Productive Fandom

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4. Queer Teen Drama: Rewriting and Narrative Closure in *Glee* Fan Fiction

Abstract
Fan works not only affirm television texts, but can serve to rewrite them and transform them. This chapter discusses the critical potential of fan fiction and geek feminism by closely analyzing *Glee* fan fiction. Through the concept of intermediality, the author analyzes three fan works and their relations to the original *Glee*. I show how these fan authors create innovative representations of gender and sexuality, and how this creates a vital platform where audiences interpret fiction and construct new narratives. The close reading of fan fiction relies on literary studies on narrative closure and queer structures, but also accounts for the medium-specific contexts in which this online fiction is published.

Keywords: Fan fiction, narrative closure, gender, sexuality, medium specificity

Introduction
Fan fiction refers to a generous field of self-published and derivative texts that have been largely published online. The writing and reading of fan fiction brings together creative fans and constructs a safe environment in which they can share their fantasies, explore their writing styles, and receive or provide feedback. The intermediality of the “fan fic”, or fan text, covers an array of textual relationships – an interplay of genre characteristics, media aesthetics, references, and even personal and social experiences (Hellekson & Busse, 2006; Stein & Busse, 2012). In the previous chapter, I showed that fans use different repertoires to construct their reading of a text. These interpretations also create a fertile ground for the writing of fan fiction as both a creative act and an interpretive process.

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In this chapter, I offer an intermedial reading of three fan fictions of the popular drama series *Glee* (2009-2015). This television series follows the events of several teenagers in the conservative state of Ohio who participate in a show choir, or “glee club”. *Glee* has the highest number of fan stories based on any television series on the popular archive Fanfiction.net (January 2013), and the generic intermediality of the source text creates ample analytical potential. Through the example of *Glee*, I explore the mediation from the television text to creative writing. This mediation takes place on several narrative levels, the most notable being focalization, genre, and narrative time. I understand this process as a sliding scale between textual fidelity and transformation, as the fan narrative transfers the themes and aesthetics of the source text but narrates new insights, combinations, and ideas. Moreover, the motivation to rewrite the story is read as a desire for narrative closure by the audience that is the result of the unfinished, episodic television text.

Because the industry and consumers increasingly share spaces and dialogue, the need arises to understand fan fiction as an interpretive rather than a resistive process. The fan author intensely studies the existing material, plays with the characters and story lines, and creates an outlet for the affect generated by the source text. Fan fiction can function as a tool to resolve textual problems or inconsistencies in the episodically written television series that are produced by different authors and creative teams. Moreover, fan writing explores the dramatic relationships among characters in new combinations, settings, or events. It signifies a wish to reach a deeper understanding of the media content and its protagonists and to extend the story (Pugh, 2005). This engagement with existing material is complex and relies on both an understanding of the textual facts – described by fans as the “canon” – and originality. Fandom often requires a mixture of closeness and distance, both in its social norms and in its maintenance of affective relationships (phrased as intimacy by Kelly, 2004, p. 10). As an affective act, fan fiction can be understood as the desire to deepen the source text and personalize its characters and events; at the same time, the writing signifies distance from the material as the fan author intensely studies the characters and rationalizes their actions.

This play between textual fidelity and infidelity has been considered more deeply in recent fan studies. Inspired by a post on Obsession_inc (2009), fans and scholars observe a difference between the fan practices that mimic the media text and those that do not (Busse, 2013; Pearson, 2012). The first strategy is considered to be “affirmational” (Booth, 2015a, pp. 12-13) because the fans closely follow the source text and the industrial discourses through which it emerges. The second “transformational” strategy pertains to
textual appropriation through extension and alteration of textual meaning (id.). Affirmational practices include the reviewing of the text, collecting merchandise, and autograph hunting. Transformational practices range from producing fan videos and writing fan fiction to activism (Fanlore, 2012). Fans themselves have suggested that the divide between affirmation and transformation is a matter not only of industry-driven and autonomous fan practices, but also of gender (Obsession_Inc, 2009). Male authorities such as reviewers are thus contrasted with creative female fans.

I do not believe that this gendered division must be readily accepted because particular transformative practices, such as video editing and remixing, draw many male fans; however, certain gendered patterns did emerge within this case study of television fandom. Glee fan fiction draws a considerable female authorship, which came to the fore in online profiles. The gendered identity of the fan authors has two implications for my research. First, the identity of the female authors suggests a culture of female authorship that has been noted by many fan scholars (Lothian, Busse, & Reid, 2007). Fiction creates a zone in which fantasies about media characters can be shared but with ample distance due to its online mediation.

Second, such rewriting practices are a hallmark of feminist authorship. Historically, writing and creating derivative works gave women a chance to establish alternative gender and sexuality portrayals, among other motives. Fan fiction can be understood as a contemporary equivalent of this feminist tradition in which women use derivative writing to create an art and voice of their own (Lanser, 1992). In Transforming Memories (2011), Liedeke Plate explores the understudied relationship between women’s rewriting and the commoditization of the past. Plate argues that feminist rewriting is a “central technology for memory” (p. 5) through which the past is reconsidered from marginalized viewpoints. However, she goes beyond these mechanisms and explores how rewriting has informed the commercial literary market. She argues that rewriting transforms the past into a “prime commodity, sold on the cultural market for consumption and profit” (Plate, 2011, p. 34).

Derivative writing is deeply entwined with commercial markets to the point that franchises such as Disney have profited from this model by reproducing heteronormative and patriarchal structures. The commercialization of rewriting tests the longstanding idea in gender studies that appropriation necessarily implies subversion. Likewise, this history presses us to think through the vocabulary of fan studies that emphasizes the transformative dimension of rewriting. Although fan communities do not often profit from rewriting narratives, they form a complex domain that is partly shared with and inspired by the industry. Fans may reproduce
tendencies from the industry, such as a bias towards male characters, in their transformative works.

This chapter provokes thoughts on the gendered identity of the fan author and media characters themselves. I am inspired by Alexander Doty (2000), who has suggested that queerness can be an analytical tool. “Queer” is thus not limited to a concept that captures nonnormative gender and sexual identities, but it is also a lens for textual interpretation. While queerness can clearly be part of a text that portrays gay identities, it can also be a way of signifying particular visual and textual clues. These elements function as a “gap or rip in the fabric of dominant textual homogeneity” (Doty, 2000, p. 81). Queerness can form a reading practice that provides additional meaning to the text. Within fandom, however, queerness also has a social meaning. Earlier research has qualified the cultural domain of fan fiction as a “queer space” that allows women to mediate intimacy through stories and discuss sexuality and gender together (Lothian et al., 2007, p. 105).

My analysis, however, is primarily grounded in capturing the mediation processes of fan fiction. The intermediality of the fan work is not a simple translation of the source text – it is a much more fundamental adaptation. Rewriting not only inspires shifts in focalization and genre, but also critically examines norms and motifs from the source text. From a literary perspective, these strategies and their diversity need to be understood. Thus, the intermedial close readings focus on the narrative strategies that young women use to reread, interpret, and creatively transform popular culture.

Glee

With over 80,000 fan fictions, Glee is the most popular television series on Fanfiction.net (15 October 2012). Glee is a high-school “dramedy” – a mixture of comedy and drama – that tells of the local show choir New Directions at William McKinley High School. The teenagers that join this musical group enjoy singing and dancing, which quickly marks them as the geeks of the school. The students are degraded by their classmates and the arrogant cheerleading coach Sue Sylvester. The series focuses on the students’ social problems as well as those of the staff, while the glee club practices and builds its way to the regional and sectional competitions. One of the prominent features of the series is that, in each episode, the glee club covers a set of songs based around a theme, ranging from musicals, rock tributes, and 1980s pop to hit songs by Lady Gaga.
Like the previous case study, on *Sherlock*, *Glee* demonstrates generic intermediality through various levels of inter-/transmediality. *Glee* echoes an awareness of previous television texts and creates ample intermedial connections with them. *Glee* is an appealing series for a fan author to work with. Every character has a unique voice that suits his or her personality and has been written in an ironic manner with fast-paced dialogue. The show builds on previous comical drama series, such as *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007), which were also characterized by their fast-paced dialogue and pop culture references. The irony and quasi-stereotypical characterization of *Glee* stands out but is not exceptional today. Michaela Meyer (2012) argues that millennial television texts display “a turn toward irony, parody, and satire as preferred modes of television discourse” (p. 265). *Glee* mixes these styles of referencing with serious, dramatic moments.

*Glee* also demonstrates the importance of television authorship, in that it forms part of the recognizable oeuvre of Ryan Murphy, *Glee*’s creator. Murphy previously produced the high school series *Popular* (1999-2001) and the medical drama *Nip/Tuck* (2003-2010). Murphy’s recent comedy, *The New Normal* (2012-2013), stars a gay couple and the surrogate mother of their baby. The homosexual Bryan is clearly based on Murphy himself, and his role as a television producer of the show *Sing* creates ample opportunities to parody *Glee* and its success. Although *Glee* seems very upbeat at first sight, it manages to address serious issues, such as discrimination against gay youth in American high schools. The series takes an important, leading stance in the representation of sexual diversity as one of the few shows that incorporates gay characters in prime time TV.

Furthermore, *Glee* brands its content on different media platforms through advanced transmedia design and promotion strategies. *Glee* has several official novelizations and invests in its franchise, which now includes a line of merchandise ranging from lunch boxes to calendars. The creators produced a reality show, *The Glee Project* (2011-2012), which airs annually on the cable channel Oxygen, to find the new *Glee* cast members. The producers circulate the show through online content such as Facebook or the official Fox site. As Alex Leavitt (2012) writes:

To retain fan interest after season one ended, FOX partnered with CoincidentTV to create the “Glee Superfan Player”. The online platform integrates social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter with other fan-enticing elements – such as links to buy music on iTunes and to create “photobooth” pictures with the cast – in a unified space that plays episodes while viewers multitask (para 3).
This online software targets the show’s fans and mediates the television content itself. However, many additional products from *Glee* focus on participation through song and dance and present *Glee* as a show that solidifies American musical culture. As Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2012) state, “[*Glee*] represented an alternative transmedia approach, one more focused on extending performance rather than storytelling across platforms and supporting different forms of audience participation” (p. 146). Fans can enjoy the transmedia performance of *Glee* even if they do not know the series. Several karaoke games, such as *Glee: Karaoke Revolution* (Nintendo Wii) and *Singstar Live! Glee* (Playstation 3), allow both fans and non-fans to cover popular songs as featured in *Glee*. The *Glee* cast also gave live concerts all over the world, concluding with the production of a movie, *Glee: The 3D Concert* (2011). The songs of *Glee* are published in albums and online stores. They have peaked on hit lists across the globe and increased the popularity of certain pop songs, such as *Teenage Dream* by Kate Perry. The episode *Power of Madonna* (2010) was also – despite expensive licenses – lucrative for the famous pop star as well as for *Glee*’s production team (2010).

By covering famous songs, *Glee* manages to appeal to a broad audience. Some viewers may be drawn to the show because they already like Madonna; other viewers may come to appreciate her anew through *Glee*’s covers. *Glee* is characteristic in its mixture of narrative and dramatic modes. The show combines the genres of comedy and drama but also frequently incorporates lyrical modes. Within the songs themselves, *Glee* often creates intermedial depth, as its oeuvre is not just limited to covers but also pays tribute to artists in “mash-ups”, in which two songs are combined. This genre has become popular online with users who specialize in remixing. The fact that *Glee* transforms existing content in a similar fashion as fans themselves is certainly part of its appeal.

The intermedial role of music within the television drama deserves further attention as the lyrics, musical form, and popular context shape the narrative. To account for the diverse ways in which the lyrical can be incorporated in the literary text, Krogh Hansen (2010) outlines a threefold categorization. This categorization is a helpful tool to frame musical interludes and to understand both *Glee* and its fan texts. First, Krogh describes “assimilating”, in which lyrics and score contribute to the narrative themes. His example is a scene from the film *Royal Wedding* (1951) in which Tom sings about his love interest in his armchair. The musical moment is assimilated in the text and perceived to be natural as an emotional outlet.

Second, “differentiating” strategies are common to musicals, which introduce song and dance in a separate diegetic space that symbolizes
events or examines character’s traits or interiority. For instance, Chicago’s (2002) *We Both Reached for the Gun* sketches narrative events as a sung puppet play. Finally, “conceptualizing” strategies flourish in the genre. Such strategies introduce the musical as real, often by focusing on settings or characters for whom singing and dancing are appropriate actions. This form is most common in “backstage musicals” – narratives about show and theater life (e.g., *Fame, The Producers*). As a backstage musical, *Glee* is set in practice halls and covers the teenagers’ journey to regional or national competitions. In these three strategies, the lyrical mode deepens the narrative and propels it forward.

The three categories all occur in *Glee*. Lyrical and literal modes often reinforce each other in the show through clever montages or dream sequences that reveal the teenagers’ anxieties. For instance, the songs are often speckled with narrative cuts that show how the teens or other characters come to terms with the show’s dramatic events. For instance, in the episode *Choke* (2012), we see the New Directions’ girls singing *Shake It Out* for Coach Shanon Beiste, hoping that she finds the strength to divorce her abusive husband. During the song, the audience is served with flash forwards of Shanon returning home, subjecting herself to this domestic abuse once again.

On another level, intermediality is also used as a conscious tool to hail viewers. The connections between the fans and industry in particular are expressed within the text and its periphery. For instance, *Glee*’s producers have integrated the lingua franca of fans. Even in the first season, the writing incorporated fannish vocabulary by referring to the fan term *Puckleberry*, used by those who support Puck and Rachel Berry as a couple (*Bad Reputation*, 2010). In a similar vein, the noun “gleeks” (a portmanteau of *Glee* and geek) that *Glee* fans used to describe themselves was adopted by the industry in promotional tours and featured on DVD boxes. However, the mainstreaming of the term gleek may also make it less special to the fans who associated with it. This colonization of fan language deeply connects the performance of the fan to that of the industry, suggesting that fannish identity formation can be motivated from the top-down.

Finally, the television show is intermedial in its integration of new media, which play a central role in the narrative. The “glee kids” clearly belong to a generation that uses new media thoroughly. In the pilot, we see how Rachel Berry – the most competitive kid in the glee club – worries mostly about the views on her MySpace profile, which she compulsively updates daily with new songs. She hopes to achieve star status on the platform while she barely has any profile views. In fact, the only users we see navigating to her profile are the very cheerleaders who despise her. In later seasons, YouTube video blogs, Skype
conversations, and Facebook pages are regularly addressed and integrated into the show. Thus, *Glee* offers a complex and clever transmedia design that is also augmented in the show’s content, which incorporates fandom and media use.

**Narrative Closure**

The fan fiction of *Glee* relies on narrative closure, a concept that is central to my understanding of these three fan texts and their appeal to the fan reader. Noël Carroll defines narrative closure as “the phenomenological feeling of finality that is generated when all the questions saliently posed by the narrative are answered” (Carroll, 2007, p. 1). As the phrase “phenomenological feeling” implies, closure is affective. It is defined by the audience’s investment, the expectations of the narrative, and the intensity with which these desires are met at the ending. Closure means that all of the macro-questions that are posed in the narrative are answered. Will the character get the love of her life? Will she succeed in her dream job? Smaller micro-questions – What happened to the character’s uncle? – may not be answered because they are less relevant for the solution of the plot.

Carroll (2007) suggests that narrative closure can affect the interpretation and resolution of a text in three ways. First, it can supply a satisfactory ending to the story that answers all of the macro-questions posed in the narrative with causal coherence. Second, closure can partly fail when it does not answer all of the questions that are raised. Side characters or plotlines may not be finished in the text and ultimately leave the audience at a loss. Third, some endings refuse closure and purposely do not result in a satisfactory ending. Episodic formulas such as soap operas are one example of this; another example is the art movies of the 1960s that deconstruct recognizable narrative structures and thereby fail to meet the audience members’ expectations (Carroll, 2007, pp. 2-3).

In the last case, however, the absence of closure – or purposeful non-closure – does not immediately result in dissatisfaction on the part of the audience. Poetry, for instance, creates an open structure, and, as such, readers prepare themselves for closure. As Barbara Hernstein Smith writes about poetry, “Closure allows the reader to be satisfied by the failure of continuation or, put in another way, it creates in the reader the expectation of nothing” (2007, p. 34). Unlike the author of a television text or novel, the poet ends at a point of stability, and not at a point where the events are finished and the expectations are met (Hernstein Smith, 2007, p. 35). After that, we may again reread the work in total and marvel at its design. The sense of completeness in poetry stems from its significant design and thematic whole.
As in painting, finality is met when the artwork is completed and the final stroke is made, not when all events are told (Hernstein Smith, 2007, p. 36).

Although Carroll defines closure as a characteristic of narratives, I argue that the wish for closure also comes from audiences themselves. Even if a narrative formally reaches closure, it may be unsatisfactory for those audience members who want to learn more about the future of the characters. At other times, the audience may not agree with the closure and envision alternatives to the romance at hand or a particular character’s death. In *Harry Potter* fandom, for instance, many fans were uncomfortable with the epilogue of *The Deathly Hallows* (2007), and the subsequent play *The Cursed Child* (Rowling, Thorne, & Tiffany, 2016), which details how the character’s family lives several years after Voldemort’s demise. Fans created new categories in their fan fiction that do not follow this timeline. Fan fiction reveals the need for closure, but always on the fan’s own terms.

The need for closure in *Glee* persists for two reasons. First, *Glee* is an episodic television text, which was ongoing at the moment that this fiction was published. The show is an open text that lacks closure, similar to Carroll’s discussion of other episodic television texts, such as soaps. Possible satisfactory endings in *Glee* depend on the closure of its story arcs that center around the glee competitions on a regional and national level. Second, the desire for narrative closure is also framed by the high school setting. Audiences of this teen fiction invest in seeing the characters develop and succeed and fantasize about the characters’ adult lives. *Glee* fan fiction shows a need for an ending that is not yet written in the television text and is expressed through fan fiction.

Closure is not only manifested as the desire for an ending but also as a hope that characters find happiness and comfort. The three stories that I examined aim to secure a stable gay identity for the main character Kurt. In particular, the fan texts respond to the failed closure that Carroll (2007) outlined; they grant closure to events that were unresolved in the source text. The fan texts respond to the relationship between the closeted homosexual Dave Karofsky and the openly gay Kurt. Dave harasses Kurt until he leaves McKinley High to attend the all-male school Dalton Academy. There, Kurt joins the glee choir The Warblers, who are rivals to his old glee choir, The New Directions. Dave seldom reoccurs in the show after these events. For many episodes, fans may have wondered what happened to Dave after the arc ended. Does he feel remorse for bullying Kurt? Does he desire him? Occasionally Dave reoccurs in *Glee* as a background character. Dave’s election as prom king returns to the coming-out plotline when Kurt is elected as his prom queen (*Prom Queen*, 2011). Kurt bravely accepts the award and later tells Dave to come out of the closet. Dave replies, “I can’t”, and walks away in tears.
Dave’s story line is resolved in the third season, when he is outed by someone at school and is bullied. Dave tries to commit suicide, but he survives. Kurt visits him in the hospital, where Dave explains to him that he is happy to be alive. Dave reveals some of his problems since his coming out: his mother thinks that he has a disease, and his best friend has refused to talk to him. Kurt talks him through these issues by envisioning the future and explaining to him that it gets better. He paints him as a successful sports agent with a husband and a son. Dave is visibly happy and relieved. The two hold hands and smile. This shocking suicide attempt was met with mixed responses by the fan community; however, at the time the fan texts were written, Glee seemed to have dropped the arc altogether.

Literary Analysis and Method

While the objects of these close readings are the fan texts themselves, I also pay attention to the online culture around them, which is characterized by the possible interactions between the author and her readers. In this case, the readers are commonly other fans who may provide reviews of, or feedback on, the fan work. I investigate the different repertoires that the Glee fan authors mobilize and the intermediality of their stories. I look closely at the mediation of the source text and related popular texts as well as cultural texts, paying specific attention to gender. Moreover, I am interested in the medium specificity of these online fictions and explore the social context in which these stories emerge. The responses of readers and the architecture of the media platforms themselves have been taken into account in the analyses.

Fan fiction is thus understood as a medium in its own right. Fan authors often pay ample attention to the study of character and its performance according to the media text – the question of whether the protagonist is “in character”. The experientiality that was key to analysis of Sherlock fandom in chapter 1 is also relevant here. Characters and stories are interpreted as consistent, and endowed with emotional realism in fandom. Television scholars such as Robert Pearson (2007) and Paul Booth (2012) have suggested that the study of character in popular culture should be relational. While analyzing character features and development has its own merits, this cannot be done without a focus on the social environment that characters belong to and that shapes them. In Glee, that environment is contemporary high school and family life, which allows for many struggles of belonging, especially in American high schools, which are structured along clubs and hobbies. Television narratives progress through the dynamics between characters rather than
the actions that individuals undertake in the text. These popular narratives rely on showing rather than telling; that is to say, interaction establishes the personality of characters and demonstrates their interiority.

_Glee_ fandom poses several challenges for an Internet researcher. First, writing fan fiction is a flourishing culture in this fandom, which provides the scholar with over 100,000 stories on multiple platforms. These texts vary intensely in terms of quality and length because they are often uploaded and written per chapter. Moreover, many of the writers appear to be young women who are still learning the ropes of creative writing; as a result, the texts may be slightly incoherent at points. The online texts are added to for years or may be abandoned altogether, which also makes it difficult to demarcate finished from unfinished works. Undertaking an analysis of these stories is a challenge for the literary critic.

Second, fan fiction is published on different media platforms, each with its own social features (e.g., comments, favorites) and norms, which bring pros and cons to the research design. Fan authors also have the habit of “crossposting” their works on several platforms, while attentive readers may also occasionally redistribute fragments of a work. I chose my initial corpus based on the recommendations of different sites and by asking fan authors themselves what they considered to be outstanding works. The recommendation list of TV Tropes (2012) was crucial to acquaint myself with exemplary _Glee_ fiction, to navigate through the private and public blogs and to get a feeling for the diversity of the material. Users of TV Tropes can recommend best practices of fan writing and list these on the site. While some stories were recommended to me by fans in informal conversations, it turned out that the sampled fiction was mentioned at TV Tropes, which again convinced me of its quality.

During the process of sampling, I also read the top 10 favorite _Glee_ stories on Fanfiction.net (20 September 2012), but I noticed that many of the stories were popular because they were long and updated frequently. As a result, fans list these stories as favorites or follow the authors so that they receive an alert when a new chapter is uploaded. This downplayed the importance of the short stories that many fan authors write and that are also prevalent at LiveJournal. The top 10 was telling in terms of the genres of _Glee_ fan fiction: it featured only slash fan fiction and no heterosexual romance. There were 5 Kurt/Blaine stories, 3 Rachel/Quinn stories, and 2 Brittany/Santana stories. My use of different media platforms amounted to a strategic sample.

While my initial sample was grounded in several media platforms, I finally decided to demarcate my field to LiveJournal to create coherence among the sample. In contrast to other platforms, LiveJournal has few features that show how popular particular fan stories are. This makes it
more challenging for a scholar to select fiction, but the upside is that its fans document fiction extensively and operate through many recommendation sites. LiveJournal was very suitable for analysis of user comments, not only because of its interface, but also because of its feminist reception culture. As Jenkins, Green, and Ford (2012) state,

> In particular, female fans were early adopters of social network technologies such as LiveJournal and Dreamwidth, using the resources offered by new media technologies (podcasting, mp3’s, video-sharing sites) to create their own distinct forms of participatory culture (pp. 29-30).

Moreover, the bloggers are known for their “metafandom”: their reflections on fandom itself as a cultural phenomenon.

The three *Glee* texts were thus selected based on their appraisal within the fan community. For instance, the three stories rank highly within the renowned TV Tropes list of favorite *Glee* fan fiction. I consider the three texts to be diverse examples of fan fiction that highlight the literary qualities of this online writing. To assure internal coherence, I chose three fan texts that can be signified as “AU” or alternative universe: a genre that deliberately changes the setting of the source text or transforms the way in which its events unfolded. In addition, I chose fan fiction that explores the popular character Kurt. This tight focus aimed to make the study accessible to readers who are not familiar with *Glee*.

The stories include gay content or “slash”. The cultural backdrop of slash requires further explanation in this chapter. Commonly, slash involves the queering of characters who are emotionally confronted with homosexual feelings (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; Penley, 1991; Pugh, 2005). Slash emerged as an exploration of homosocial and latent homosexual texts in television and movies. The portrayal of homosexuality through subtle visual and narrative cues has also been noticed by mainstream critics outside fandom (Doty, 2000; Dyer, 1990). In 1975, Laura Mulvey even theorized the increase of homosocial bonding as an effect of the male “gaze”, which codes the woman as a passive character – a character only there to be looked and with lack of depth (Mulvey, 1999). She argues that homosocial buddy movies emerged in the seventies to resolve the problems of the female character and its resulting heterosexual relationship that hampers the narrative. However, in contemporary television texts such as *Glee*, gay content has migrated from subtext to a main motif.

As Jenkins (1992) notes, a typical slash story is set up according to the following steps: an initial relationship in which the characters are not together
but are interested in one another; a dystopic stage in which they cannot address their emotions; a confession of love to one another; and finally a utopia where they are together (pp. 206-219). The slash plot exaggerates the template of the genre of romance, in which the female character first dislikes a male character, goes through an unsettling time with him, and then experiences a change of heart. She learns to understand the hero, and, eventually, the relationship becomes intimate (Radway, 1987). In media fandom, slash flourishes as a popular romance genre. While slash connotes erotic intimacy between men, the term “femmeslash” (also spelled “femslash”) is used to refer more specifically to fiction depicting sexual relations between women.

Slash and femmeslash both provide complicated representations of gender and focus on different types of sexualities, including asexuality and homosexuality. Although the three stories reflect on slash, romance is not the main purpose of their narrative structures. They rely on diverse genres, repertoires, and character interpretations. This echoes the idea of Mafalda Stasi (2006) that modern slash is best read as a “palimpsest”: a deeply intermedial product that is not just informed by the source text but also by other media texts and contexts. My analysis focuses both on the narrative qualities of the texts and on their medium specificity as online fiction by considering reader comments and developments in the writing process. However, the primary focus is on the writing itself and how it transforms Glee.

**Pick Up Right Where We Left**

Lookninjas’s has represented the events from Glee in, among others, her short story *Pick Up Right Where We Left* (2011). She offers a different perspective on an important event from Glee’s second season, when Kurt is increasingly bullied by Dave Karofsky, a young gay man afraid to come out. This fan fic is set at Dalton Academy, a setting that has inspired many fan texts to consider Kurt’s experiences there and his encounter with Blaine. The series only shows us the tip of the iceberg of this all-male setting, thus leaving blanks that many fans fill in. While many of the fan texts focalize either Kurt or Blaine and focus primarily on their relationship at the school, others have explored alternative viewpoints of Karofsky or other Dalton attendees, such as Sebastian and Wes. One outstanding example of solace and closure of the Karofsky line is *Time and Again* (2011) by Fyrewyre. She focalizes Karofsky through two different voices, painting two timelines that could also be read as two interpretations of one event. Both voices are mixed in the text, with one styled in plain text and the other between brackets. In the two stories,
Karofsky faces similar events but handles them in a different way until, in one story line, he marries Kurt, and, in the other, he commits suicide.

Dalton Academy also provides fertile ground for much fiction. Some fan authors experimented with other romantic relationships, such as Readfah-Cwen, whose *I’ll Have to Say I Love You in a Song* (2011) offers a sensual portrayal of the minor characters Logan and Blaine. This multimedial story offers hyperlinked YouTube videos to frame the songs that the boys sing to each other directly. Their relationship develops through these lyrics and their introspective reflections on them. A novel-length example that explores the Dalton setting is A-Glass-Parade’s *Miss Holliday goes to Dalton* (2011), in which the author transfers *Glee*’s substitute teacher Holly Holliday from McKinley to the boarding school. The all-male setting of Dalton is enriched through Holly’s perspective because it allows us to imagine the classes and the teachers. Her playful feminine voice stands in contrast with those of the boys who attend her classes.

The selected story by Lookninjas was written during the second season and can be read as a response to the *Glee* episode *Furt* (2011), in which Kurt is harassed and finally leaves school. The author explores Dave’s intimidation of Kurt, the confusion of his gay desire, and the motivation for his actions. In Lookninjas’s story *Pick Up*, Dave goes to Kurt’s new school with ambiguous motives. It seems that he wants to try to apologize to him, after Finn has given him word that Kurt is at Dalton Academy. Dave reflects on his bullying of Kurt and how far these actions escalated because no one was there to stop him. The authority figures in his life – both his father and his teachers – did not understand the troubles that he was going through. At Dalton, Dave tries to communicate with Kurt and apologizes, but Kurt does not accept his apology. Instead, he gives Dave the wedding topper that Dave had previously stolen in the episode *Furt*, whereupon the frustrated Dave breaks the ornament. Kurt’s classmates tell Karofsky to leave.

**Queer Bully**

Lookninjas deepens *Glee* by narrating its side characters and filling its blanks. Rather than starting with the content of the story, I would like to begin with its title *Pick Up Right Where We Left*, a reference that already provides an intermedial lens through which the reader could examine the text. The author explains that the title is an allusion to Amanda Palmer’s song *Guitar Hero*. Palmer’s song, which tells of the game *Guitar Hero*, communicates depression and anger. It narrates the loneliness of the addressed gamer, portraying him as
a false hero who sits at home gloomily, and as the lyrics underline, “making out to faces of death”. The “faces of death” are those of the virtual audience in Guitar Hero, which applauds or boos after every song and solidify this loneliness. The lyrics suggest that the game provides a deep, immersive context that is at once shallow. The negative emotions that the game play evokes are seen as unnecessary and possibly a waste of energy. The bridge builds up to “I could save you baby but it isn’t worth my time”, thus abandoning the addressee.

Connected to the fan text, the song already discusses the repercussions of Dave’s actions and his inability to come to terms with himself. However, “pick up right where we left” also carries much meaning when read as a statement by itself: a deeply meaningful desire to continue an event. The text is premised on issues that the source text abandoned and gives a voice to a minor character. I detail both fan texts and how they, as women’s fiction, remediate the dominant perspective of Glee by voicing minor characters. Pick Up focalizes Dave through an angry inner monologue that reflects his confusion and anger. He is portrayed as a passive character who blames others for his own actions:

Sooner or later, someone’s gonna stop him. It hasn’t happened yet, although he’s been waiting for it for a long time. Waiting for a teacher to step in before he can slam the next kid into the lockers; waiting for Coach Beiste to throw him off the football team for starting shit with Hudson or Puckerman or that wheelchair kid, whatever his name is; waiting for his dad to do something more than shake his head and sigh when he comes home with another shitty report card. Coach Sylvester tried for like a second, but she gave up quick as soon as Hummel transferred to his fancy new school, and Schuester’s so fucking useless he actually told him to channel his energy into glee club, like he’s just pushing kids around because there’s nothing better to do (Pick Up Right Where We Left, 2011).

The beginning of the fan text suggests that Dave has low self-esteem and that his negative acts are signals to the outside world. His bullying is a statement to his classmates and the tough coach Sue Sylvester. The responsible adults whom he addresses – all of them teachers, all of them in a position of power – overlook him because they do not read his behavior as it is meant, a self-destructive signal. The reader knows that Dave hopes to be stopped, as the first sentence already emphasizes: “Sooner or later, someone’s gonna stop him.” The narration afterwards highlights that he is waiting to be stopped and that he is well aware of his wrongdoings. Nonetheless, he persists because there are no repercussions to his actions. Dave, however, successfully manages to infiltrate the school and confront Kurt.
Dave’s anger and passivity also color the following passage about Finn Hudson, a character he once admitted, but not since Finn joined the glee club. Dave effeminates Finn in his narration:

And Hudson, for all he acts like he’s King Shit these days, is so pathetic that it makes Karofsky’s skin just crawl looking at him sometimes – he damn near cried when Azimio and Karofsky tore his letterman’s jacket in two, and then he actually offered to take Karofsky straight to Hummel so they could hug and apologize and then sing songs or some shit, which is just fucking retarded. Because Karofsky’s not going to apologize to Hummel, and even if he tried, he’s not stupid enough to think for a second that Hummel would actually accept it (id.).

The confused and violent mood of the fan texts effectively voices the frustration of its main character. The fan text thus explores the reasoning behind Dave’s bullying and the self-loathing that is implied in Glee. The focalization of Karofsky exemplifies what Genette describes as “internal focalization”, a character-bound way of telling that is close to the character’s thoughts and feelings (1980). Still, the narration is also distant in its tone because the narration reflects a fragmented, confused self. The narrative also refers to him as “Karofsky” rather than Dave. The choice for his last name in part results from the source text, in which the glee kids often refer to Dave as “Karofsky”, thus distancing themselves from him. It also closely resembles the language of Glee, in which the athletes or “jocks” – the group to which Dave belongs – often address each other by their last names.

However, this mediation alone does not answer the question why a fan text that so closely follows Karofsky’s thoughts would refer to him with his last name. I propose that, within the context of the fan text, this name carries significant meaning because it both highlights the character’s distance from himself and operates as a stylistic device that reinforces the idea that the protagonist’s self-image is dependent on others. By incorporating “Karofsky” rather than Dave in the author’s voice, Dave is again staged as a persona, as the mask that he wears rather than the individual that he could become. This underlines that Dave is more emotional than we see in Glee; he is someone who cannot be himself. The distance in this focalization thus reflects his performance of selfhood.

Similarly, the inadequate style of the narrative draws out Dave’s ineptitude through chaotic sentences, curse words, and casual indicators (e.g., “yeah”, “whatever”). The narrative tone supports his rudeness and anger but also his pretense and flaws. Despite this limited perspective, Dave’s focalization
is clever on several occasions because he demonstrates unpopular but true insights about the glee club. His perspective allows the fan author to go into interpretive actions and character studies that would otherwise be more difficult. It reveals the fraught sentiment in *Glee* and the naivety of its main characters, such as Finn, who gives Kurt’s address to Dave so Dave can apologize to the boy. As one of the fans cleverly replies,

> It’s kind of insane how much you were able to tell us about the entire *Glee* canon through five slimy minutes in Karofsky’s head. And you’ve done something I wish the show could do, which is make Karofsky human, and smart in his own way, and even worth thinking about, without making me feel guilty for not wanting to forgive him (id.).

Kurt can be read as a positive mirror image of Dave, a more comfortable young queer on whom Karofsky projects his self-loathing as well as the part of himself that he cannot accept. An additional dimension is created by the idea that Kurt is the only one who can stop Dave’s aggression and possibly redeem him. Dave looks up to Kurt as a strong and proud person, and that is exactly why he thinks that Kurt will not accept an apology.

Because Karofsky’s not going to apologize to Hummel, and even if he tried, he’s not stupid enough to think for a second that Hummel would actually accept it. Because yeah, Hummel’s a fairy, and he dresses weird and acts like a girl like 99% of the time, but Hummel’s also been the only person to ever stand up to Karofsky with any kind of consistency (id.).

These lines suggest that Dave presumes that Kurt would not want an apology, but would instead want Dave to own up to what he did. Dave reads Kurt with an insight similar to that of the fan reader. However, though Dave knows that Kurt will not forgive him, he hands him the wedding cake topper that he stole in the episode *Furt*. Thereby, the fan author continues the events that the television text suspended and reminds us of the wedding cake topper that symbolized the marriage of Kurt’s father with the mother of the main character, Finn. In line with Karofsky’s reasoning, however, Kurt does not forgive Dave in the fan text. It is clear that Dave can neither take control of his life nor feel responsible for his own actions.

The fans who read the text appreciate the depiction of Dave and that his actions towards Kurt are not interpreted as romantic but rather as a type of queer projection. Whereas Kurt is successful and comfortable with his homosexuality, Dave cannot acknowledge his desire and lashes out at
Kurt as a result. Within *Glee* fandom, Dave's actions have led to different interpretations of the source text and even conflicts. Some fans romantically invest in the relationship between Kurt and Dave and develop this within their own slash fiction. They seek to explore Dave's desire and resolve the source text by forgiveness and intimacy between the two characters. Other fans purposely do not want to do this and even naturalize any romantic motives as an incorrect motif that is not in line with the characters and Dave's psychological state. Some draw a line under Dave's characterization, which radically changed through his acts of sexual intimidation (or desire) such as those portrayed in *Never Been Kissed*. As one reader states, “I get so frustrated when I see people casting Karofsky as obsessively in love with Kurt or admiring of his courage because that reads so false to me (if we are to take his treatment of Kurt in *The Substitute* and *Furt* seriously).”

Although both readings have their own merits and could be teased out of *Glee*, the fans make distinctions between those that develop the pairing romantically and those that closely rework other tensions between the two characters, ranging from hatred to possible forgiveness or friendship. The fan fiction suggests a more complex view. Dave's intimidation of Kurt is understood as a pleasure of its own and reveals his motivations as slightly sadomasochistic. When Dave finally goes to Dalton’s house to apologize to Kurt, this dark queer drive can be read very clearly:

> It takes Karofsky a few seconds to find Hummel's pale, stunned face in the crowd of blue-jacketed boys, and when he does, he smiles. He'd forgotten how good it feels, that first moment where Hummel can't cover up how scared he is. It never lasts long, but that's why Karofsky likes it so much. (It makes him a little sick, actually, how much he likes it. But not sick enough to stop.) (id.).

When Dave scolds Kurt and his friends at Dalton, Kurt calls him a fag who is scared of himself and resolves his issues through violence. Dave protests,

> “I'm not.” Karofsky's voice is too loud, and he cuts himself short before he even knows what he was going to say next. Not a fag? Not scared? They're both lies, and they both know it, even if Hummel's the only one who'll actually say it out loud. “You are,” Hummel replies, and his voice is flat but his eyes are wide, glittering like he's about to cry or something, and his hands are shaking. “You're a pathetic, cowardly, self-loathing *fag*; you're just too scared to.” Karofsky steps in fast, only barely able to stop himself punching Hummel, punching the wall, punching anything, and he doesn't
miss the way Hummel looks, quickly, back at the double doors. And maybe he should hit him, or at least say something to make Hummel run back into that choir room, something to make it worthwhile when those Dalton boys push him out into the street again. All he can say, though, is “Stop.” (id.).

Dave apologizes to Kurt, but, like he envisioned, Kurt only laughs and says that he cannot accept his gesture. Dave has come to Kurt to redeem himself, but he first needs to accept who he is. Connections can be made to the narrator of Guitar Hero as a counter-voice to Dave’s anger: “I could save you baby but it isn’t worth my time”. The line reminds us of Kurt, who tried to help Dave but got into trouble instead. Now, Kurt will not bother because Dave must first take responsibility and accept who he is. Thus, Dave is the only one who can redeem himself. This is clearly symbolized in the continuation of the motif of the wedding cake topper from Glee. Although Dave returns the stolen centerpiece to Kurt in the fan text, Kurt does not accept it. At the end of the text, he returns the centerpiece to Dave, suggesting that it is too late to make amends. Whether Kurt means to provoke him is unclear, but that is how Dave understands this act, after which he breaks the topper.

This act suggests that Dave’s relationship with Kurt, and with himself, is still fragmented and damaged. He is not at ease with himself. The symbol of heterosexual love and intimacy that he once claimed is now broken. The fan text can also be read in a different vein, as Kurt perhaps returned the previously stolen topper to Dave as a positive amorous symbol, suggesting that he should be comfortable with himself and his sexual identity. Though the author suggests in her comments that she does not perceive Dave’s feelings towards Kurt to be romantic, symbols such as the topper show that Kurt and Dave’s struggle is deeply emotional and intimate. Although this should not be read as romance per se, they find common ground in a shared sexual identity.

The fan text is an exemplary character study. Dave’s focalization and distance from the Glee cast echoes the reading strategies of fans themselves as they make sense of the characters. By explicitly portraying Glee events through the eyes of side characters, new ideas about characters and events emerge in an original text. This transformation creates a context for Dave’s problems and flaws. The text shows an intimate mirror relation between Kurt and Dave, but the relationship is never quite revealed as romantic. Readers’ discussions also dovetail with the idea that Kurt deserves true romance and that, even if Dave even has genuine feelings for Kurt, these feelings are too dark and messy for Kurt. The fan readers thus share positive ideas of romance that allow them to naturalize the fan fiction and Glee itself through repertoires of intimidation rather than queer desire. The interpretive
community of this fan text, insofar as the comments reveal, thus deconstructs the possibility of slash between these two main characters. Nonetheless, the fan text demonstrates interpretations about the darkness within Dave and the realm in which his sexual fantasies may be projected upon Kurt.

The Lost Nightingale

*The Lost Nightingale* is a noir fan fiction by Mothergoddamn who posts her work on LiveJournal (2012). She writes original works and *Glee* fan fiction but is also inspired by Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (2005). Her interest in noir is evident, as she also published another *Glee* noir, *The Girl in Room 17* (2010), a *Sherlock Holmes* noir called *Looking for Mary* (2010), and stories about her original detective character, Nash. Mothergoddamn excels in the alternative universe genre. She has positioned the *Glee* cast in thrillers, zombie apocalypse, and superhero drama. *The Lost Nightingale* also has a sequel, *The Swan Song* (2010), a reworking of the aforementioned *Sherlock Holmes* fan text (2010).

*The Lost Nightingale* rewrites the popular teen drama as a mature crime story that stars Kurt’s love interest Blaine as a queer detective in Los Angeles. We meet Blaine in the 1940s when he is requested to solve Kurt’s disappearance and slowly learn about the detective’s past as a police officer through first-person narration and flashbacks. While Blaine has matured in the fan text, Kurt seems hardly any older than his character in *Glee*. Slowly, the reader finds out that Dave Karofsky is behind Kurt’s disappearance in an attempt to cover up the crimes of his boss, Jesse St. James. When Blaine finds Kurt, their love story unravels parallel to the detective story. Kurt flees to Club Pavarotti, where Blaine finds him and is assaulted by Jesse St. James and his goons. They manage to kill the criminals, but Blaine's old partner Sam is himself killed. The ending is grim: Blaine admits his love for Kurt but lets him return to Ohio.

This genre analysis is led by the idea that noir is a trans-generic phenomenon that is composed of recognizable aesthetic and structural elements. These elements do not form a coherent whole, but emerge in texts that surpass genres, repertoires, and media. In the American cinema of the 1930s and 1940s, noir elements bridged genres, appearing in crime melodrama, detective movies, thrillers, and women’s pictures. Film noir borrowed from existing popular traditions such as literary pulp fiction that deconstructed the classical detective story by offering a more pessimistic worldview, debatable closure, and hard-edged first-person narration (Palmer, 1994, p. 34).
Historical noir films reflect the anxiety of the American postwar period and deconstruct the American dream with its darker tone, style, and themes (Hirsch, 2001, pp. 19-20). As Palmer notes, “Violence and moral ambiguity, as well as murky character and action, create the effect of film noir, which is nothing less than making the spectator experience what these desperate characters feel: anguish and insecurity” (1994, p. 19). Since noir’s traditional days in the 1940s and 1950s, its aesthetics echo through different media texts. The studied fan fiction, as I shall show in the analysis, can be clearly identified as belonging to the body of work known as noir.

*The Lost Nightingale* positions itself as part of this postwar movie landscape by depicting the social anxiety of urban life in Los Angeles. The text deeply associates itself with Hollywood’s early values as witnessed through the *Glee* characters, Kurt and Rachel, who long to be stars. This is backed by references to stars such as Bette Davis, Mae West, Fred Astaire, and Ginger Rogers, as well as other canonical texts and actors. The writing is interlaced with one-liners reminiscent of the 1940s movies. “Frail must not like you much, bub” (chapter 4), “Always with the Quips” (chapter 4), and “Wise crack all you want, Gum Shoe” (chapter 4) are transfers of this use of language. Through these references, the text explicitly frames itself as part of a particular historical and cultural tradition.

**Darkening *Glee***

We meet Blaine as he is requested to solve Kurt’s disappearance and slowly learn about the detective’s past through first-person narration and flashbacks. Blaine, however, does not solve the mystery disappearance but runs into Kurt by chance. The boy explains the crime, while the detective can only guess at the circumstances. As an ex-cop and personal investigator, Blaine stands between crime and the law. Blaine strikes the reader as a much older character, considering his extensive history as a cop and detective. He appears to be middle-aged like most noir detectives (Borde & Chaumeton, 2002, p. 9). In contrast, Kurt, a young boy who wants to be a star, seems hardly any older than in the source text. Thus, the author matured some characters to befit the genre while others retained their original age.

Blaine’s narration in *The Lost Nightingale* echoes the sense of disenchantment characteristic of the noir genre (Silver, 1996). He signifies the rottenness of the town and its characters. His tone is rife with anguish:
Unfastening the top buttons and pulling up my sleeves, I listened to the quiet fill the room. I leaned my head back and tried to clear my mind listening to the drone of the shower. After a while my eyes shut and I began to drift. Drift from car crashes that left innocents maimed. Drift from thugs who tied men to chairs and killed them. Drift from boy’s with pretty faces and big problems (chapter 4).

The reader almost hears the characteristic, cynical voice-overs of noir as the detective observes the crime scene. The dark urban sphere and its inhabitants are contrasted with the outsiders. Unlike Blaine, Kurt and Finn do not live in L.A. but are visitors from Ohio. The story emphasizes their innocence in opposition to the morals of the other characters. When witnessing Finn’s difficulty in phrasing Kurt’s homosexuality and his apparent embarrassment, Blaine muses, “An out of towner, for sure” (chapter 1). Finn is concerned with Kurt’s homosexual lifestyle that is “illegal in England, you know?” (chapter 1), hinting at the deviance of his half-brother’s lifestyle. When Kurt, at the end of the story, asks Blaine to join him, the detective refuses.

I winced and turned away, shoving my hands in my pockets. “I don’t think I’m cut out for small time life, Kurt.” He stepped up behind me, pressing his stomach to my back and wrapping an arm around my waist, his breath layering the flesh of my neck. ‘I can’t leave this town, Kurt. As corrupt, dirty and seedy as it may be it’s all I know. I’m it and it’s me. I wouldn’t know how to be anything else (chapter 7).

*The Lost Nightingale* tells the story of a crime through the eyes of a private detective – a common trope in noir. It shows the ambiguity of both the criminal and the main character. In the story, crime is depicted not as a moral or social problem, but as a fact of life, a sign of the decaying town and modernity itself. The culprits commit their crime for personal reasons, financial gain, and pleasure. This wrongdoing is not depicted as a social problem or a tragic circumstance: “The bleak America where the private dick practices his profession holds out no real hope for restoration of order and justice” (Palmer, 1994, p. 73). Crime is a sign of its time and is inevitably tied up with modern life. In this case, crime is embodied by Jesse St. James, a ruthless capitalist who wants a monopoly over the city’s nightclubs.

The dark setting playfully refers to *Glee*. The “Cheerios” club is named after the cheerleaders in the series; “The Fury” echoes Karofsky’s nickname; “Daltons” is the boarding school that Blaine attends. The relevant characters are all associated with the groups to which they belong in the series. Jesse’s
interest in buying out these clubs mirrors his drive to eliminate his competition in *Glee*. As in the source text, his interest in Rachel serves only to learn more information about his rivals. The murky public sphere of noir fiction mirrors the high school competition and in-groups that are central to *Glee*.

Blaine has been hired explicitly as a gay detective to solve Kurt’s disappearance. He asks Finn, “I assume you think that due to my own alternative lifestyle, I’ll be able to seek out your brother quicker?” (chapter 1). Although Blaine manages to unearth some clues over the course of a month, Finn is dissatisfied. The clues are provided through chance rather than wit, and Blaine eventually shows an inability to put the pieces together. He fails to trace Kurt himself and to connect his own past to the crime. This is not an uncommon formula because noir is often ambiguous and depends on surprise more than on obvious clues that guide the reader. The plot development of noir deconstructs the rational detective genre in which every clue has a function and every crime reaches closure. Eventually, the noir crime is reconstructed, but, during the progression of the narrative, the pieces may seem random and difficult to follow (Silver, 1996, p. 169). The resolution of the crime in *The Lost Nightingale* is typical of that of the noir detective story, in which “chance, not intention, governs the human experience” (id., p. 73).

The incorporation of a gay plot and possible hate crime connects the gay detective to the gay victim. Blaine is interested in finding the illustrious Kurt, whom he has never met but to whom he already feels attracted. His assignment shapes the desire that he feels for this imaginary Kurt that he cherishes as a photograph. “I glanced back down at the photograph and felt a chill in my throat. The image was black and white but it filled my mind with color” (chapter 1). Although the tone of the text is as dark as we may expect in noir, the homoerotic themes clearly add a romantic touch and even modernize the early genre. In this sentence, the author combines the colored aesthetics of television with the gray atmosphere of early film.

Romantic narration is integral to the fan story. Melancholy prevails over romance, as Blaine realizes early in the text that he must eventually let Kurt go. The boy is on the run and should return to his family. Kurt is portrayed as fragile, an innocent in need of protection. “He placed a hand onto my arm. It felt like a stray eyelash” (chapter 1). Blaine describes his skin as “ivory” (chapter 1), which makes him seem, not only fragile and pale, but also rich and precious. Blaine’s narration signifies queer desire, but his idolization of Kurt also purposely distances himself from a love that cannot be.

The motif of Kurt as frail and exotic is furthered by comparisons to songbirds. The boy’s first stage name is “Nightingale” (chapter 2), while Pavarotti’s owner considers dubbing him “The Black Bird” (chapter 6). Club Pavarotti
refers to the songbird from *Glee*, named “Pavarotti” in honor of the famous opera singer. Pavarotti is the Dalton students’ pet and carries much symbolic meaning in the series. Wes explains to Kurt, “This bird is a member of an unbroken line of canaries who’ve been in Dalton since 1891. It’s your job to take care of him, so he can live to carry on the Warblers’ legacy. Protect him. That bird is your voice” (*Special Education*, 2011). The metaphor between the bird and the voice is significant. The canary dies shortly after The Warblers have competed in the regional competition for show choir. His death reminds Kurt and Blaine of their relationship together (*Original Song*, 2011). During the pet’s funeral, Kurt sings The Beatles’s *Blackbird*, to which the fan text alludes.

The relationship between Kurt and the songbird is thus already closely drawn in *Glee* and mediated even more strongly in this fan creation. The metaphor of the bird as a voice is again a prime motif within the noir. As in *Glee*, Blaine and Kurt’s significant moments swirl around Pavarotti, which is now symbolized by a club. When Blaine enters, Kurt is singing the jazz song *Body and Soul*, a tune that emerged in the 1930s and was covered by Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, and Billie Holiday, to name a few. This classic and melodramatic piece seems an appropriate choice for a nightclub song. This embedded song allows Kurt to express his feelings: “My heart is sad and lonely / For you I sigh, for you dear only / Why haven’t you seen it? / I’m all for you body and soul” (chapter 6). The mediation of the lyrics expresses both loneliness and queer desire that could otherwise not be named.

The love triangle involving Karofsky, Kurt, and Blaine is central to the narrative. Both Karofsky and Blaine are enamored, perhaps even obsessed, by the young singer. At first, the reader assumes that the aggressive Karofsky is to blame for Kurt’s disappearance. As Mercedes, the nightclub singer at The Fury, explains, “He’d work Kurt until his voice was hoarse and still want it again. Better. Louder. More” (chapter 2). Her last observations give an erotic dimension to Kurt’s practicing. Finally, Karofsky keeps Kurt back late and Mercedes hints at sexual harassment. Echoing the events in *Glee*, Karofsky battles against his feelings and kisses Kurt; the television moment that has been interpreted by some fans as sexual intimidation and by others as repressed desire. While *Pick Up* portrays Dave as a threat to Kurt, *The Lost Nightingale* suggests the sincerity of Dave’s feelings and provides a romantic interpretation of the characters. The historical setting problematizes Dave’s queer sexuality even more and marks it as taboo.

Although a detective’s erotic interest in the victim is nothing new, the gendering of the victim as male and gay deconstructs the role of the female victim. Kurt’s presence is emphasized as one of an understanding lover who could perhaps redeem the detective. Kurt is not portrayed as many
heroines in noir who are “vicious, deadly, venomous or alcoholic” (Borde & Chaumeton, 2002, p. 12). The part of Kurt is that of the “good woman”, the one woman in noir detective stories who is faithful, morally just, and not promiscuous (Borde & Chaumeton, 2002, p. 94). Early noir movies tend to give an erotic and sometimes vicious view of women, while actual sexual activity is never shown (Borde & Chaumeton, 2002, p. 9). The female characters are “femmes fatales”: mysterious, seductive, and dangerous women who are cast as both lovers and suspects.

*The Lost Nightingale* stands out in its tragic portrayal of the nightclub singer Rachel as a femme fatale, who turns out to be an associate of Jesse St. James. She manages to become closer to Blaine, earn his trust, and eventually turn him over to St. James himself. Rachel is referred to as “Jesse’s Girl” (chapters 6 and 7), a reference to the song that Finn sings for her in *Glee* (*Laryngitis*, 2010). He expresses his interest in Rachel through this song, but she chooses Jesse. The story also brings out Rachel’s desperation to become a star, no matter the cost.

“Rachel Berry. I know you’re scouting. I know you think you’ve found something in Mercedes Jones, but just let me convince you that your success lies with me. I’ll sing anything you want.” Her fingers twinkled softly up my arm and she cast her eyes to the floor shyly. “Do anything you want” (chapter 6).

Rachel’s flirtation brings to mind the episode *Blame it on the Alcohol* (2011), when Rachel and Blaine kiss to see if Blaine is bisexual or not. In *The Lost Nightingale*, Blaine is not attracted to her. He describes her in the fashion of her name, Berry, as a “fruit”, suggesting that she seems delicious but that he is not intent on picking her. “If I’d been a man of different tastes”, he muses when he sees her in a night dress, “I’d have been picking my tongue off the floor” (chapter 5). The fan text plays with the tension between Rachel and Blaine that also occurs in *Glee*. Although the fan fiction is shaped by homosexual interests, the heterosexual relations are also drawn out as loves that cannot be.

The focalization of the queer detective thus functions as a means to escape the anti-female sentiment common to noir (Hirsch, 2001, p. 21). The male gaze in *The Lost Nightingale* is directed at men rather than women, which also allows for more playful, friendly interactions between the detective and the opposite gender. The first sentence, for instance, reads thus: “Finn Hudson was a tall streak of handsome in the right light. And my office had dimmers. He was doing just fine” (chapter 1). The gay identity of the detective allows for different interactions with the men in the narrative. The dynamics between former police duo Sam and Blaine, in particular, stand
out. Sam now works for Jesse St. James but eventually betrays him to help Blaine and Kurt escape at the end of the story. Sam’s death is touching and unexpected because Blaine’s trust in Sam has been violated several times.

This relationship fascinates me particularly because Blaine and Sam had little interaction in Glee itself at the time that this fan text was written. Their classic partnership in The Lost Nightingale may even have additional queer appeal for later readers because Blaine develops a crush on Sam in the fourth season of Glee. In this example, we witness a moving back and forth between fandom and source text. As the television text continues, new readings may be projected onto the early fan works.

Although the noir setting may seem highly transformative, the story affirms dominant themes and relationships in Glee, such as the road to stardom. Many times, the transformation of the text also emphasizes or exaggerates the source text. For instance, Rachel and Kurt’s wish to become stars shines bright in the dark nightclubs of historic L.A., a town filled with the ambitions of young actors and artists. Similarly, Karofsky’s struggle with his sexuality is augmented in a 1940s setting. The focalization of the queer detective in The Lost Nightingale not only adds to Glee but also effectively deconstructs the heterosexual topography of noir itself.

Mostverse

The budding friendship between the roomies Kurt and Rachel is central to Mostverse, a collection of stories that are all set in the future. This story offers a different approach to the alternative universe genre by outlining the hopes and dreams of the glee kids. This fan text is a “future fic” that is set in a possible future for the characters of the series. It takes place after the students of McKinley have graduated. The older Glee characters graduated at the end of season 3 (2011-2012), but the fan text was written during the show’s first season. Many authors in Glee fandom are concerned with the future of the characters. The top 10 favorites of Fanfiction.net features Color (2010) and Mischances, Stances and Stolen Glances (2011-), which are both concerned with telling the story of the relationship between an adult Brittany and Santana.

Within Glee fandom, Miggy is a celebrated author. She stands out as an author of “gen fiction”, or generic fiction, which may incorporate romance, but commonly explores other relationships such as friendship, parenthood, or student-mentor relationships. Miggy excels in comedy (e.g., Predators, 2010) and short fiction written from the points of view of different Glee
characters. As many fans indicate in comments on her fiction, she does an excellent job of voicing their personalities. Her serial stories include *Mostverse* and *The 25th President of the United States* (2010). The latter is a tragic story reminiscent of Columbine, in which several gunmen shoot students from McKinley High. The social anxiety raised by high school shootings is brought even closer to home by incorporating Glee’s beloved characters. The theme of shootings has been picked up by other fan authors, such as Gandalf0123’s *And Innocents* (2010-2011). Miggy has won several awards for her fan fiction at the “Glee Fic Awards” (2010) and hosts her fiction on LiveJournal, Archive of Our Own, and Wordpress. I analyzed her fiction on LiveJournal, her primary publication venue, where readers posted ample comments whenever she uploaded a new part of *Mostverse*.

While the previous texts discussed Kurt’s relationship with Karofsky, Miggy’s *Mostverse* (2010) represents the rivalry between Kurt and Rachel in *Glee* and develops their relationship into an intimate friendship. Set after graduation, *Mostverse* describes Rachel and Kurt’s disappointments in New York and the loss of contact with their former friends, while its sequel focuses on the beginning of their careers. *Mostverse* is a universe that consists of various stories that are all connected. While the stories are focalized by different characters, the budding friendship of Kurt and Rachel is a central motif. Early in the television series, both characters make it clear that they want to be on Broadway. Miggy has used this motif as a starting point.

The story begins as the *Glee* kids graduate. Rachel and Kurt are both accepted to schools in New York: Rachel at the classical performance school Julliard and Kurt at the Fashion Institute for Technology (F.I.T.). Because Rachel’s school is quite expensive, she asks Kurt to be her roommate, and he agrees. They hardly go out, instead investing all of their time in their study. Both of their schools are demanding, and, among like-minded, ambitious individuals, they do not stand out in the way they were able to in high school. Although Rachel and Kurt do not get along at first, they slowly become aware that they share many qualities, drives, and ambitions. The plot swirls around breakups and even more serious themes, such as eating disorders, depression, and possible sexual harassment. *Mostverse* has been met with much acclaim within the Glee fan communities. Interestingly, the third season of *Glee* includes similar story arcs between Rachel and Kurt, who also become roommates in New York and are confronted with the professional worlds of Broadway and fashion. Overall, *Mostverse* stands out as a beautiful portrayal of an unlikely friendship and intimacy.
Growing up

The fan fiction develops the relationship between Kurt and Rachel as portrayed in the first season, in which they tolerate each other at best. In New York, the two behave awkwardly around each other. Rachel is afraid that she is getting in Kurt’s way and tries not to bother him. She is in his apartment, after all, and it is because of the expense of her education that they had to move in together. She feels that she forced herself upon him. Eventually, Rachel realizes that they should communicate and bond as friends.

The two friends become more sociable by creating and uploading YouTube movies together, but it is clear that Rachel uses these movies to fill her own void. She uses them to show that she has friends and to remind her old friends of Kurt and her. YouTube also fills the emptiness of her unsuccessful, lonely Manhattan life. The movies are free from pressure and provide instant gratification, unlike school.

Their sessions were so easy. They would practice performances, record them, and finally find a take they were pleased with. Up it went to YouTube. No auditions. No permission needed to step forward. And, stupid as it was, Rachel looked at every single thumbs up that came in and it felt like a round of applause. (Most Changed since High School, 2010).

This online presence on YouTube helps Kurt and Rachel stay in touch with their old friends elsewhere. Eventually, Kurt becomes less invested in uploading these movies, and it becomes clear that Rachel depends a great deal on the success of their movies. College has made her insecure because she faces dozens of talented individuals every day. She voices her fears to Kurt:

“I work so hard,” Rachel forced out. “But I’m surrounded by people also on the top of their game, and… and I might lose, and all I want in the world is for someone to make me their number one again.” That was all she needed. For someone to make her their number one. Their top choice. (Most Changed since High School, 2010)

Kurt, however, is sick of her complaining and emphasizes that she never once asks him how he is doing. He understands the world of singing and auditions from high school but she does not realize that he is putting so much effort into his fashion education that it is wearing him out, too. Eventually, they sympathize with each other and realize that they are very much alike or, as Kurt puts it, “are each other” (Most Changed since High School, 2010).
Kurt and Rachel slowly become better friends who realize that they have similar ambitions and doubts. As the story progresses, the two friends start to care deeply about one another. However, their lives are not happy ones. Their perfectionism prevents them from making new friends and maintaining long-lasting, intimate relationships. *Mostverse* reflects upon the character's futures and develops their personalities accordingly. The text contains a great deal of anxiety about the future that construes the character's actions and emotions. The characters' dreams hardly add up to reality and even self-destructive elements.

One of the most emotional passages in the text is when Kurt's half-brother Finn notices his eating disorder. The pressure of school and his perfectionism are getting to Kurt, and, as a fashion designer, he feels that he needs to look his best. Kurt's problems have escaped Rachel's attention, and she feels guilty for not noticing that her best friend was so sick. Because Rachel predominantly focalizes the fan fiction, the disorder might also come as a surprise for readers. Rachel explains the disorder to Finn as a result of their perfectionism:

"We have to be perfect. The entire world will seek reasons to cast us aside." She looked down. Her shorter [hair] hang hung around her face like a shield. "They do look for reasons. He's doing better than me on the major things but... but it's still hard. Even if I'm the only one to admit it. You don't know how many criticisms we've heard. We've heard things we weren't supposed to hear. I don't sell my role onstage. He can't edit his work. We have heard exactly how we fail and it's the most painful thing I've ever felt in my life" (Least likely couple, 2010).

The possibility of failure and the need to compensate through perfectionism is furthered in the fan text by the idea that conflict is not a source of strength but of increased weakness and vulnerability:

Rachel was glad they were together, so glad, but suddenly felt as if the two of them had grown very hard. And when things grew too hard they became brittle. She hoped it wasn't too much to promise, saying she would look out for him. They should be healthy on their own. They should be happy on their own. She'd still try. Besides, she didn't know if the two of them really could make it apart. (Least likely couple, 2010)

The characters are unhappy with their lives but, at the same time, make no changes in the pursuit of their dreams and thus remain immature in
their social lives. The fans who read *Mostverse* on LiveJournal applaud this grim realism but also convey at times that they are still rooting for a happy ending. The comments on the final story, *Most Talented*, particularly reveal the sentiments of the fan readers. Although all of the fans expect closure and root for satisfactory closure in which the characters’ dreams are fulfilled, they acknowledge that the ending of the text might be depressing or open (as it was initially before Miggy wrote the sequel, *Most Talented*). The medium specificity of online fiction is clearly revealed, as readers can interact with the authors and authors can continue a story when it is appraised by the readers.

In the final installment of *Mostverse*, the characters slowly land jobs. Kurt’s career is advancing more quickly than Rachel’s, which is a source of friction. However, Kurt collapses after his colleague asks him out for dinner because he fears that it might be an actual date rather than a formal appointment. He is committed to go through with this for the sake of his career, but the prospect of the dinner thoroughly damages his self-esteem. He even feels that he deserves such abuse, as he tells Rachel:

> “I’m a whore,” Kurt laughed, wiping at his eyes. “It’s what I’ve been doing all this time. Never saying no. Flattering my instructors. Telling everyone I met anything they wanted to hear. Turning myself into their fantasy, no matter how badly it hurt. Should have seen where this was headed. I thought I knew myself, I thought I was strong. All you had to do was dangle a big enough dream in front of me and I’d keep dropping little pieces of myself with each step.” (*Most Talented*, 2010)

Finally, it turns out that Kurt gets a promotion and that the appointment is not a date at all. This event is telling in terms of characterization, however, because it suggests that Kurt’s sexual harassment in *Glee* has a traumatic afterlife. The characters are clearly burdened in the fan story, but their friendship is depicted as one of the good things that helps them overcome difficult circumstances.

When Kurt and Rachel finally return to Ohio, they host a small workshop for the new glee kids. Both emphasize that their dreams came at an expense and explain to the teenagers that “it’s not easy to be amazing” (*Most Talented*, 2010). Kurt also visits his old cheerleading coach, Sue Sylvester, who is happy that he is progressing well. She emphasizes her loneliness at the top and tells him that he is lucky to have Rachel. Sue is the most ambitious and arrogant character in *Glee*, taking pride only in her many trophies and achievements. She wants her cheerleading troop to win, whatever the cost. After Kurt has a heart-to-heart with Sue, he asks Will Schuester if he believes that Sue is happy. He replies that she is not, though the number of prizes that she has
may suggest otherwise. Will emphasizes that it is friends and family that give life meaning, not achievements.

Kurt and Rachel are portrayed as successful young adults at the end of the story, but their success comes at a price. Neither has a longstanding relationship and they hardly go out. Still, they love each other dearly. In the conclusion, Rachel contemplates having a baby with Kurt because he is the only person who understands her and with whom she feels comfortable. This touching ending convincingly draws out an intimate friendship that can progress as an actual relationship, even if it is not sexually consummated. Thus, *Mostverse* concludes with the premise of asexual romance and familyhood that goes beyond mainstream paradigms of parenthood and sexuality.

**Conclusion**

Intermediality allows genre comparisons to be made and cultural influences to be assessed. When analyzing these processes, looking merely at the mediation of the source text to the fan text does not suffice. Fans mobilize different repertoires, such as genres and pop culture references. Fan fiction is not a mere textual echo of *Glee*. Rather, the source text functions as a template through which fan authors convey new ideas. Fan fiction is especially grounded in the desire to provide immediate closure to the episodic and inexhaustible television format.

I have shown that fan authors have unique focal points and aesthetic styles through which to explore, extend, and finish the source text. The first work changes the focalization of the narrative. The author voices the concerns of Dave and distills his personality from fragments of the source text. Second, *The Lost Nightingale* deconstructs *Glee*’s context and aesthetics as a high school drama by shifting its tropes to a historical, alternative universe. The fan text closely follows the plotlines from *Glee*, but its effect is ultimately more estranging because of its displaced crime setting that stars a queer detective. Through this strategy, the text also talks back to noir’s heterosexual demands. Finally, *Mostverse* alters the narrative time of *Glee*. The text elaborates upon the characterization established during the show’s first season and pursues the characters’ hopes and aspirations. The practical problems of a highly competitive job market dismantle the American dream that *Glee* salutes, which is also subject to critique in *The Lost Nightingale*. Through careful development, Miggy’s Kurt and Rachel gain depth and credibility. *Mostverse* not only mediates and continues *Glee* but also effectively deconstructs some of its teen ideals as the characters are forced to grow up.
The three stories thus transform the characteristic elements of *Glee* by extending textual meaning and possibilities. Still, the texts also work quite closely with the existing material; that is to say, the authors work within certain limits instead of stretching the characters too far. The characters, for instance, retain their recognizable qualities and histories even in a historical or future setting. The stories also actively provide new views of gender and sexuality as they integrate emancipatory themes, such as coming-out problems, historical queerness, or portrayals of asexual family life. *Glee* itself has often been applauded for its diverse gender portrayals, but the fan texts enhance these motifs even further. Online, the fans can include thoughts, sex scenes, and queer identities that the television show does not permit. Similar to the results of a recent *Glee* study (Ellison, 2013), I found that fan fiction did not subvert the canon but expanded upon the queerness of *Glee*, thereby exploring its latent subtext. The sexual openness of *Glee* may also be one of the reasons why this source text is particularly prominent in media fandom.

Critically, this selective transformation also means that some aspects of the text can be lost in the translation/mediation process. *Glee’s* official texts emphasize transmedia performances wherein the lyrical functions as an important access point to draw in casual viewers, non-viewers, and fans; however, the autonomous female fandom of *Glee* shows a different tendency that focuses on characters’ interiority. Rather than scratching the surface of the performance, the fans go beyond the personal reproduction and appropriation of songs to deepen the text. The lyrical matters only when it serves to demonstrate the characters’ emotional lives, and, although the incorporation of songs was important in the latter two fan texts, the overall emphasis was on drama.

The mediation of the lyrical thus poses challenges for fan fiction. Creative writing cannot readily mediate the transmedia performance of *Glee*, its songs and visual spectacle. Online fiction, however, can provide thoughts on the inner lives of televiral characters and thereby provide great depth. These results should not be read as a claim against the quality of *Glee* fan fiction, but rather as a notion that demonstrates the medium specificity of the television text as opposed to written fiction. Moreover, *Glee* fan fiction cannot be analyzed in quite the same way as written texts because its context in online blogs is fundamentally different. Readers and authors interact in a shared space of fandom and influence one another’s creative and interpretive work. While the fan text can tease out new meanings and provoke ideas, its attachment to the existing story shapes its meaning. After all, fan fiction caters to an informed audience.