The Other Woman
Re-Authoring and Re-Othering Gendered Narratives

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Abstract

Fans are increasingly publicising their adaptive works, and Hollywood is turning to reworking and remaking existing media properties as a method of franchising. Regendering – rewriting a character as another gender – is becoming a more popular choice in these adaptations. This occurs in both mainstream works (recently: *Hannibal*, *Elementary* and *Doctor Who*) and fannish/non-commercial works. By examining the methods some fans and creators use in their regendered works, the construction of a male-masculine other can be identified, as well as the ways in which celebrity (mainstream or sub-cultural) is traded on for legitimacy in that construction. This examination also provides examples of the 'frustrated fan' identified by Jenkins as at the heart of fandom – examples that are not necessarily bound to the canon but to media in general. The frustration evidenced by fans centres around the way the 'everyman' necessarily others the 'everywoman'. Fans who engage in regendered adaptations work around embodied notions of gender to occupy the absence of women in original works, the absence of women's agency in wider media, and form the male-masculine narrative as the Other. The re-authoring of the narrative not only highlights the gendered pseudo-neutrality of the original, but also the necessity of that construction as othering the audience of women. The reaction of some fans in re-authoring and re-othering the male narrative while retaining the masculinity of the original transgresses both the boundary of the creator-audience but also the boundary of male-female and the polite fictions of cross-gender identification.

Keywords

Gender, fan studies, masculinity, regendering, adaptation, media studies

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Introduction

The prevalence and popularity of fanworks in Western media has steadily increased over the past decade, with the use of technology assisting fans to communicate with each other and form a counterpublic, and commercial interests leveraging that communication for monetary gain. The methods used by fans (including professional authors within fandom, or those who create commercial fanworks) to adapt the works have also steadily changed, becoming more creative with format, form and content in order to adapt around the perceived bones of the original, and the more 'mainstream' forms of adaptation that populate the counterpublic. This essay will look at the ways gender is reworked and remade within regendered fanwork, professionally and within fandom; this regendering may take place simply by changing male characters to female ones, or more rarely female characters to male ones, or explore transgendered narratives. It also takes place across the spectrum of sexuality, and interacts with gender at a social level and in the media landscape. The regendered works, and the explicitly stated inspiration and drive behind them, reveal a literary and sociological form which it creates within the gendered structure of media but shifts it in order to reflect back something the creators see as more real, more emotionally resonant, than the original. The drive

of the creators moves beyond Jenkins' hypothesis of dissatisfaction to a kind of feminist praxis, centred on media and creativity.

Primarily functioning as a theoretical exploration of how otherness is refigured in fanworks that change the gender of one or more characters, this essay uses professional adaptations (primarily *Elementary* but also other mainstream media products such as *Ghostbusters*) alongside fanworks, and data gathered from fans in a survey and a series of interviews. Fans who participated in the data gathering came from a variety of backgrounds, with a wide range of creative practices, attitudes and thoughts about regendered fanwork. The specific fictional pieces I refer to and analyse are all available on *Archive Of Our Own* and permission was given to include those works in my research. Some authors also consented to interviews or have written extensive authorial notes on their work. By using Grounded Methodology, I was embedded within the community and identified myself on my tumblr and in person as a researcher, and participants engaged with me with that knowledge. I primarily followed Charmaz' methods for iteratively processing both analysis and collection, and creating inductive abstract categories for analysis (Charmaz 2014, 15).

This analysis revealed numerous elements for deeper research, however this paper focuses on the experience of regendering as one linked with feelings and states of 'otherness' – in communities or in media – that then function as a creative praxis. While experiences of non-conforming gendered people – transgender, genderqueer, non-binary people in particular – were evident in much of this data, as a high proportion of my respondents were outside the gender binary, much higher than either a national or even worldwide survey would predict due to using non-standard surveying techniques for respondents to communicate their gender to me, their experiences when elaborated on were often folded into the category of 'woman' or 'not male' as much as this was also a source of tension in their answers. In a symposium piece 'The Surface Of Women' for *Transformative Works and*

Cultures I explain not only what this means for fan studies methodologies (as it supports the findings of several other studies, academic and otherwise, that suggest fandom has a higher proportion of non-binary gendered and trans individuals) but also how it intersects with the conflicts between quantitative and qualitative research. In light of that work, when the word 'woman' or 'feminine' is used within this paper it is referring to that 'surface' of women – women as a class of 'not-men' rather than a biological or psychological state of being, that incorporates trans women, those assigned as female at birth, those read as female, and those whose social experience is coded by others as 'female', among others.

Crucial to this research is reflecting the rejection of the male default as an abstract category found in my analysis of my data; this is a form of feminist praxis within the creative function of fannish labour that regenders existing work that does embrace and reinscribe that male default. In particular this is relevant to the exclusion of slash, and male-male works that do not engage with regendering, and much of the research around gender and fandom that replicates this default focus on male narratives, even when using a feminist lens. Secondary to this is the focus on Western media. While this does replicate the white default of mainstream media, it is due to several issues; one being my own monolingual background, but also the highly culturally specific representations of gender that are explicable only through embodied and grounded critical examinations. Elements of race do need to be contended with, particularly in the instances of *Elementary* and *Ghostbusters* (2016) where intersections of race *and* gender are relevant to audience reception and fannish behaviour, but my position as a white Australian woman does not allow me the embeddedness required to legitimately explore fandoms from non-Western cultures such as regendered Japanese fanworks.

Reconfiguring Gender

Regendering is the creative process of adapting a work to change the gender of one or more characters. This can take place in commercial adaptations for television such as the remake of *Battlestar Galactica* where the hard-drinking, cigar-chomping Starbuck is regendered as Kara Thrace (still hard-drinking, cigar-chomping, ace pilot with the callsign 'Starbuck') or the Sherlock Holmes adaptation *Elementary* where Dr John Watson, the bastion of Victorian English masculinity, becomes Dr Joan Watson a Chinese-American surgeon. Both of these examples provoked backlash from viewers, critics, people involved with the original, and fans prior to release. A high profile example in recent film is Paul Feig's *Ghostbusters* (2016) which reimagines the male originals as women in a contemporary New York, and garnered significant opprobrium by fans of the original series and film, with Feig saying that "I didn't realize it was like religion for a generation of boys that came after me. It turned out it was the ultimate boys' movie" and that the backlash "…it threw me off for a couple of years", and that his decision to engage with those critiques was a mistake, as "…I took on one of the trolls, and they can fire at you for a year. You dare say one thing back at them, and it's all over. You're a victim and you're a monster…" (Douglas 2017).

This seeming antipathy towards regendering is not repeated in fandom however. Within that context – such as cosplay, fan art or fanfic – the amount of fanwork hours, the audience, the effort, gives it a depth and provides a broader pool of methods and means for the regendering compared to the more hierarchical work in professional environments. Examinations of the methods and materials of these works provides not only an oblique reconstruction of how gender is formed in the original works, but also how gender is reformed by the audience of fan-creators, including those fans with studio and Hollywood backing to realise their adaptational works. Their drive to 'honour' the original through their own professional lens is often akin to those of fans, it simply happens to also include large budgets and a

significant amount of social capital (VanDerWuff 2013). These works often interact with wider political concerns about representation, creative and economic opportunities, and the psychological effects of misrepresentation (Sandvoss 2005, 78–79; Busse et al. 2009, 105). Within fan environments this 'cause' is viewed with some approval, or neutrality, due to the metanarratives of transformation integral to fanwork, but Feig in particular notes that the negative reaction to the regendered *Ghostbusters* was because "… for some of our audience, they were like, 'What the fuck? We don't wanna go to a cause. We just wanna watch a fuckin' movie'" (Ferber 2017).

The illusion of fanwork creators as amateurs ignores the sheer amount of work they do – reading particularly – and the shifting barriers between fanwork creators and the professionals who use fanwork as a part of their commercial work. Many professional authors write fanfic, many fan artists are professionals in their own right, and the explosion of actual fanfics being published (with 'the serial numbers filed off' – invoking the theft analogies beloved of anti-fanwork activists) reveal the permeable nature of the borders between fanwork and the more acceptable pastiches, reboots, remakes, and adaptations. Australian author Tansy Rayner Roberts has created several projects regendering classic narratives, including the "a crowd-funded web serial" reboot of *The Three Musketeers* that I interviewed her about in 2014, which she calls "genderswapped musketeers in space". Roberts goes on to note that her position as a professional author affected the reception of this fannish work;

> Because I know in fanfic communities the commenting culture is really big, but I think actually because this is being presented as original fiction on a published author's blog, I suspect that people don't want to interrupt the flow of, like they feel awkward commenting on the fiction which isn't finished? I don't know? Normally my friends are normally more outspoken than this.

Fanworks which ask how a change in gender or race affects a narrative or character often suggest that the stories would become more interesting, not less, and that any

discomfort is due to our own internalising of stereotypes about race and gender (Scodari 2012, 337). Roberts, in her interview, found this conflict affected *how* she chose to regender the original *Three Musketeers*

> I kind of wanted to change up the canon relationships, so that if I genderswapped everybody they would also all be straight, you'd still have all these male-female relationships and I wanted to explore different relationships. I also, because at its heart the Three Musketeers is a story about four men and their professional friendship, and I actually didn't want to change it into a story of four women and their professional friendship because for a start, … because I was very interested in male-female platonic friendships. And so I deliberately kept one of the musketeers male, changed all the others to women, I kept another small canon character female, which allowed my heroine D'Artagnan to be bisexual. And because my version of Aramis is a lesbian, therefore any character Aramis slept with in the three musketeers got to stay female.

The original characters, often a site of identification or at least comfortable recognition for the audience, are displaced by the new version, although a common complaint is that this is often overlaid with what can seem like a political drive to 'correct' a narrative without paying due respect to that original.

The overstated fear of political correctness creating bland narratives, a character's depth 'lost in castration' as put by Dirk Benedict in his scathing review of the remade *Battlestar Galactica*, or much of the negative responses to the regendered characters of *Ghostbusters* (2017), is one that fandom proves to be unfounded within fanworks and the multitude of responses fanworks garner from their own counterpublic (Lackner, Lucas, and Reid 2006, 193). Fandom unfolds with almost infinite plots, characters and characterisations, and while the canonical media imbalances are often replicated, the field is broad enough that transgressive works have an adoring audience and a constantly changing pool of creators (Reid 2009, 466). Fanwork has the capacity to include a multitude of universes, versions, and contains works that consciously and unconsciously recreate the mainstream, or elements of it, even as they may transgress other political ideals.

Adapted and fanworks provide a unique insight into both creative and social practices. There has been a noted tendency in mainstream media to create adaptive

works; sequels, remakes, reboots, transmedia adaptations, and so on (Allen 2012). There are a number of imputed reasons behind this change over the past 10 to 15 years, ranging from the purely commercial (that the audience wants familiarity over everything) to creative bankruptcy (that all stories have been told/modern creators are devoid of originality) but the tendency remains and media producers are finding new ways to investigate and invigorate source material in an over-saturated environment (Sciretta 2009; Allen 2012). Genre media tends to engage fans with high levels of creative and obsessive behaviours which leads to higher levels of engagement and identification with the media itself; however the question of what creates a fandom like Trekkies, or X-Philes, is hardly a settled argument (Duffett 2014). So, while fannish engagement with the canonical materials seems to invite audiences to consume the remake it can also lead to a level of identification which actively impedes their ability to engage with the adaptation. To be the audience requires a distance, as Doane states, one that is thoroughly disrupted by closing the distance and becoming the character or becoming the (re)creator;

> Glasses worn by a woman in the cinema do not generally signify a deficiency in seeing but an active looking, or even simply the fact of seeing as opposed to being seen. The intellectual woman looks and analyses, and in usurping the gaze she poses a threat to an entire system of representation. It is as if the woman had forcefully moved to the other side of the specular. (Doane 1982, 78).

In fandom, Irigaray's curved mirror "…with its impossible reappropriation 'on the inside' of the mind, of thought, of subjectivity" or Doane's 'girl with glasses' find themselves reasserting the gaze of the assumed female (or at least, not normatively male) creator and audience, while undoing the distance between themselves and the works they consume (Irigaray 1985, 155).

In the non-commercial adaptations, or fanworks, a more creative approach can be taken where fan producers transgress that fannish identification and engagement and receive criticism for their sins (Bacon-Smith 1992, 234). Due to the romantic and sexual metanarratives of fanwork where the most popular

(relation)ships are those between male leads rather than the women they are paired with in the media, regendering characters often leaves fans and creators with two choices: heterosexualising a queer bond, or queering a heterosexual one; when discussing *Elementary*, Roberts noted that "I'm all for the slashiness but I feel like that's the more transgressive choice to make (to make the male-female relationship platonic)". These bonds may or may not be sexual in the canonical media form – in fact they are often not – but the metanarratives of fandom are heavily invested in representations of male homosexuality via slash (porluciernagas 2013). Regendering within this metanarrative context has negative associations regardless of intent – either the queering of a heterosexual bond/relationship is susceptible to the fetishisation that lurks as a palimpsest in criticisms of fanwork and slash, or the heterosexualising of it then plays into the wider media 'heterowashing' and erasure of queer identity.

There are several methods fans use to regender characters and the next section will examine several of them as methods of transgression and othering. The rare regendered female character provides an examination of masculinity within a cultural insistence that it is default and immutable. The regendering of the slash metanarrative via regendered characters manifests as femmeslash, which addresses the absence of the explicitly lesbian woman in both mainstream narratives and fanworks but also replicates the wider focus on male narratives by focusing the emotional labour of the (female) fan on those (male) narratives and performances. The presence and problem of heterosexuality and heterosexism is a common critique of regendered work but is an avenue for investigating the myriad constructions of other and varied ways of transgressing the socio-cultural boundaries of gender (Lackner, Lucas, and Reid 2006, 189; Lothian, Busse, and Reid 2007, 103). While regendering is not the most popular adaptive technique, nor the most prevalent, it is one which offers a qualitative engagement with media depictions and perceptions of women from the creator, the created and the audience.

Gender, sex and sexuality within fanworks, along with gender presentation and performance, are differently explored axes for characterization and identity. Maleness is not masculinity; equally, femininity is not an indicator of sexual identity, rather they are both a manifestation of some internal quality that the universe attempts to assign meaning to. Many regendered fanworks interrogate this axis in some way; *Elementary* engages with the race-bending of Watson through Joan – now Chinese-American and played by Lucy Liu – objecting to assumptions she 'knows martial arts', while also illustrating a familiarity with Chinese herbal medicine. In the fanwork *In Arduis Felis* by mad_maudlin, the regendered Watson says, in an aside on her own masculinity compared with the canonically lesbian Harry, her sister;

> (Harry had never been interested in the guns, or the hunting, or anything else that Jane liked, really; she was always more about makeup and dolls, never the one with the stain on her dress. No wonder people were usually surprised at which of them was the lesbian.) (Mad_Maudlin 2010). *(parentheses original)*

The effect of codified sexual preference performances of gender, in terms of Femme and Butch or the feminisation of 'bottoms' (gay men who are penetrated), has been to delineate a kind of gender performance as sexual identity – one that manifests not only in sexual behaviours but in characterisation and representation of one's self in dress, speech, and non-sexual behaviours (Halberstam 2012, 336).

The canonical characterisation may or may not correlate with the acceptable performance of sexual identity in fanworks and similarly may or may not be static in those representations; the novel-length fanfic *How The Mouth Changes Its Shape* by Having Been Breathed Out very deliberately engages with (mostly) historical tropes around Femme and Butch, and how that manifests sexually when performance does not match desire within a highly codified cultural context (breathedout 2013). The characters find themselves transgressing not only the historical gender policing social codes, but also subcultural codes of behaviour about the receptive Femme and penetrative/aggressive Butch behaviours that still

find traction in media and culture; Sanger and Lynch reveal the ways in which those cultural figurations of female masculinity and 'butchness' impact both domestic violence and sexual behaviour within lesbian relationships in South African communities, and Rossiter examines the perceived problematic nature of trans women who may 'destabilise' the lesbian community with their masculinity, particularly if they also perform Butchness (2017; 2016). The flexibility of the sexual and gender identity is a feature of fanwork, as is the flexibility of performing those behaviours associated with identity in the works (and more generally as fans, as people).

In order to capture some of this flexibility the complex connections between sex and gender performance need to be understood through the construction of the female-feminine and the male-masculine, and the female-masculine and male-feminine in fanworks. Sexual identity is similarly fluid and exists as a continuum between text and subtext in the canon to the metanarratives of homosexuality and homosociality in fandom. What is subtext in the original is made text in fandom, with homosociality particularly becoming a sexualised motif within analyses and critiques of the original, often only in terms of the presumed straight but fannishly queer man, with masculinity no longer the delineator of heterosexual male identity. The female-feminine can be read as 'Femme' or 'straight' but it is still portrayed as a collection of external identifiers of gender (cis or trans), and culturally mandated and enforced behaviours, which may or may not be an actual manifestation of preference and desire. The conscious performance of femininity as a form of protective colouration is featured in numerous fanworks as a way characters negotiate a world – canonical or fannish or real – that still punishes gender transgressions.

What Does She Look Like?

The perception of a character changes according to their presented gender – not necessarily their actual gender but the *perceived* or *presented* gender. In *Pitch Black* for example, a character passes as male for much of the movie until she is revealed as female due to her menstrual fluid, her blood, attracting aliens – the body as truth and women's bodies particularly as dangerous, for the hidden places and inexplicable wounding we carry within us (Rosewarne 2012, 85; Twohy 2000). This perception is boundarised by concepts of performance and the binarised other. Fanworks that regender one or more characters interact with these complex sites of gender performance and embodiment, and the role of the gender binary in othering. The audience perception of female characters is reliant on their media consumption practices and on their community. The female character, and the female role, is often seen as a foil to the male.

> The real problem, though, is that the people involved in the series think they are doing something good for women by castrating detective fiction's greatest sidekick. …But the first thing they're saying is that it's appropriate to have a woman in the junior role: the follower, the admirer, the helpmeet. Which is where women have been on screen for years already. (Coren 2012)

Criticisms of the regendered Watson in *Elementary* often focused on what impact her femininity would have upon the stories – that by virtue of her gender she must nag Sherlock, mother him, romance him – and thus turning them into women's stories (Coren 2012; Stagg 2012). Ignoring the high number of female Sherlock fans and the long history of female fans of the Conan Doyle canon, these perceptions are that a woman character makes a woman's story and thus unfit for 'normal' audiences unless she is appropriately dimensionalised as subservient to the masculine narrative as in the canonically female characters. Or in the case of Sherlock, the canonically feminised Watson who indeed nags and mothers Sherlock and according to some critics and readings of the subtext, romances him as well. (Neko's Muse 2012; Stout 1941).

The arguments supporting the existing over-representation of men in media as supposed sites of neutral identification or as more innately interesting, or even just due to the ability of women to identify with men with 'ease' (Doane 1982, 81), are not a reflection of a statistical over-representation in the audience or an objective understanding. Instead they correlate with an over-representation of men in positions of power (Spender 1985, 30–35). The 'other' of women is constructed from a foundation of personal fulfilment and fandom responds with its own personal agenda; homosociality becomes outright homosexuality, and male narratives are flipped, the female gaze is prioritised and catered to. This act, this feminised and female agenda that is aggressively *not male*, acts to other the presumed male audience despite it changing very little. Instead it fills in the absences and rectifies the imbalance, simply by existing. The othering comes in the specific modalities and methods used in regendered narratives and works. The next section covers the way gendered expectations interact with those textual elements of fanwork to create a version of the other within the subculture of fandom.

Boy?Version

Fans rarely regender the canonically female character. When they are regendered it can be mired in unexamined sexism or fetishisation of the queer male; it can also be a valuable reconstruction of gender. This rarity works to reinforce the way regendering others the male; that experience of male-masculinity is so rarely given the attention demanded by the female-feminine or female-masculine that it is effectively erased and becomes, not invisible, but unimportant. While it seems superficially to function as the opposite to the male character regendering, it occupies the other and the absence more fully by revealing the limitations of the original canonical female character within the narrative. The act of erasure not only replicates and makes obvious that erasure – unlike the unexamined and unconscious erasure of the wider media – it reconfigures masculinity within the erasure, the

myriad female masculinities becoming dominant. Instead of the female other being essentially unknowable in the construction of the male, masculinity and maleness become dependent on the female other and the feminine creative process[1]. Similarly the reworking of a cis – normatively gendered – narrative into a trans narrative is one that makes obvious the construction of the male-masculine default as a birth heritage within mainstream media.

The regendering of the canonical female character in either fanwork or commercial adaptations transgresses the metanarratives and polite fictions of fandom by making the absences and othering of the canon explicit and reformulating that absence to investigate the default male-masculine. This regendering can be queered as well, to create from the heterosexual narrative a gay male representation at the expense of the representation of women. This tension between the representation of women and representation of (male defaulted) queerness is only possible within the cultures of fandom; the transgressions can be cultural and subcultural, can be read from a multitude of perspectives. The tension between the progressive depictions of queer sexuality and the queer subtexts where fandom often situates itself is underwritten by regendering which forces the audience to confront the fetishizing/objectifying nature of their gaze and attention, and to consider the imbalances inherent in the prevalence of queer male narratives over the depictions of women, who may or may not be queer.

Regendering, however, does still prioritise a female experience and characterisation and creates a tension with the canonical media that does not. It still replicates a societal focus on the male character, the male narrative, but it does this through a female lens. There are fanworks which regender canonically female

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[1] Note: the gendering of fanwork as feminine and female is a simplistic one and part of a wider characterisation of fandom-as-female compared to fans-as-male – the difference between Twilight fans and Manchester fans is slight, but the creative works are explained as a manifestation of the feminine while the riots and gambling are exhibitions of masculinity (Busse et al. 2009).

characters but these remain rare and are often pointed commentary on visual representations of women where a male character is positioned and clothed to mimic a female character, and the impossible anatomical contortions and improbable attire is highlighted as in *The Hawkeye Initiative* (Stevenson 2014), or they serve to provide an avenue for queering characters and relationships. The act of regendering is often well-received in geek and feminist communities (particularly cosplay and other visual mediums) but remains something which can provoke outbursts of aggressive critique in wider forums, such as the backlash against *Ghostbusters* (2017), or those critical and fannish complaints about *Elementary*. This can be seen in the reactions that provoke spectres of Solanas-esque feminist dictatorships removing men from the media, in the way those creative reworkings are refigured as personalised acts of violence and harm against the men in the audience, or the actors themselves –

> The war against masculinity has been won... The male characters, from Adama on down, are confused, weak, and wracked with indecision…(the removal of a male Starbuck) was accomplished quicker than you can say orchiectomy (Benedict 2006).

The impact of regendering, in terms of perception and audience reaction, relies on it being read as an oddity, as unique. The transgression of the acts relies on the relative silence and invisibility of women in media, and the audience expectations of performance, behaviour and representation. However, this transgressiveness can fail, reinforcing gender role constructs, such as the recreation of sexualised violence and abuse in 'Mary Sue' narratives that simultaneously function as a 'deflection' of the author's anxieties about society and media, or the 'heteronormative monogamy' of some slash fanfic, even as it prioritises gay relationships (Frey 2009, 67–69; Hellekson and Busse 2014, 75–81). Or as a survey respondent explained "…genderswaps often reinforce binary genders and gender roles" (AT35). It is this tension that drives much of the reaction of creators to regendering, while the subversion itself still arouses ire from some sectors of the audience.

The construction of the male-masculine Other, as opposed to the male-feminine, or as opposed to the female Other, is reliant on the gendered constructs of fandom and fans, and of the media forms themselves. The occupation of the Otherness inherent in binarised gender – as described by Irigaray – is the base from which those gendered constructs are identified and critiqued (Irigaray 1991; Lackner, Lucas, and Reid 2006, 89). Then the methods by which regendered fanworks construct both maleness and masculinity from regendering can be explored, and the reconstruction of the Other within the male-masculine character and the female narrative can be examined. This intersection, between the fandom perception and representation of gender, sex, and sexuality, and the media that they use within their creative works, is explored in the next section.

Make it so

Fanworks which cast the male default as the other – prioritising the 'female gaze', examining the female experience, challenging the male default as the norm – transgress deeply held social mores. This transgression relies not only on the male dominance in media existing but on fannish reaction to that and their push back, through their fan praxis, against it. This avenue of thought has been well-examined by Henry Jenkins and other fan studies researchers however the manifestations of this transgression within the sub-forms of fannish work provide different perspectives on how this is practiced and developed within creative works. Construction of a male reader, male viewer, as the outsider while using the very media defined as 'men's domain' (such as *Sherlock*, *Marvel*, media fandom in general outside the creative enclaves of fanwork) to enact it, transgresses the assumed audience and the assumed nature of the female audience member as the Other. The distance of the audience is abruptly terminated, and the female spectator becomes not only creator, but reimagines the space she creates in order to disrupt the male gaze itself. Doane's two options, masochism of over-identification or

narcissism in becoming one's own object of desire (Doane 1982, 89), are subverted to create a masochistic, narcissistic masculinity illuminated in the creation of a female gaze that fetishizes both the men and, as Lackner and others suggest, the women writing them (Lackner, Lucas, and Reid 2006, 2000).

This re-othering can only occur because the female is already structured as the Other. The fan, presumed female, and fanwork which has been gendered as female, occupies their own otherness and writes from within it to refit the structure and make it habitable. It is from this place of power as the dominant force within fandom and as the rising dominant force within adaptive work, as the majority of the audience, that fans force maleness and masculinity to understand their own otherness. This can be seen very clearly in fan art and collectives which regender existing artistic pieces or caption them. The now defunct political humour site *the toast* maintained a series of 'conversations' between women in Western art and the viewer or within the art itself that punctures and reworks the dominant focus of the male experience to instead give voice to the female art object, unendingly harassed and objectified by the men intra and extra-diegetically; A voice that is weary, sarcastic, cutting and *knowing*. The rejection of art practice and theory to give a voice to the commonly held women's experience of male entitlement regenders only in its criticism (Ortberg 2014). Similarly, Kon-yu and van Loon's analysis of the *Art as Therapy* exhibition punctures the masculine nature of both the philosophical commentary accompanying the curated pieces but also the expectation of the presumed male audience reading those;

> But the commentaries on those selections were sometimes odd: oddly simplistic or just plain wrong. These issues niggled at us until we were faced with a set of commentaries on two adjoining works that lead to us abandoning our visit all together.
> …
> De Botton and Armstrong provide commentary on both paintings on small placards beside the information provided by the NGV. The figure of the gentleman is described as "proud" and "having a really interesting look on his face" According to the commentary, "he has a clear sense of what he is about". The passage about the portrait of Susannah, on the other hand, focuses on her vulnerable body, on

> what she might be about "underneath" her "finery".
> We found ourselves doubly-distanced by this commentary through a combination of objectification and the sense of anger that accompanies the observation of that objectification when we know the people at fault ought to know better.
> …
> In their commentary, de Botton and Armstrong draw our attention to the fact that the woman "looks a bit of a snob". We are told she is "very impressed by her own grandeur and probably in the habit of putting other people down".
> There is no mention of mortality; the skull beneath her foot is obviously a mere symbol of her priggishness.(Kon-Yu and van Loon 2014).

The rejection of the male-constructed female gaze and instead constructing their own regenders not just the object but the subject, the criticism, and the body of work entirely. An example of this is 'False Equivalence' by David Willis (2011), from the series *Shortpacked*, which takes the male constructed object of female desire identified as Batman, and refigures it to reject the male artist and the mainstream construction of 'attractive' masculinity. It not only reveals the 'false equivalence' of Batman as a female fantasy figure, but illustrates the way in which these constructed ideals register as discomfort to the objectified illusion.

The construction of masculinity with femininity but *not* women, or female-ness, is rejected and reconstructed by the explicit female gaze of fanwork (Lackner, Lucas, and Reid 2006). This is not restricted to fanwork – female creative practitioners within myriad forms and genres have been engaging in this for centuries – but it is a feature of fanwork which simultaneously accords it popularity and critical derision. From this position of popularity but powerlessness at a critical level, fandom and fanwork are aligned with other feminised art forms like romance writing, craft, domestic arts. Within the new attention economy this powerlessness is being rapidly reversed and those fields are reconfiguring their social effects (Duffett 2014). The importance of the female gaze is being co-opted into the commercial aims of mainstream creative works such as *Hannibal* and *Arrow*; which explicitly and knowingly court the female audience and their gaze at the male heroes. At a creative level the explicit female construction of the female gaze is

transgressing the constructed male dominance of their own perception of 'what women want'; instead of presenting the imagined female fantasy of 'Batman' these shows provide masculine fantasy figures that align with the 'real' female fantasies (as per 'False Equivalence') (Jenkins 2012). Instead of the masculine power fantasy, which a male default 'neutral' is imagined wanting to be, and the female 'other' imagined to desire, the female gaze oriented creations prioritise the female narratives and do not demand cross-gender identification from the still majority female counterpublic of fandom.

The construction of the 'everyman' as a neutral character is reliant on the erasure of female narratives and commonalities, and the 'habit' of 'transvestite' identification (Doane 1982, 85); a manifestation of the male neutral Gatens identifies as a result of *gender* neutralising processes (Gatens 1996, 52). The male body, the male experience, is the default and any diversion or diversity transgresses this by forcing the audience to control the absences in that characterisation. Fans engage with this in a variety of ways ranging from slash fiction to regendering to increasingly intricate shared universes such as the 'transindividualism' and complicated interplay of identities in Tumblr roleplaying (Howard 2017). Their frustrations are also aired in a variety of ways from popular fancasting gifsets to lengthy 'meta' posts critiquing media, which several survey participants linked in their responses;

> The one that comes to mind is an AU gifset that genderbent the two leads of the CW show Supernatural, suggesting the same premise but featuring two girls. I absolutely fell in love with the concept and the potential it carried (AS246).

> I've written four genderswap stories and lots of meta. Here is the DVD commentary for my longest story, which includes much ruminating on genderswap and why I wrote it (link redacted) (AS 38).

While the dissatisfactions may be dismissed as those self-same fans recreate and reinforce that gendered (non)neutrality of character by the currency of their attention, the quality of that reinforcement cannot be ignored. While regendering

and slash in particular often uncritically reproduce the focus of the wider media focus on male characters and male stories (even with 'female' narratives) they also actively disrupt the way that focus constructs maleness and masculinity. As we shall see in the next section, this disruption reaches something of a peak when lesbian representation combines with regendering.

We Can Build Her and They Will Come

The narrative techniques used by fans to construct the male-masculine other are not subtle, nor are they strictly a genderflip of the narrative techniques used in wider media to construct and reinscribe women as Other. Regendered narratives cannot rely on an almost universal body of work supporting their othering and instead they must shore it up internally in the text and within the microcosm of fannish conventions and norms that rarely regender female characters. The textual othering, like all aspects of fanwork, relies heavily on previous experience with media and literature, but also on social progressiveness and feminist theory.

Textual othering is accomplished often through point of view and characterisation and narrator voice. The familiar 'bumbling unemotional man' is revealed by close point of view, and narration, to not only be achingly and obviously ignorant but also to be either damaged or wilfully ignorant to his own self when recontextualised by a female narrator speaking to a presumed female audience; "She's not sure if Sherlock's noticed that he's attracted to her, though, because dating isn't his area, which means that in some ways he is very stupid indeed." (Douglas 2017). While this trope is common in mainstream media – Homer Simpson, Ray Romano, any number of sitcoms – it is restructured in regendered narratives to be viewed from the perspective of the bumbled upon. This flip of the narrative focus is not enough to other the man, that is, to other male-masculinity; to accomplish this, the narrative attention the universe is also restructured. The specifically female and feminine experience is foregrounded, and it is the male character whose

ignorance renders him the blank slate on which her narrative is imprinted. This can be as overt as narratives which assume a female reader, which then assume the audience will understand elements of a 'communal' female experience and overtly reference that knowledge:

> Joanna knows that Sherlock is attracted to her, because in a world where appealing to a man's sexuality can lead to marriage or to murder, every woman over the age of thirteen is a master of observation and deduction (branwyn 2011).

This example functions as a callout and callback to contemporary discussion about the sexualisation of young women and also as a rejection of masculine attention as a positive state and as an external confirmation of adulthood by linking that attention with the twin dangers of marriage and murder. These examples predate the explosion of #metoo into the public perception, but not the conversations and the activism that linked the psychological othering of women to sexual violence. The implied reader not only understands this but empathises, and the male originator of those desires is left outside the narrative scope. It can also assume a narrative absence, male characters relegated to the background, to two-dimensional caricatures. This re-authoring of the other relies on the transgressiveness of the act and relies on that existence of the male canon. In regendered fanworks based on the Sherlock Holmes mythos this re-authoring is seen in works that regender one of the canonical pair and works that regender both. The single-sided regendering allows for a direct conflict between the two characters, often around desire and safety within the existing framework of the retired army veteran and the detective. The female army veteran offers a different view of the service to the male, the female detective is observed differently to the male. These regendered characters form their canonical counterpart as the other, but also their non-regendered partner as the other; through the narration and through characterisation.

  The 'how' is where the transgressions and othering actually takes place. The mere creation of a female Sherlock Holmes with wings is the stuff from which

fandom is founded, but the particular manifestation is where fans rework the relationship with canon and with the wider media. Fans often speak of how fanwork introduced them to media they otherwise had no exposure to, or to tropes and kinks they were unaware they enjoyed, or to narrative styles they had never experienced, as both the consumer and the creator (Leng 2013, 90; Fiesler 2007, 735). From this boundary expansion fans also act politically; organised political campaigns and fundraising, but also social justice movements and discourses (Brough and Shresthova 2012). One survey participant linked to the Woman & Genderqueers First: A Podfic Exchange - WAGFAPE (AS148), and Volume 10 of *Transformative Works and Cultures* focuses specifically on the "power and potential of fan activism" (Jenkins and Shresthova 2012). The simple inclusion of women in male narratives challenges not only the accepted tropes around female characters but also provokes questions about wider narratives.

Conclusion: Works Re-othered and Re-authored

The reconstruction of male-masculinity re-authors the works and the Other; it also transgresses the now regendered relationships between the audience and the work. The works themselves exist within a theoretical matrix that genders the audience, the spectator, as receptive and passive – thus feminine – while engaging in aggressively creative practices; then within those works the expected audience is legitimised and their female gaze, their feminine experience, prioritised. While regendered narratives accept the framework of the male narrative as default and neutral as the foundation, the construction of gender from there transgresses not only the common delineations between creator and audience but also the internal metanarratives of fandom.

This instigation of action, even simply thought, transgresses the boundaries of the audience and the creator. Comments, associated fanworks, spin offs, all reimagine the space of the audience and the creator. The gendering of the audience itself as

female, as feminine, gives this transgression into action a regendered aspect as it transitions the creative praxis from the male creator to the female audience. This, obviously, is not a genuine reflection of the genders of the audience and the creators themselves but is a facet of the binary model which applies from gender outwards. The gender neutral that becomes another facet of masculine dominance is a common underlying structure within reading and media consumption via the prevalence of male characters and the assumed ability of women's 'transvestite identification' (Doane 1982, 85). This gender 'neutral' state where the male is the 'human', or 'he' being appropriate in referring to humanity, is explicitly rejected by regendered fanworks. While the majority of fanworks are complicit in that cross-gender identification between the female audience and the male narrative, regendered fanworks highlight the incongruities between the states, the disembodied notions of gender which conform to male states and elide the female body in all its variances.

The polite fictions of gender, essentialist or otherwise, are interrupted by regendered works. Gender is neither static, nor easily defined, nor inherent to a character. Instead aspects of performative gender are blended with essentialist statements and implicit understandings about behaviour, subscribing to no one single theory of gender or feminism. The comfort of the original work and the sideways comfort of the fanwork are disrupted by gender and the conflict between lived reality and the distorted mirror of mainstream media. The formation of the female experience as the default, for both reader, writers, consumer and character, refigures the male and the masculine as the other which reflects the reality of gender within the works and fandom itself. Simultaneously, outside of the parasocial fandom sphere the refocusing effects of regendered work serves to reflect the distortions of essentialist binarised male-female expectations.

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