyny, but fandom's ongoing mainstreaming has made these biases even more apparent.

Many studies of fandom have attempted one of two broad methodological approaches: close reading of isolated works or data-driven coding of large sets of fanwork. In the first case, scholars often approach fanwork partly with the goal of integrating it with mainstream art forms, especially among early fan scholars. Russ or Bacon-Smith might approach and read a *Star Trek* fanfiction in their scholarship the same way that they would read *Jane Eyre* in a paper. In the second case, the focus tends to be more on the audience, attempting to aggregate sufficient data from the fanwork archive to make meaningful collective statements about fandom. For instance, Black et al. attempt to understand the discourse on autism in *Harry Potter* fanfiction by reading fanwork and fan meta while coding the valence of various statements and ideas to create a dataset.¹⁹ While both approaches have their uses, especially depending on the view of fanwork that an individual scholar subscribes to, neither is quite appropriate to studying a collection of fanwork in context, as a set of iterations on similar ideas that depend upon each other for coherence.

The close reading method lacks both scope and specificity. The methodology, as used by many fan scholars, briefly describes the plot and themes of a fanwork and then spends much more time applying a reading to the text described. This microscopic attention to isolated works does not reflect the consumption habits of most fans, who can consume vast quantities of fanwork in a short time. Fanwork in the same archive often repeats the same stories and themes

¹⁹ Rebecca Black et al., "Representations of Autism in Online Harry Potter Fanfiction," *Journal of Literacy Research* 51:1 (2019): 30-51.

with variation, the scope of which is not visible when reading one fanwork so closely. As a result, the consistent preoccupations of the community are lost in favour of the scholar reporting an individual work as representative of the archive. It also lacks specificity, in that most scholars are not expected to be competent in fanwork, certainly not in a specific sub-community within fandom. Even as a lifelong fan, my reading of Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women* or Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* was often interrupted by the need to look for supplemental reading on the *Star Trek* fan community during the period in question.²⁰ By approaching novel-length *Star Trek* fanfics in the same way they might approach a canonical work—a work in the Western canon tradition, with which most people, especially scholars, have some level of familiarity—Bacon-Smith, Jenkins, and others who follow this method up to the present fail to consider that scholars have little access to fanwork, as opposed to the canon. Not only are fanworks often inaccessible due to small print runs and the decay of digital archives, but scholars are not trained to read fanwork. Except for a minuscule subclass of fellow fan scholars who share the same background, academics do not have competence to follow fan scholarship the way they do the canon. When fanwork is approached using close reading, academics are left in the position of needing to trust the scholar(s) without access to their line of thought or the competence to understand their conclusions, even if they were to read the cited fanwork.

The data-driven approach is also inappropriate to understanding fandom in context because the coding techniques used in most studies are rudimentary and subjective. Except for isolated purposes at the largest scales, like measuring the prevalence of ships, characters, or narrative conventions across whole fandom archives, attempting to encode discrete data from fanwork faces the same issues as coding data from any artwork. This is especially true as

²⁰ Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), and Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

fanwork is increasingly considered a creative form like any other. The effect of a work—or a set of works—as appreciated by an audience member, is an emergent quality of the pixels, bits, ink, or other media, not encoded within them. Coding the valence of representations of autism in *Harry Potter* fanwork is highly subjective, and selection criteria for such a study will necessarily miss important contextual information.²¹

The approach used by Valerie Fazel and Louise Geddes in *The Shakespeare Multiverse* comes closer to the structure of the community.²² Fazel and Geddes describe fandom as a multiverse in which many realities exist simultaneously, and ideas are connected and draw on each other. Each fan has a unique point of entry and path through the multiverse space, and they use what they have learned from prior experience with fandom to understand new iterations that they encounter. To focus more on the interdependence of various fanworks, I prefer the metaphor of a constellation to the multiverse, a more explicable idea that shows how fandom archives can be seen as a collection of fanwork, all interrelated and inseparable from each other. When looking at the whole, it becomes apparent that to look only at a single star in the constellation—close reading—is insufficient to understanding the gravitational relationships between stars, while fencing off a study region within the night sky—data analytics—will miss huge amounts of context.

In order to both follow the development of the ideas that I am focussed on as well as provide a substantial introduction to fanwork for the non-fan reader, I will conduct my study using an expanded method of close reading that encompasses many different, but related, pieces of fanwork. Following a detailed summary of a fanwork and key elements of its tone, themes,

²¹ Black et al., “Representations of Autism.”

²² Valerie M. Fazel and Louise Geddes, *The Shakespeare Multiverse: Fandom as Literary Praxis* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 5-6.

and relationships to other works—including as much of the original work in quotation as possible—I will place it into the constellation so that it can contextualise further fanworks. Using this method, I hope that I can show how inherently interrelated fandom is, and how that interrelationship is key to the meaning of an individual fanwork.

Academic studies on diversity in fandom have often focussed on combatting the ingrained racism and homophobia of fans, and efforts within fan communities to do the same.²³ These same studies have often decried how online fan spaces assume the default: that is, white, cisgender women. The casual exclusionary practices of fan communities have been attacked by many writers, both in the academy and in online fan spaces. Antiracist work is ongoing in fan spaces, but fan communities have many of the same issues with casual racism as other online and offline communities in the contemporary world, as described by these scholars in their studies of fan activism and fanwork engaging with racialized topics.

However, the focus of this research tends to be either on fandom as a whole or on a specific selection of works/fan communities that are particularly large and/or venerable. In my experience, these communities, by virtue of their size, are exceptions that clarify the rules governing smaller communities. The size of the community magnifies exclusionary voices, and the constant influx of fans to the community limits how interrelated the community can be. In my experience, fans who persist in very large fandoms tend to find a small niche, sometimes a group of creators on a given archive, sometimes a forum or closed community, in which they build the networks of creation that motivate new fanwork.

Rather than eternal recapitulation without variation—though that is an important element

²³ Rukmini Pande, *Squee from the Margins*, Sarah N. Gatson and Robin Anne Reid, “Editorial: Race and Ethnicity in Fandom,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 8 (2011), and Ebony Elizabeth Thomas and Amy Stornaiuolo, “Raced, Storying, and Restorying: What Can we Learn from Black Fans?” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 29 (2019).

in fanwork that shouldn't be undervalued the way it is—looking more closely at a subcommunity within a larger fandom reveals that fans are engaged in constant creative discourse with each other, presenting arguments and rebutting each other and their source media through various types of fanwork. At least since the early 2010s, a movement for naturalistic representation of diversity in fanwork became dominant in some musical theatre subcommunities, arriving from the fan communities of various TV shows that had active fan communities in the late '00s. This began with the representation of gay male sexuality in a naturalistic—as opposed to a fantastical—way and expanded to an emphasis of presenting rounded characters with diverse traits, whether or not those traits are easily read into the characters as presented in the source media. Acknowledging the antiracist work ongoing in fandom, I want to take time in this thesis to show how race, gender, and sexuality emerge in a very different way among fans than in mainstream media. Many of the fanworks in this thesis represent transgender/genderqueer, racialized, queer, female, and otherwise marginalised characters with more complexity than is found in the extremely commercialised media the fanwork mostly derives from. In fanwork, these marginalised characters have the opportunity to fit into narrative structures, themes, and character archetypes they have historically been denied in media. By showing where fandom is actively attempting representation I hope to support the antiracist work described by Gatson et al., Pande, Thomas, and other scholars, as well as to bring the fruits of those antiracist labours to the attention of scholars.²⁴ This representation takes a particularly transformational form among musical theatre fans, who are not as bound by the bodies of the performers in their favourite media as visual media, like film and television shows.

²⁴ Radically diverse representation of different sexualities, gender presentations, and racial backgrounds has also been a mainstay of feminist fantasy and science fiction (an important antecedent of contemporary western fandom) since at least the 1950s, with Ursula K. Le Guin and her peers.

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On Broadway Musicals and their Fans

The Broadway musical is a highly commercial art form, comparable to a movie production in terms of the number of people involved and the capital investment required to bring a show to fruition. As a result of this, marketing for the largest musicals has increasingly extended into the digital space, fostering online fan communities among people who have never seen the musicals live.²⁵ These fans, experiencing the musicals, are exposed to the utopian ideas and emotions present on stage in a different way than an audience in the theatre. *Hamilton*'s fan community even achieved such size and importance through the mid-2010s that significant scholarly work has been dedicated to its fan community already.²⁶ Previous research on musical theatre fans has focussed on acquisitive fans, the fans who want to see the actors at the stage door, participate virtually with the cast and creatives on Twitter, and express their love for the musical on forums. These online fans encompass a range of affective responses to the musicals considered in this thesis, but especially ideas around adaptation and identification, as well as the apprehension of the utopian potential of the musical form. Here, I will set out some background on the utopian potential in musicals, the ways those utopias are compromised—and yet absorbed by their audience—and provide a summary of previous research on online musical theatre fandom during the 2010s.

When describing utopian potential in theatre, there are two different but interrelated things that I am referring to, in the text and in the momentary experience of the theatre. For the

²⁵ Jessica Hillman-McCord, "Digital Fandom: *Hamilton* and the Participatory Spectator," in *iBroadway*, ed. Jessica Hillman-McCord (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), and Stacy Ellen Wolf, "'It's All About Popular': *Wicked* Divas and Internet Fangirls," in *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁶ One good example is that the success of *Hamilton* partly inspired Jessica Hillman-McCord's collection, *iBroadway*.

utopia presented in the text to be apprehended by the audience, they already need to be experiencing the ephemeral potential for a less explicit utopia, which is induced by the music, the community, and other aspects of the live theatre experience. This intangible feeling of a better world is the focus of Jill Dolan's *Utopia in Performance*, in which she describes the "utopian performative," a quality of the theatrical experience in which audience members perceive a "future that might be different, one whose potential we can feel as we're seared by the promise of a present that gestures toward a better later."²⁷ This quality, for Dolan, is emergent from the experience of live theatre, and is one of the things that draws people to the theatre. It is intensely communal, based on the collective experience of emotions on stage, which allow the audience to feel things as one. This moving experience, for Dolan, exhibits a horizontal utopian quality in that it has no explicit policy goals, instead manifesting as an emotional experience of potential and hope. As a result, it dissolves when sought too aggressively, but it also does not contain the flaw of many utopian works, which try to crystallise their policy goals and thereby make utopia a discrete point, not a constantly moving horizon. Instead, the utopian performative is an ephemeral emotional experience that can galvanise a person's sense that a qualitatively better world is possible, even if only in the theatre itself.

Musicals harness this utopian quality of live theatre, and in the case of Broadway musicals, they harness it in service of the status quo. According to Dyer's description in "Entertainment and Utopia," entertainment, in his case golden age musicals, offer "the image of 'something better' to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide."²⁸ He identifies several deficiencies in modern life that the golden age musical promises

²⁷ Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 11.

²⁸ Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," in *Only Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 2002), 20.

to fill, including isolation, exhaustion, and scarcity.²⁹ However, as a commercial enterprise, “entertainment provides alternatives *to* capitalism which will be provided *by* capitalism.”³⁰

Isolation is resolved through monogamous heterosexual partnership and childrearing, along with the intensity and immediacy of connection facilitated by the music. Exhaustion is resolved through energy, synonymising work and play, and scarcity is resolved through fantastical abundance and the miraculous elimination of an individual’s poverty. These compromised utopian expressions are a consequence of the financial model that dominates large-scale musical theatre, which requires significant capital investment and the approval of the investors, who decide what the—white, liberal, upper middle class—audience in their production base, largely New York and London, wants to see.

The communication of a musical’s transformative potential to audiences outside of the theatre is taken up in D.A. Miller’s *Place for Us*, particularly in the first section, “In the Basement.”³¹ Reporting on the gay male experience, Miller shows how a young boy can experience intense identification with musical theatre characters via the official recording, without having ever seen the musical in question. In spite of their physical distance from the theatre space, the traces of the live theatre experience provide a transcendent emotional experience to the musical theatre fan, similar in many ways to the utopian performative. In online fandoms, where fans can share their emotional experiences with a likeminded community, the theatre experience is rebuilt by the community, though in a different form. Fans value live theatre, and they treat the ephemeral performances as the primary object of their fandom. However, they also make robust use of various stable traces of those performances to establish

²⁹ Ibid. 26.

³⁰ Ibid. 27.

³¹ D.A. Miller, *Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998): 1-27.

their community, including official recordings, movies, novelisations, and bootlegs. Without the shared moment that occurs in the theatre, where the utopia exists between people who are physically sharing a space and time, musical theatre fans perform labour through their fanwork to recreate the horizontal utopic ideas they experienced in the musical.

Previous studies discussing online fandom in relation to Broadway musicals are Jessica Hillman-McCord's *iBroadway*, in which her chapter considers online fan behaviour in relation to *Hamilton*, and a chapter in Stacy Wolf's *Changed for Good*, where she discusses the forum posts of young women fans of *Wicked*.³² Both Hillman-McCord and Wolf focus on a set of behaviours which interface with the liveness of the theatre experience as well as the cast and creators. For Hillman-McCord, the online buzz around *Hamilton* is apparent in the musical's incredible hype cycle, the extreme fan engagement with the creators, and the "unspoken competition" between fans to achieve the greatest possible proximity to those creators.³³ In short, Hillman-McCord's chapter highlights how online fandom increases the reach and power of the source media. She briefly discusses various forms of transformative fanwork but stops short of engaging with fanwork as artwork in itself, focussing instead on how it forms a communal response vector to *Hamilton*. Wolf, in a chapter subtitled "*Wicked* Divas and Internet Girl Fans," describes how young girl fans of *Wicked* shape their identities using the main characters, Elphaba and Glinda. Through reading forum posts relating to the musical, Wolf notes how identification with the main characters helps young women to understand their sense of self.

Hillman-McCord briefly mentions various types of fanwork, including fanfiction and fanart, but her discussion focusses on the online marketing efforts that created this huge fan

³² Hillman-McCord, "Digital Fandom: *Hamilton* and the Participatory Spectator," in *iBroadway*, and Wolf, "'It's all about Popular': *Wicked* Divas and Internet Girl Fans," in *Changed for Good*.

³³ Hillman-McCord, *iBroadway*, 134.

community, and the impact these fans and their fanwork have on the performance of the actors in official venues.³⁴ Wolf engages more significantly with forum posts by various adolescent girl fans of *Wicked*, and uses these discussions to accentuate her point that the two female leads of *Wicked* are diva characters of the type that fans can shape themselves around.³⁵

In her chapter “Digital Fandom: *Hamilton* and the Participatory Spectator,” Hillman-McCord summarises fan practices like meta discussion and the creation of fanart or fanfic. She points out briefly that *Hamilton* is in many ways a historical fanfiction—a conclusion that I will complicate in Chapter 2—and then proceeds to discuss the real impacts that *Hamilton*’s highly engaged fans have on the behaviour of the actors and events at the Gershwins Theatre.³⁶ For instance, Hillman-McCord discusses in some depth how Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton*’s composer, librettist, and scriptwriter, as well as the originator of the titular role of Alexander Hamilton, engages with fan culture using his Twitter and Tumblr accounts. For Hillman-McCord’s argument—that *Hamilton*’s online following affects the object itself—the most useful level of fandom is that which interacts directly with the performers, that of the fans who engage in the “unspoken competition” she describes to gain the greatest possible proximity to the cast and creators.³⁷

When Wolf discusses fanwork, she focusses her attention on the meta discussions produced by adolescent girls on forums. Many of these girls, she reports, discuss topics like the nuances of live performances of *Wicked*, their identification with the characters in the musical, and their experiences attending the musicals live. To combat the perception that young girl fans are an easily duped audience, an idea that has been used to discredit the media they enjoy for

³⁴ Hillman-McCord, “Digital Fandom,” in *iBroadway*.

³⁵ Wolf, “‘It’s All About Popular’: *Wicked* Divas and Internet Fangirls” in *Changed for Good*.

³⁶ Hillman-McCord, “Digital Fandom,” 134.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 134.

decades, Wolf shows the intense analytical attention that these girl fans apply to their favourite media. In some threads, the fans discuss the book, songs, and stage action and how they shape the characters, as in a thread where they attempt to establish which characters are Wicked. In others, they discuss the performances of different actors in the lead roles, and in yet others they discuss their own identity formations, and which characters they feel most connected with among the leads. Fanwork is a lens which Wolf uses to show how girl fans of *Wicked* apprehend and utilise the diva characteristics of the characters of Elphaba and Glinda to help make sense of their own lives as young women.³⁸

The kinds of fanwork that Hillman-McCord and Wolf bring to their discussion form an important background to the fanwork that I will discuss here. While I will not be interpreting forum threads or Tweets, those kinds of discussion and engagement with the source media necessarily underscore other kinds of fanwork. Fan behaviours like waiting at the stage door or Tweeting at the creators are discussed in these prior texts. Returning to my constellation metaphor, it could be said that these kinds of fan behaviours have very little “gravity.” In aggregate, they will be seen to have incredible power over how fans interpret the story and characters of a musical, but their ideas win this power through uptake by other kinds of fan creators, like fanartists and fanfiction writers. They influence the dissemination of the musical and its hype bubble, which brings in more fans and drives their creation of new fanwork. Compared to Hillman-McCord and Wolf, my interpretive method is meant to understand the form and content of fanwork as a kind of artwork itself.

These prior studies of musical theatre fanwork identify the presence of online fandom for Broadway musicals and make some effort to understand the impact of these fandoms on the

³⁸ Wolf, “‘It’s All About Popular,’” 225-7.

dissemination of the musicals, but neither Hillman-McCord nor Wolf are concerned with fanwork as media separate from the musicals they are derived from, or how fans have actively transformed the musicals to better reflect what they view as the most important elements of each work.

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Plan of the Work

To achieve my goal of describing the interrelationships of fanwork and fans using fanwork itself, I intend to fill in the constellation of aesthetic and formal moves in fanwork surrounding *World Ain't Ready*. Rather than only use the *Les Miz* archive for this, an exercise that, for accuracy, would require an in-depth study of nearly two centuries of fanwork for the novel and musical, I will show the consistency of the specific changes that created the conditions for *World Ain't Ready*'s composition by looking at three different musical theatre fandoms: *Hadestown*, *Hamilton*, and *Les Miz*. While all three of these musical theatre fandoms emerged at different times and have different trajectories, the specific sub-communities on which I will focus exhibit consistent traits between all three, reflecting the slow development of the constellation that fans use to structure their new fanwork.

Notably, both *Hadestown* and *Hamilton* are cast in a race-blind/conscious way, a set of techniques with their own history and inherent flaws.³⁹ For fans of the two musicals, the presence of marginalised bodies on stage structures much of the fanwork they create and how they talk about the characters. The actors' bodies are important to how they see the characters. *Les Miz*, which at the time of the Hollywood film's release in 2012 was not regularly produced with race-blind casting but had decades of different productions and several official cast

³⁹ Gonzalez, "True Lies: The Myth of Color-Blind Casting and the Silencing of the Black Playwright in American Theatre," *Theatre Symposium* 29 (2022): 150-162.

recordings, exhibits a very different phenomenon in terms of how fans chose to represent marginalised bodies in their fanwork. The Les Miz fans whose creative work I will discuss here intentionally transform the characters to reflect different representational possibilities, disregarding the appearances, races, and genders of the performers who have played the characters, but retaining key character elements.

Starting with *Hadestown*, in each chapter I will narrow my focus to a smaller sub-community within each fandom. *Hadestown* fans create fanwork that interrelates primarily with the source media as they attempt to form community and define the boundaries of canon communally. This fanwork extends naturally from that described by Hillman-McCord and Wolf in their chapters, but I will provide more sustained attention to fanwork than either of them do. Different fans represent the main themes of the musical, especially feminism and anticapitalism, in different ways, deepening a discussion which the source media flattens. Often, these thematic representations refer heavily back to the source material, depending upon canon as the primary arbiter of truth in the community. Near the end of this chapter, I will show how fanwork starts to take other fanwork as a primary source for transformation, creating a network between fanworks and forming the start of the constellation of fanworks I am describing.

Chapter 2, focussed on *Hamilton*, will narrow the view to primarily modern alternate universe (AU) *Hamilton* fanwork posted during the 2015-2016 period when *Hamilton* hype peaked. Beginning from where Chapter 1 leaves off, I will cover *Hamilton* fanwork in which other fanwork begins to become a defining factor in how fans work. Romantic arcs and slash will begin to become important at this point, as I will discuss how the three love interests presented in the musical—Angelica and Eliza Schuyler, and especially John Laurens—interact with Alexander Hamilton in fanwork. By showing the consistency with which fans represent these

characters across different fanworks, despite different formats and themes between different works, I will show how fan creators used each other's work as an already-read text for their own fanwork. I will then show how a small group of *Hamilton* fans coalesced around a specific set of conventional representations of the characters. Increasingly, these representations of the character and narrative bear a looser relationship with the source media. Instead, they become more interrelated with each other and the fanwork of other fandoms. This community's fanworks will be seen to be more heavily weighted by their constellation of other fanworks than by canon.

Finally, in Chapter 3 I will focus primarily on the work of a small peer group surrounding Jessica Best and *World Ain't Ready* in the *Les Miz* community. This group was inspired primarily by a type of modern AU, based not on *Les Miz* canon, but on a set of normalised story arcs common to fanfiction, mostly ideas for romantic or sexual encounters. All the fanworks of Chapter 3 are predicated upon a single ship: Enjolras/Grantaire, or "Enjoltaire." As a result, I will focus on showing the characterisation and dynamic of these two characters, along with how fans construct the fictional world around them. For various reasons, *Les Miz* fans create fully realised worlds and, either briefly or in detail, fill out the characters of their stories with extremely diverse bodies and cultural backgrounds, presented as casually as if those bodies were those of the original actors. By transforming the characters in this way, *Les Miz* fans are able to adjust the iconic characterisations of the cast for any context. They also expand on the scale of the stories, combining several ideas into a complex, fandom-specific, whole.

This methodology will, I hope, better reflect the practice of fans than other potential methodologies and show how fans build up communal norms and shared ideas, not merely that those ideas exist. This study should also show some of the range of forms and aesthetics that drive fanwork, and explicate their appeal for non-fans, showing how fanwork influences

audience perceptions of mainstream media due to their immersion in fan communities. My goal is that, by the end of this thesis, a fan scholar who is not well-read in the *Les Miz* fandom or its related communities should be able to read *World Ain't Ready* in its entirety and appreciate its position, not only as an exceptional *Les Miz* fic, but also a representative of fanwork as an art form.

Chapter 1

“How the Gods Were Made,” *Hadestown*

‘Cause here’s the thing: to know how it ends/And still to begin to sing it again.
As if it might turn out this time/I learned that from a friend of mine.⁴⁰

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Viewing the early fanwork of the *Hamilton* and *Les Miz* communities is very difficult, especially in the spaces I have frequented. Tumblr is a very trend-focussed website, and after attention is initially applied to a work it rarely reemerges. The search function is rudimentary and surfaces only recent content. Partly as a result of this, I have chosen to focus in this chapter on the current status of a different fan community, that of *Hadestown*. This musical’s fanbase has many other advantages than just being current: it is small, it exhibits many characteristics common to other musical theatre fandoms, and the musical itself has many thematic similarities with *Hamilton* and *Les Miz*, like its focus on transformative social changes and radical revolution. While the musical itself forecloses much of its own utopian content, bounding it with explicit ideological content rather than a horizontal, universal utopian tone, fanwork recuperates this content by focussing on the one-on-one interpersonal relationships among the characters in the musical, using them as a lens for larger issues rather than allowing the larger social issues to dominate their work.

Most of the works in this chapter are very similar to those mentioned or discussed in previous scholarship on Broadway fandom, which makes them ideal for creating a grounded understanding of the kind of fanwork that is continuously ongoing in these communities. These works are the basic background of fandom and construct the interpretive space within which other fanwork responds. This chapter will cover a small cross-section of *Hadestown* fanwork,

⁴⁰ Anaïs Mitchell, “Road to Hell (Reprise)” Track 39 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*, released July 26, 2019, Sing It Again Records, digital.

including meta not dissimilar from that in Wolf's study of *Wicked* fangirls, fanart, an animatic, and fanfiction. Most of this fanwork primarily depends on the musical for coherence, while exhibiting some qualities that are evidence of fanon practices. *Hadestown* fanwork primarily consists of fanwork which either reiterates canon (meta discussing the text and art where canon events take place), fills in gaps in canon (fanwork portraying interactions that do not occur in the text but are implied), or extends canon (fanwork portraying moments after the end of canon). *Hadestown* fans often tie the musical more closely to Greek mythology through fanwork. They also tend to focus on the oppositional dynamics between Hades and the other characters, either portraying the reconciliation with Persephone or Hades' continued rivalry with Orpheus.

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Hadestown and its Internal Adaptations

Hadestown, by Anaïs Mitchell, is a loose adaptation of the story of Orpheus in the Underworld form Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, combined with elements from the Rape of Persephone. It's a sung-through musical incorporating elements of Depression-era jazz and contemporary indie music. Summer and winter have become unbalanced because Hades, a corporate capitalist and fearmongering populist, keeps Persephone in Hadestown, his kingdom, beyond the agreed-upon six months. Orpheus, a ward of the musical's narrator, Hermes, has a magical singing voice and is composing a song to "bring the world back into tune," rebalancing the cycle of the seasons.⁴¹ He falls in love with Eurydice, a cynical wanderer who longs for comfort and safety from the unpredictable seasons. During the winter, Hades seduces Eurydice with the promise of work and food, and she goes to Hadestown. Orpheus follows, and through his song causes an uprising while also reconciling Hades and Persephone by reminding them of their love. Hades makes a

⁴¹ Mitchell, *Hadestown* (2019), Track 4, "Wedding Song."

deal with Orpheus: he must walk back to the surface without looking behind to make sure Eurydice is following him. Orpheus fails the trial, relegating Eurydice to the underworld forever, but the people of Hadestown are awakened to their power as workers and remember Orpheus with gratitude.

There are three different official recordings of *Hadestown*: a 2010 concept album based on a 2007 stage production (concept album), a 2017 live recording of the New York Theatre Workshop production (NYTW), and a 2019 studio recording of the original Broadway cast (OBC).⁴² As a result, it is possible to trace the different adaptations that occurred as *Hadestown* grew into a Broadway-ready show, which expose some of the biases of Broadway towards digestible and contained themes. This is exemplified in the distinct layers of content found in “Wait for Me,” a song from act one present in all three recordings. Initially, the song is strongly metaphorical, maintaining an archetypal, fantastical tone which serves to make the emotions induced by the music and the on-stage experience more universal. In the process of adaptation, more and more details are filled in, ultimately making the song extremely explicit about the intended interpretation of events and the specific ideological and political content Mitchell is highlighting. This all but eliminates the horizontal utopian quality.

The concept album as a whole is strongly allegorical rather than representational, with characters standing for concepts rather than being fully individuated. In “Wait for Me,” Orpheus has discovered that Eurydice died to go to Hadestown. As he travels to the underworld, Hermes instructs Orpheus “how to get to Hadestown.”⁴³ Hermes delivers three verses of instructions and warnings, each followed by a chorus sung by Orpheus to Eurydice with the refrain “Wait for me,

⁴² Anaïs Mitchell, *Hadestown*, released March 9, 2010, Treleven Music, digital; Anaïs Mitchell, *Hadestown: The Myth. The Musical. (Original Cast Recording) [Live]*, released October 26, 2017, Parlophone Records, digital; and Mitchell, *Hadestown* (2019).

⁴³ Mitchell, *Hadestown* (2019), Track 18, “Wait for Me.”

I'm comin'’.”⁴⁴ Hermes' lines are more spoken than sung, as he describes the challenges of the Underworld in evocative ways that could fit into either a Depression-era drama or the fantastical world of Greek mythology, like the “hound dogs howling ‘round the gate” or how “This town [Hadestown] will try to suck you dry.”⁴⁵ Orpheus's voice is layered, singer Justin Vernon recording each line with several harmonies, creating a supernatural, multivocal quality that contrasts with Hermes' gravelly speech. With no content outside of the verses and choruses, important questions are left unanswered. Who is Hermes to Orpheus? How long has it been since Eurydice's death?

In the NYTW production, Mitchell inserts a duet-dialogue between Orpheus and Hermes before the verses begin, much like a recitative before an aria. Orpheus comes on stage, searching for Eurydice, and finds himself mocked by Hermes, who taunts him for ignoring Eurydice, saying “you'll find another muse somewhere.”⁴⁶ When Orpheus continues to insist on knowing where Eurydice has gone, Hermes admits that she is “down below.”⁴⁷ Finally, Hermes tells the distraught Orpheus that there is a route to Hadestown “around the back” and confirms that Orpheus is willing to face the challenge.⁴⁸ From this point, the song continues with the same lyrics as the concept album, though instead of Orpheus's voice harmonising with the same performer the rest of the musical's cast sings in harmony with his lyrics. Like many of the additions to the NYTW recording, the added content of “Wait for Me” is strongly poetic, full of intense images and repetition. While the action of the NYTW production is no longer so imprecise as on the concept album, the characters' behaviour reflects the types that they

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Mitchell, *Hadestown* (2010), Track 8, “Wait for Me.”

⁴⁶ Mitchell, *Hadestown* (2017), Track 10, “Wait for Me.”

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

represent, Orpheus as *the* “young man down on bended knee,” rather than *a* specific lover.⁴⁹ As a result, the NYTW recording maintains much of the horizontal content from the concept album, with the addition of some explicit narrative context.

The OBC recording inserts post-choruses after the second and third choruses, suiting the song’s role in the lavish, complex Broadway production as the first part of a song complex with “Why We Build the Wall” at the end of act one.⁵⁰ In the first post-chorus, the three Fates interrupt Orpheus’s singing and question him, asking “Who are you to walk this road that no one ever walked before?”⁵¹ He overpowers the doubt they seed by singing the Epic theme, a melody that has enhanced importance in the OBC compared to the previous recordings and which, in the previous recordings, does not appear at the conclusion of act one. In the second post-chorus, Orpheus sings to the absent Eurydice, telling her “I hear the rocks and stones/Echoing my song.”⁵² This lyric returns at the end of the musical, performed by Eurydice in “Wait for Me (Reprise)” as “I hear the rocks and stones/Echoing *our* song (emphasis mine),” creating a triumphant call forward/back between the two songs.⁵³ This post-chorus also creates a triumphant tone for Orpheus’s final solo in act one, in which he sings alone rather than alongside the ensemble, who no longer represent his supernatural voice but instead the echoes/followers who respond to his singing. This Orpheus is also more individuated as a character, played as Hermes’ naïve ward. This makes the dialogue added in the NYTW recording and retained without changes in the OBC read less as a taunt from an omniscient narrator/god and more as a scold from a parent to a child. With the post-choruses also serving to explicate Orpheus’ mental

⁴⁹ Mitchell, *Hadestown* (2017), Track 1, “Road to Hell I.”

⁵⁰ Mitchell, *Hadestown* (2019), Track 19, “Why We Build the Wall.”

⁵¹ *Hadestown* (2019), “Wait for Me.”

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Mitchell, *Hadestown* (2019), Track 37, “Wait for Me (Reprise).”

state in detail, less information is left for a listener to fill in, and the fictional world of *Hadestown*, already much more constructed on stage in the OBC with a detailed set, is increasingly explicated through the lyrics.

This increase in explicit statements about *Hadestown*'s topic and action in the OBC makes it much less open to interpretation and transformation than the other two recordings. The added content in "Wait for Me" is symptomatic of the broader issue that *Hadestown* performs its own interpretation. Rather than leave Orpheus' emotions for the listener to decide or let the nature of the multivocal choruses be implied, the OBC fills in every gap with an explicit intended reading that forecloses interpretive work. It also brings into the explicit text very direct theme statements, attempting to apply the utopian feelings induced by the live theatre experience to a specific intended ideology. Rather than allowing the utopian performative to work within the listener, *Hadestown* attempts to apply it to a specific set of policy goals, like anticapitalism or environmentalism. This eliminates the horizontal utopia and instead makes the only utopia *Hadestown* can display that which Dyer describes, which is the one still embedded within capitalism. It is up to fans reading through the musical to recreate the feelings that are misapplied to the capitalist utopia and create their own versions of the musical's story.

~

Metafiction and Fan Discussions: Founding Fanon

Meta posts by *Hadestown* fans on Tumblr show fans engaging in a critical or interpretive way with the source media. These fans are much less likely than *Wicked* fans in the early 2000s to explicitly describe themselves as one of the characters or perform their fandom in the same uncritical way. Instead, they often read heavily into the text of either the studio recording or the stage show itself, using intense rhetoric and descriptive language to convey the meaning that

they have interpreted. They argue for various readings, often using a subset of the text as their evidence and ignoring the remainder. Just like the fans Hillman-McCord and Wolf both describe, they value the on-stage performance of the musical above the trace left in the official recording. They also tend to draw from both the performers and the text itself for evidence of their readings, interpreting the biographies and personalities of individual performers as part and parcel of the characters they portray.

In this example of *Hadestown* meta, a user called princesskuragina (hereafter kuragina) argues for their reading of the romantic tragedy of the musical, and how it distinguishes itself from other Orpheus adaptations:

Sure it would be nice if Orpheus didn't turn around, but that isn't actually the triumphant ending of *Hadestown*. The Orpheus who doesn't turn around has not changed, is still the trusting and naive boy he was at the top of the show, unable to imagine anyone would wrong him on purpose. What we want, what the narrative demands for this to be satisfying, is for Eurydice not to turn around. The jaded, scrappy, *all I've ever known is how to hold my own* Eurydice, who knows exactly how cruel the world is, and chooses to trust her lover anyways. That would be the hero's journey, that would be the positive character arc, and that would be the happy ending.

But *Hadestown* is a tragedy. So that doesn't happen. Orpheus is asked to walk out of hell. At the top of the show it never would have occurred to him that Eurydice wasn't right behind him, but that view of the world has not survived the trip to the underworld. His goodness and his gift of seeing beauty are eroded by the abject horror of the world he lives in. It's a tragedy because Eurydice, who has no reason to trust anyone, who should be selfish, who probably wouldn't have been with him at the beginning of the show, runs after him with open arms. And he still turns around

#this is why hadestown is my favorite adaptation of Orpheus and Eurydice #bc giving Eurydice this characterization and this arc makes it so much more tragic #she finally learns to trust and is immediately punished for it #they have parallel arcs which is so much better than all the versions where Eurydice is more or less passive #like in hadestown she's not just walking blindly. it is a BIG deal that she can trust Orpheus #anyways show good #hadestown #Broadway #orpheus and Eurydice (Tumblr post by princess-kuragina, retrieved March 1, 2023.)

In this post, kuragina describes their reading of the final moments of the song "Doubt Comes In," when Orpheus fails the challenge set by Hades and turns around, causing Eurydice to return to *Hadestown*. With reference to the concept of the hero's journey and classical tragedy, they

describe their understanding of how Mitchell updates Ovid's myth to incorporate complementary character arcs for Orpheus and Eurydice, and how this adaptation of the myth is more useful and interesting to them than others. The first two paragraphs form the "body" of the post, while the third paragraph constitutes the "tags," part of the Tumblr discourse environment that impacts the meaning of kuragina's writing. The post begins as if in reply to an implied interlocutor, a common discursive technique on Tumblr, where users can write unlimited text below an existing post when "reblogging" a post. This technique could also be a holdover from many early users' history on forums. The implied interlocutor kuragina responds to appears to hold the strawman position that *Hadestown* would be better if Orpheus succeeded in walking out of Hadestown without turning to see Eurydice.

The basic argument that kuragina brings to bear in their 'response' is that the rules of the tragic story demand that this is not the case. They argue that if Orpheus did not turn around, it would show that he has not experienced character development throughout the musical, becoming less naïve and sheltered. A moving ending where the character walking out of Hadestown did not turn around, for kuragina, would be if jaded Eurydice had to walk in front, and thereby prove that she has experienced character development and become more willing to trust another person to be altruistic. In this, kuragina fundamentally misunderstands the rules of tragedy—the tragic hero's fatal flaw is something they cannot grow past and that is why it causes their demise—but does argue convincingly for the ending of *Hadestown* as appropriate. That Orpheus and Eurydice have grown past their core character flaws and this growth causes their tragic failure is a moving variation on the well-known myth, which must end the way it does because it is an already-read of Western culture.

In their response, kuragina uses a highly emotional rhetorical style that is common in fan meta. Fan critics learn to use rhythm and quotation, along with descriptive language, to support their theses. Kuragina describes Eurydice in the first paragraph as “jaded, scrappy, *all I’ve ever known is how to hold my own* Eurydice,” directly quoting the title of one of Eurydice’s solos. Along with the textual and generic evidence they deploy, kuragina also uses their personal identification with the musical to colour their interpretations of the two lead characters. They describe Orpheus’s naïvete having been “eroded by the abject horror of the world he lives in” and say that “it is a BIG deal that she [Eurydice] can trust Orpheus,” in the process showing partly why they identify with the characters. In their reading of *Hadestown*, kuragina has focussed on the character traits and dynamics that speak to the themes they read into the musical. Orpheus and Eurydice are encompassed, for kuragina, in their contrasting, complementary character arcs. This iconic characterisation of the main characters from the musical reflects how creative fans accentuate a small suite of traits for each character in a work, depending on the goals they have for their fanwork.

The tags, the final paragraph of the text reproduced above, are included because kuragina uses them as a sort of whisper voice. Functionally, these clauses preceded by a hash symbol (#) are meant to be used for the search function, but Tumblr’s search function is so underused that hashtags, which are not naturally preserved when reblogging, are more of a secondary discursive level in an original post. In this post, kuragina uses a more conversational mode of speech to explicate their ideas about Eurydice’s character, and expand on Orpheus and Eurydice’s “parallel arcs,” which they contrast positively with Eurydice’s passive role in other adaptations of the myth. The tags expand upon kuragina’s ideas from the main body of the post but are not required to understand their point. As I will show for many of the fanfics drawn from Archive of our Own

(Ao3), a central archive for fanfiction since the late 2000s, tags being used as a whisper voice or commentary mode is a norm not only on Tumblr, but also on Ao3. Multiple discursive modes in a work are a fanwork convention, as users often caption art, or provide brief notes on their fanfictions, or detailed descriptions on their videos.

Another meta post by rooniemag shows how fans of *Hadestown* demonstrate their proximity to the production of the musical to the community by reporting on stage action not recorded in the OBC. They also demonstrate how fans infuse their reading of the musical onto the stage action, often superseding evidence presented in the recording:

In hey little songbird, those three little guitar notes directly correspond to the three fates moving remarkably like birds, or perhaps very enthused gossips.

Eva Noblezada puts SO much into her performances. Like sobbing, on her knees, so much emotion.

Orpheus and Eurydice have great chemistry, but Reeve Carney and Eva Noblezada are absolutely *magnetic* on stage. They bring a depth to their interactions and dynamic that are to die for.

In our lady of the underground, Persephone is flirting like hell with the whole audience. It's so fun to see, and really makes you feel roped in!

In general, this show does a wonderful job of incorporating the audience. The only time in the recording (live [NYTW] or OBC) that gets close is Hermes saying "you've got a lonesome road to walk..." (and the associated verse).

More bits of audience incorporation include:

In Orpheus's toast in living it up on top, when he says, "and the one we live in now," [C]arney looks right at the audience. Everyone does. The silence is so tense nobody breathes until he stomps his feet, and you're almost relieved they've looked away, because being seen like that is almost too much.

In Wait For Me, the workers have headlamps and sometimes stare directly at and hold very intense "eye contact" with an audience member. They see you, not that they actually see you more than they can see anything other than their own work right then.

...

A recurring style for the workers' movements is to seem rigid as a statue until a "huh!" or "ch!" which marks them seeming to collapse or falter under their invisible burden

Seriously I could wax poetic for hours about how beautifully the workers move (Tumblr post by rooniemag, retrieved March 1, 2023.)

When making this post, rooniemag had clearly just seen the musical live on Broadway. They demonstrate not only their familiarity with the recording with specific references to

instrumentation (“those three little guitar notes”), but also which cast members they saw, specifically naming the actors who originated Orpheus and Eurydice and play them on the OBC. Rather than proceeding in temporal order through the musical, rooniemag appears to have composed their list as they thought of new points. Some points run into two or more bullet points as they record their stream of consciousness, and rooniemag smoothly switches between referring to characters and performers with a precise but narrow distinction between the two. Ultimately, they begin speaking about their favourite element of the show that is not present in the OBC, which is the performance of the ensemble, who they refer to as “the workers,” which is how the show credits them as well.

By attending live, rooniemag has the opportunity to collect information not available on the OBC or on bootlegs filmed at a great distance from the stage, such as some of the emotional content of the ephemeral experience of being in the theatre. They also have the opportunity to demonstrate their proximity to the show, and the fact that they physically viewed two of the human beings whose voices are canonized by the OBC. As in kuragina’s post, rooniemag is highly subjective in their report. They universalise their experience as *the* experience of the musical, positing a collective audience response to moments like “Orpheus’s toast.” Rather than encompass the range of probable responses in the theatre, from boredom to critical viewing to rooniemag’s own intense emotional response, rooniemag attempts to report the transcendent, ephemeral experience they had in the theatre. When describing a choice like the ensemble making eye contact with the audience during “Wait for Me,” rooniemag describes their specific read on the performance, that the workers gaze out to the viewer but cannot actually see them due to their exhaustion. In this moment, they slide into speaking about the characters rather than the performers. In another moment, they perceive that the performance is artificial, describing a

choreographical choice as “style” and commenting on its beauty while simultaneously insisting on the expressiveness of the choices in the fictive reality.

Clearly, rooniemag values the live theatre experience in a different way than the virtual traces that they experienced before attending *Hadestown*. Having experienced the recordings allows them a depth of analysis that likely wouldn’t be available to someone attending *Hadestown* who had no familiarity with the recorded version. In their attempt to nail down the ephemeral experience they had and the emotions they experience, rooniemag continuously uses superlative language like “to die for,” “roped in,” “too much,” describing moments as intense or “so much.” Towards the end of their post, rooniemag noticeably focusses in on the workers and their movements, in particular what those movements mean for the story. For rooniemag, the anticapitalist theme of *Hadestown* clearly has an impact on their reading, shaping how they view the choreography and acting choices of many of the characters, but especially the ensemble. Between kuragina and rooniemag, different central elements of the musical are held up as essential and meaningful, creating a productive tension that helps to inspire other fan creators.

Posts like these are the constant gravitational background of fanwork. All further fanwork in the constellation draws on fan criticism and meta for coherence. Users posit readings and interpretations of the source media which are fundamental to other readers’ understanding of the media. Though ephemeral and immediate, meta discussions create the initial matter with which the constellation of fanwork is constructed.

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An Animatic: Fandom Nucleation

The creators of fan animatics practice some similar techniques to the creators of meta. Animatics of the kind I will interpret here are ones where an artist animates a song from the musical and

tells the story in a similar way to in canon. They fill a lacuna in fandoms that don't have access to an official video recording. Perhaps because they take the place of a canonical video recording there is limited "room" in a fandom for animatics. That is, a few fan creators will tend to become very popular, producing pseudo-canonical animatics based upon which all future animatics are judged. When there is an official video recording, animatics shift to presenting alternate potential interpretations of the music. There is more "space" for these kinds of alternate animatic, but also less potential to substitute for canon. Animatics for media with an official video recording tend to be more abstract, rather than the straightforward execution of the animatics seen here.

Animatics are a type of fan video where an artist creates animated storyboard art for a piece of music. Many of the storyboard frames have small amounts of variation, like different frames to match lip flap or a change in a character's expression, and artists often reuse art throughout to reduce the workload. In terms of art style, they are often simple, with sketchy lines and minimal use of colour. Backgrounds are often relatively simple. In musical theatre fandom, animatics take the place of official videos between the release of the cast recording and any official video content. Artists use the recording as a blueprint for the performances of the actors, making choices about their affect and behaviour based on the vocal performance. In general, they use the bodies of the performers associated with the recording in their storyboards and hew closely to the statements of the creators about the interpretation of the text, while inserting some additional elements where there is space. Often, musical theatre animatics perform significant amounts of word painting, where the artist literally represents the content of the lyrics. This is distinct from other kinds of animatics for visual media like TV or film, where fans might use a song to animate the story of an unrelated piece of media and conduct more interpretive work to metaphorically represent the lyrics in light of the characters and narrative they're focussed on.

On January 10, 2018, YouTube user Miranda Pla (Pla) posted an animatic of the NYTW “Wait for Me.”⁵⁴ The video went viral beyond the nascent *Hadestown* fandom and has approximately 3.7 million views. The pinned comment is from original cast member Patrick Page, who plays Hades in both the NYTW and OBC recordings.⁵⁵ Page commented on the video thanking Pla for her work. In the video description, Pla writes “Time to jumpstart the *Hadestown* fandom please,” implying that, as of her writing, the fan community was not yet a highly creative or centralized fandom (Figure A, bottom right). This statement implies that Pla’s “Wait for Me” is not heavily influenced by the kind of fanwork I will discuss later in this chapter, since she is trying to inspire those other creative works using her animation. Instead, Pla takes as her inspirations the lyrics and promotion of the NYTW recording, including the bodies of the actors, and external references, including Greek mythology.

Pla bases her designs for Hermes, Orpheus, and Eurydice, who all appear in the animatic, upon the actors in the NYTW recording, including Chris Sullivan, Damon Daunno, and Nabiyah Be. The Fates also briefly appear, though Pla sometimes chooses to represent their singing using a background ensemble of souls during the choruses. These designs are based on promotional images from the production, of which only brief video clips are legally available. Due to the combination of limited video content and such a limited staging, Pla creates settings for her animatics and incorporates much of Hermes’ monologue in the verses as literal description. Overall, she animates a much more explicitly mythological world than the one that appears in the OBC.

⁵⁴ Miranda Pla, “‘Wait for Me’ – Hadestown the Musical ANIMATIC,” uploaded January 10, 2018, video, 4:17, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4k44h7U9iWo>.

⁵⁵ pagepatricky, “This is absolutely gorgeous work...” comment on Pla, “‘Wait for Me.’”

Orpheus enters a glade in the forest where he presumably left Eurydice and finds Hermes waiting for him, tossing a coin in the air (Figure A, top). Upon being told where Eurydice has gone in the opening dialogue—see above for a detailed description of “Wait for Me”—Orpheus resolves to go to Hadestown, and Hermes grins and passes Orpheus the coin. Orpheus walks along a railroad track, blocking the view of a security camera while he breaks through a barrier over a train tunnel (Figure A, upper middle left). After a long walk, he sees a huge wall—the river Styx—in which the single gate is guarded by a hooded Charon and chained dogs (Figure A, upper middle right). Orpheus shows the coin given to him by Hermes, which has a symbol of a bee on its face, and Charon opens the gate, allowing Orpheus to pass into Asphodel (Figure A, lower middle left). While crossing the fields of Asphodel, surrounded by the exhausted spirits of the dead, Orpheus calls to an imagined Eurydice, who recedes into the distance as Hermes appears in Orpheus’s memory to offer him a final warning about Hadestown (Figure A, lower middle right and bottom left).

Pla adds several mythological elements in her animatic that do not appear on stage. The Styx as a wall around Hadestown is common to every version of *Hadestown*, but Charon does not appear in the musical, nor do the fields of Asphodel. Orpheus needing to complete specific mythic tasks—showing a coin, blinding the security camera—other than simply persevere is a fabrication of Pla’s as well. All of these additions reflect one of the *Hadestown* community’s major recruitment pipelines: fans of Greek mythology. Apart from these mythic additions, most of Pla’s animatic is explicit word painting, with Hermes’ verses in particular becoming narration of Orpheus’s actions, like the “hound dogs howling ‘round the gate,” which Pla animates as a literal trio of dogs chained by the gate. The explicit word-painting continues in the choruses, as the ensemble who harmonises with Orpheus is drawn as the spirits of the dead in Asphodel. As

Orpheus calls to Eurydice to “Wait for me,” she appears before him, receding into Hadestown. Pla uses this technique to draw a viewer’s attention explicitly to the lyrics of the song, and to denotate the narrative and emotional arcs in a more confined temporal space than is available in the temporally unstable official recording.

The use of colour is limited, but the amount of grey in the backgrounds increases as Orpheus passes from the world above into the underworld. Other than greyscale, Pla uses orange to show flames, the light shining on the coin, the accents on Charon’s cloak, and the nonphysical presence of Hermes in the final verse. As a result, colour in Pla’s “Wait for Me” comes to represent the fire and heat of the underworld along with the power of the gods. Unlike the other animatic that I will discuss in Chapter 2, Pla appears to have intended her “Wait for Me” partly as an introduction for non-*Hadestown* fans for the musical. There are the mythological elements and the explicit and direct word painting, which draws attention to Mitchell’s poetry throughout the song, as well as her explicit call to kickstart *Hadestown*’s creative fandom in the description. This appears to have gone even further than Pla expected, because she appears to have edited a *dramatis personae* for the musical into the description, along with the musical’s scenario. This would be strange for most fanwork, which assumes the competence of its audience in the source media. However, because the description is implied to have been added after the video was posted, it most likely responds to significant confusion expressed in the comments (Figure A, bottom right).

Like in the meta posts, Pla’s focus in her animatic is less on the anticapitalist content of the musical than on the love story, in particular the emotional journey that Orpheus undertakes during “Wait for Me.” Beginning as a cocky musician in the forest glade, by the end of the song Pla has put Orpheus through a total transformation, as he seems small and frightened at the gate



Figure A: Frames from “Wait for Me” by Miranda Pla. Left to right, top to bottom: Orpheus returns to the forest glade (0:04); Hermes explains that Eurydice has gone to Hadestown (0:20); the boarded up train tunnel to Hadestown (1:50); “Hound dogs howling ‘round the gate” (2:31); Charon opens the gate (2:43); Eurydice recedes into the crowd (3:33); Hermes gives Orpheus a warning (3:07); and the video description, including Pla’s plea to “jumpstart the Hadestown fandom please” and the dramatis personae. Miranda Pla. “Wait for Me” – Hadestown the Musical ANIMATIC.” Uploaded January 10, 2018. Video. 4:17. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4k44h7U9iWo>. Retrieved June 7, 2023.

but becomes newly galvanised by Hermes and the vision of Eurydice he sees in Asphodel. Interpersonal relationships among characters are of primary importance to fans, especially romantic ones and, as I will show below, oppositional ones. Other main themes of the work are often subordinated to character relationships in fanwork, especially western fanwork. In all the fanwork throughout this thesis, character relationships are the primary driver of fan creation. Thematic utopian content is always present, as drawn from the musicals, but it serves stories focussed on character interactions. These interactions are the lifeblood of fan creation, bringing characters to a relatable human scale for many, even most, fans.

As a very early piece of *Hadestown* fanwork, these features of Pla's "Wait for Me" animatic function as not only an expression of fandom norms, but they also set those norms in a significant way for the *Hadestown* community. By refocussing on interpersonal relationships rather than ideology, drawing on mythology as a key source, and animating the—racially diverse—performers as the characters, Pla creates a stable base upon which other fans can depend for the coherence of their own fanwork. In the constellation of fanwork, Pla's animatic has a massive gravitational field, influencing the whole shape of the star field, partly by simply predating the rest of the works.

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Fanart: Romance as a Focus of Fanwork

Fanart shares the preoccupations of the above forms of fanwork, but takes a different form given its different aesthetics. Fanart is the practice of creating visual art that is derivative of the source media. Generally, fanart is hosted on social media websites like Tumblr, where users can attach pictures, gifs, or videos to their posts. While fanart does encompass forms like comics that can tell a longer form story, the fanart I will discuss in this thesis consists of unified artworks that

communicate a single set of ideas, generally showing a single image, sometimes with variations. Fanartists are not bound by the music in the same way as the animator of an animatic, but they also do not have the same amount of space as a prose writer—at least in works of this scale—to establish fanon. Fanart responds to preexisting fanon or canon, exhibiting intertextual relationships with other fanwork. Ideas that are present in the community are often expressed in fanart before they move into other forms. This means that fanart is a useful lens to continue our overview of what elements from *Hadestown* are most important to the fans, this time beginning to extend beyond the fanwork that communicates or interprets the content directly presented in the text.

In a piece of fanart by songbirds-in-the-fields (songbirds), posted on Tumblr in late 2022, four different variations on the artwork are presented, showing four different versions of Orpheus and Eurydice reuniting in Hadestown (Figure B). The casts of the three official recordings are represented as well as songbirds' imagining of the mythical characters in fantastical Ancient Greek dress. In each variation, they are framed by the red carnations that are an important symbol in the musical. The artist pays close attention to accurately portraying the physical appearances and costumes of each cast member in each version. Eurydice, on the left, is shorter than Orpheus, and her front is open to the viewer as she looks toward Orpheus, while Orpheus's side faces the viewer.

This fanart illustrates a similar core theme to Pla's animatic, focussing on the chemistry between Orpheus and Eurydice, which highlights the fan community's interest in these interpersonal dynamics, as established by earlier fanwork in the constellation. Regardless of the individual actor and their performance as the character, the dynamic between the two characters, the love story, matters a great deal for creative fans. The fact that songbirds created four

variations of the art shows how variable canon is for *Hadestown* fans, and how often they refer to the Greek mythological antecedents of the story. This theme of eternal recapitulation of the myth has been tied into *Hadestown* itself, and picked up by fans, through the lyric “sing it again,” which is a tagline of the musical and the caption of songbirds’ art. Fans of *Hadestown*, whether producing meta or fanart, often enjoy playing with the idea that the musical is a circular story that is continuously retold. By showing four different Orpheus/Eurydice couples, songbirds expresses not only their love for the musical, but also the idea that all four variations are different continuous iterations of the myth, eternally repeating “as if it might turn out this time,” a line of Hermes’ towards the end of the musical. The many versions of Orpheus and Eurydice are seen coming back together in love every time, but the viewer of the fanart knows that every version of Orpheus shown has already failed to walk out of Hadestown without looking back and will fail again upon the tragedy being sung once more.

In the introduction, I mentioned that many fans consume large quantities of fanwork in short periods of time. This was not meant to imply that fans engage at a surface level with fanwork. Indeed, songbirds’ caption promotes the reading of their fanart as an expression of *Hadestown*’s infinite recapitulation as a cyclical tragic narrative, rewarding close attention and careful reading. Instead, fans consume a lot of fanwork all at once, and treat all of it intertextually. This intertextual blending of various works results in the themes of several fanworks working simultaneously on each other to enrich the reading experience for the fan, and also allows for the recuperation of an ephemeral, incomplete quality for the source material, re-energising the utopian performative through various different fan interpretations.

To discuss the intertextual mode of fanwork, I will discuss multiple pieces of fanart, this time focussed on the musical’s other lead couple, Hades and Persephone. A couple of pieces of

fanart by alyona11 (alyona) on Tumblr show the way that fans incorporate their interpretations of characters into their fanwork, as well as how musical theatre fans, in particular fans of recent musicals like *Hadestown*, incorporate the performances of different lead actors into their art (Figure C). First, I will discuss alyona's interpretation of Hades and Persephone dancing together after hearing Orpheus's song. Instead of drawing the characters based on Patrick Page and Amber Gray, from the NYTW and OBC recordings, alyona chooses to use Will Mann and Brit West, from the North American tour production of *Hadestown*, as their inspiration. In this artwork, the characters are dressed in their costumes from the musical. Alyona emphasises key defining characteristics, like West's long curly hair and Mann's geometric arm tattoo, to distinguish these designs from Page and Gray.

In the fanart, Hades and Persephone dance together, smiling and very clearly enjoying themselves. Hades has removed his suit jacket, signifying his character development from the miserly King of Hell to a loving husband, and Persephone's movements are smooth and precise, rather than the jerky, bizarre choreography that she displays throughout the musical. Like many fans of "Hadesphone," the ship name for the couple, alyona much prefers to portray the characters in love, rather than the intense domestic conflict between the two gods in the musical. The concord alyona shows in this artwork is, in canon, short-lived. Immediately after this moment in the musical, Persephone and Hades are separated by the coming of spring, and whether their relationship recovers is left up to interpretation, as we will see in a contrasting reading later in this chapter. In fanart, alyona is able to capture the feeling of their lost romance rediscovered.

The second fanart from alyona shows original designs of theirs, in which they blend the lead actors playing Hades and Persephone with their own Greek myth headcanons to create new



Figure B: Left to right, top to bottom: Eva Noblezada and Reeve Carney as Eurydice and Orpheus (from the OBC), Nabiyah Be and Damon Daunno as Eurydice and Orpheus (from NYTW) Anaïs Mitchell and Justin Vernon as Eurydice and Orpheus (from the concept album), and Eurydice and Orpheus from the myth. Text in caption:

"Cause here's the thing. To know how it ends, and still to begin to sing it again. As if it might turn out this time. I learned that from a friend of mine."

Hadestown and Orpheus and Eurydice over the years. Broadway, NYTW, album, and myth.

Art by songbirds-in-the-fields on Tumblr, posted December 6, 2022, retrieved February 24, 2023.



Figure C: Left to right: Digital fanart of Will Mann as Hades and Brit West as Persephone in the musical *Hadestown*. Hades holds Persephone's face as he offers her a red carnation, looking lovingly at her as she closes her eyes in bliss and embraces his arm. Caption:

Will Mann Hades and
Brit West Persephone for
funzies!

It was interesting to draw
them, I should do more
hadesphone pairs, I have some
cute ideas :3

Art by alyona11 on Tumblr, posted
January 17, 2023, retrieved March 1,
2023.



Figure D: Persephone and Hades from *Hadestown* looking into each other's eyes at sunset. Persephone is wearing a green dress, while Hades wears a simple white shirt and a dark wrap. Caption:

Colored the sketch really fast.
Art by alyona11 on Tumblr, posted January
11, 2023, retrieved March 1, 2023.

looks for the characters (Figure D). Hades and Persephone are shown standing under a sunset sky, Hades' arm around Persephone. In this fanart, the characters' proportions are more realistic, but the way alyona composes their faces retains some exaggeration. The background is much more detailed, creating a sense of an environment in which the characters exist. In their design, alyona has retained Mann's arm tattoo and West's hair, as well as the skin tones and basic facial structures from Page and Gray. The costumes are wholly redesigned, in an imagined Ancient Greek style similar to songbirds' art. Hades wears a black toga, and Persephone wears a much simpler green dress than the one she wears on stage.

The characters remain recognisable here due to these references to the performers and the context of other fanart by alyona and others. While it may seem odd at first glance that two characters who spend almost the entirety of the musical in conflict are such a focus of fanwork, there are many precedents in fandom and in original media, with the common "enemies to lovers" character arc, often named in fanwork, being most relevant to this thesis. Hades and Persephone foil each other as characters. Hades is miserly, decided, and closed off, while Persephone is generous, flighty, and open. For fan creators, this dynamic, where contrasting characters have an oppositional relationship, is extremely engaging. Many different fanwork narratives are based on apparently incompatible characters discovering their compatibility and learning from each other. The core contrasting characteristics of Hades and Persephone are highlighted in alyona's art. Hades' physical size is exaggerated, with straight lines and smooth curves defining his body and face. Persephone is much smaller, her body language more expressive, with a more dynamic expression on her face.

By focussing on moments of peace, connection, and unity between two characters who spend the source media in conflict, alyona explores an aspect of Hades and Persephone's

relationship that is not portrayed on stage. As the fanartist, their perspective on the loving, balanced relationship possible between two characters so virulently opposed to each other in the musical deepens and emphasises the importance of the moment at which they become reconciled on stage. Like in many of the other fanworks in this chapter, alyona focusses much greater attention on the romantic dynamic between the characters, putting aside the anti-establishment themes of the musical in favour of an intimate, classic love story. The romances between Orpheus and Eurydice, young lovers torn apart, and Hades and Persephone, an old couple who have grown into opponents, motivates the action of *Hadestown* for all these fans, and make the musical meaningful. Other narrative elements, like the anticapitalist and environmentalist themes, are an undertone throughout, rising to the surface in meta like rooniemag's, but the interpersonal love story shapes fan creation to a much greater extent. As in the NYTW production, this shift in focus takes better advantage of the story to incorporate anticapitalist themes as background elements, without defining a specific set of goal policies for change.

Fanart, like meta discussion, is an extremely timely and often continuous background of a fandom constellation. The moments that fans choose to fill in using visual art are strong indicators of the things they consider important in the source media. Fanart is often an intermediary between other parts of a fanwork constellation, with many small works creating significant gravity, but each individual work caught in the gravitational well of other fanwork.

~

Post-Canon Fanfiction: "Fixing" What Was "Broken"

The most common subgenre of fanfiction in the *Hadestown* community is post-canon, a type of fic that takes place after all of the events in canon. This means that, in these fics, Orpheus has already failed his test to walk out of Hadestown without looking back. Many of these fics are fix-

its, another subgenre that attempts to “fix” the negative parts of canon. In a post-canon fix-it the action of the fic takes place after the events of canon, telling an extended story where, for instance, Orpheus and Eurydice come back together even after Orpheus fails the test. The formal practice of fanfic is very loose, with almost any prose style or format represented somewhere across the archives, but the dominant styles include fairly close third- or first-person narration, utilitarian novelistic prose, and tone, dialogue style, and character traits drawn from a combination of the source media and fanon. Among the most popular *Hadestown* fics, many are about Hades and Persephone’s relationship after the end of the musical, often focussed on make-up sex. As I mentioned when discussing alyona’s art, the character dynamic between the two gods is one that many fan creators find very engaging. However, one of the briefest of the popular fics is a post-canon fix-it focussed on the relationship between Hades and Orpheus.

In the darkest time of year by anamia is titled using a lyric from “Chant,” a song where Persephone and Hades get in a fight.⁵⁶ Posted in August 2018, nearly a year before the release of the OBC, the fic is just under 3000 words long, putting it in the range of a short story. In the tags, anamia includes the ship Orpheus/Eurydice, but only after the tag Hades&Orpheus, the ampersand indicating that a nonsexual/nonromantic relationship between the two characters will be portrayed. Since it is listed first, it is the main relationship dynamic in the fic. The fic is additionally tagged “Afterlife” and “Hades is not great at interpersonal relationships.”⁵⁷ Just like the meta post from Tumblr, anamia uses the tags of the fic as a whisper voice, encapsulating the theme of their fanfiction in the tags. The content and style of anamia’s fanfiction is influenced by

⁵⁶ Throughout this thesis, I will respect the capitalisation practices of each individual writer uses to title their fics on Ao3. anamia, *In the darkest time of year*, Archive of Our Own, uploaded August 4, 2018, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/15559077>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

their participation in the *Les Miz* fandom, and the cross-fandom intersection makes *In the darkest time of year* evidence of the deep connection between the communities.⁵⁸

The fic is written in a close third person point of view, with Hades as the perspective character. It begins “Hades is waiting at the station when Orpheus dies,” which sets the scenario for the fic succinctly.⁵⁹ Like many other fanfiction writers, anamia uses techniques like this abrupt first paragraph, a single sentence, to situate the reader quickly in this fic. The reader is assumed to already know *Hadestown*, probably to have read other *Hadestown* fics already, and so anamia can start with “the good part,” setting up the drama of the fanfiction as quickly as possible. She does so in the following paragraph, where anamia describes Orpheus’s elderly body, having lived a long life before his death. She also describes that Hades “takes him in with a glance, unable to see anything but the youth from so long ago,” firmly establishing the close perspective and the tension of the fic in one sentence.⁶⁰ In this fic, Hades still sees Orpheus as a flighty young man who he can cow with his power and age, rather than a mature adult who knows what he wants. Throughout the fic, anamia renders dialogue in italics, not using quotation marks, a stylistic marker that creates a dreamlike feeling. This technique is less common in large-scale fanfiction, but unusual narrative voices are a common element of fanwork.

Rather than bring Orpheus to Hadestown, Hades takes Orpheus to the underworld from Greek mythology, tying the two together just as Pla does in her animatic, tying *In the darkest time of year* to the same interrelated constellation. This underworld is lit by electric light, but also by magic, and dead animals and plants pass into it as well as people. On the way, the train Orpheus and Hades ride passes through Hadestown, and when Orpheus asks to see Eurydice

⁵⁸ anamia, Dashboard, Archive of Our Own, retrieved July 24, 2023, <https://archiveofourown.org/users/anamia/pseuds/anamia>.

⁵⁹ anamia, *In the darkest time of year*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Hades offers him a labourer's contract, which Orpheus refuses. By the time Hades leaves Orpheus in the underworld, the scenario has been firmly established: Hades won't let Orpheus see Eurydice and wants to prevent them from meeting at all to prolong Orpheus's suffering. At the end of the first scene, Hades asks Orpheus to sing him a song, and Orpheus refuses, setting up a bookended story where Orpheus will sing for Hades at the end.

Orpheus defies Hades' wishes and begins seeing Eurydice:

Orpheus visits her, sneaks in through the back ways to Hadestown and steals minutes, even hours of her time whenever he can get there. He charms the foremen and the gatekeepers, whispers sweet sentences to the furies guarding the tracks to buy their silence, sings of sunshine to ease his passage through the desperate, aching workers on the wall. In winter, Persephone lets him in, slips him through the back passageways of Hades' palace and presses his hand into his lady's herself. In summer, he manages it on his own.

Hades throws him out, when he catches him, drags him back to the underworld and dims the sunlight in his glade a little more each time. *You could still sign on*, he says to the back of Orpheus' head. *Then you'd see her every day.*

And slave my death away? Orpheus returns. *I'd rather take my chances this way.*⁶¹

The first paragraph here is the one anamia uses as the summary of the fic. It encompasses the lyrical prose style of *In the darkest time of year* and the scenario of Orpheus sneaking in to see Eurydice. Persephone's complicity shows that she and Hades' relationship remains in stasis, still deeply opposed to each other, in this fic. This scene is an inversion of Orpheus's journey to Hadestown in the musical, passing up to Hadestown from the underworld rather than down from the world above, singing and cajoling in a similar way but performing the task repeatedly to demonstrate his fortitude and tenacity, rather than once, as in the musical. That Hades can't do more than bring Orpheus back to the place he started in and take away the false sunlight that he created for Orpheus shows the change in dynamic between the characters. With Orpheus dead,

⁶¹ Ibid.

Hades can only do so much to him, and there is little more punishment to force upon Eurydice. Like in the NYTW production, dialogue in this fic often rhymes and has a lyrical rhythm to it.

Hades attempts to provide a peace offering in the form of a lyre, but when he is refused he goes back to “invent[ing] new machines and feign[ing] surprise when Persephone doesn’t like them.”⁶² The reader is shown that Hades is fundamentally the same character. When Persephone provides Orpheus with a gift and is accepted, Hades rages at her and then punishes Eurydice upon Orpheus’s next visit. As Orpheus continues to sneak into Hadestown, Hades waits for him to give up, but becomes disquieted by rumours and knows he is “losing face in front of his workers, who see how this one man finds his way to them again and again.”⁶³ Just like in *Hadestown*, it is the prospect of losing control of his labourers, more than altruism, finally prompts Hades to give Orpheus “A railway pass, from the underworld to Hadestown, valid for eternity.”⁶⁴ Finally, Orpheus sings for Hades.

Like the other fanwork in this chapter, *In the darkest time of year* shows how *Hadestown* fans focus primarily on the love story, using the anticapitalist themes of the musical to colour their storytelling. “In the darkest time of year” is not a revolutionary story: Orpheus does not bring about a revolution, Eurydice continues to work for eternity in Hadestown, and Persephone remains bound in a loveless marriage to Hades. However, anamia successfully imagines how Hades, as he is portrayed on stage in *Hadestown*, could be convinced to let Orpheus and Eurydice see each other. If anything, in a scene where Hades drags Persephone to the dungeon and scolds her for giving Orpheus a lyre, anamia extends Hades’ character further into being an abusive husband, beyond his representation in the musical. Ultimately, Orpheus’s perseverance

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

wins him the concession he wants from Hades, which resolves the musical's tragic arc and "fixes" the problem while complying with the events portrayed in the musical. While the anticapitalism explicitly portrayed on Broadway is not presented in *In the darkest time of year*, the themes are still present. Orpheus's perseverance and Eurydice's unbroken spirit are, in themselves, portrayed as defiance of Hades' rule, and while Hades recognises the danger they pose before they incite an uprising against his reign, their defiance is portrayed in the fic as a distinct danger to Hades. The fear that the owner feels of his own labourers, and the efforts he goes to in order to prevent them from overpowering him, are centred, and disrupt dominant societal narratives about corporate power.

Prose fanfiction is a versatile form, and here is the first time that the main themes from the musical are explicitly reincorporated into *Hadestown* fanwork. However, through interactions with other fanwork in the constellation, *In the darkest time of year* refocuses those themes from the high-minded idealist policies of the stage musical into a narrower, interpersonal story. While the stage musical remains the primary reference, a reading of anamia's work is well-supported by fanwork like Pla's animatic and various pieces of post-canon fanart.

~

Canon Divergence Fanfiction: Points Made, Differently

The fanworks in this chapter are strongly influenced by canon, that is, the musical *Hadestown* itself. Some elements, like the fanon portrayal of Hades and Persephone's relationship and the inclusion of elements from Greek mythology, are consistent elements of fanon that make their way into large amounts of *Hadestown* fanwork. By and large, though, the fandom returns consistently to canon for coherence.

The last piece of fanwork to be interpreted in this chapter is my own, a canon divergence fanfiction called *and keep on walkin', come what will*. In this piece, I approach both *Hadestown*'s canon and fanwork with a critical eye, attempting to critique the themes that the musical communicates and which fans have recuperated in their work. Rather than exclusively pushing back on my fellow fans and on the musical, I aim to draw on the emotional content of the musical and its narrative in a way that aligns with a different theme that reinserts the horizontal, incomplete utopia into the world of *Hadestown* beyond the interpersonal character dynamics. It is in this sense a disidentificatory text, neither pastiche nor straight adaptation.⁶⁵

In *and keep on walkin', come what will*, a title which quotes one of Eurydice's lyrics in the musical, it is Orpheus rather than Eurydice who is seduced into signing a contract with Hades. This event is the major canon divergence. Eurydice journeys to Hadestown to rescue Orpheus and wagers a century of her labour on a game of chance with Hades. After she loses, Eurydice spends the century of her servitude inspiring a rebellion among the people of Hadestown. The day after her service ends, work in Hadestown comes to a halt and Hades is forced to bargain again with Eurydice, losing a second game of chance so Eurydice leaves Hadestown with Orpheus. During the first game between Hades and Eurydice, Hades says, of Orpheus' failure to incite a rebellion as Hades' indentured servant, "He is just one man, and one man singing will not change the world," encapsulating my critique of how the musical implies revolution is an individual act of momentary heroism.⁶⁶ Instead, Eurydice spends a century building up grassroots support for what amounts to a general strike. Unlike in the other fanwork in this chapter, my focus is less on the character relationships, though the specific versions of the

⁶⁵ Steven Christopher Greenwood, "'We Will Make It Our World': Musicals and Queer Cultures at the Turn of the 21st Century," PhD diss., McGill University, Quebec, 2021.

⁶⁶ Incasa, *and keep on walkin', come what will*, Archive of Our Own, uploaded July 13, 2020, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/25248868>.

characters created by Mitchell are important to my story. Instead, I focus my attention more on the theme of anticapitalist revolution that is so heavily compromised in the OBC.

Writing in the present tense, a very common technique in fanfiction, I create a fictional world that responds to *Hadestown* by asserting that a song is not sufficient to inspire a revolution. It also responds to fanart like aliyona's Hadesphone art, as Persephone and Hades are not reconciled in my fanfiction. Instead, Persephone asserts her right to leave Hadestown after Hades abandons the game table in disgrace at the end. However, *and keep on walkin', come what will* is not exclusively a critique of the musical. The interpretation of Eurydice as a scrappy, cynical wanderer who takes advantage of every opportunity is integral to the fanfiction and emerges from meta content like rooniemag's post reporting on Noblezada's performance as well as fanart like songbirds'. My fanfiction exists in dialogue with the musical, asserting a different view of how to create a better world, but also is consequent to prior fan interpretation, assuming the pre-existence of the constellation of fanwork and a readership who reads fanwork closely. This idea of how to be in tension with the source media will return, especially in Chapter 3. The *Les Miz* fanfictions that I will discuss there had a huge influence on my writing of this fanfiction.

Stylistically, *and keep on walkin', come what will* manipulates many of the elements discussed throughout this chapter. Like in Pla's animatic and the fanart by songbirds, I tie *Hadestown* to Ancient Greek mythology using references to various gods and myths. The tone and voice of the fic, with long periods of description, image-focussed language, and a poetic mode of speech, is drawn from both the musical and the tone of fanfiction like anamia's. Throughout, I attempt to capture the utopian emotional experience I had listening to the NYTW recording, similar to how the writers of meta posts capture their experiences of the musical through descriptions of experience coloured by emotion. This isn't to say that my specific

creative fanwork is of a fundamentally different nature than the rest of the fanwork here, but actually to show how similar they all are. When creating fanwork, each work depends on all that existed before it, and creates a new piece of the network that influences future creation.

In this chapter, I have shown a representative subset of *Hadestown* fanwork, providing background on the kinds of fan creation that are ongoing in the other two fandoms I will discuss in the chapters ahead. Fan meta and animatics recapitulate the source media while producing headcanons and cross-content intertexts for other fans to draw on. Fanart extends the source media with interstitial content, while fanfiction has a more discursive relationship with canon, extending or altering it in fundamental ways to discuss the themes that fans apprehend from the source media. By adapting and parodying the source media in these various ways, creative fans not only show their devotion to the source media, but also engage critically with canon, its themes, and the aspirational content they absorb from it.

For fans of *Hadestown*, the compromised textual anticapitalism of the musical is often a secondary theme, implied alongside the more relevant romantic themes that they choose to emphasise. Fanwork benefits in terms of complexity and variety from the instability and incompleteness of canon, though fans paradoxically seek more concrete canon information, especially by absorbing traces of the staged musical and meta discussions of it. Unlike the fandoms in upcoming chapters, *Hadestown* fans prefer heterosexual ships to ships of gay men, but their focus is often on the oppositional dynamics between Hades and Persephone, Orpheus, or Eurydice. More than a gender bias, this reflects the gender parity of the *Hadestown* cast, as the fans use many of the same story premises for heterosexual and homosexual fanwork across communities. Particularly when creating fanwork about Hades and Persephone repairing their marriage, fans encourage the representation of one of the most common fanwork narratives, in

which characters in an initially oppositional relationship fall in love. Throughout, they recuperate the utopian feelings they experienced while consuming the musical, or at least its cast recording, using fanwork to capture what they can describe of the feelings they experienced. Sometimes, this takes the form of rapturous meta descriptions of the live experience, sometimes in fanart or animatics of an important instant in the musical, and sometimes in the form of fanfiction that attempts to capture the utopian feeling in narrative.

The upcoming chapters will mostly discuss larger scale fanworks that make significant changes to canon, beyond the canon divergence of *and keep on walkin', come what will*. These works are created by a clear subset of fan creators, rather than being a selection from across the most widely disseminated fanworks in the *Hadestown* community. These fanworks are created based on a landscape that includes a variety of fanwork quite similar to that described in this chapter. They need the continuous background of fanwork that is so clearly rooted in canon to both make sense of and justify their highly divergent works, which require a community that has a deep familiarity with canon, fanon, and the potential interpretive space beyond these roots.

Chapter 2

“Non-Stop, Are We?” *Hamilton*

me: with the way that things are coming full circle on the *Hamilton* mixtape, I feel like there is not enough attention paid to the fact that LMM [Lin-Manuel Miranda] has won a Tony, Grammy, Pulitzer, and host of other awards and become a multi-millionaire via writing an historical RPF [real person fandom] bandom [band fandom] AU

@ponyregrets: You are not wrong

Title: *Hamilton: An American Musical*

Fandom: Historical RPF

Pairings: Alexander Hamilton/Eliza Schuyler, Alexander Hamilton/Angelica Schuyler, King George III/The American Colonies, implied Hercules Mulligan/horses

Rating: E

Word count: 20,520

Summary: How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten sport in the Caribbean by providence impoverished, grow up to be a hero and a scholar?

Tags: AU - historical rap (free form), CABINET RAP BATTLES, idek I was on the beach and this just came to me

me: Author's Note: here's a link to the facecast I put together :)

@ponyregrets: I know *Hamilton* looks like me but he is NOT a Mary Sue!!⁶⁷

~

The above is a tumblr post by a user called thefederalistfreestyle, based on a chat exchange with another user (@ponyregrets) in which they comment on the popularity of *Hamilton* while lampooning its distinctive similarities to fanfiction by creating a fictional Ao3 summary for the musical. Along with the musical, the post also parodies common features of fanfiction summaries and tags, like absurd ship pairings (“King George III/The American Colonies”) and a mix of discursive modes between the main body of the summary and the whisper voice of the tags and notes, which use a lower register. Jessica Hillman-McCord comments in her chapter in *iBroadway* on how accessible Lin-Manuel Miranda—known affectionately by the fans as

⁶⁷ thefederalistfreestyle, “me: with the way that things are coming full circle...” Tumblr post, retrieved August 13, 2023, <https://www.tumblr.com/cresselian/155225032868/thefederalistfreestyle-me-with-the-way-that?source=share>.

LMM—was to the *Hamilton* community during the musical’s peak in 2015-16. He answered questions from his fans on Twitter and Tumblr, and sometimes posted videos on Twitter and Vine in which he would enact things that fans joked about, like jokingly kissing costar Jonathan Groff, who fans shipped him with. Of course, the underlying joke of thefederalistfreestyle’s post is that fans created immense quantities of fanfiction for the musical theatre property *Hamilton*, in a sort of fannish recursion that will be repeated again by the end of this chapter. *Hamilton* can be read as fanfiction, albeit fanfiction with so much gravity that it established a wholly new fandom and a set of creative norms that drive new creative work. The musical has so much gravity that it established its own fanwork constellation around itself.

In this chapter, I will focus especially on a subset of *Hamilton* fans who create modern AU romantic fanwork, basing their creative work on similar kinds of character-establishing fanwork that was covered in Chapter 1. As the volume of this kind of fanwork increases, it exerts an increasing amount of gravity on future fanwork relative to the source musical until fanwork emerges which depends far more on other pieces of fanwork for coherence than on *Hamilton*. These are the kinds of fanwork that, when they “break containment” and are viewed by people outside the insular fan community, become incomprehensible and ridiculous, because they treat other fanwork as necessary prior reading. This is why they must be covered after providing a base in fanwork that does not have this same dependency. At the end of this chapter, I will once again reorient the path to *World Ain’t Ready*, which shares the fandom-dependency of the later *Hamilton* fanworks but takes the extra step of removing most references to its source media, which most *Hamilton* fanworks use to maintain coherence with the musical.

Hamilton, an American Myth-Making

Hamilton is the second Broadway musical by Lin-Manuel Miranda and incorporates hip-hop and R&B music into a classic theatrical narrative following the life of Alexander Hamilton, the first Treasury Secretary of the United States. The orphaned Hamilton, from the West Indies, comes to New York and joins the Revolutionary Army. He begins a lifelong rivalry with fellow revolutionary Aaron Burr and serves as George Washington's personal aide, forming a partnership that lasts for the rest of Washington's life. Hamilton meets the sisters Angelica and Eliza Schuyler during the war, both of whom fall in love with him, and marries Eliza. During the conflict, he fights alongside the Marquis de Lafayette, Hercules Mulligan, and John Laurens, the last of whom he has an intense emotional connection with, severed by Laurens' untimely death at the end of the war. After the end of the war, as Washington is elected the first President of the US, he offers Hamilton the job of Treasury Secretary, which Hamilton eagerly accepts, refusing the calm life that his wife Eliza desires. In act two, Hamilton commits infidelity while Treasury Secretary and pays off the husband of his mistress, Maria Reynolds, to keep his secret. He helps Washington shape the American economic system and broker deals like choosing the site of the capitol. His enemies in government—Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Burr—threaten to reveal the affair, so instead Hamilton exposes his affair himself. This public shaming causes a rift with Eliza that only mends after the tragic death of their son Philip in a duel. In the election of 1800, Hamilton supports Jefferson's candidacy for president, incensing Burr, who comes in second due to Hamilton's influence. Burr challenges Hamilton to a duel, in which Hamilton aims at the sky and is fatally shot by Burr.

Overall, *Hamilton* follows the broad outline of the historical Hamilton's life, with changes to promote the drama and assert the importance of the women in Hamilton's life, who

left far fewer traces than the men who wrote the period's histories. One of the themes of *Hamilton* is the contingent nature of recorded history, as it is written with an agenda, so the narration of Hamilton is open about its biases, and Miranda makes intentional omissions or alterations to serve his narrative. For instance, the historical Angelica Schuyler was married when she met Hamilton, and therefore not free to consider marrying him, as she does in the musical.⁶⁸ Also, Eliza's correspondence and writings were destroyed, likely by her, meaning that she leaves almost no historical record of her own thoughts. Miranda fills in gaps like these based on descriptions by others and especially using the biography that *Hamilton* is based on, Ron Chernow's *Alexander Hamilton*.⁶⁹

Along with adapting history to make it fresh and engaging, Miranda created *Hamilton* to provide roles for actors of colour. Apart from the role of King George III, who can be played by an actor of any race, professional productions of *Hamilton* are conventionally cast with only actors of colour.⁷⁰ The OBC, who recorded the sung-through musical's official recording, includes Latino, Black, and Asian actors in the lead roles. This race-conscious casting was part of a broad shift in the mid-2010s across media and culture. Opening on Broadway in late 2015, *Hamilton* set a trend for race conscious casting that has continued in musicals like *Hadestown*, though the framing of race in the musical—or rather, the lack of explicit discussion of race—reflects the post-racial mainstream politics of the Obama era in the US.⁷¹ Extratextually, Miranda and the other cast and creatives of *Hamilton* spoke and wrote about the importance of representing diverse bodies on the Broadway stage, even though the narrative of *Hamilton* is the

⁶⁸ McCarter and Miranda, *Hamilton: The Revolution* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 82.

⁶⁹ Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 2.

⁷⁰ McCarter and Miranda, *Hamilton: The Revolution*, 33.

⁷¹ Renee Christine Romano and Claire Bond Botter, eds., *Historians on Hamilton: How a Blockbuster Musical is Restaging America's Past* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press: 2018), 4.

story of a white man among white men.⁷² The productive tension between the whiteness of the show's topic and the racialization of how it is presented—through the music and the bodies of the performers—works alongside the utopian feelings raised by the musical form and creates a sense of a potential post-racial reality.

I might come across as a bit hypocritical here. I critiqued *Hadestown* for being overly explicit in its definition of its utopia, which causes the utopian performative to collapse. Here I am about to argue that *Hamilton*'s failure to engage in explicit text with race and gender, especially regarding Transatlantic slavery, causes its post-racial utopian rhetoric to collapse. However, I am not trying to say that the collapse of the utopian feeling inspired by the combination of music and live theatre is negative. The idealised feelings inspired by a work of art *will* collapse, it is simply a question of at what point they collapse. To interpret a work that has aspirational or utopian goals and concretize these goals is to induce that collapse, because utopia is unattainable and inherently unstable. Were *Hamilton* to make its aspirational politics explicit in the text—I will argue that its goals are explicit in the performance and especially in the extratextual content surrounding the musical—the collapse would occur, for many audience members, in the theatre, as it does for me in *Hadestown*. By implying these aspirational goals, *Hamilton* defers the collapse until after the theatregoer or listener has finished the musical and applies critical attention to it.

By centring “the story of America then, told by America now,” to quote one of the musical's taglines, Miranda creates an equivalence between the conflicts of the Founding Generation, including the war and the decades of political strife that followed, and contemporary racial liberation, especially the lives of Black and Hispanic people in America.⁷³ This conflation

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ McCarter and Miranda, *Hamilton: The Revolution*, 33.

is exemplified in “My Shot,” the song in which Hamilton introduces himself. The political dynamics of the early revolution in America are thematized as comparable to the project of racial justice in the contemporary US. Throughout, the musical effectively tells the story of how a racialized person might find meaning in the struggle for recognition in America. However, the musical never explicitly discusses racism, preferring to use the racialized bodies of the actors and musical references to establish this, and the musical refuses outright to engage meaningfully with the history of slavery and the treatment of native Americans during the historical period.⁷⁴ There is thus an easily available reading of the musical which implies that racial justice has largely been achieved, and only incremental moves remain to be made. While the individual story of marginalisation is one that many people can find meaningful, *Hamilton*, like *Hadestown*, refuses to challenge the worldview of its upper middle class, predominantly white, audience and shareholders.

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Background on *Hamilton*’s Fandom

It’s not clear why *Hamilton* attained such massive reach across popular culture. It appears to have been the right work at the right time to become a generation-defining hit. The musical brought not only Broadway, and not only hip-hop history, but also American history to the attention of a whole generation of young people. It also steered a hype cycle that redefined musical theatre marketing.

This immense hype around the musical inspired a concomitantly massive creative fan community. The scale of the *Hamilton* fandom was such that the musical inspired multiple viral

⁷⁴ Romano et al., *Historians on Hamilton*, 10-11.

memes that spread beyond its own community into the wider internet.⁷⁵ *Hamilton* fans were ridiculed for their “cringe” fanwork, partly because the people judging these viral fanworks had no familiarity with the interdependent fanwork constellation that inspired them. As I discussed in the introduction, the accumulation of ideas and norms in a fan community creates an ecosystem that interacts with, but is not wholly based on, the source media. The creative fans of *Hamilton* made several key adjustments to the characters and themes of *Hamilton* through fanon that appear surprising or strange to total outsiders.

That the vast majority of the lead cast are people of colour is very important to the fans. Unlike in the *Hadestown* fandom, where fanart based on alternate casts is relatively common, the *Hamilton* community is laser-focussed on the OBC. The biographies and bodies of these performers, as well as specific nuances in their performances on the OBC recording, have a huge influence on their characterisation in fanwork. The postracial utopia of *Hamilton* fanwork is born from the community’s use of the actors’ performances to create new iterations on the historical ideas of the musical. Most fan communities don’t exhibit nearly the same centrality of AU fanwork as *Hamilton*’s, for the primary reason that the musical is on such a large scale. Covering a century of well-documented, well-known history, with the characters’ arcs so well-suited that they appear preordained to tragedy, the fast-growing *Hamilton* fandom swiftly filled out the fan space with canon-era fanwork of the type covered in Chapter 1. Fans then wielded the characterisations and dynamics created in those works to transplant their versions of the characters into modern AUs, creating fanwork that begins at a remove from canon. As a result, the “gravitational interactions” of various fanworks begins to matter more than canon.

⁷⁵ Two major memes spawned from *Hamilton* fanwork are “Thomas Jefferson Miku Binder,” which will be discussed below, and the “hivliving scandal,” which is discussed more in this Reddit post: [iwasonceafangirl, “\[Hamilton Fandom\] The HIV+ high school au...”](https://www.reddit.com/r/HobbyDrama/comments/d135s8/hamilton_fandom_the_hiv_high_school_aucannibal/) Reddit post, retrieved August 14, 2023, https://www.reddit.com/r/HobbyDrama/comments/d135s8/hamilton_fandom_the_hiv_high_school_aucannibal/.

The most important of the ideas fans transplanted into modern AUs were those associated with the ships circulating around the titular Alexander Hamilton. With the propensity of fans to write romantic and sexual fanfiction, romantic dynamics often receive the most development from communities, as seen in Chapter 1. On stage, Hamilton has explicit sexual tension with Eliza—his wife—and Angelica—his sister-in-law, as well as Maria Reynolds, his mistress. In *Hamilton* fanwork, however, Angelica emerges as incandescently independent and competent in almost all areas, effectively beyond the reach of potential romance. Eliza, in an extension of the musical and Chernow's biography, accumulates the traits of the idealised wife: sensitive, self-sacrificing, and supportive of Hamilton's goals. These characterisations are the blueprint from which Angelica and Eliza are transported into the modern AU tradition. However, neither of them is the primary romantic partner for Hamilton in *Hamilton* fanwork. Nor does Maria tend to appear in very much *Hamilton* fanwork, at least not in a central role.

Instead, the most popular pairing in the community is Lams, the slash ship of Hamilton and John Laurens. This ship pre-exists the musical, having had a small but dedicated fanbase writing fanfiction and creating art for the historical people Hamilton and Laurens.⁷⁶ This tradition combines with some flirtatious moments between the two characters in act one and the propensity of most fan communities to prefer male/male ships, driving a massive focus on a minor secondary character among fans. Laurens in *Hamilton* receives much less focus than Eliza and Angelica, dying at the end of act one with no more than three solo verses in the whole act. As a result, fans had significant space to create their own versions of Laurens, using his hotheadedness and outspoken progressive views as the base for a characterisation that

⁷⁶ The romantic interpretation of the relationship between Hamilton and Laurens has been common for decades prior to the creation of *Hamilton*, like in Jonathan Ned Katz, "Love: 1779-1932" in *Gay American History* (New York: Meridian, 1976), 445-562.

compliments Hamilton. Ultimately, for some fans, this fan-version of Laurens supersedes the more rounded characters from the musical, and Laurens is the perspective character of the final fic in this chapter.

While Laurens' fan characterisation is one of the most extreme in the *Hamilton* fandom, it will quickly become apparent when discussing Angelica and Washington's portrayals by the fans that every character in *Hamilton* experiences this drift. Fanart based on fanon characterisations is overwhelmingly common, as well as small-scale fanwork which portrays the characters in different settings. Fanworks that share key character interpretations are more enmeshed with each other, occupying the same space in the constellation I am describing. In the remainder of this chapter, I will continue to trace the development of characterisations and transformations of the characters into a narrower field within the broad strokes of the constellation constructed in Chapter 1.

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An Animatic: Fanon Characterisation

Hamilton animatics were massively popular during 2016 and 2017, at the peak of the *Hamilton* community's size. This was after the fandom had already become massive and interconnected, so unlike the *Hadestown* animatic from Chapter 1, this *Hamilton* animatic exhibits significant amounts of fanon. szin, the most popular *Hamilton* animator and the creator of this animatic, created several *Hamilton* animatics, spanning many of the most popular songs in the musical, which had impressive reach in the community. They were the major animator in the *Hamilton* fandom, as Miranda Pla was in the *Hadestown* fandom. While finding the post from thefederalistfreestyle that starts this chapter on my personal Tumblr blog, I found a link to szin's deactivated Tumblr containing an embed of this exact animatic for the song "Satisfied."

“Satisfied” is a rap song that reiterates the music and stage action of the previous song in the musical, “Helpless,” from a different perspective.⁷⁷ “Helpless” is *Hamilton*’s pop queen romance song, an early 2000s R&B-style song from Eliza’s perspective, summarising her first meeting with Hamilton and their whirlwind courtship, concluding with their wedding.⁷⁸ In “Satisfied,” Angelica, the elder Schuyler sister, reminisces at the wedding about her first meeting with Hamilton moments before Eliza’s. She flashes back to that moment and recalls her thoughts and actions during the ball where Hamilton and Eliza met. Throughout the song, Angelica sings from at least three different perspectives: in the past, inside her own mind (in the past), and in the present. As a result, Angelica is a multivocal character in “Satisfied,” with the same voice—that of Renée Elise Goldsberry in the OBC—speaking from several perspectives. With no available official recording until mid-2020, fan creators making “Satisfied” animatics were required to make important decisions about Angelica’s perspective and thoughts based on the cast recording, which has some points that are notably, and intentionally, unclear on this issue. Depending upon various official sources—the OBC recording, official promotional images—as well as existing fanwork and unofficial sources—posts like rooniemag’s *Hadestown* meta, bootlegs, and fanart/fanfiction—szin creates a very different interpretation of “Satisfied” than that which would ultimately appear in the 2020 Disney+ official video.

To visualise the different perspectives Angelica inhabits throughout “Satisfied,” szin portrays Angelica in multiple different ways. When she flashes back to the ball, Angelica goes from a detailed sketch with her curly hair up (Figure A, top left) to a white silhouette with her hair down, covering one eye (Figure A, upper middle right). The Angelica attending the ball has

⁷⁷ Lin-Manuel Miranda, composer, “Satisfied,” released September 25, 2015, Volume 1, Track 11 on *Hamilton (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*, Atlantic Records, digital.

⁷⁸ “Helpless,” Volume 1, Track 10 on *Hamilton*.



Figure A: Frames from szin's "Satisfied" animatic. Left to right, top to bottom: Angelica (0:15); Hamilton (0:16); Eliza (0:20); Angelica reminiscing about the ball (1:10); past Angelica (left) and reminiscing Angelica (2:13); "My father has no sons" (3:07); "If I tell her that I love him" (3:55); Angelica pleased Hamilton and Eliza are together (5:23). szin. "Satisfied || Hamilton Animatic." Uploaded February 25, 2017. Video. 5:33. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pR-PeeRYVc>. Retrieved June 7, 2023.



Figure B: Angelica's (Renée Elise Goldsberry) façade breaks as Hamilton (Lin-Manuel Miranda) and Eliza (Phillippa Soo) at the end of "Satisfied." *Hamilton*, dir. Thomas Kail. 2020: Disney. <https://www.disneyplus.com/movies/hamilton/3uPmBHW1O6HJ>. 40:18.

a different eye shape, more arched and girlish, as she fawns over Hamilton (Figure A, lower middle left). During the section that interpolates "Helpless," when Angelica "pauses" the action to comment on her decisions, a pause symbol appears in the middle of the frame, and another version of Angelica steps in front of the screen to perform the verses (Figure A, lower middle right). Finally, when Angelica fantasises about the future she could have had with Hamilton if she had claimed him from Eliza, she, Eliza, and Hamilton appear briefly as black silhouettes (Figure A, bottom left). This reflects the multivocality of the character in this song while making significant alterations to the way the song is staged on Broadway. The Angelica of szin's animatic is not shown engaging in more than a lyrical fantasy of her possible future with Hamilton, one which she knows would be wrong and cruel. In the official staging the continued focus on Angelica emphasises how Angelica is choosing to accept the same fate she knows her sister would experience if Angelica claimed Hamilton, and that she is acting *like Eliza* by relegating her own desires.

When designing the characters from *Hamilton*, szin's use of official sources alongside fanon is apparent. They depend mostly on the bodies of the actors in the musical. Angelica's curly hairstyles are rooted in Goldsberry's hairstyles as Angelica, as are her dresses, though the large panniers the Schuyler sisters wear in the first part of act one are removed in favour of a less temporally rooted silhouette (Figure A, top left and bottom right). Eliza's design makes use of actress Philippa Soo's straight black hair and rounded facial features, and Hamilton retains Miranda's ponytail and stubble (Figure A, top right and upper middle left). Their behaviour in the animatic, though based on the performances of the actors, has more resemblance to various fanon content. Hamilton's face is round and unlined, appearing as quite a young man, and his flirtatious interaction with Angelica ends with him giving her "finger guns" as he backs away awkwardly, reflecting the gawky awkwardness the character often adopts in fanwork. Eliza becomes even softer than her portrayal by Soo, all shy smiles and fluttering bashfulness.

Angelica changes the most relative to canon. This is apparent in the final images of the animatic, in which Angelica shares a glance with both Hamilton and Eliza as they leave the wedding. Goldsberry, in the 2020 film, has a frenetic, calculating energy throughout "Satisfied," but visibly deflates as she is left alone on stage, watching Eliza and Hamilton leave without even a glance back to her (Figure B). Left alone in a spotlight at centre stage, Goldsberry's Angelica clearly struggles with her regret at letting Hamilton marry her sister rather than marrying him herself. Meanwhile, szin's portrayal of Angelica is clearly regretful, but seems ultimately assured and happy with her decision. In this moment and others, szin reflects an important fanon idea that Angelica has near-superhuman capacity. She appears in multiple places and times at once and appears to have a depth of experience beyond that of her peers. The structure of "Satisfied" makes Angelica appear to have prescient knowledge of events, and szin's rendering in their

animatic makes her into a character who can move beyond the boundary of the narrative to speak directly to the audience. This expansion of Angelica's character reflects both *Hamilton* fanon and how Miranda writes about her—he conflates the historical woman and his character. He likewise creates a near-superhuman Angelica in the metatext, both smarter and kinder than Hamilton, who she foils, constantly self-sacrificing, and essentially always in the right.⁷⁹ This interpretation forms the core of Angelica's fanon characterisation which persists across many *Hamilton* fanworks and was firmly established by the time of szin's animatic. The other characters likewise have fanon characterisations that stretch across the community and appear in the smaller parts here. One notable inclusion is the jealousy displayed by Laurens in the first moments of the animatic, which will return time and again throughout this chapter.

Unlike Miranda Pla's "Wait for Me" animatic, szin's "Satisfied" is not a central nucleation site for the fandom. It emerges later, in a context where there are already firm fanon characterisations of the core characters. The animatic reflects this, stretching the lyrics through interpretation in fresh ways that accentuate these characterisations. While szin does not establish these ideas, the virality of their animatics means that they serve to codify them, functioning as a key reference point and a centrepiece of the growing fanwork constellation.

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Fanwork to Set Up the Modern AU

When fans of *Hamilton* speak and write about the characters from the musical, they mix the staged presentation, the biographies of the performers, and wholesale fanon together. How the characters are portrayed in *Hamilton* fanwork reflects much more how fans speak about the characters than what is explicit about them in the musical, as the bodies of the performers of

⁷⁹ McCarter and Miranda, *Hamilton: The Revolution*, 78-85.

colour become difficult to justify in fanfiction that is intended to be more representational. The historical setting, which already contains heavily mythologized and established versions of all the characters in *Hamilton*, presents a potentially intractable problem for historical fanfiction based on the musical. *Hamilton* fans creating the kinds of fanwork in this chapter are often intensely concerned with race and representation, which makes the historical setting inappropriate to their needs. To transplant the bodies of the actors to this historical setting would require either a complete contrafactual history in which a Black man—George Washington played by Chris Jackson—is the first President of the US, or a total avoidance of all issues of race. Both options are incompatible with the goals of the highly race-conscious *Hamilton* community. While audiences at a stage musical are accustomed to disregard verisimilitude in casting, more representational forms like prose or comics, which are expected to represent events more accurately than a stage musical, don't share this quality. If *Hamilton* fans want to discuss contemporary racial issues in their fanwork, contemporary versions of the musical's characters are a useful innovation. While some fanart uses the on-stage portrayals of the characters, by late 2015, fans had begun to create fanwork in which the main characters from the musical are high school or college students in the contemporary world.

The iconic—that is to say, fanon—characterisations from fanart and animatics persist in small-scale AU fanfiction and fanart. Short, popular *Hamilton* fanfics generally encapsulate a single scene in which a single moment in two characters' relationship is explored. This moment can be anything from drama, like a first meeting or a breakup, to quiet intimate moments. Generally, these kinds of fanwork are romantic in nature. Applying the teleological lens to explain the development of successive, longer modern AU fics, the 'purpose' of these fanfics is to create the gravity to sustain more significant works. These small but important moments of

intimacy or drama encapsulate how the fan community thinks of the characters. They become texts that a fan creator can assume a sufficiently invested fan has read, allowing the scenes they depict to be elided or summarised so that the creator can get to the next scene that hasn't been portrayed in fanwork already.

The most popular *Hamilton* fic on Ao3, with the greatest number of kudos—Ao3's equivalent to likes—is less than 2000 words long and depicts a meet cute between Hamilton and Laurens. In *sharing body heat in the passenger seat* by Ravenesta, Laurens is alone at his friend Lafayette's apartment when Hamilton, Lafayette's other friend, enters and misidentifies Laurens as Lafayette.⁸⁰ Hamilton complains about his classmate Burr without giving Laurens a chance to interrupt and introduce himself, and then Hamilton falls asleep on Laurens' lap. When he wakes up and the situation is explained, Hamilton and Laurens converse, flirt, and the fic ends with Hamilton falling asleep on top of Laurens again.

Over the course of about twenty minutes, John learned several things about Alexander in quick succession. He was a law student at Columbia, wrote a column for a local newspaper, ran (from what John could count,) at least five blogs, was fluent in French, and he had a running rivalry with his roommate, Aaron Burr.

John found himself fascinated with how Alexander spoke; he made run-on sentences sound eloquent, fit too many words into a single breath like if he stopped for a single second, he'd find that he couldn't continue or nobody would be listening, like he had to convey everything in as little time as humanly possible. His body told a story all on its own, arms flying up in exaggerated gestures as he ranted, his entire body jumping and moving with the flow of his words, pulled taut like a violin string ready to snap. Laurens found himself staring in slight awe, practically able to feel the energy radiating off the man.

(John didn't contribute much to the conversation, but did, at one point, mention having volunteered and protested with several of the activist organizations Alexander had mentioned. Alexander had given him a delighted grin that made John's chest do that jumping thing again, and replied, "A man after my own heart, it seems!")⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ravenesta, *sharing body heat in the passenger seat*, Archive of Our Own, uploaded November 11, 2015, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/5192546>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Details in *sharing body heat* are communicated quickly through the third person perspective character (Laurens') internal monologue. The first quoted paragraph, eliding what could be a long, naturalistic conversation between the characters, provides the reader with the information they need to understand this contemporary iteration of Hamilton, the character from *Hamilton*. Hamilton is a student at Columbia University—thus, the story is set in New York, and retains Hamilton's alma mater. He writes blogs and newspaper articles, similarly to the article-writing, pamphleteering historical man. He also has a personal, rather than professional, rivalry with Burr, which significantly lowers the stakes of their conflict. The second paragraph communicates Laurens' interest in Hamilton, while the parenthetical third paragraph, which is also visually separated from the rest of the text by a double space on Ao3, shows Hamilton's interest in Laurens. Early in the fic, Ravenesta also refers to Miranda's portrayal of Hamilton, describing him with "long hair in a disheveled ponytail and noticeable shadows under his eyes."⁸²

Fanfics like *sharing body heat* are similar to some *Hadestown* fics but reflect the greater number of characters and the density of ships in *Hamilton*. Rather than the four main characters of *Hadestown*, all in monogamous canon relationships, the characters in *Hamilton* are nearly all in some kind of a dynamic with Hamilton which can be shaped into a ship by invested fans. Short fics on a moment of intimacy, without an overarching storyline or drama, like *sharing body heat*, are a backbone of fanfiction. Called "fluff" fanwork, for the fluffy feelings they evoke, these fics allow writers to focus intensely on single moments in a relationship, creating an expression of that dynamic which can become fanon for the community, allowing fans creating fanwork with higher melodrama, or fics about things other than happy couples coming together, to use existing fluff fics as an already-read for their work.

⁸² Ibid.

any given night is a similar Lams fic to *sharing body heat*. On Ao3, the fic is listed as being authored by orphan_account, meaning that the original poster has either deleted their account without deleting their fics or jettisoned this particular fic from being listed among their stories.⁸³ In the notes, though, they list their usernames on Tumblr and FanFiction.NET—heavensclaire and ClairesNovak—so I will refer to them as Claire.⁸⁴ In “any given night,” the characters are students—either high school or college—and Lafayette dares Laurens to get Hamilton tongue-tied, which results in the following interaction between the two characters.

John whistled.

“Non-stop, are we?” He teased, and Alexander gave him a genuine nod.

“Perpetually.” He assured Laurens. “I also took a couple of pages to properly call Jefferson out- there are, thankfully, many words in the dictionary that helped me to inform the committee that Thomas is a racist asshole.”

John frowned.

“You said that? Out loud? To his face?”

Alexander nodded, nonchalantly, and Laurens stifled a laugh.

“He’s a menace, he must be stopped.” Alex stated.

“God, you’re incredible.” John laughed, shaking his head. Hamilton- probably for the first time since John Laurens had met him, at the beginning of the semester- faltered.

“You’d, uh-” He gave John an odd look, pondering him for a moment. “You’d be one of the first to think so.”

Laurens glanced at him, dubiously.⁸⁵

This fic has much more dialogue than *sharing body heat*. The characters largely interact naturalistically. Even though we, the readers, know that Laurens was initially prompted to start talking to Hamilton on a bet, we also know from Laurens’ internal monologue that he has a latent interest in Hamilton that he doesn’t like to acknowledge. As a result of this and the reader’s presumed familiarity with the musical, Laurens comes across as genuine as he compliments Hamilton, rather than intentionally trying to fluster Hamilton.

⁸³ orphan_account, *any given night*, Archive of Our Own, uploaded November 28, 2015, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/5306006>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

The characterisations are slightly broader, more exaggerated from human behaviour, than in *sharing body heat*. Just before this quotation from the conversation, Hamilton admits that he wrote a 10-page paper protesting Jefferson’s racist statements, a response which would appear disproportionate, though it reflects both Hamilton’s characterisation in *Hamilton* and the extreme loquacity with which the historical Alexander Hamilton responded to attacks.⁸⁶ The Hamilton of *sharing body heat*, by contrast, runs several blogs and writes a newspaper column, which compares more closely with the centrality of writing pamphlets and long polemics during the revolutionary period. The more exaggerated characterisation also allows Claire to work in several references to the musical’s text in *any given night*, like when Laurens calls Hamilton “Non-stop,” referring to the song of the same name in the musical. These kinds of quotation are quite common in *Hamilton* fanwork, perhaps because they allow the writer to tie a very different work—contemporary university AU—more closely to the musical.

Longer works rooted in these short fanworks use the smaller works, including fanart, meta, and fanfiction, as already-reads that allow them to summarise certain interactions like introducing Lams. The second most popular fic in the *Hamilton* Ao3 archive, *Sons Of Libertea* [sic] is a 170-thousand word modern AU fic by fihli.⁸⁷ The core narrative of *Hamilton*, like the machinations of the antagonists and the introduction schedule of the characters, is retained in *Sons Of Libertea*, though most of the particulars are very different. Hamilton, a struggling pre-law student, is introduced by Aaron Burr to the titular coffee shop, which is owned by George Washington and staffed by Laurens, Lafayette, and Mulligan. Hamilton, upon expressing a need for a job, is hired on the spot and integrates into the lives of the other employees, who all live

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ fihli, *Sons Of Libertea*, Archive of Our Own, updated November 21, 2016 https://archiveofourown.org/works/6052915?view_full_work=true.

together and invite Hamilton to move in with them. The core conflict, reflecting the musical, is that George King, a real estate mogul, has a personal vendetta against Washington and the coffee shop, and wants to shut them down. While the character dialogue and prose are often original, they sometimes begin speaking lines from the musical, drawing parallels between events.

Pink Coat hiked up her purse on her shoulder and reached out her hand.

“My name’s Angelica Schuyler.”

Alex took her hand and shook it, taken aback at the sudden change of heart. Maybe she dealt in sarcasm and innuendos instead of actual human conversation. Well, he could relate.

“Alex Hamilton.”

She fixed him with a look, a soul-searching, mind-reading look.

“I’m about to change your life.”

Taking a few steps back and hooking her arm through the other girl’s, she tugged her up to the counter and deposited her right in front of Alex. She was wearing a tiny pearl on a gold chain, and a subtle shimmer on her eyelids. It was captivating.

She held out her hand the same way Angelica had done. “Elizabeth Schuyler. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“Schuyler?”

Angelica took her place beside Eliza. “My sister.”

“Thank you,” Eliza said, gesturing at the expanse of Liberteas, “for not being the only coffeeshop on the block.”

“If it took rat poop at Starbucks for us to meet, I’d say it was worth it.”

Angelica hit Alex with another one of her looks, this one more dangerous, more intense. It was a watch your step look, a don’t fuck with my family look. “I’ll leave you to it.”⁸⁸

Here, fihli quotes with small edits a full scene between Angelica, Eliza, and Hamilton from “Helpless” and “Satisfied.” For someone who is very familiar with the text of the musical, reading this scene evokes the performance recorded in the OBC, allowing fihli to efficiently encapsulate the character dynamics between Hamilton, Eliza, and Angelica while also introducing elements from their AU. In this version, Angelica, Eliza, and Peggy are roommates living near their extremely wealthy father. They prefer to go to the Starbucks at the end of the block but visit Sons of Liberteas when a rumour goes around that the Starbucks has rats. The

⁸⁸ Ibid. Chapter 3.

modern AU versions of the characters reflect more the fanon versions, like szin's expression of Angelica, than those from the musical. Angelica, who Hamilton has been flirting with up until the start of the quotation, is snarky and sarcastic, but also shows some of the supernatural qualities she absorbs in fanon. Her protectiveness over her sister is communicated with a glance at Hamilton and gives him a "mind-reading" look that appears completely genuine, a complete flip in her attitude from her flirtatious behaviour a moment previously. As this chapter is told from Hamilton's perspective, fihli may be attempting to communicate Angelica's thought process from "Satisfied" through her body language here. Eliza, by contrast, retains her preternatural goodness, with a demure description and softly playful affect. She is "wearing a tiny pearl on a gold chain, and a subtle shimmer on her eyelids," marking her as quite different from her natural look in the musical. This description is specific enough that I infer it's based on a specific piece of fanwork, or perhaps a piece of fanon about a modern AU Eliza preserved in this popular work. Shortly, we will take a look at some of the ways that fanartists design modern AU characters.

With *Sons Of Liberte*a's focus on the relationships between the characters and Hamilton in a modern AU, the dynamic between Washington and Hamilton appears a few times. In the first chapter, just after being hired, Hamilton thinks of Washington that "he would have agreed to anything right there on the spot, just to make this man he'd just met proud of him."⁸⁹ A piece of italicized introspection then immediately comments that Hamilton should "*Tone down the daddy issues.*"⁹⁰ The parental dynamic between Washington and Hamilton is a key focus of college-aged modern AUs of *Hamilton*, since framing Hamilton as a teenager or young adult emphasises the age difference between the two characters much more than on stage, where Miranda and Jackson, who play Hamilton and Washington, appear of an age.

⁸⁹ Ibid. Chapter 1.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

While fihli minimises descriptions of the characters' bodies, preferring to describe their clothing instead, they do introduce Laurens, the primary romantic interest of the fic, with an effusive reference to Anthony Ramos, the actor's, freckles, saying "he [Hamilton] had no idea there were that many freckles in the entire universe. They scattered over the bridge of his [Laurens'] nose, over his cheeks, down his neck, and they were even all over the part of his left arm that Alex could see slung over the bar" (You might begin here to see one of the major difficulties of writing fanfiction for properties with large numbers of male characters who all use he/him pronouns).⁹¹ Ramos' freckles are a distinctive feature and are preserved in most fanart of the characters he plays in the musical, Laurens and Philip Hamilton. In *Sons Of Liberte*, fihli uses this description to establish the fic's fidelity to the musical's cast in terms of the bodies of the characters, celebrate a feature that many fans find attractive about Ramos's body, and also to establish *Sons Of Liberte*'s relationship with *Hamilton* instead of other historical fanfiction. The existence of prior Lams fanwork also allows fihli to elide many character interactions between Hamilton and Laurens, treating their friendship as preestablished very early on, in the same way that they treat Hamilton and Eliza later.

One key part of the *Hamilton* modern AU is the character design sheets, which encapsulate the kinds of information that allow fanfiction writers like fihli to assume that certain relationship dynamics don't need to be established. When creating a modern AU for *Hamilton*, fanartists often create outfits and character designs that represent the qualities they want to emphasise in their work. Often, these designs include character notes, including the life history of the character in the AU and some key traits the artist is accentuating (Figure C). As modern AU fanwork became more common among *Hamilton* fanwork, these characterisations got

⁹¹ Ibid.

increasingly detailed and specific, and creators researched both the historical people and the actors playing them to find interesting character traits. Alongside this, they sought to set their AU apart while also participating in the representational norms of the *Hamilton* community by seeking to represent marginalised communities through their redesigns of the characters.

In a viral piece of fanart from September 2017 by a user who was called umbronydraws (umbrony), Thomas Jefferson is redesigned as a 26-year-old transgender bisexual man who is a former drug dealer (Figure D).⁹² Because he has yet to receive top surgery, he wears a chest binder with a pattern of Hatsune Miku, a popular Japanese pop music character's, face. In the piece of art that umbrony includes with their redesign of the character, Jefferson has a soft, anime-inspired face, fluffy purple hair, and he is wearing a wide-necked sweater with the text "I met God. She's Black" written on it. This piece obviously extends fanon significantly, fabricating new life histories for the characters that are only loosely based in the musical or history. The quality that remains most consistent is the core character dynamics from the musical, with Jefferson having a positive relationship with Angelica but a very negative confrontational relationship with Hamilton. This piece was not unique in its relationship to representation, the musical, and fanon. Many fanartists created this kind of dramatically adaptational fanart, which stretched the boundaries of the characters in the musical. However, this one is preserved from this period because it went viral beyond the *Hamilton* community. Without the context of the fan community, the art appeared ridiculous and worthy of scorn, which it received.⁹³ When the art first went viral, I assumed it was a self-aware parody of qualities common in the community and was surprised during my research to discover that it was genuine fanart. umbrony was attempting

⁹² See Figure D for the transgender and bisexual pride flags, visible under Jefferson's name. Adam, "Miku Binder Thomas Jefferson," Know Your Meme, updated March 15, 2021, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/miku-binder-thomas-jefferson>.

⁹³ Ibid.

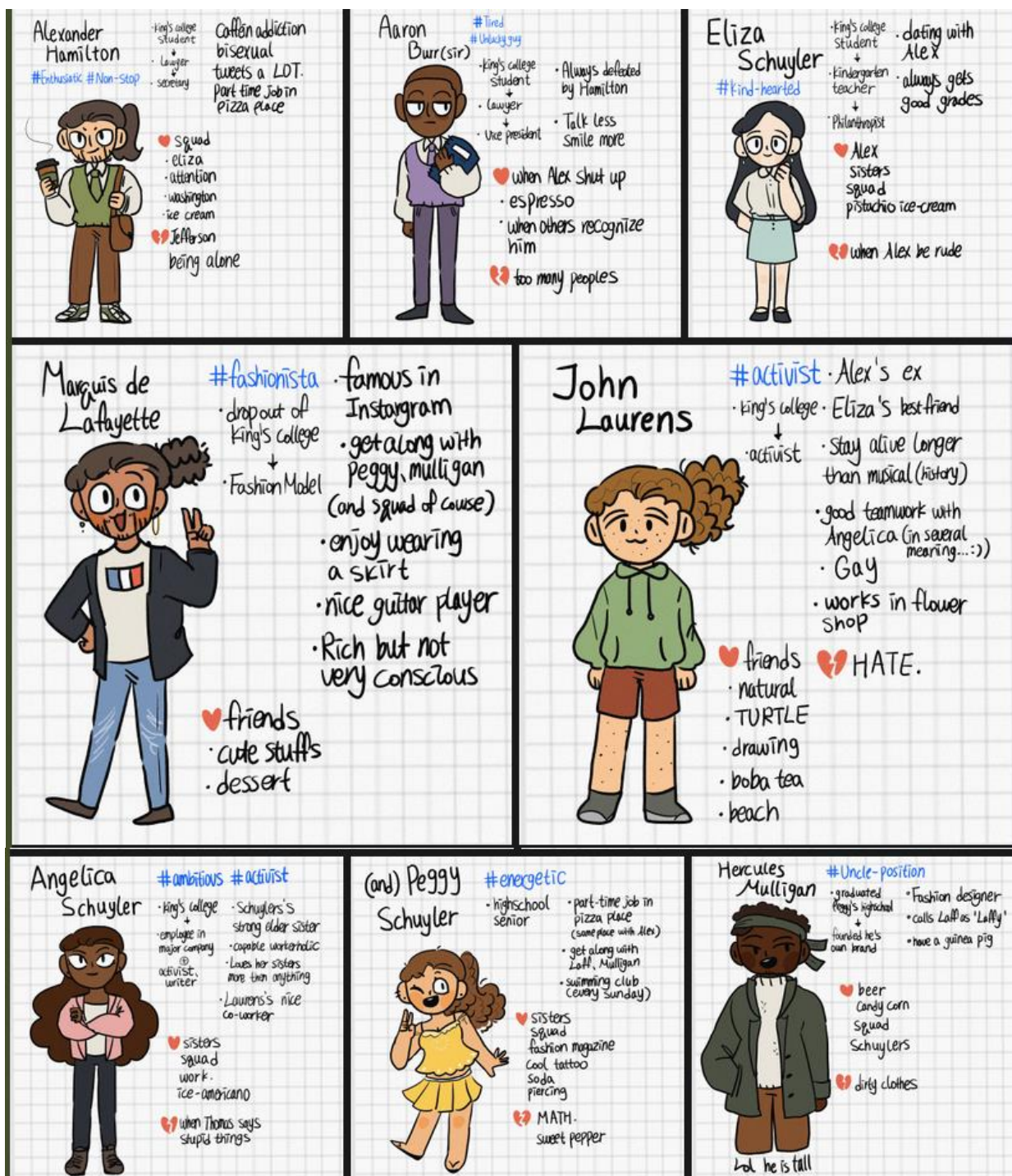


Figure C: A set of fanart of modern AU versions of the main cast from act one of *Hamilton*. Each character is drawn in a cartoonish style on their own character sheet, which includes their name, career path, a short bullet-point biography, and a short likes/dislikes list. Caption:

My 'modern hamilton' profiles

(There are many other stories I didn't wrote yet)

also jeffmads, washington and maria will be upload soon so wait for it!

Art by juneaway on Tumblr, posted August 6, 2022, retrieved April 2, 2023.



Figure D: Fanart of a modern AU version of Thomas Jefferson from *Hamilton*. The character art is on the right, and his pronouns, known languages, LGBTQ+ identity flags, education, height, age, and character notes are written on the left. Art by umbronydraws on Tumblr, originally posted on Tumblr on September 11, 2017. Retrieved from fanlore on March 29, 2023. https://fanlore.org/wiki/File:Jefferson_Character_Sheet.jpeg.

to represent perspectives beyond their personal experience, and beyond the range generally seen in media, through their art. That it was not successful beyond the small audience they intended it for is to be expected. Fanwork targeted to a small community or a small subset of interests is under no obligation to serve the tastes of people outside of that group.

However, the backlash against umbrony's fanart impacts contemporary redesigns of the characters, including junebway's redesigns of the characters (Figure C). Each character has a short description that hews relatively closely to their portrayal in the musical, though transplanted into a contemporary context. Their relative socioeconomic positions are also

preserved, as June describes Lafayette as “rich but not very conscious [sic]” and Hamilton working at a pizza place to put himself through school. June’s designs are more focussed on interpersonal character dynamics than identity categories, and are significantly closer to canon, partly as a result of this.

All of this modern AU fanwork serves to establish a robust set of ideas and norms for the contemporary versions of the musical’s characters. The coherence of the fanwork relative to the musical itself is assured through consistent references to the text and narrative of the musical as a centre of gravity around which it orbits. Once established, the modern AU is ripe for further transformation, as fans can use other AU fanwork as the context for further transformative work, creating another layer of the constellation at a greater remove from *Hamilton*.

~

Transforming the Modern AU and Leaving Canon Behind

When creating a world into which they can escape and imagine a better life, fans often create worlds that would be unpleasant or upsetting to many people or create media that plays out fantasies that would not be appropriate in real life. Like umbrony’s design for a bisexual transgender Thomas Jefferson, when these fantasies exit the specific community for whom they were created, they become subjects of ridicule or hatred. Most often, fantasies of nontraditional relationships, especially those including gender-queerness or people of colour, face the most significant backlash. Other studies have explored how antishippers (fans who believe certain ships or character dynamics are morally repugnant and shouldn’t be written) reflect reactionary prejudices in the real world.⁹⁴ These fantasies are important to the utopias the fan creators dream of. The potential they perceive in the source media is translated into aspirational text, art, or other

⁹⁴ Victor Larsen, “‘It Makes Me, a Minor, Uncomfortable:’ Media and Morality in Anti-Shippers’ Policing of Online Fandom,” Master’s Thesis, Universiteit Gent, 2021: Faculteit Letteren en Wusbegeerte.

fanwork. Again, often this expression of utopian potential is pure, unadulterated wish fulfillment, pornographic or representational, without a clear project or better world being dreamed of.

However, they certainly express a fantasy or dream for the creator, one which often resonates with readers as well. The fantasies expressed in these works can be unhealthy or unrealistic, even harmful, were they to be fulfilled in real life. However, when expressed as fanwork in which the desires and experiences being expressed are not real, these fantasies are not only popular but important to the readers, as has been shown in research on fanfiction over several decades.⁹⁵

Reading through both the source media and the fantasies they portray, these fans practice disidentification with their sources, drawing on the erotic or aspirational potential of the characters or premise, even when those characters or premises are inherently morally compromised.⁹⁶

One exemplar of this kind of morally questionable behaviour is a fic called *Quid Pro Quo*, posted during February and early March 2016 by rillrill.⁹⁷ It serves a specific set of pornographic interests in the *Hamilton* fandom, as well as coping with the historical problems of modern AU *Hamilton* fanwork in a novel way. As a result, it inspires a sub-community in the fandom who enjoy nontraditional or kinky romances, evidenced by their use of a specific technique for creating alternate histories for their *Hamilton* fics: a reversed or scrambled order of American presidents. While *Quid Pro Quo* continues to exhibit the key *Hamilton* fandom technique of returning to the musical as a key source for certain quotes, it makes massive changes to the structure of the narrative and realises a basic contrafactual history that other writers use as a basis for their own writing. *Quid Pro Quo* is a modern AU political drama fic set

⁹⁵ Russ, "Pornography for Women," 89-90.

⁹⁶ Greenwood, "'We Will Make it Our World.'"

⁹⁷ rillrill, *Quid Pro Quo*, Archive of Our Own, updated March 5, 2016, https://archiveofourown.org/works/5880157?view_full_work=true.

in Washington, D.C. during a debt crisis in 2013. Hamilton, a young law graduate, is hired as the new personal aide for Senator George Washington, a powerful Democratic Senator from Virginia. As Hamilton begins moving through the strange world of America's political elite, he and Washington commence an affair. In return for sexual favours, Hamilton receives mentorship, key networking introductions, and expensive gifts. A genuine romance begins to blossom between Washington and Alex, rather than a workplace affair, but Jefferson and Madison, Washington's most intent political opponents, attempt to blackmail them with an incriminating recording of the two men having sex. Hamilton successfully obtains and destroys their blackmail material and then leaks details of Jefferson and Madison's misconduct and illegal money laundering to an investigative journalist. Hamilton overcomes his tragic flaw, framed in the fic as an inability to plan for a long-term future, tying off the fic's emotional arc, and goes forward into a romantic relationship with Washington.

In addition to *Hamilton* fanfiction, rillrill also wrote fanfiction for the TV show *Veep* and real person fanfic about American politicians. She creates a scandal-ridden, backdoor-dealing Capitol by drawing on the high-octane political dramas common in those communities. This cross-pollination between fandoms, previously seen primarily from one musical fandom to another, will remain a significant factor in Chapter 3. While the basic premise of the story, a romance between modern versions of Alexander Hamilton and George Washington as portrayed in *Hamilton*, seems far-fetched, rillrill actually makes use of historical data for inspiration, reflecting a common technique creative technique throughout *Quid Pro Quo*. A persistent myth surrounding the historical Alexander Hamilton is that he was George Washington's bastard, a myth that is referenced in *Quid Pro Quo* as well as in *Hamilton*, as Jefferson jeers at Hamilton in

both that “Daddy’s calling.”⁹⁸ The historical Aaron Burr/Theodosia Prevost affair appears, as well as Burr’s defection from the Federalists/Democrats to the Democratic Republicans/Republicans, neither of which are especially common elements in *Hamilton* fanwork. Jefferson and his allies attempt to blackmail Hamilton with what they believe is financial misconduct, which is revealed to be merely sexual misconduct, reflecting the Reynolds affair during Hamilton’s historical tenure as Treasury Secretary and its portrayal in *Hamilton*. These historical plot points help to ground the fic, creating verisimilitude that rillrill can depend upon to facilitate coherence in the face of far-fetched narrative elements.

The characterisations of the cast are familiar but twisted. Rather than the romantic tone of fics like *Sons Of Liberte*, *Quid Pro Quo* is overtly sexual. Multiple characters are in extramarital affairs and unnamed monogamous or polyamorous relationships. George and Martha Washington are in relationships with their young underlings, Hamilton and Eliza, and as a cover George and Martha encourage Hamilton and Eliza to date, including an erotic scene in the Maldives where Hamilton and Eliza kiss while George and Martha watch. While Hamilton is quite similar to other fanon, though many of his responses and traits are adjusted to give him a more youthful vibe, Washington’s calm and fatherly demeanour from fanon is adjusted into self-control, covering up a more sensual person.

Washington’s keen understanding of public perception — which he seems to take pleasure in flirting with, pushing the boundaries, this close to disaster. Dinners in public places. Feeling him up in the bookstore basement. Feeding him off his own fork, Christ’s sake. That’s danger. That’s flouting all common sense. That’s the sweet spot where Alex’s own impulses live on a good day, when he’s almost normal, just manic enough to be sharp. Washington’s edge is clearly a path less frequently trodden.

It occurs to Alex that the restraint Washington boasts about has mostly only reared its head between them to be soundly beaten down by desire. There’s power in that. Regardless of what he lets Washington do to him — and, he muses, there’s quite a bit

⁹⁸ Ibid. Chapter 26, and Miranda, “We Know,” Volume 2, Track 12 on *Hamilton*.

he'd like to let him do — so long as Washington is helpless to exercise his own famous restraint, there's a balance. A system.⁹⁹

By characterising Washington in this way, as a more sensual man with a hidden sexual appetite, rillrill pushes back on other *Hamilton* fanwork in a similar way to my *Hadestown* fanwork from Chapter 1, critiquing the fans' propensity to have characters be morally unimpeachable. Instead, rillrill allows many of her characters to behave in ways that violate conventional morality without facing consequences, because it suits the fantasy of *Quid Pro Quo*. The fantasy of danger and immorality is key to the fic, as is the fact that Washington is losing control over his desire for Hamilton, who, as the perspective character, represents the reader in many important ways. In this sense, *Quid Pro Quo* is in many ways comparable to *Fifty Shades of Grey*, with one older partner who has vast wealth and political power exerting it almost against the will of the younger, less powerful partner in the relationship. At the same time, rillrill also indulges the fantasy of Alex, the “weaker” partner in the relationship, exerting power over Washington, the “stronger” partner, through the way that Alex's presence induces risky behaviour in Washington.

Serving multiple potential fantasies is a key part of the structure of *Quid Pro Quo*. In the early chapters, rillrill carefully mentions when Washington is or is not wearing his wedding ring, and it's not until Chapter 13, just before the scene quoted above, that Washington explains that he and his wife Martha are in a lavender marriage. This allows for *Quid Pro Quo* to play into the fantasy of breaking up a loving marriage, which is a genuine fantasy storyline that appears in erotica. Washington quashes all of Alex's money concerns and solves many of his major life problems, the same kind of fantasy experience that Anastasia Steele experiences in *Fifty Shades*. The private suit fittings, penthouse suite vacations, and office sex are part of an individualist fantasy, that day-to-day suffering can be alleviated through wealth and power. Hamilton and

⁹⁹ rillrill, *Quid Pro Quo*, Chapter 13.

Washington are “bad,” in that they do things that would be immoral and unsafe in real life, as well as engaging in backroom politics and indulging in the luxury of the global elite. However, as characters in a story, they allow the reader to play with these fantasies without being unsafe or immoral.

While these elements are certainly a part of the appeal of *Quid Pro Quo*, a joined pair of ideas that it brought to the *Hamilton* community drove a huge burst of creativity surrounding what the creators in the community refer to as the QPQ-verse, a set of related fanworks that either exist in the same setting as *Quid Pro Quo* or draw significant inspiration from it. The order of the presidents is reversed, and rillrill introduces many historical characters while also changing their ethnicity to match the diversity of the OBC cast of *Hamilton*. The first idea is not one that appears much in the text of *Quid Pro Quo*, and it becomes more of a focus for fanwork in the QPQ-verse. One piece of fanwork based on *Quid Pro Quo* is a 400-word scene focussed on Obama and George W. Bush as generals in the revolutionary war.¹⁰⁰ However, rillrill does introduce several historical women, adapting their ethnicity to suit the cast. Hamilton describes a Black Martha Washington upon their introduction: “Dark skin aglow, set off by her bright white tennis dress, she has a regal affect all her own.”¹⁰¹ This pair of concepts returns even beyond the QPQ-verse, and writers in those spaces refer to *Quid Pro Quo* as their inspiration.

At the end of *Quid Pro Quo*’s final chapter, Ao3 lists several other works inspired by the fic, most of which exist in the same universe.¹⁰² One of the writers of these fics is a user called OscartheGrouchILOVETRASH (Oscar), whose name refers to their self-identity as a person who likes fandom “trash,” fanwork that some fans would consider morally objectionable or otherwise

¹⁰⁰ flawlessassholes, *Post Hoc, Ergo Propter Hoc*. Archive of Our Own, uploaded March 18, 2016, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/6279751>.

¹⁰¹ rillrill, *Quid Pro Quo*, Chapter 19.

¹⁰² Ibid. Chapter 34.

“trashy.” Oscar wrote several fanfics based on *Quid Pro Quo*, including some in late February 2016, while *Quid Pro Quo* was in progress, and others after the final chapter was published in early March 2016. In *Flying in the eye of a bullshit hurricane*—whose title is a reference to “Hurricane” from *Hamilton*—posted on February 26, 2016, Oscar creates a scene in which Deborah Sampson speaks with Hamilton and Washington about their affair.¹⁰³ Sampson, appears in the background in *Quid Pro Quo*, mentioned as an investigative journalist. Oscar adapts the historical woman, who in real life served in the revolutionary army, into a more fleshed out character. The scene, in which Sampson confronts Washington and Alex, directly conflicts with events in *Quid Pro Quo*, in which Sampson does not appear until an epilogue set weeks after the climax.¹⁰⁴ However, by writing fics that attempt to anticipate events in the “canon” of *Quid Pro Quo*, Oscar shows their investment in the story in a way that is very similar to the behaviour of a creative fan making fanwork for a piece of conventionally released source media.

Oscar started a fic the day after the final chapter of *Quid Pro Quo* was posted, entitled *How to orchestrate an 18 car pileup*, which begins directly after the final canon events of *Quid Pro Quo*.¹⁰⁵ As with Oscar’s above fic, it features mostly new historical characters, following rillrill’s technique for introducing new historical people to the modern AU *Hamilton* setting. In its form and narrative, it expands the events of *Quid Pro Quo* with interstitial scenes, new perspectives, and events after the fic’s canon, like the *Hadestown* fanwork from Chapter 1. The existence of these fics based on *Quid Pro Quo* shows that a sub-community of fans accumulated around *Quid Pro Quo* and created *Hamilton* fanwork that was much more derived from rillrill’s

¹⁰³ OscartheGrouchILOVETRASH, *Flying in the eye of a bullshit hurricane*, Archive of Our Own, uploaded February 26, 2016, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/6113113>.

¹⁰⁴ rillrill, *Quid Pro Quo*, Chapter 33.

¹⁰⁵ OscartheGrouchILOVETRASH, *How to orchestrate an 18 car pileup*, Archive of Our Own, Updated March 29, 2016, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/6178249/chapters/14155432>.

writing than Miranda's. Unlike any prior fanwork in this thesis, *Quid Pro Quo* had sufficient gravity that it became a new primary reference point for fanwork all on its own, creating its own sub-constellation in the fandom.

This gravity is apparent in a fanfic that, on its surface, appears unrelated to the QPQ-verse. In *Sharps Hour* by raven-aorla (raven), John Laurens is admitted into a voluntary mental ward following a suicide attempt.¹⁰⁶ He rooms with Hamilton, who is adjusting to a new medication for bipolar disorder, and gets to know a group of other characters, from the musical and borrowed from history, who are receiving treatment for various mental illnesses, including Tourette's, OCD, schizophrenia, and major depression. According to raven, this is largely inspired by their own experience in a mental ward.¹⁰⁷ At its core, *Sharps Hour* is a slice-of-life story about Laurens' recovery and the expansion of his social circle. The characters are funny and personable, not defined solely by their illnesses, and they are very frank about their needs and interests.

Alexander's crayon went still. He looked up from his massive stack of paper, stared for a second, and then smiled at him. "Oh. Hi. Welcome to the Men's (Relatively) Nonviolent and (Relatively) Voluntary Ward. Suicide attempt, or medication recalibration? Or the rare and exciting court order?"

John blinked. "Excuse me?"

"Your answer will affect how hard I try not to be an asshole."¹⁰⁸

This way of speaking and interacting reflects the broader fantasy of the fic: that mental illness can be treated as normal by a group of people. The primary idea developed throughout *Sharps Hour* is Laurens' growth as he begins to understand that receiving treatment for mental illness isn't

¹⁰⁶ raven_aorla, *Sharps Hour*, Archive of Our Own, updated April 9, 2016, https://archiveofourown.org/works/6152521?view_full_work=true, Chapter 1.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

something to be afraid of. He, like Hamilton in the above scene, begins to reach a point of living with his illness rather than seeking a way to overcome it or seeing it as aberrant.

In the notes at the end of Chapter 15, raven writes “The magnificent Quid Pro Quo universe [...] uses a flipped presidential order to account for that 'verse's history. I decided to be a little different (and avoid the mental image of George W. Bush as a Founding Father). I think I'm the first to do a *jumbled* presidential order.”¹⁰⁹ The shuffled presidential order is not so important to *Sharps Hour*, merely acting as an excuse for raven to include Meriwether Lewis and Sacagawea as characters, but becomes more important in various spinoffs that raven writes in a series called *Time Out of Mind*, which encompasses the lives of many characters outside the mental ward and follows Laurens and Hamilton after they are discharged.¹¹⁰

Apart from being inspired by the QPQ-verse and taking some of the ideas from those fics a step further, raven also participates, in a slightly different way, in the nontraditional sexual politics that are featured in *Quid Pro Quo*. In *Sharps Hour*, this manifests in raven's inclusion of Friedrich, Baron von Steuben, and his historical aide Pierre Etienne de Ponceau, who raven writes sparking a romantic/sexual relationship in spite of their significant age gap. In Chapter 23, Lafayette appears and engages in some light sexual roleplay with Pierre as well, giving him a kiss from both Lafayette and his wife.¹¹¹ In response Laurens mentions in the prose that “He knew Lafayette was bisexual heteroromantic,” in a sincere but amusing use of overly specific language in an unusual context.¹¹² These sexual dynamics are used much more explicitly in other fics in the *Time Out of Mind* series, where characters engage in dom/sub play, and many fics

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Chapter 15.

¹¹⁰ raven_aorla, *Time Out of Mind*, Archive of Our Own, updated February 8, 2020, <https://archiveofourown.org/series/433246>.

¹¹¹ raven_aorla, *Sharps Hour*, Chapter 23.

¹¹² Ibid.

feature explicit sex scenes. Unlike in *Quid Pro Quo*, the sexual content of *Sharps Hour* is not the major draw of the fic, and raven says explicitly in one of their notes at the start of Chapter 5 that “John and Alexander's relationship will remain queerplatonic over the course of the fic,” using a term that refers to a specifically non-romantic, non-sexual type of committed relationship.¹¹³

Compared to even the extended QPQ-verse, which includes several fics by other writers than rillrill and Oscar, *Time Out of Mind* is enormous, over 300-thousand words not counting a second spinoff series.¹¹⁴ Partly as a result of this, as well as raven's intentional participation of *Hamilton* fans in playing with diversity the way that umbrony and june do as they redesign the characters, raven expands the characters. Not only are most of the characters diagnosed with various mental illnesses, but they are also diverse in their religious practice, sexuality, gender presentation, and ethnic/cultural backgrounds. Extending the discussion of Lafayette, Hamilton mentions that “Lafayette's paternal grandmother was born in Senegal. Not Muslim, though. Bahá'í religious minority,” during a discussion on religion with a Muslim staff member at the clinic.¹¹⁵ This adaptation of Lafayette's character has very little grounding in the historical man or the actor Daveed Diggs, who is maternally Jewish.¹¹⁶ However, it does serve to expand the range of representation in *Sharps Hour*, a practice which continues throughout *Time Out of Mind*, and is clearly very important to raven.

Sharps Hour does not exclusively distance itself from the musical, though. In the universe of the fic, Hamilton is desperate to attend *Bly*, a Broadway musical by Lin-Manuel Miranda about Nellie Bly.¹¹⁷ While raven never includes a full plot summary of *Bly*, various

¹¹³ Ibid. Chapter 5.

¹¹⁴ raven_aorla, *Time Out of Mind*.

¹¹⁵ raven_aorla, *Sharps Hour*, Chapter 28.

¹¹⁶ McCarter and Miranda, *Hamilton: The Revolution*, pg. 148.

¹¹⁷ raven_aorla, *Sharps Hour*, Chapter 6.

references to songs and lyrics imply that it is structurally very similar to *Hamilton*, with a similar level of online dissemination, allowing raven to quote the musical at various times and generally have *Hamilton* act as a proxy for the fan's presumed devotion to the real life musical.

In a lot of ways, *Sharps Hour* begins to feel like something other than fanfiction. Many of the most important characters, like Pierre and Lewis, are not from the musical at all, and are instead the result of raven filtering other historical people through a facsimile of the process used to create *Hamilton*. The narrative bears minimal resemblance to *Hamilton*, and more to other slice of life dramas, and the characters are based more on other fanwork than on the characters in the musical, with the canon characters' traits extended from fanon into extremity. Even the setting owes more to other *Hamilton* modern AU fanwork than to the musical, making further iterations upon other ideas presented by fans. However, it is not only still obviously *Hamilton* fanwork to a member of the fandom, but it also makes efforts to tie itself further back to canon using quotations from the musical and the mechanism of the fictional musical. In this way, even with its main source of gravity emerging from modern AU fanwork and the QPQ-verse, *Sharps Hour* still displays the gravitational effect of *Hamilton* as a key source for its coherence.

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In the *Hamilton* fandom, I have shown how fans use fanwork to aspire to the independence of young adulthood, as well as to process the trauma incurred by that experience. The narrative of *Hamilton* is often, but not always, used as the occasion for interpersonal romantic dramas, but is sometimes superseded by premises that are conventional to western fandom. Representations of racialized and queer characters are very important, and often make efforts to show these characters in a different light than in mainstream media, where they are tokenised or one-dimensional. The density of fanwork and the familiarity that fans had with fanon during the peak

productivity of the community is such that writers often skip or summarise important character development scenes, assuming that the reader will understand the relationships based on prior fanwork. Even when fans work against these characterisations, they still retain them as key reference points.

Race is clearly important in *Hamilton* fanwork, as the bodies of the actors appear explicitly in most fics and are often mentioned as part of the drama of the story. One reason that modern AUs are so common in the *Hamilton* community is that they allow characters to better reflect the lived experience of the fans. The other reason is that the tragic and expansive narrative of *Hamilton* forecloses many of the lighter possibilities that fanfic writers often enjoy exploring. In these larger fanworks, like the long fanfics, style tends to be less important than in communities where the fanwork is generally smaller scale and closer to canon. Characters begin to speak more like the witty, sarcastic characters in other media forms, and the prose style begins to resemble the style of fandom as a broader community, even as specific sub-communities branch off from the main group of fans. The greater gravity of large-scale fanwork aggregates these new communities around them, becoming a significant fraction of the content fans use in the creation of new fanwork. The constellation begins to be dominated by existing fanwork, rather than canon itself.

All of these elements help set the stage for talking about *Les Miz* fanwork. In the next chapter, I will show how canon, apart from characterisations that are heavily altered by fanon, is used in conventional fannish narratives by the sub-community I will focus on. These conventional narrative arcs are then recombined to tell new stories relevant to the writers and readers in the community, creating fanwork that bears so little resemblance to the source media that, while it is clearly still fanwork to an insider, it can also be read as original fiction.

Chapter 3

“People Who Make It Easy to Believe in Humanity,” *Les Miz*

Jehan lives by his own rules. He dresses like the back room of a thrift store: awful sweaters, pants either way too long or half an inch too short. Sometimes his jeans have rhinestones on the back pockets. He wears the same glittery salmon-colored loafers every day. He's halfway into his sophomore year, and his look remains unchanged. For that reason alone, he may be the bravest kid in Columbus High.

And people give him shit for it, of course. A lot of people do. As far as Grantaire is concerned, this alone is proof that Enjolras is wrong. Humanity is capable of being mean to Jehan, therefore a brighter tomorrow is never coming.¹¹⁸

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Both the subtitle for this chapter and the quotation above come from *Les Miz* fanworks by Jessica Best, screenname idiopathicsmile. In spirit, both refer to the themes of the novel and the musical *Les Misérables*, where love and compassion are fundamental to the creation of a better world. In Best's work, Grantaire is the central subject for her exploration of the faith and perseverance demanded by the project of changing the world. His cynicism and ironic posturing are revealed to be defense mechanisms, masks he puts over an intense empathy for the people around him to protect himself from persecution. In order to grow as a person and overcome his history, Grantaire needs to embrace the people who are different from him and put his heart at risk, rather than hiding among the enemy. However, Grantaire's irrepressible comedic sense and his practicality are also necessary for Enjolras, the character he is romantically paired with in Best's fanfiction. Rather than being a willing martyr for his Capital C Causes, Enjolras learns to target his attention and give himself and the people around him grace when they don't match his impossible standards for moral purity and engagement with the Cause.

If these storylines sound rather different than those represented in Hugo's novel and in the Broadway musical, that is not surprising. *Les Miz* fans have spent decades recreating the

¹¹⁸ Idiopathicsmile, *World Ain't Ready*, Chapter 1.

characters from Hugo's novel, and the core premises that appear in fanwork owe much more to other fanwork than to what appears in the novel, the constellation no longer dependent upon either. When reading *Les Miz* fanfiction, it is more important to understand deeply how fans write and adapt their favourite media than it is to have knowledge of *Les Misérables*. I entered the community without ever reading the novel or hearing any but the most famous songs from the musical via the recommendations of my friends and by following fan creators who wrote fanfiction for other fandoms. This mode of entry is neither isolated nor even unusual in some venerable fandoms.

In *Les Miz* fanwork, the modern AU is in some ways the standard for fan creation, often presumed unless a fanwork is tagged "Historical Setting" or "Canon Era." In the same way as *Hamilton* fans, *Les Miz* fans use this technique to make the characters and premise more relevant to their everyday lives and to better engage with certain themes. Much *Les Miz* fanwork is the same kind of small-scale scene-setting as in the *Hamilton* community, and it's not impossible that the format of *Hamilton* fanfiction was heavily influenced by the norms of the *Les Miz* community, which predates it significantly. However, *Les Miz* fans share neither the *Hamilton* community's focus on the original cast nor the *Hadestown* fandom's tendency to syncretise the many performers who play the main characters. Instead, *Les Miz* fans focus on the key characteristics of their favourite characters, like Enjolras and Grantaire, while creating wholly original bodies for them to inhabit, like an exaggerated version of umbrony's redesign of Thomas Jefferson into a transgender drug dealer. *Les Miz* fans like Jessica Best even *racebend* the characters, who are normally assumed to be white, creating unusual characterisations by combining the characters' central traits with diverse bodies.

Les Miz fanwork is much fluffier, on average, than the *Hamilton* fanwork discussed in the last chapter. This is not necessarily because of a difference in the tone of the source media, as *Hamilton* and *Les Miz* share many narrative elements, like their wide temporal span and large casts. In *Les Miz*, Jean Valjean is a man who struggles with the law but finally escapes and appears to have made a new life for himself. An employee of his, Fantine, is cruelly mistreated for her sexual misconduct and ultimately dies, but begs Valjean to take care of her daughter, Cosette. Valjean complies, rescuing Cosette from the cruel Thenardiers and going on the run from the law. Years later, the sheltered Cosette becomes involved with Marius, a young law student and a member of a radical student organisation in Paris called Les Amis de l'ABC. Les Amis join the Paris uprising of 1832, during which all but Marius die. Marius and Cosette get married, though Valjean dies shortly afterward, and the two young lovers begin a new life together. The stage musical is a codifying example of the megamusical, a production of such incredible performance forces, marketing reach, and choreographic and effects complexity that it recreated the format of the largest musicals during the 1980s.¹¹⁹ Many critics have argued that the corporatized nature of *Les Miz*, along with artistic features like its sung-through format and being “locked in”—disallowing actors from reinterpreting characters to maintain fidelity to the original performance for both branding and artistic purposes—reduce the revolutionary elements of Hugo’s radical novel into mere window dressing.¹²⁰ Paradoxically, the blatantly utopian burst of fan creativity that I will discuss in this chapter follows the release of the 2012 Tom Hooper film, which is possibly the most sanitised and corporate-friendly version of the musical. As I

¹¹⁹ Jessica Sternfeld, *The Megamusical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1-4.

¹²⁰ Bradley Stephens, “How do You Solve a Problem Like Cosette? Femininity and the Changing Face of Victor Hugo’s *Alouette*,” *Modern Languages Open* 1, 2019.

have discussed at length so far, fans recover the utopian potential from the text of even the most compromised media products.

There are two major ships in the *Les Mis* fandom: Enjoltaire and Valvert. Valvert refers to Valjean, the reformed prisoner, and Javert, the rigid police inspector, from the novel. These two are the most central characters to the novel and are thus more rounded. However, they are also mature men, which is a relatively niche interest in most fandoms, who prefer to write romantic stories about young men. To understand this chapter, it is most important to understand Enjolras, Grantaire, and Les Amis, of whom Enjolras is the leader. To someone familiar with the book or the musical, the fact that Enjoltaire—Enjolras/Grantaire—is the most important ship in the fandom might seem absurd. While Enjolras is not an unimportant character in the musical, he is secondary, appearing in group numbers with the rest of Les Amis. He and Grantaire never have a duet, though they have some brief interactions. The novel has somewhat more content focussed on the two of them, but relative to the scale of *Les Miz* it is negligible.

Les Amis are highly iconic, in the sense that their characterisations, in both the novel and the musical, are broadly symbolic and not always representational of individualised human beings. Enjolras is a textbook idealist, the leader of Les Amis, who believes fully in the People and the Revolution as Proper Nouns. Grantaire is a cynic, who spends his time drinking and critiquing Enjolras' ideals, but ultimately stands at the barricade out of love for his friends rather than love of the cause. The rest of Les Amis are similarly broadly characterised: Combeferre is philosophical, Courfeyrac gregarious, Jehan is a poet, Joly is a hypochondriac, Feuilly is a workaholic, Bahorel is bold, and Lesgle/Bossuet is unlucky. Since all these characters die in canon, any fan whose goal is to create fanwork with a long-term happy ending has to create some kind of AU. The most common form of this is the college-age modern AU, similar to some of the

Hamilton fanworks from Chapter 2. In the *Les Miz* community, modern AU fanfiction often incorporates some kind of highly conventional fanfiction romance arc, which structures the drama around a slight inconvenience, misunderstanding, or romantic mishap. The stakes are thereby lowered, relative to the bombastic drama of the *Les Miz* canon, which should be immediately apparent as we look at the first fanfiction in this chapter.

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The Standard Modern AU

The most popular fanfiction in the *Les Miz* Ao3 archive exhibits many of the basic qualities of Enjoltaire fanfiction. *How the Future's Done* by barricadeur was posted in March 2013, shortly after the release of the Hollywood film. Les Amis are a group of activist law students and their friends in New York City, engaging in a campaign against the discriminatory stop-and-frisk law. Grantaire, a peripheral member of the group who often argues with Enjolras, shows up drunk at Enjolras' apartment one night with a rescued kitten and asks Enjolras to take care of it. While working on the campaign, Enjolras bonds with Grantaire over taking care of Robot the kitten, and while away in Albany he realises his feelings for Grantaire all at once while looking at a picture.

Enjolras draws a breath. He's faintly aware that his face is doing a thing, but he honestly has no idea what it might be. Robot stares up at him with her big, gray eyes, but it's Grantaire's eyes he wishes he could see. The top of the frame cuts out just at the dark fall of his lower lashes, and only the parentetic curve of his mouth suggests his expression. Enjolras wonders how many shots Eponine took before settling on this one. He wonders what they were talking about, to make Grantaire look like that.¹²¹

This paragraph is accompanied by one of a few images in the story, fictional screenshots from Enjolras' cellphone (see Figure A). Unlike every other piece of fanart I discuss in this thesis, the

¹²¹ barricadeur, *How the Future's Done*, Archive of Our Own, published March 17, 2013, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/725065>.



good luck from the peanut gallery. we know
ull knock em dead



Figure A: A screenshot of a fictional email from Grantaire to Enjolras, including an attached picture of Grantaire with Robot the kitten. barricadeur. *How the Future's Done*. Archive of Our Own. Published March 17, 2013. <https://archiveofourown.org/works/725065>. Retrieved August 1, 2023.

image included in *How the Future's Done* is a picture of a person, not a piece of digital or traditional art. Like many works of fanfiction in this chapter and the previous one, the prose is relatively spare and conversational, with occasional bursts of profundity like describing a smile as a “parenthetic curve.” The dialogue is written in a naturalistic way, matching the conversational tone of the prose. The key character dynamics are evident here. In Enjoltaire fanfiction, Grantaire tends to fall in love first, over a significant period, and then Enjolras realises his feelings all at once. Eponine is often put together with Grantaire as his closest friend in the group, while on his trip to Albany Enjolras travels with Combeferre, the character he is often in a close platonic friendship with.

The tender tone as Enjolras realises his feelings for Grantaire contrasts with the opening lines of the fic, as barricadeur ushers the reader quickly to the “good part,” like most of the fanfiction in this thesis.

Grantaire shows up at Enjolras's apartment at 11:30 on a Saturday night.

He leans on the buzzer for so long that the noise makes Enjolras's teeth vibrate, and doesn't even pretend to be sorry when Enjolras cracks the door open and hisses, "I was asleep, asshole."

"Man, your life is the worst," Grantaire says, and shoulders past him. He's carrying a shoebox, a plastic grocery bag slung over his forearm.

"Not all of us think the goal of life is to get blasted on well whiskey."

"I beg your most egregious pardon," Grantaire drawls, stretching his neck long and throwing back his shoulders. "I reject your teleological and frankly rather bourgeois presumption that I live my life according to goals, rather than as a leaf on the winds of fate. Also, it was Maker's Mark."¹²²

In this brief introduction, barricadeur establishes the tone of the prose and dialogue, as well as the variations on the main characters they are using. The story is told from Enjolras' perspective, largely from within his apartment. He and Grantaire have a contentious, but familiar, relationship, since Enjolras willingly lets Grantaire show up at his apartment unannounced. The

¹²² Ibid.

characters are educated but largely unpretentious, reflecting the background and values of many fanfic writers. In most “enemies to lovers” Enjoltaire fanfiction, the characterisations of the two main characters are consistent. Enjolras is a workaholic idealist, generally a law student, who can’t understand why anyone wouldn’t hold his radical ideas in the same way he does. He has significant generational wealth, or at least is comfortable enough that his finances are not a concern. He tends to take poor care of himself while working but he has good reasons for the work that he does. He has blond hair and is associated with the colour red. Grantaire is a broke artist who works odd jobs whenever they are available, whose financial situation is generally more precarious than Enjolras’. His self-loathing results in him treating himself badly through substance abuse or self-punishing behaviours, but he takes care of others and does his best to improve for their sake. He has dark hair and is associated with the colour green (see Figure A). Both characters, as I said, are generally educated and erudite, though Grantaire tends to be more philosophical and bombastic in his speech, compared to the blunt Enjolras.

While the main characters in *How the Future’s Done* are explicitly white, the B plot focussed on stop-and-frisk legislation directly and repeatedly acknowledges the responsibility of the white characters to prioritise the needs of people of colour, possibly reflecting barricadeur’s feelings on their engagement with such issues, or the engagement of other fans.

"Even so," Combeferre chimes in, "none of us are directly affected by stop-and-frisk. We don't want to be in a position where it seems like we're appropriating the community's concerns and talking over them."

"But they're not calling anyone from the community to testify at all. The only reason they're listening to us is because we have Ivy League credentials attached to our names." Enjolras runs a hand through his hair. "If we don't use that structural advantage to advocate forcefully and try to change the system, then what good are we?"¹²³

¹²³ Ibid.

Intersectionality and representation, and the power afforded by whiteness, are key points that barricadeur expresses here. Their representation of Lamarque, a character from the Hugo novel who is often adapted to the specific needs of an individual piece of *Les Miz* fanwork, also reflects their prioritization of these issues, even though Les Amis remain white. She is introduced as, “Jeanne Rosemonde Lamarque, born in East Harlem to Haitian immigrant parents; former deputy Borough President of Manhattan; adjunct professor at Fordham University School of Law.”¹²⁴ According to their notes, barricadeur bases Lamarque on Rose Pierre-Louis, a real New York politician of a similar background.¹²⁵ While *How the Future’s Done* is posted earlier than most of the fanwork by the race-conscious community Best belongs to, barricadeur’s explicit marking of their characters as white could reflect the tone of the broader community during this time. Gender- and racebending Lamarque, a white man in *Les Miz*, is a precursor of practices that become steadily more common.

The extremely high contrast between Enjolras and Grantaire’s characterisations is what creates the intense interest among fans in Enjoltaire. Like how rillrill selected a pairing based on contrast and opposition with Washington/Hamilton for *Quid Pro Quo*, the friction between Enjolras and Grantaire is key to the romantic dynamic between them. The two characters have such distinctive core traits that they can be inserted into almost any setting or premise and maintain coherence. For barricadeur and many other *Les Miz* fans, including Best, flirtatious arguments and banter are key to the story, even if the characters don’t have the same kind of opposed first meeting that *How the Future’s Done* implies. In fact, far from the same kind of elision of important character interactions that was obvious in some *Hamilton* fanwork, often the elided content in *Les Miz* fanfiction is the establishment of the modern AU, with the setting

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

largely implied or communicated later in the story, while the character interactions take centre stage.

One example of this contrast with *Hamilton* fanfiction is *Love in a Coffee Shop* by tellthemstories. The story includes every interaction between Enjolras and Grantaire that occurs during the story, and several indirect interactions as well, rather than leaving the interactions up to other fanwork to fill in. At 23,000 words, *Love in a Coffee Shop* is at a scale where such elision might be expected in a focussed *Hamilton* fanfiction. The premise is neatly encapsulated on Ao3: “Grantaire's a famous rock star. Enjolras owns a coffee shop slash bookstore that makes no money and is dangerously close to becoming hipster. One night, Grantaire stumbles in when they're closed.”¹²⁶ The premise of a romantic dynamic between some kind of famous performer and a perspective character with a very ordinary service job is not uncommon in fanfiction. In *Love in a Coffee Shop*, Enjolras and Grantaire meet as described. They meet by chance a few more times and miss opportunities to act on their immediate chemistry. Grantaire, as a very famous person, has trouble making time for a potential relationship, which Enjolras confronts him about, refusing to just wait for him. As a result, Grantaire writes both a number one hit song and a genuine apology letter for Enjolras. Meanwhile, the second main plot of the fic is the ever-larger group of Amis coming to LiberTea, Enjolras' coffee shop, and leaving their stamp on the space. Enjolras becomes influential in his own right, and the coffee shop eventually starts making money. In an echo of the first scene of the fic, Grantaire comes to the shop after they close and the two commit to trying a romantic relationship, this time on equal footing.

While it might seem at first glance that LiberTea's finances would be a serious concern throughout *Love in a Coffee Shop*, this potential worry is swiftly quashed, as Enjolras “has

¹²⁶ tellthemstories, *Love in a Coffee Shop*, Archive of Our Own, published June 7, 2014, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/1755181>.

enough money that he doesn't really have to care about financial security."¹²⁷ In the same breath as they establish the escapist fantasy of having enough money to work a stereotypically low-value service job, tellthemstories also establishes their own feelings on revolution and changing the world.

[Enjolras is] smart enough to know that social upheaval, it's not going to work the way people want it to. His bi-monthly meetings right here, on mismatched and over-stuffed chairs surrounded by donated books and home-made shelves, they make a difference. They're a place for people to gather and feel included and needed, a place where anyone is welcome, and there aren't prejudices. He might not be able to change the world, but he can carve a little part out of it for himself, and those he cares about.¹²⁸

While reflecting the same fantasy of material wealth as rillrill does in *Quid Pro Quo*, tellthemstories also articulates the same theme as the one Best touches on in the quotes that begin this chapter. In a lot of *Les Miz* fic, the work of creating a better world is understood to be something that requires beginning with oneself. Enjolras is implied to have a fabulous amount of personal wealth, but he uses it to live a quiet life and take care of his friends. This is a fantasy of private luxury that resonates with many members of the *Les Miz* fandom but is rarely represented in mainstream media. The less bombastic goals of Les Amis are also a practical element of creating *Les Miz* fanwork. Establishing fanon where Enjolras is not a revolutionary itching to do violence to effect change is almost a prerequisite to create a happy story where he doesn't attempt martyrdom. This doesn't mean that Les Amis are nonviolent in *Love in a Coffee Shop*. More than some of the other fan creators in this chapter, tellthemstories portrays the characters regularly getting in physical altercations with bigots, another form of wish fulfillment, as the bigoted characters are almost totally relegated to non-speaking roles.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Race is unmarked in *Love in a Coffee Shop*, though Enjolras has blond hair and Grantaire blue eyes, and their respective positions in society, casualness around public drug use, and ease with committing crimes implies their whiteness. Apart from the queer relationship between Enjolras and Grantaire, several other Amis are in queer relationships, including Joly, Bossuet, and Musichetta, who are in a polyamorous triad, a common dynamic for these three characters in *Les Miz* fanwork. One of the B plots of the story is a romance between Combeferre and Courfeyrac, another relatively common secondary romance in the *Les Miz* fandom. Part of the reason why Enjolras and his friends continuously get in fights is their nonconformist—queer—aesthetics. Other than this characterising content, since the fights and arrests never have a long-term impact on the lives of the cast, queerness seems to be totally normalised in the fictional world, as no characters ever have a coming out scene and tend to assume each others' sexuality correctly. The first time that Enjolras and Grantaire speak to each other directly about dating they are both sure the other is interested in men.

“I wanted to see if you’d bring anyone; if you had anyone to bring.”

The distance between them seems to have vanished completely, Enjolras notices. He tilts his head up to better meet Grantaire’s eyes, says, “You idiot. You could have just asked if I had a boyfriend or not.”¹²⁹

This world of referenced but invisible homophobia is part of the escapist utopian content of *Love in a Coffee Shop*. Unlike many mainstream stories about queer people, queer fanwork is usually not focussed on the coming out or coming of age narrative, though it can be—*World Ain’t Ready* later in this chapter partly is. Instead, fanwork characters are often mature and confident in their sexuality and gender identity, and model aspirational behaviours for the writer and/or readers. In the case of *Love in a Coffee Shop*, Enjolras and Grantaire negotiate a queer relationship similarly to how any couple with very different, high intensity jobs might, through a fight followed by

¹²⁹ Ibid.

making it up to each other. They also perform lives where everyday problems like money and spending time with friends are non-issues, as both are wealthy and work with their closest friends every day. This affords them the freedom to do things like stand up for their values with their fists or host all of their friends for discussion groups and activist events.

Even though there are strong parallels in the ways that Enjolras and Grantaire are described between these two fanworks, there are already significant divergences as well, which show how variable these characters are. While Enjolras' body is not described very much, his behaviour in *Love in a Coffee Shop* is much less prosocial than in *How the Future's Done*. His bluntness is turned up to 11, while his inability to understand social cues is a major element of the comedy of the work. Grantaire, meanwhile, is described more, with a focus on his tattoos and his voice. tellthemstories' descriptions are more sensual than barricadeur's, which reflects how *Love in a Coffee Shop* goes slightly farther in portraying sexual intimacy, with the importance of kisses and physical contact as a symbol in the narrative. The Enjolras and Grantaire of *Love in a Coffee Shop* are somewhat older than those in *How the Future's Done*, more established in their careers and personalities. The differences in the portrayals by the different writers reflects the different premises of their stories, which they insert the characters and character dynamics into, adjusting them to fit. This practice of adjustment becomes much more extreme going forward.

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Racebending in *Les Miz* Fanwork

As I discussed in the introduction, conversations about how to best represent marginalised people in fanwork were well underway by 2013, the period during which most of these *Les Miz* fanworks were produced. With the vast majority of media properties primarily displaying white people, one way to create more diverse fanwork is racebending, where existing characters are

reinterpreted as being of a different race or ethnicity. Sometimes, characters of colour are racebent to be played by a white actor, which is the more common form of racebending in mainstream media and also occurs in fandom. However, a sub-community of *Les Miz* fans approach the iconicised characters of *Les Amis* with the goal of racebending them into people of colour. Enjolras, Grantaire, and *Les Amis*, with their iconic canon characterisation and clear dynamics, expanded by fanon into ideal subjects of fanwork, are ripe for this kind of reinterpretation. The central fanon character traits of each cast member are easily transplanted to any setting and premise and adapted to different storylines. Genderbending is also available, to reinterpret the male characters into characters of other genders. *Les Miz* femslash—slash between female characters—is often genderbent Enjoltaire fanwork, rather than focussing on the female characters from *Les Miz*, though these fanworks are beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, the rest of this chapter will focus on *Les Miz* fics where at least some, if not all, of the characters are explicitly racebent, and race, sexuality, or gender identity are a reasonably important part of the storytelling. The sci fi utopian fics of myrmidryad and the—much more recent—racebending fanart of the-march-hair (march) show how fundamentally the characters can be altered while remaining familiar.

There were racebending artists in the *Les Miz* fandom during 2013, when most of the fanfics in this chapter were created. One very popular artist in particular, Sas Milledge (screen name batsii), deleted her Tumblr some years ago, after beginning a career as a professional artist. Much of her fanart is thus lost, preserved only on Pinterest or other sites that do not include rigorous sources. Meanwhile, march started their Tumblr relatively recently, around 2017. However, in a 2018 *Les Miz* fic, myrmidryad, a fan creator who has been active in the community since 2013, cites three pieces of march's fanart as inspiration for their Enjolras and

Grantaire. Notably, march tends to redesign Enjolras and Grantaire regularly, usually as men of different ethnicities or body types, and often portrays them in ways that defy stereotypes of masculinity in those groups. In the three pieces cited by myrmidryad, Enjolras and Grantaire are Black men with long hair and slender builds, drawn in dynamic poses with smooth lines to emphasise the curves of their bodies rather than rigid muscle (Figure B). Like in most *Les Miz* fanart, Enjolras is blond and wears red, while Grantaire has dark hair and wears green. The fan community has some trouble representing a racialized Enjolras, whom Hugo describes as angelic and blond, and march solves this by making him bleach blond. Meanwhile, many fics that are sensitive to racial representation retain Enjolras as white due to this issue while racebending the rest of the cast, creating a dynamic where a white man is the leader of a racialized activist group. Instead, march provides a backstory reason for Enjolras' hair colour in the caption of their art, which includes character notes. The Enjolras in this fanart bleached his hair at one point, not realising that bleach doesn't wash out, and refuses to dye it (Figure B, left).

This Enjolras is a biracial Black man with a white father.¹³⁰ In the three pieces of fanart, he is visibly petit, smaller than Grantaire, with an angular face and an intense expression. Along with his red/orange shirt, he wears a string necklace with rainbow beads on it, and is captured in a dynamic pose, looking to the side while leaning on a table. While march's art is partly lineless, the face is captured in detail, showing Enjolras' blue eyes and sharp features. His long hair is curly and surrounds his face, the bleached tips creating a halo-like effect to reflect the Hugo description. The art of Grantaire is less detailed and in greyscale. Grantaire is in profile, showing his arched nose and angular jaw, as well as his dreadlocks, which are in partly tied back in a bun. He appears to be wearing a loose-fitting tank top. The third art piece, of Enjolras and Grantaire

¹³⁰ the-march-hair, "The next nu!canon," Tumblr, image, March 7, 2018, <https://the-march-hair.tumblr.com/post/171608342552/the-next-nucanon-because-why-have-only-one>.



Figure B: Fanart by the-march-hair of Enjolras and Grantaire. Left: Enjolras sitting with a coffee mug, the-march-hair on Tumblr, <https://the-march-hair.tumblr.com/post/171608342552/the-next-nucanon-because-why-have-only-one>. Posted March 7, 2018. Retrieved May 11, 2023. Centre: Grantaire, the-march-hair on Tumblr, <https://the-march-hair.tumblr.com/post/176961278587/r-sketch-cos-r>. Posted August 13, 2018. Retrieved May 11, 2023. Right: Enjolras and Grantaire together, the-march-hair on Tumblr, <https://the-march-hair.tumblr.com/post/173307194907/enjoltaire>. Posted April 26, 2018. Retrieved May 11, 2023. See Appendix A for full reproduced Tumblr posts.

together, shows them lying down on a yellow background, coloured in shades of green. Grantaire is on the bottom, his head turned to the viewer, showing his piercings, scruffy stubble, and half-lidded eyes. Enjolras, on top, has his eyes closed and his hair loosely tied back as he kisses Grantaire's neck. This piece shows the difference in their skin tones more than the individual pieces, as Grantaire is distinctly darker-skinned than Enjolras. By redesigning the main characters of the *Les Miz* fandom as men of colour—several times over—march shows how variable the characters can be. Within moments of seeing the Enjolras art for the first time, an experienced fan can begin to connect the key traits of the character with the new art piece, seeing how they interact to create new potential interpretations of the characters and slotting this Enjolras into the constellation of *Les Miz* fanwork. Indeed, myrmidryad's citation of march's art

in their 2018 fanfiction draws a very strong line of influence between the two works, as march's Enjolras becomes key to myrmidryad's.

In an earlier 2014 fic by myrmidryad, they engage in this practice by further queering the characters of Les Amis and racebending several of the secondary characters. The world of *blooming* is a near-future post-apocalypse where some major revolution or world war has eliminated contemporary society. It appears that this conflict was at least partly popular and ideological, as Grantaire worries that Enjolras, had he been any older, would have died fighting in it.

Had Enjolras been born just a little earlier (six or seven years, maybe even less), those beliefs would have ended in martyrdom. Grantaire walks past streets still carved up from decades-old bombs, stumbles over cracks in the pavement caused by the weight of tanks on the stone, and thanks gods he doesn't believe in for Enjolras' too-late birth.¹³¹

This is the closest reference in the entire fic to the events of this conflict. The main focus of the fic is on the society that has risen up since this event, which seems much more local and communal. Different regions appear to have largely independent, self-sufficient societies with very different cultures and norms around queerness and gender presentation. The desert city where *blooming* is set appears especially communalist and diverse. The story follows a period after Grantaire first moves to the city, as he integrates with both his community service colleagues and his neighbours. He also practices his art, in this work sculpture, and the climax is precipitated when he receives a job offer to teach at the local art school. Enjolras, a native of the city, is his neighbour, living in the apartment across the street from Grantaire, separated by only a narrow gap between the buildings, so close that Grantaire can step across into Enjolras' room.

¹³¹ myrmidryad, *blooming*, Archive of Our Own, published June 5, 2014, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/1746395>.

Another major subplot, along with Grantaire's art, is Grantaire becoming comfortable with his gender fluidity and overcoming his feeling of shame in wanting to wear dresses occasionally.

The core premise of *blooming* is a romance between people whose windows face each other, which is then expanded with the post-apocalyptic universe and the casual inclusion of racial diversity in the background. While Enjolras is blond and white in *blooming*, reflecting the tension I mentioned above between his blondness as a key trait and the desire in the community for greater racial representation, Grantaire is non-specifically dark-skinned. Cosette and Musichetta are explicitly Asian and Black, respectively, while other minor characters like Courfeyrac and Fantine are described as dark-skinned or brown-eyed. The post-apocalyptic setting also contributes to a utopian tone, as the city attempts to be self-sufficient, all citizens participate in community service to reclaim destroyed territory, and a form of radical egalitarianism appears to be key to the structure of society. Grantaire, the perspective character, expresses several ideas that are mainstream in contemporary society—gender fluidity is aberrant, polyamory is abnormal, janitorial jobs are lesser—but these ideas are not reflected back to him by the society of the city. Instead, the city in *blooming* appears as a self-sustaining egalitarian utopia, where the self-improvement of all classes is encouraged and people are free to love however they like.

Rooted in the combination of prior *Les Miz* fanwork and discussions of racial representation in fandom, *blooming*, again, bears very little resemblance to the novel or the musical. Instead, the primary sources it draws on are previous fanwork, which it engages with through its intentional racial and gender diversity, as well as a short story called “Summer Ice” by Holly Phillips.¹³² The above quote about Enjolras' revolutionary tendencies is probably the

¹³² Ibid.

closest *blooming* gets to referencing *Les Miz*. Apart from this, the tone is light and optimistic, with only a brief moment of tension when Enjolras reveals that he's seen Grantaire wear his dresses.

“What did I look like?” [Grantaire] asks, because no one else has ever seen him like that before, and he's a glutton for punishment, waiting for Enjolras to say something cruel.

“You looked lovely.”

Grantaire's head snaps up, staring at Enjolras on the other side of the gap between their windows. The gulf between their lives. “What?”

...

“I suppose you come from a pretty binaryist background?”

“You could say that.”

Enjolras gives him another small smile. “Me too. It's fine here, you know. You can be whoever you like.”¹³³

Naming the values of contemporary mainstream society as “binaryist,” myrmidryad establishes once and for all the different values of the society in *blooming*, in which contemporary values are not hegemonic, but just one among multiple approaches to gender norms. Apart from the scene quoted above, the tone of *blooming*, though serious, is joyful. Grantaire has a totally accepting community in which he can become comfortable with his identity. His prejudices are entirely internal, things that he puts on himself, rather than being part of the external world. That these internal prejudices aren't imposed externally doesn't reflect the real world, but similar to the fantasies of wealth and power in other fanworks, a fantasy world without externally applied prejudice allows myrmidryad to expound on different points. Shortly after the quotation from *blooming*, Grantaire finds out about genderfluidity from Enjolras. This changes his perception of his own gender identity, and Grantaire uses they/them pronouns during the short final scene of *blooming*, where everything pleasant that he could have imagined has come to pass. Notably, even in the quotation above, the key insinuation Grantaire makes is that he must be *ugly* in the dress, which Enjolras quashes. Rather than believing that trans-ness is bad or aberrant, Grantaire

¹³³ Ibid.

initially believes that he specifically is incapable of performing femininity adequately to change his gender presentation. A step beyond the theme of “trans-ness exists,” myrmidryad here makes the point that trans bodies are beautiful, even when, as in Grantaire’s case, they don’t conform to societal standards for their shape and their gender identity is complex or fluid. At the same time, trans normalisation or explaining the existence of trans people is not the sum of *blooming*’s contribution to the community. With its expansive, fantastical world and radical inclusion of various other races and romantic/gender presentations, as well as limited discussions of substance addiction, *blooming* is anything but a single-issue story.

Fanwork like march’s fanart and *blooming* iterate upon the extant modern AU fanwork in the *Les Miz* archive. By intentionally expanding the representational range of the musical’s characters while using the modern AU as their main gravitational referent, they create new potential reference points for further fanwork. *blooming*, with its near-future setting, establishes a casual tone with reference to racial diversity. The inclusion of the characters’ ethnic backgrounds is incidental to the narrative, a technique that becomes a main reference point in the remainder of this chapter’s fics.

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An Introduction to Jessica Best

Before proceeding to a sustained discussion of *World Ain’t Ready*, I will first provide a brief overview of some of Best’s other *Les Miz* fanwork, which further queers and racebends the college AU setting relative to fanworks like *How the Future’s Done*. These fics show, in a more conventional *Les Miz* context, the same techniques for altering characters through context that Best repeats in *World Ain’t Ready*. In both of her fics set at universities, *Lovesickness* and *In Defiance of All Geometry*, Best performs in a somewhat smaller form the same emphasis on

casual diversity and the recombination of several fanfiction ideas to create novel stories. These fanfictions also display some of Best's authorial preoccupations, especially how she focusses on creating a balanced relationship between Enjolras and Grantaire.

In *Lovesickness*, Best takes the unusual tack of telling the story from Joly's perspective. Enjolras comes to Joly, a medical student, complaining of a mysterious set of symptoms that appear whenever he's around Grantaire. Upon realising that Enjolras is in love with Grantaire, Joly encourages both characters to realise that the other is in love with them. The story is set in Paris, contemporaneous to its early 2014 posting date, a relatively common geographic setting for *Les Miz* fics. It exhibits Best's comedic techniques to their fullest, and with her emphasis on characters who are normally secondary in *Les Miz* fic, like Joly and Combeferre, she has quite a bit of room to characterise them. However, *Lovesickness* is importantly a very early example of a racebent Enjolras, and the only one in a contemporary setting written by Best. Just like in march's art of a Black Enjolras, Best finds a creative way to explain Enjolras' blond hair.

"You know, he thinks the only reason people stare is the whole dark skin, blond hair thing?" said Joly.

Strangers on the street sometimes stopped Enjolras to ask if he bleached his hair. If Courfeyrac or Bahorel was with him, these conversations tended to descend into violence, or at least profanity. If Joly or Combeferre was with him, things tended to begin with a brief overview of the fascinating genetic features of people from the Solomon Islands, and then end with nuclear levels of snark.¹³⁴

By making Enjolras a Solomon Islander, Best preserves the idea that he has naturally blond hair while also successfully racebending him. This scene is the only mention of Enjolras' race in *Lovesickness*, as Grantaire and Joly talk about Grantaire's uncharacteristic attraction to Enjolras. Best's route to explain a Black Enjolras is quite different from march's. Best discusses another non-white ethnic group who have naturally blond hair, while march creates a reason that Enjolras

¹³⁴ Jessica Mary Best (idiopathicsmile), *Lovesickness*, Archive of Our Own, published February 27, 2014, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/1243585>.

bleached his hair. Like the scenes where diversity is discussed in *Sharps Hour* from Chapter 2, this scene comes across as not quite natural, but in the context of other *Les Miz* racebending fanwork like *blooming*, where Enjolras is sometimes the sole white character, Best's explicit denotation of Enjolras as specifically a Solomon Islander makes sense as a call for greater creativity in reinterpreting Enjolras' representation in fanwork, engaging intentionally in a gravitational tug-of-war across the constellation with fanwork where Enjolras is not racebent with the rest of the Amis. Since *Lovesickness* predates fanart like march's 2018 works, the contemporaneous fanwork constellation does not include the necessary content to smooth this interaction.

This isn't to say that Best does not write a white Enjolras when it suits the story. In *World Ain't Ready*, the whiteness of Enjolras and Grantaire is explicitly marked as an advantage they have in their fight to create a positive media narrative focussed on their relationship. Similarly, in Best's first *Les Miz* fanfiction, *In Defiance of All Geometry (Defiance)*, Enjolras is strongly aware of his privilege, and often works hard to uplift the people around him using his privileged voice, much like how Les Amis are portrayed in *How the Future's Done*. In *Defiance*, Les Amis are students at an American university, a conventional setting for *Les Miz* fic. However, they all live together in a student housing co-op. Enjolras and Combeferre are mutually in love but unaware of the other's feelings, while Grantaire is a new resident of the house who falls in love with both of them over the course of the school year. Enjolras and Combeferre begin a romantic relationship and then invite Grantaire to join them.

The point of view of *Defiance* is split between Enjolras, Combeferre, and Grantaire, each scene told from a close third person perspective of one character. The fic's premise combines mutual pining—Enjolras and Combeferre—with the enemies to lovers dynamic discussed earlier

between Enjolras and Grantaire. A huge part of the fic's appeal is also how familiar Best clearly is with life in a co-op, while also framing communal living in an appealing way. The social dynamics of a large group of people who all live in the same house together are unique, and Best captures them well, efficiently mapping the now-familiar *Les Miz* characters into this context. At a much larger scale than *Lovesickness*, over 50,000 words, *Defiance* allows Best to discuss race and gender diversity in the cast in a more casual way than the less graceful introduction of Enjolras' heritage in *Lovesickness*. Given that Grantaire is a newcomer to the group, rather than Les Amis already being established, as in *Lovesickness*, he is able to naturally ask questions that the reader shares, representing a reader's perspective in a similar way to his role in *blooming*, or Laurens' characterisation in *Sharps Hour* from Chapter 2.

"Okay, horrible-person-question. What pronouns do I use when I talk about Jehan? And I know," he adds, immediately, before Combeferre can answer, "I should really go ask him-or-her-or-none-of-the-above myself, but it's way too late now. It's like not learning someone's name in time, you can't just sidle up like, 'Hey, I've been misgendering you for a month, sup amigo? Or amiga. Shit.'"

Combeferre shakes his head encouragingly. "It's not a stupid question at all," he insists. "And it's actually a little complicated, because Jehan says—well. Jehan has implied it might change in the future, but that until there's a definite decision, the default might as well be male. But," he sighs. "Courfeyrac pulled us aside a while back and pointed out that if you watch Jehan's face, it kind of wilts when you use 'he' and 'his', so there's an unofficial house-wide effort to just—"

"Not use pronouns with Jehan at all," says Grantaire. "Yeah, I noticed that. Or I started to, around the time I was frantically watching you guys, hoping for clues."¹³⁵

Jehan, the Capital R Romantic of Les Amis, is the character most often written as gender non-conforming, a characterisation Best repeats in *World Ain't Ready*. Like Grantaire's in *blooming*, Jehan's gender expression in *Defiance* is complex and shifting. In *Defiance*, Jehan doesn't fully know what gender pronouns they might end up using in the future. In the text of the fic, this point is never resolved, and instead left open. *Defiance* is not about Jehan's journey in exploring

¹³⁵ Jessica Mary Best (idiopathicsmile), *In Defiance of All Geometry*, Archive of Our Own, published December 21, 2013, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/1091686>.

their gender identity, even less than *blooming* is about Grantaire's gender identity. Instead, much like the characterisations and interactions that become so normal as to be skimmed over and summarised in *Hamilton* fanwork, elements of racial and gender diversity in *Les Miz* fic become elements that can be introduced at will as shorthand for establishing the fictional world that the fan creator is aligned with. In this case, Best marks herself and her fanwork as part of the in-group within the *Les Miz* fandom who headcanon Jehan as genderqueer, which is just one element of the radical diversity that she practices in creating *Defiance*. Combeferre, who has an uncommon point of view role in *Defiance*, a contrast with his usual background role, is notably Métis, a trait that influences certain interactions he has with other characters, as well as being raised Unitarian.

Much like in *blooming*, a key part of the world of *Defiance* is that the characters spend most of their time inside of the co-op house, insulated from any potential prejudice against their various marginalised identities. Unlike the city in *blooming*, this radically inclusive environment is intentionally maintained, indicated by Combeferre's remembrance in the quote above of a conversation between the house residents to intentionally not use gendered pronouns when speaking about Jehan. While the utopia of *blooming* is one that appears to be wholly commensal, with the complete support of all members of the community, the tiny, judgment free world inside of Amis House, the co-op in *Defiance*, is a place that requires constant maintenance and shifting goals. The first interaction between Enjolras and Grantaire is a debate over whether it is worthwhile for the house to begin sourcing local, organic produce for meals when this will result in a not insignificant increase in rent for the residents. The conclusion the residents reach with Grantaire's input is to compromise and save money elsewhere in order to reduce the house's dependence on industrial farming while also not pricing out lower-income students.

This element of *Defiance*'s intentionally non-escapist utopia is encapsulated in Enjolras. He is intentional about wielding his whiteness to protect his friends and perfectly willing to break the law if he feels the law is unjust. At the same time, his ideals can be very rigid and he has trouble accepting that others don't see the world the same way he does, which Combeferre calls him on when Enjolras complains about Grantaire. Enjolras puts in effort to overcome his initial animosity towards Grantaire as a microcosm of the effort required to maintain an inclusive community. Enjolras also verbalises a central value that appears across Best's work as she portrays Les Amis living and working together to create a better world for their friends.

Enjolras taps his fingers on the table, gaze somewhere near the ceiling. "What is the absolute most I can do to make the world the best possible version of itself?" he says.

Grantaire ponders this. "Let me guess, and for you somehow the first step is communal living?"

"The first step," says Enjolras, with real earnestness, "is surrounding yourself with people who make it easy to believe in humanity."¹³⁶

For Best, this is the central question that she explores in her *Les Miz* fanfiction. *Defiance*, *Lovesickness*, and *World Ain't Ready* share elements of many other fanworks from this thesis, drawing on the constellation whose shape has been increasingly revealed. They are very focussed works and share in fanon and headcanons of the community around them to maintain their coherence. They make use of romance premises common to fanfiction, as well as elements of escapism and wish fulfillment to texture a world that readers can imagine themselves in. Additionally, Best incorporates key parts of her own interests and life experience to make the stories even more relatable, engaging, and unique, along with recombining elements from other fanwork in unusual ways. However, Best also thinks through the fictional worlds that she creates, expanding on the utopia by questioning it and showing explicitly how the escapist world is maintained. *Defiance* may not be a blueprint for a better world, but it recaptures the same kinds

¹³⁶ Ibid.

of utopian aspirational feelings as *Quid Pro Quo*, *Love in a Coffee Shop*, and many other fanworks in this thesis. *Defiance* also models how a small part of that world can be brought into the reader's everyday life without requiring vast wealth, institutional power, or transcendental magic. This theme persists into Best's largest-scale work, *World Ain't Ready*.

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World Ain't Ready

In many ways, *World Ain't Ready* reads like an original novel, as I mentioned in the introduction. The characters are introduced piecemeal throughout the early chapters, rather than quickly catching readers up to events like in a lot of fanwork. The quote about Jehan at the beginning of this chapter is his character introduction, once again establishing his gender non-conforming aesthetic. Through Grantaire's description, Jehan is sufficiently introduced that he is coherent to a reader regardless of their experience with *Les Miz* or other *Les Miz* fanfiction. Even though, at 180 thousand words, *World Ain't Ready* is the length of two novels, it has equal clarity to *Quid Pro Quo*, the other large-scale, forward-planned fanfiction in this thesis. There are two central plots, both rooted in adapted versions of conventional *Les Miz* fandom premises, and Best remains laser-focussed on Les Amis and the core romance, removing all but the least obtrusive references to *Les Miz*. Even before reading this thesis, I am confident that any reader with a basic understanding of the romance genre would have a rewarding experience reading *World Ain't Ready*, though familiarity with *Les Miz* fanwork and fandom norms in general contribute to a more meaningful reading of the work, as I will show here.

World Ain't Ready serves a specific demographic that is prevalent in fandom, and likely also describes Best. As a high school AU written by someone who is no longer in high school, *World Ain't Ready* takes a retrospective view of high school, recapitulating the heightened

emotions induced by teenage hormones like a lot of commercial teen romance works. While the characters of *World Ain't Ready* appear on the surface somewhat like an early 2000s reboot of *The Breakfast Club*, Best targets a specific kind of teenage and young adult experience common to many people in fandom, but not often given detailed characterisation in mainstream media: the gifted kid. Les Amis are almost all different kinds of gifted kid in *World Ain't Ready*, a demographic of mostly neurodivergent (late-, self- or never-diagnosed ADHD or autism) people who appear unusually “gifted” during elementary school due to various factors but fall behind in high school or college as material becomes less rote and social dynamics increase in importance. Many fans, especially creative ones, identify with gifted kids, for reasons that are beyond the scope of this thesis. In a lot of media, people with this particular shared experience are underrepresented or portrayed as the “savant” or “burnout” types, two extremes that are not meaningfully representative of the vast majority of former gifted kids.

World Ain't Ready is told from Grantaire's third person perspective. Enjolras is a new student at Columbus High School, a school in a suburb somewhere in the US Midwest in the mid-2000s. On his first day, Enjolras and Grantaire end up in detention together, and Grantaire experiences an immediate attraction to Enjolras in spite of the contrast between Grantaire's burnout façade and Enjolras' firebrand idealism. Enjolras founds a club called the ABC—there's a joke that no one knows what the letters stand for—which Grantaire joins a few months later mostly by accident. Enjolras asks Grantaire in secret if they can go to prom together, as cover for Courfeyrac, who wants to invite Jehan to prom. When Grantaire says yes in front of the entire school, it causes him to become a social pariah, liked only by the other ABC members. As Enjolras and Grantaire struggle to keep up the fake relationship, they become more interested in

each other, but continue to believe that the other isn't interested in them until a confrontation at prom itself.

In the process of integrating himself with the ABC, Grantaire finds himself continuously reminded of his shared middle school experiences with the other characters, when he was a promising gifted nerd struggling to keep up with the ever-increasing expectations of the authority figures around him. Being friends with them again causes Grantaire to question his long-held belief that he was tricking people into thinking he was smart, a relatable feeling for many fans. Grantaire expresses a lot of the anxious negative exceptionalism of gifted kids that is rarely articulated in media, where people are often either what they express openly on the surface or its total opposite.

“Except, like, if you're smart, you don't actually have to try that hard, you know? And I mean, I knew from pretty early on that I was working way more than everyone else in my class. I got good grades but sometimes homework took me six hours a night and I was always fucking lost in math.”

“Combeferre's smart,” Enjolras points out. “Combeferre is maybe the smartest person I know, and he works at it all the time—”

“Combeferre doesn't count,” says Grantaire. “Combeferre's an island. Combeferre—and like, Feuilly, Jehan, all your smart friends. You guys are in it for sheer fucking love of learning. I was just running a con on myself. Like, struggling to hold onto my grades, struggling to trick myself into thinking I wasn't struggling. I can't really tell you how not-fun it was.”¹³⁷

As an unreliable narrator, Grantaire is regularly called out for his inaccurate perspectives on events by other characters. His naturalisation of some inherent trait of “smartness” reflects the way that children are told intelligence works, a schema of intelligence which requires that it be effortless. When Enjolras attempts to question his perspective, Grantaire retrenches, framing the “smart” members of the ABC as outliers, while ordinary smart people would find it effortless. Notably, Grantaire also believes that the intelligence he performed as a younger child was

¹³⁷ idiopathicsmile, *World Ain't Ready*, Chapter 11.

inherently dishonest, which contributes to a persistent feeling for him that he deserves to suffer. The extremity of Grantaire's situation in *World Ain't Ready*, as a burned-out teenager failing high school and using drugs to self-medicate because his parents are absent and no adult authority figures have stepped up to support him, shows how inaccurate his perception is. For the reader experiencing a less extreme situation, the fact that Grantaire can maintain his self-flagellation in these conditions shows keenly how his beliefs are the result of anxiety, not an accurate perception of reality. The scene also acts as a quiet indictment of the academics-focussed American school system, especially as it encourages children to hang their self-worth on academic and extracurricular achievement rather than prosocial behaviour.

While racial representation is further in the background in *World Ain't Ready* than in Best's other *Les Miz* fanfics, Grantaire does observe that most of the students of colour are members of the ABC. Instead, Best focusses more attention on mental health and social class, especially in the main B plot. This plotline is, in many ways, beyond the scope of this chapter, as it encompasses Grantaire's perennial best friend in fanwork, Eponine, and the villainous Thenardiers, who never appear in a speaking role in the fic. However, Best makes an effort to incorporate sexualities that were, and remain, underrepresented in fanwork. Shortly after they start their fake relationship, Grantaire comes out to Enjolras as bisexual under pressure, followed shortly after by Enjolras coming out as demisexual. Similar to the scene in *blooming* where Grantaire learns about genderfluidity, in *World Ain't Ready* Enjolras explains demisexuality to Grantaire, as, very simply, needing to know someone prior to becoming attracted to them. Like Best's innovation of adapting Enjolras into a Solomon Islander in *Lovesickness*, a demisexual Enjolras complies with fanon while adapting it in a novel way. As I mentioned early in this chapter in my discussion of *How the Future's Done*, Enjolras is often portrayed falling in love

with Grantaire suddenly, after Grantaire has slowly fallen in love with Enjolras. In *Lovesickness*, Enjolras is so unused to being in love that he misidentifies his feelings as an illness. By making Enjolras demisexual, Best codifies this fanon character trait and incorporates it into an unusual identity, much like raven does with many of the characters in *Sharps Hour*.

There are drawbacks to such casual racial and sexual representation. Bahorel being Korean is mentioned in one scene more than halfway through the fic, while Musichetta's Haitian heritage is mentioned only once in Chapter 2 and never again. For both of these, admittedly minor, characters, the assumption that readers will retain information like this partly reflects the techniques of using fanon to elide important scenes, as seen in Chapter 2 of this thesis. When readers are used to seeing certain portrayals of characters and certain relationships between them, they don't require constant reminders of those relationships or identity categories and find them intrusive. However, with idiosyncratic racial representation like for these two minor characters, who are not often portrayed in other fanwork as people of colour, restricting all mention of their diversity in this way makes their racial identity easy to overlook.

Like in many other *Les Miz* fanworks, like *How the Future's Done*, Best portrays Enjolras and the ABC using their privilege to benefit other people. When Grantaire experiences a homophobic attack at school and his attacker faces no discipline from the administration, the ABC resolve to go the press. When Grantaire expresses doubt that anyone will be interested, Eponine points out the favourable media narrative on their side.

“If you look at it from the outside. Two rich, cute white boys, one is a total honors student, whatever, and the other with this tragic past, all the bullying and shit, who've only ever dated each other—and you could do a whole thing like, ‘I only want the guy I like to be safe’, blah blah blah it's all for love. People would eat that up with a spoon. A lot of people would. It's a good idea.”¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Ibid, Chapter 12.

The intersection of oppression in which Enjolras and Grantaire exist as upper middle class white men is something Best is not only aware of but uses to expand the depth of her work. Far from being male-bodied ciphers for heterosexuality as was theorised in early academic work on slash fic, Enjolras and Grantaire in *World Ain't Ready* are queer men, and this impacts both the bullying they experience and the privileges that they take advantage of. Along with scenes of verbal bullying and institutional disregard, Grantaire at one point receives a conversion therapy pamphlet from a group of religious students who he assumed he was safe from, which hits him harder than a lot of the other bullying.

Like so much other fanwork, there is intense wish fulfillment content in *World Ain't Ready*. Much like *Quid Pro Quo* and *Sharps Hour*, while Best doesn't shy away from portraying prejudiced behaviour in *World Ain't Ready*—compared to the other *Les Miz* fanwork in this chapter, there is quite a lot of emphasis on actual bullying and bigotry as major plot points—there are also moments where characters do or say things that are not especially realistic but reflect the desires of the writer and readers. After Grantaire becomes a social pariah for dating Enjolras, the ABC members very obviously close ranks around him. Even through Grantaire's negatively biased perspective, the reader is shown ABC members going out of their way to protect him, sitting next to him in classes and standing up to him in front of their peers. A non-ABC member comes to Grantaire for queer dating advice at one point. In one scene, Jehan not only stands up in solidarity with Grantaire but also takes on one of the disengaged high school teachers whose lack of control over his class contributes to Grantaire's disengagement from academic learning. When the teacher attempts to send Jehan to the principal's office for insubordination, Jehan's response is pure escapist wish fulfillment.

Jehan whirls around. "Nobody ever, ever gets in trouble in this class. They act out all the time, but. You know they wouldn't listen to you anyway, so you let them do whatever."

His fists are clenched at his sides. "Do you know the, the things people have said to me in this room? And how many times have you tried to stop—" He takes a deep breath. "But me, when I act out, I'm supposed to face the consequences, y'know, 'Jean's a good kid, he'll do what he's told.'"

His lip curls. "You think that because I follow the rules, I respect you. But I don't. I behave because I'm here to learn. Nobody in this room respects you less than I do. Um, so yeah. I'm not walking to the office, and I don't think you're gonna carry me. I'm going to wait here until he—" Jehan jerks his head at Eddie, "—gets up and moves, so we can all do what we're supposed to be doing, which is to read a very, very dumbed-down retelling of the Trojan War."¹³⁹

For the target demographic of *World Ain't Ready*, the gifted kid described above, irritation with the specific kind of teaching incompetence epitomised by this teacher is common. He is the “relaxed” teacher who fails to set proper expectations for behaviour or engagement in his classroom, and as a result makes learning more difficult. In real life, talking back to this kind of teacher often gets a student stonewalled or ignored. However, when Jehan talks back to this teacher, he expresses himself articulately and isn't treated as if he is making a fool of himself in front of his peers. Even though Grantaire is the only character on Jehan's side in this classroom, Jehan gets what he wants and is not sent to the principal's office. In another version of this scene in a more conventional novel, this character who dresses and acts extremely camp could easily be the subject of a deflationary manoeuvre in which him standing up to the teacher fails, escalating the tension between the ABC and the school further to lead up to the physical attack on Grantaire. This would serve the narrative purpose of this arc of the story, which is meant to put Grantaire in an extreme and isolated mental state. Instead, Jehan's action is framed as justified and successful, and Grantaire joyfully tells the tale of Jehan's heroism to the rest of the ABC later that day. Even though the behaviour of the characters in this scene is not quite naturalistic, it suits the desires of the writer and readers, the imagined version of high school that they hold in their minds.

¹³⁹ Ibid. Chapter 3.

The utopian version of high school does not come to pass in *World Ain't Ready*. There is no moment of the school community coming together to accept Enjolras and Grantaire's relationship at prom, as might be expected in a teen romance. In fact, Grantaire's real confession to Enjolras at the end is preceded by a near-fight between Enjolras and a homophobic student, and happens alone, outside of prom. The scene where Grantaire asks Enjolras to fake-date him early in the fic is much more cinematic, directly lampooning the kind of dramatic public confession followed by cheers and applause that might appear in a teen movie. While the story ends before the ABC bring the story of the attack on Grantaire to the media, it's implied that they are still about to bring national attention to the homophobia and prejudice they've been experiencing at school. The story contains no roadmap to how to create a radically inclusive version of high school. However, much like Amis House in *Defiance*, the ABC are a small piece of a better world, where decisions are made democratically and, despite all the secrets they attempt to hide from each other, the characters resolve their conflicts diplomatically. Enjolras and Grantaire may not be accepted by their community, and they will probably spend the rest of their senior year in possibly greater danger as they attempt to bring legal consequences down on their oppressors. However, Grantaire has a wider group of friends than before, and he is capable of seeing a potential future in front of him after high school. Compared to many queer teen and young adult media, this ending is both more believable and more affirming. Life in high school, in *World Ain't Ready*, is not perfect. It is not nearly as independent or happy as university life in *Defiance*, *Lovesickness*, or the rest of the college AUs in this chapter or Chapter 2. Grantaire doesn't have the safety of being in an ongoing story, as in interstitial fanwork like an animatic, that tells the reader things will be, if not okay, at least predictable. *World Ain't Ready* is not a post-canon fanwork, though Best wrote several epilogues as separated works, effectively as post-

canon fanwork of her own fanfiction. While it uses many of the norms of fanwork for generic and thematic coherence, *World Ain't Ready* bears many similarities to an original work of fiction, and yet reads equally coherently as a work of fanfiction.

Conclusion

This thesis has constructed a discursive structure, a constellation, upon which an informed, engaged discussion of *World Ain't Ready* can rest. Not only the source material, but also layers of fanwork, each depending less upon the source material for its coherence, are important foundations for understanding. Fans initially create fanwork which intensely discusses their fan object, like meta and fanart. These works highlight specific elements of canon that fans find important. Fans recuperate the core themes of the media, as they see them, and emphasise the themes that affected them the most. Fans then begin to create large scale works that make fundamental changes to canon, initially through unusual readings of characters or events, but increasingly by replacing canon events, settings, and characters. Often, crossover fans draw on content from other fan communities or media to expand the scope of fan creation. These large-scale works become new centres of gravity, amassing fanwork that expands upon and responds to them. This process proceeds in a recursive fashion, referring back to canon but responding more immediately to other fanwork. In this way, fanwork like *World Ain't Ready* emerges, which bears very little resemblance to the media it purports to be fanwork of.

In musical theatre fandom, the most common alteration made to canon is to create a qualitatively different world for the characters to live in. This world resembles the world that the writer lives in in important ways that allow them to demonstrate their identification with the characters. They also sometimes make significant alterations to the biographies or appearances of their favourite characters to represent diverse identity categories. By this means, fans make use of characters and works in ways that recuperate their utopian potential and transformational themes, without ignoring the flaws inherent in any commercial media's framing of a better world. Instead, they imagine a different world than the one portrayed on stage.

These new worlds are also inherently flawed, still coloured by their creators' embedding in the contemporary world. However, by giving attention to many different fanworks with diverse perspectives, I have shown how the experience of these works retains a utopian performative in the discourse between the discrete works. Matching the consumption practices of many fans in these communities, I put many works in dialogue with each other. Each in isolation would provide an incomplete perspective, only capable of referring back to the original work. Instead, my methodology allowed me to follow trends across different communities and engage with recurring themes that are emergent from the work of many different fan creators. Fandom is an inherently discursive and adaptive space that should be studied as such.

With the limited scope of this thesis, I was unable to give well-deserved attention to a variety of other highly adaptational fanfictions within the *Les Miz* fandom, let alone other fandoms and media types. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Enjoltaire femslash, where Enjolras and Grantaire are reimagined as a pair of women, has its own history and community. Many Enjoltaire fics are set aboard space stations or on alien planets. In others, Les Amis are resistance operatives in a 1984-style post-apocalyptic dystopia. There are yet others set in magical worlds, contemporary and medieval, or where some characters time travel into the present or the past. This is not to mention a similar diversity of sub-communities and lineages for Valvert fanwork.

Other fandoms have similar, but different, highly original works within them. In the *Star Wars* fandom, community characteristics like a focus on the proverbial galaxy far, far away result in fanwork in which the setting remains the same, but events play out in a different way as a result of a single fundamental change to canon events. The *Harry Potter* community is inundated with fanwork where characters from other media attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. *Pokémon* fanfiction often includes characters based on the writer going on an

adventure with their favourite fictional monsters, in a world very different from that which is portrayed in the children's video game series.

These fandom creations are deserving of study in their own right, as well as to better understand the audiences for conventional media. Many of the largest works in the English language by word count are fanfiction or based on the aesthetics of fanfiction. Thousands of fanworks are uploaded to the internet daily, at a low estimate. Several successful musicians, writers, and artists began their careers in fan communities, which impacts their artwork in ways that are deserving of further study. However, the massive scale and intense decentralization of fandom make many critical methodologies largely inappropriate to approaching the actual practice of fan creation. I hope that the methodology attempted here makes some progress towards an approach to fanwork suitable to the kinds of research questions fans are likely to ask about their communities.

Appendix: A Glossary of Fannish Terms

Canon: A term describing things that a fan community understands to be provably true in the source media. Also “the canon,” which refers to the source media as a discrete body. Different from the canon in literary theory, though fans are similarly militant in their analysis and protection of their canon. Things that fans agree are non canon but have a similar importance in the community are *fanon*. Depending on the fan community, canon can be limited or expansive, and sometimes encompasses extratextual content like author statements. For example: “It is canon that Romeo and Juliet are in love in *Romeo and Juliet*.”

Fanon: Things that a fan community agrees are plausible or interesting to include in fanwork and discussion without being provably canon. Portmanteau of “fan canon.” A piece of information may be fanon for a small group of fans, or widely agreed upon across the entire community, to the point that contradictory elements of canon are ignored. Called a “headcanon” when an individual presents an idea of this kind. For example: “It is fanon that Horatio is in love with Hamlet in *Hamlet*.”

Fan (acquisitive): Short for *fanatic*. Acquisitive fans are collectors of information and memorabilia related to the object of their fandom. They might not primarily associate fan activities with critical, creative, or other transformative work, unlike *creative fans*. An acquisitive musical theatre fan might, for example, attend multiple performances of the same show, collect playbills, and purchase/listen to official recordings as their preferred fan activities. This is not to say these activities are not at all transformative, as poststructural theory shows that consumption is itself a transformative activity, but transformation is not the primary focus of the acquisitive fan. Fans who are primarily acquisitive are not the focus of this thesis.

Fan (creative): The theoretical binary opposite of the acquisitive fan. Creative fans' primary fan activity is to engage in critical/creative/transformative relationships with source media, usually, but not always, following a period of acquisitive engagement. As this caveat shows, the creative/acquisitive binary flattens all the potential ways for fans to engage with media to a pair of binary poles. Most fans engage in a subset of fan activities across the spectrum from acquisitive to creative. Separating creative from acquisitive fans is useful for this thesis, though, because it is important to recall that most fans, even many creative ones, do not create fanwork that drifts so far from canon.

Fandom: The community of fans *OR* the act of engaging in fannish activity. The ambiguity is key to how fans discuss fandom.

Community: Umbrella term encompassing sub-communities focussed on single elements in source media, community around a single source media or digital location, or the overarching community of all fans everywhere.

Activity: Includes, but is not limited to, creating and consuming fanwork, attending fan events, collecting information and memorabilia, consuming the source media.

Fanwork: An umbrella term for the many different forms of transformative media created by fans. Includes *meta*, *fanart*, and *fanfiction*. Some other kinds of fanwork include cosplay, roleplay, and the creation of edited videos and gifs using the source material. These latter kinds of fanwork will not be covered in this thesis, but they are an understudied subset of fanwork.

Fanart: Transformative visual art based on copyrighted material. Includes traditional and digital media. Generally a single isolated artwork or small set, but sometimes larger in scale, like fan-comics, which overlap with fanfiction.

Fanfiction: Also fanfic or fic. Transformative literary work based on copyrighted material. Ranges in scale from tens or hundreds of words to millions. In many fandoms, focussed on *shipping*.

Meta: Short for *metafiction*. A colloquial term for a variety of practices where fans discuss elements of their fan object. Includes descriptions of the work, amateur criticism, historiography, and other inherently fannish practices that produce written traces but are not inherently transformative.

Ship, shipping: Short for relation-shipping (archaic). The fannish activity in which fans imagine and create fanwork where characters are portrayed in romantic or sexual relationships. Two or more characters can be “shipped” together, meaning a fan creator portrays a romantic or sexual dynamic between them, discusses the potential for such a dynamic, or believes in it. Can be used as a noun (“My ship”), a verb (“I ship it”), or an adjective (“Seems shippy”).

Slash: A variant on shipping where two or more male characters are shipped together. This is a very common practice across many fandoms. The name refers to the slash between two names when the characters are shipped together. When two women are slashed together, called *femslash*.

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