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The Author Who Lived: Charles Dickens, J. K. Rowling, Their Fans, and Their Characters

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THE AUTHOR WHO LIVED:

CHARLES DICKENS, J. K. ROWLING, THEIR FANS, AND THEIR CHARACTERS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Tess R. Stockslager

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

August 2015

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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Title: The Author Who Lived: Charles Dickens, J. K. Rowling, Their Fans, and Their Characters

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This study of two of the most prominent popular novelists of the past two centuries explores the connections among Charles Dickens's and J. K. Rowling's authorial identities, their relationships with their readers (specifically, fans), and their affection for their characters.

The opening chapter introduces the dissertation and surveys key theories of authorship, reader response, and fandom. Chapter Two examines Dickens's developing authorial identity as he began to use number-plans to gain greater control over his novels' trajectory; it also presents a case of author-fan bonding over the death of a character, Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Chapter Three analyzes interviews from early and later in Rowling's career, offering a longitudinal view of her developing authorial identity and categorizing two main reader approaches to the *Harry Potter* books: *Potter* as phenomenon and *Potter* as text. Chapter Four is a study of the public readings Dickens undertook late in his career; it demonstrates that during the readings, Dickens fulfilled the roles of celebrity author, ultimate reader/fan, and beloved character. Finally, Chapter Five offers a close reading of *Pottermore*, the website where Rowling posts her recent short writings about *Harry Potter* and where fans can interact in limited ways with the text, each other, and Rowling. The chapter shows that despite the conflicting goals of the site (interactivity, safety, and revelation of new information), *Pottermore* represents an unprecedented effort by an author to extend the world of a fictional text beyond the boundaries of the book(s). The conclusion of the study speculates on what *Pottermore* might mean for the future of authorial identity, fan activity, and author-reader interaction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people contributed to this dissertation, but most of them don't know that it exists. A glance at my Works Cited makes clear that I had to (and was glad to) do some non-traditional research for a study on this unusual topic. So I am grateful to all the people whose work— comments, reviews, stories, drawings—I read on sites like *Goodreads*, *Pottermore*, and *FanFiction.net*, whether or not I ended up citing them. I also want to thank the many people with whom I have bonded, in "real life," over the subjects of this dissertation. If you watched a *Harry Potter* movie with me, attended LeakyCon 2013, had a conversation with me about my dissertation, planned a Dickens/NFL crossover fanfic with me, spent eight hours with me one Saturday watching the Masterpiece adaptation of *Little Dorrit*, shared a Dickens or *Harry Potter* link with me on *Facebook*, or modeled anything that would constitute fan activity (even if it was for a different fandom) that I got to observe, I am grateful to you!

On a more scholarly note, I want to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Christopher Kuipers, for his enthusiasm and support for my topic, and my committee members, Dr. Christopher Orchard and Dr. Tom Slater, for their flexibility in working with me from a distance. I also wish to thank my colleagues at Liberty University for their patience and prayers. Special mention goes to those I work with most closely, the faculty, staff, and tutors of the Center for Writing and Languages, some of whom also belong on the list in the previous paragraph, and one of whom, Kerry Hogan, gave me a great deal of helpful feedback on the first drafts of my chapters.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my mom, who introduced me to Harry Potter, and my dad, the only person I know outside of an English department who has read all of Dickens's novels (including *Barnaby Rudge*). I would still love you both very much even if you didn't have such good taste.

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INTRODUCTION

THE WRITER BECOMES A FAN-CRITIC-THEORIST

Stage 1: I Learn to Admit My Fandom

According to several of the scholars I cite in my dissertation, including Henry Jenkins, Lisa Lewis, and Jennifer Hayward, it has become acceptable for fans to write academically about the texts they love and the experience of being fans. I am relieved to hear it, because I am a fan of both of the authors this dissertation is about. But there was a time when I hesitated to produce scholarly work on the texts I read for enjoyment. When I was working on my master's thesis, on eating and bodies in George Eliot's novels, I said things like "Eliot is for work; Dickens is for fun." I was afraid, I think, that in order to write academically about Dickens's novels, I would have to adopt a drearily critical stance toward *David Copperfield* (my absolute favorite) and all the rest. I was afraid, in other words, that I would have to stop loving Dickens.

Something happened in 2009 that changed my perspective: I discovered Harry Potter. Not that I had never heard of him before; I had just considered him annoying and beneath my notice. The story of how I changed my mind is probably delightful only to me, so I will refrain from narrating it here. Suffice it to say that I arrived at the party very late; all of the books had been released by the time I started reading them, but at least I made it in time to see the last three movies come to theaters. I had finished reading the series by September 2009 and was already getting together with friends to make butterbeer (our version consisted of cream soda, butterscotch, and, yes, sticks of butter) that fall. Sometime around the end of the year, I received a call for papers for a casebook on *Harry Potter*. And the funny thing is that I never hesitated over whether writing an academic essay for the casebook would destroy my newfound love. Of

course I wanted to write an essay about *Harry Potter*; I wanted to do everything about *Harry Potter*.

My academic interest and my fan interest in the series grew simultaneously. In summer 2010, I learned that my proposal for the casebook had been accepted, and I got Virginia license plates that said HAFBLOD (i.e., Half-Blood, as in the Half-Blood Prince). In the nearly five years since then, the casebook has been published, and I have presented papers on *Harry Potter* at two academic conferences; in the same period of time, I have visited the theme park The Wizarding World of Harry Potter twice and accumulated a respectable collection of memorabilia (including three wands). In summer 2013, I had my most immersive and eye-opening fandom experience to date when I took a trip to Portland with my mom, who introduced me to Harry, to attend LeakyCon, a massive fan convention that, while it no longer bills itself as exclusively a *Harry Potter* event, still considers Rowling's world to be its organizing principle. I said that I was going there to gather information relevant to my dissertation, but I was mostly going because I, like my enthusiastic and quirky fellow attendees, was a fan.

In December 2014, when I visited the recently opened Diagon Alley section of The Wizarding World after having written the bulk of this dissertation, I found that my love for Harry Potter's world and my eagerness to suspend disbelief and become part of that world had diminished not at all. I cried a little with happiness when I disembarked from the Hogwarts Express and saw the castle looming over Hogsmeade. I bought a Hufflepuff cardigan so authentically subtle that nobody but a die-hard fan can identify it as anything but a regular, everyday cardigan. In other words, I had no hesitation about acting like a fan. But I had not separated into dual identities, fan and scholar; instead, my months of intensive research, I believe, had deepened my affection.

It is a bit more difficult to be a fan (in the technical sense, which will be defined in chapter one, of one who engages in fan practices, usually with other fans) of Charles Dickens, at least in our day when booksellers are no longer hawking Pickwick tie-in merchandise. But after my *Harry Potter* experience freed me to embrace my fandom, my expressions of appreciation for Dickens and his work began to take on fan-like qualities. For example, after re-reading *A Tale of Two Cities* in 2014, I wrote a blog post explaining why I had a crush on its hero, Sydney Carton ("My Literary Crushes"), and around the same time I created a public playlist on Spotify of ten songs that remind me of Carton. A colleague and I have half-seriously planned a fan fiction novel to be written in the style of Dickens, about a lovelorn and conscience-haunted Dissenting preacher named Jerricho Cotchery.[1] And while it is true that Dickens merchandise is no longer sold on every corner, I do own a *Tale of Two Cities* t-shirt from Out of Print, as well as a Dickens finger puppet/refrigerator magnet that I found in a bookstore. To the extent that a person today can be a Dickens fan, as opposed to merely an aficionado, I am one.

Stage 2: I Become a Fan-Critic

By early summer 2012, when I started thinking about my dissertation, I had let go of the division I had formerly set up between books read for work and books read for fun, but I was at a bit of a crossroads in my scholarly identity. I called myself a Victorianist, but I was at least as much a *Harry Potter*-ist. I am not sure what sparked the idea that I could be both, at least in my dissertation; it may have been a conversation with my dad, who was reading through Dickens's

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[1] Our use of a current NFL player's name for our protagonist was inspired by a *McSweeney's* article by Susan Schorn entitled "NFL Players Whose Names Sound Vaguely Dickensian, and the Characters They Would Be in an Actual Dickens Novel (2007–2008 Regular Season Edition)". *McSweeney's* has published other Dickens-themed posts that, while tongue-in-cheek, exhibit a more than superficial familiarity with the novelist's works, making it a viable example of online Dickens fandom. The Jerricho Cotchery story is featured in another one of my blog posts, "My Continuing Dickens Obsession."

novels for the first time, or it may have been the buzz about *Pottermore*, the Rowling-authored yet fan-driven website that had gone live that spring. Whatever the cause, I recognized in Charles Dickens and J. K. Rowling, the representative celebrity authors of their respective eras, a potentially fascinating link between author-reader interactions in the nineteenth century and those occurring today. And, just as important, I saw a way to revel in fandom for a couple of years while telling people I was doing it for a project.

I did not yet have a thesis in mind until I started "experiencing" (the site's word) *Pottermore* in spring 2013. As a *Harry Potter* fan, I completely geeked out over the opportunity to get sorted into a house (I am a Hufflepuff, it seems) and to read J. K. Rowling's new and debatably canonical information about the back-stories of beloved characters. As a student of literary criticism, I was intrigued by the conventional signs of authorship (e.g., an icon of a quill, a faux-parchment background) used to distinguish the new Rowling content from the rest of the text on the site.

I was also a bit troubled by *Pottermore*'s quiet way of censoring user comments, presumably in an effort to make the site safe, and perhaps intellectually accessible, for children. When I tried to submit a comment that included terms such as "Blacks" (I meant the old wizarding family that figures prominently in the series), "conflicted," or "Charles Dickens," my comment was returned to me with a red line through the offending word or phrase, forcing me to self-censor or forego posting the comment. I was puzzled by the selection of terms marked this way. I could understand how "Blacks" could be misconstrued, but what about the others? Were *Harry Potter* fans never supposed to feel conflicted? Was Rowling attempting to create a hermetically sealed fictional world, where Charles Dickens dare not intrude?

I knew that if I had found so many instances of Rowling's assertion of the authorial/authoritative role just in my first cursory, not deliberately critical reading of the site, *Pottermore* could be a fertile site for a case study within a dissertation about an author attempting to reach out to fans, and even propose something that looks like a collaborative relationship, without giving up control of the characters, plot, and "world" of the text. Additionally, I was attracted by the newness of the site. The only articles on *Pottermore* that I had come across were written before the site went live and were largely speculative. I was attracted to the opportunity to write one of the earliest analyses of Rowling's unique project.

This and subsequent experiences with *Pottermore* assured me that I was capable of taking a clear-eyed view of the site and any troubling implications it might have, while still enjoying it as a fan, and without needing to interpret Rowling's every move with suspicion. As I began doing the research on Dickens that I had avoided before, I discovered also that I could take a middle position between the early Dickensians who could brook no criticism of their beloved, and the Modernists and others for whom Dickens's sentimentality and simple characterization excluded him from the ranks of authors to be taken seriously. I could see and articulate both authors' faults without losing my respect for them or affection for what they had created. Fandom and criticism had met and created something quite like love.

Stage 3: I Stumble onto Some Theory

An important part of this story that I have not yet mentioned is my professional career during the approximately four-year period when I was discovering *Harry Potter*, changing my orientation toward Dickens, learning how to be a fan-critic, and generating a dissertation topic. Since 2008, I had worked for the Graduate Writing Center at Liberty University, the world's largest Evangelical Christian degree-granting institution. I am presently the director of Liberty's

Center for Writing and Languages, home of all the university's writing and language tutoring. Although I initially saw no connection between my work and my interest in Dickens and Rowling, and indeed occasionally questioned my choice to pursue in a degree in literature while working in the field of composition, I can now see that two aspects of my professional identity have direct bearing on this project, specifically on its perspective toward author theory. This perspective will become increasingly clear as the chapters progress, but suffice it to say here that my study assigns more power to the author than literary criticism in general has been willing to assign for the past several decades. I attempt to show that in the cases of Dickens and Rowling, an active fan base combines with a highly audience-engaged author to create a situation in which the author's privileged role is maintained, while at the same time, readers are empowered to join the conversation and become co-creators. My Christian worldview and my writing center experience have informed this understanding of authorship in ways that were not at first apparent to me.

First, my Christian worldview leads me to assign an important, almost sacred role to the author. When I took literary criticism courses as an undergraduate and graduate student at Liberty, the professor (who could be unusually conservative even for our department, but whose understanding of author theory is typical among Christian literary scholars) insisted that authorial intent is real and knowable, if not always easily discovered, and that part of a reader's job is to try to understand the message the author was attempting to convey. The importance of the author within Christian literary theory is driven in part by the respect and empathy owed to fellow human beings created in God's image. But an even more crucial reason is the doctrine that God is an author. This is a central tenet of Christianity, derived not only from the Jewish concept of the God who created the world by speaking, but also from the Greek-influenced

philosophy of New Testament writers like John, who calls Jesus "the Word," and Paul and Peter, who teach that the author of the Bible is God himself, working through the medium of human writers. Evangelical Christians hold the Bible as authoritative in matters not only of doctrine but also of daily life, and we hold that it receives this authority not from any particular virtue of its own, but from its author, God. Therefore, we have a significant stake in maintaining, against the trend of postmodern literary criticism, that authors have a claim—the most important, though perhaps not the only, claim—on the interpretation of their own work. Human authors do not take on the omniscience and infallibility of God, but they are sub-creators (to borrow a term from J. R. R. Tolkien), who exercise an authority over their own writings that reflects God's authority over his creation, but with the inherent limitations of humanity (e.g., an author obviously loses some power over a text when he or she dies).

When I drafted this dissertation, I was not aware of making any attempt to assert a Christian theory of authorship. Frankly, I would have been hesitant to do so, not only because of the long-standing unpopularity of any theory that appears to exalt the author, but also because of my self-perception as a literary scholar. I see myself more as a concrete than an abstract thinker; my activity of choice is close reading, sometimes empirical research, but not theory. My perspective shifted during summer 2014, when I wrote most of the chapters of this study. After each chapter, I would meet with a writing center colleague from Liberty for a "tutoring" session. This colleague kept finding places where I seemed, to him, to be advancing the concept of authorial intent, and where he saw resemblances to God's activity as the ultimate author. I kept resisting these suggestions, often laughing them off as products of his conservative theoretical leanings. I wanted to write an enjoyable study on two authors who interested me, not a theoretical treatise that would raise difficult questions at my dissertation defense. But after my

proposal meeting with my dissertation committee, where my assertions about authorship were already beginning to raise questions, I was forced to confront the idea that my study did, indeed, have something theoretical to say about authorial identity. I now feel comfortable with this idea, but I want to make it clear from the outset that I am not simply reiterating a traditional theory of the author as unquestionable authority. I am attempting to demonstrate that in a culture of widespread literacy, in which both of my authors lived, and even more now in an Internet-enabled culture of widespread authorship, authors can live, thrive, and exercise their creatorship without oppressing or silencing readers. Readers, through collaborative interpretation and fan practices, are stepping up as sub-creators even as they acknowledge their debt to the original authors of the worlds in which they create. This idea is not especially Christian, but I think my Christian worldview makes me less likely to recoil from the suggestion of an author having power.

The other piece of my professional identity, my writing center work experience and conversance with writing center theory has also shaped my understanding of an author as someone other than just a dead patriarch overdue for burial (Barthes's concept). In a traditional writing center scenario, the author/writer is not the one in the privileged expert position, and the reader (usually a tutor) is not passive. In fact, when contemporary writing center theorists deal with authority and control, they are not trying to liberate a silenced reader from the power of a godlike author; more likely, they want to liberate a writer's voice from the gatekeeping power of an authority figure such as a professor or tutor. The categories of author and reader take on different significances from the ones they have in literary theory, and the slippage between the two is more obvious. In a writing center session, one person can be both author and reader,

perhaps even simultaneously. I will employ a similar idea when I position Dickens and Rowling as fans of their own work.

Writing centers are also known for being sites of collaboration, another key concept within my study. Collaboration happens when two or more people share a love for a text and work together to make something new from that text, whether the new thing is an analytical discussion, a creative production such as a fan fiction story, or something more ephemeral, such as a shared reading experience. The collaborative product of a writing center session is usually understood to be a piece of academic writing, but not all sessions end in a neatly finished product; instead, the collaboration might lead to a new perspective on an issue or a newly acquired skill. In this study, we will see the emotional collaboration of Dickens and his audience as they created the homey yet charged atmosphere of one of the public readings, and we will see the more tangible collaboration of Rowling and her fans to create the content of *Pottermore*. Just as my writing center experience has enabled me to see beyond the discrete categories of author and reader, it has also helped me to conceive of a broader definition of collaboration, one that allows me to see collaboration at work even when only one author's name appears on a book cover.

Chapter one lays out the theoretical underpinnings of this study. Chapters two through five do not use much overtly theoretical language, but in light of this introduction and chapter one, the implications for theory should be clear. In the conclusion, I return to explicit theorizing as I review my arguments and consider their broader implications for the field of literary studies. It still is not my intent to create a new school of literary theory; even if I were interested in doing that, such as goal would be presumptuous for a young doctoral candidate. But in literary criticism, all of our work is driven by theory, whether or not we realize it. In my case, my

identity as a Christian believer and a writing center professional profoundly influenced the theoretical direction of this study, even before I realized it.

Stage 4: I Present My Aims and Send Forth My Little Book into the World

Pottermore made the news in January 2015 when Tom Felton, the actor who played uber-Slytherin Draco Malfoy, tweeted that he had finally joined the site and had been sorted, to his chagrin, into Gryffindor, Slytherin's rival house. I saw the headline for two days running on my *Yahoo!* homepage. Clearly, people—and not just some obscure, stuck-in-the-past fans—still care about *Harry Potter*. In recent months, J. K. Rowling herself has made a few appearances in the news: she wrote twelve short stories for *Pottermore* during the 2014 Christmas season; posted a backstory for Dolores Umbridge, a character many fans hate even more than they hate Lord Voldemort; continues to work on the screenplay for *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, a film set in the *Potter* universe, slated to be released in 2016; and (this caused the biggest sensation) quelled a speculation that she had hinted that she was planning more *Harry Potter* books.

When that last story broke, several people who know I am a fan (as nearly everyone in my life does) said things like, "Sorry, I guess you won't get to read any more *Harry Potter* books." I responded optimistically, however, pointing out that Rowling has several times made a feint at closing the *Potter* chapter of her life—for example, as I discuss at length in chapter three, she used the language of mourning after she finished writing the last book, and then she turned for a while to other projects, such as her adult novel *The Casual Vacancy*. But then she announced *Pottermore*. And then she started writing the screenplay for *Fantastic Beasts*. And ever since the Quidditch World Cup coverage in summer 2014, she has been much more active in writing for *Pottermore* than she has since the site opened in spring 2012. What I tell people

who ask me about all this is that Rowling seems unable to stay away from the *Harry Potter* world. I say that with a bit of amusement, but not with disdain. How can I blame her? I want to be there too, because I am a fan. And, strange as it is to say, I think Rowling is a fan as well. She created a world, she populated it, and then she fell in love with the world and its people. And since most people agree now that making money is no longer a relevant motivating factor for Rowling, and since she has proven herself capable of doing other things besides writing about wizards (for example, her detective novels have been well-reviewed), there seems to be no other logical explanation for her desire to stay in the *Harry Potter* world than that she loves to be there. I believe it is a mere matter of time before Rowling will directly admit what her behavior has been showing: she has no desire to "move on" from Harry. Nor do her fans want her to. Perhaps she will never write another *Harry Potter* novel. But if she does, I am not going to be surprised.

Similarly, I believe the best way to explain the insatiable drive to perform public readings that controlled the latter part of Dickens's life was that he was a fan of his own work, that he loved his characters. In Dickens's case, a couple of other motivations could be valid—for one thing, the money certainly helped, since he was supporting a number of relatives and a large family of his own. And, as I discuss in chapter four, the physical proximity to his public seemed to fulfill a psychological need in Dickens—a need that seems not to plague the comparatively private Rowling. But Dickens could have chosen other routes to make money and be close to his readers; for example, he could have appeared in his own persona as a lecturer, as he sometimes did. The more frequent and more beloved public readings, however, allowed him and his readers to enter imaginatively into his fictional worlds. Charles Dickens the author disappeared, while the characters remained, standing before an adoring audience who collaborated in the recreation

of the fictional world by laughing, crying, and sometimes even shouting. Dickens the fan was able to watch that happen.

In all this discussion of fandom and collaboration, it should be remembered that both of these authors have strong authorial personas, which sometimes come into tension with the affective bond with readers and limit the extent of any potential collaboration. While they both have acknowledged the creativity of their readers and their own indebtedness to the support of their fans, neither would countenance any suggestion that readers are equally qualified to speak about their fictional worlds. Both authors insist that they stand in a special relationship to their characters, one that is never quite accessible to the reader. Through the public readings and through *Pottermore*, Dickens and Rowling enact the role of not just any fan, but the ultimate fan, as if to remind readers that no matter how much they may love these characters, their maker loves them more.

My thesis, essentially, is that the authors are justified in this assertion. Although both literary theory and my experience as a reader (scholar and fan) have made me more comfortable than either of these authors with the idea that multiple valid interpretations exist and that texts can have meanings of which even the author is unaware, I believe that the originator of an idea, including a fictional world or character, has a unique relationship to that idea. But instead of oppressing readers by restricting their interpretive choices, that unique relationship facilitates an affective bond among author, reader, and story that can, through sympathy defined in the technical sense, open up interpretive possibilities that would otherwise remain obscure.

Obviously, this dissertation is not a deconstructive study, nor does it have much in common with any of the late twentieth-century schools of literary theory that tend to approach texts and authors with a skeptical lens, constantly asking who is profiting from the text and who

is being silenced. Those are important questions, but there is also value in taking a charitable

view of a text and its author and asking what we can learn from an attempt—not to nail down the

authorial intent—but to understand the author's perspective, to think and feel along with him or

her. This is, unabashedly, an optimistic dissertation: optimistic as it is possible to be about

Dickens's and Rowling's motivations, as well as about the future of author-fan collaboration.

I have also been optimistic in attempting a comparative study among two authors widely

separated in time, genre, and personality. Dickens is considered the quintessential Victorian, an

exemplary realist, a consummate entertainer, and a passionate extrovert. Rowling, by contrast,

has been emblematic of the turn of the twenty-first century, became famous for writing fantasy,

seems to care little about entertaining her audience, and is notoriously reserved. Considering the

fact that this dissertation takes technology into account as a platform for communicating with

fans, the differences between the contexts of the two authors become almost insurmountable.

Thus, this is not a typical comparative study, but rather an examination of one phenomenon—the

affective bond between author and readers, facilitated by characters—in two distinct contexts.

Nevertheless, there are a number of notable similarities between the two authors, and many of

the differences can be instructive.

The similarities begin with the two authors' styles. In an online discussion of Rowling's

first detective novel, *The Cuckoo's Calling*, a *Goodreads* user named Jason notes that "hardcore

mystery fans may get a little tired of Rowling's Dickensian style"—presumably a reference to

the novel's lengthy and atmospheric descriptions of London, as well as its keen attention to

issues of social and economic class, elements that appear in the *Harry Potter* series as well,

albeit in muted tones. Other critics have pointed out Rowling's "neo-Victorian" preoccupation

with the place of the orphan in society (Reynolds *passim*), both authors' use of creative and

significant names (Granger 111), and their borrowing and transformation of fairy tale elements (Stone, *Invisible World*, *passim*; Klaus 22-23).

For the purposes of this study, the most important comparison is that both Dickens and Rowling are expert "world-builders," to use a term typically associated with high fantasy but that can be appropriately applied to any author who writes about an internally consistent fictional society. The term "world" or "universe" (sometimes "Potterverse") is routinely applied to the English wizarding society of Rowling's series, as reflected in *Pottermore*'s invitation to "learn more about the wizarding world" ("What is Pottermore?") and in the name of Universal's theme park The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Long before the advent of the Potterverse or the conceptualization of fandom, critics recognized the "world"-like qualities of the settings of Dickens' novels, especially those set in London. As early as 1859, David Masson identified Dickens, along with Thackeray, as one of the foremost chroniclers of "the Metropolis," Masson's name for London (147)—a relatively small but teeming world, ripe for serendipitous encounters, much like Rowling's wizarding world. Though Dickens set his novels in an existing society rather than, like Rowling, creating a new one, through his atmospheric descriptions and unusual focus on what others considered to be background scenery (cabstands, street crossings, rag shops, etc.) he almost single-handedly shaped the idea that still comes to mind today when someone evokes "Victorian London" (Tambling *passim*). Steven Wall notes that Dickens' first several novels "established a large and loyal public who became committed to 'the Dickens world' and not just to individual novels" (27). Not surprisingly, there is a small theme park in Kent called Dickens World.

Not only the settings but also the characters of Dickens's and Rowling's novels give the illusion of independent existence. One of Dickens' greatest fans, G. K. Chesterton, claims that

he believed as a child that his copy of *The Pickwick Papers* was missing some pages at the end; the novel seems almost to be a random snapshot from a continually adventurous life (244). A later critic, Louis James, asserts that "*The Pickwick Papers* created a set of characters that became common property" (473). This concept of characters belonging to all readers, not just the author, shows up much later in the controversy surrounding Rowling's statements at the Carnegie Hall reading. Because Dickens's and Rowling's works feature a large cast of characters, most of whom are relatively simply delineated (cf. James 472), living in a world that, because of its high degree of realization, can accommodate a seemingly infinite number of plots, other writers find it easy to appropriate these characters and setting for their own stories. In Dickens's day, these derived (and often derivative) stories tended to take the form of plagiarisms, while in our era of copyright protection for books and easy distribution for other types of media (namely, Web 2.0), Rowling's world is reused and reinterpreted through fan fiction. In an interview with Melissa Anelli, Rowling demonstrated that she fully understands the attraction of and the ease of distributing *Harry Potter* fan fiction:

> If the Internet had been around in the time of Agatha Christie, this would have happened to Christie. Or Dickens! It would have happened to Dickens. Because there were writers who had very, very, very popular characters who created a world that people found immensely attractive. They wanted to go into that world and a great way of inhabiting that world was to write that world themselves. (Anelli 93)

The public predilection for recycling Dickens's and Rowling's creations is undoubtedly a factor in each author's interest in intellectual property protection. During his American journeys, Dickens used his celebrity to advocate for stronger and better-enforced copyright laws, an issue

that was personal to him because of the pirated editions of his novels that were ubiquitous in the

United States. Because there was no international copyright law, he was not entitled to royalties

from sales of his work in other countries. During his 1842 visit to America, he was asked to

present a petition to Congress on the issue, signed by a number of American writers including

Washington Irving (Forster 153). In a speech during the same visit, he denounced the climate of

fear that made American writers hesitant to speak up about the injustice of their country's

copyright law, and he claimed that "of all men living I am the greatest loser by it" (qtd. in Forster

149). Shortly before leaving the country, he was angered and discouraged by a resolution passed

in Boston "against any change of the law, in the course of which it was stated that, if English

authors were invested with any control over the republication of their own books, it would be no

longer possible for American editors to alter and adapt them to the American taste" (Forster

172). The controversy followed Dickens back to England, and he made obvious references to it

in his next novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Although he did not reopen the question during his second

trip to America years later, the issue continued to be associated with his name.

Rowling, on the other hand, is less outspoken about intellectual property issues, but her

name has become associated with stories of lawsuits against writers and webmasters who crossed

the boundaries of *Harry Potter* copyright, even those suits that were brought not by Rowling

herself but by one of her publishers or Warner Brothers, the production company of the film

adaptations (cf. Anelli 94-100, Ingleton 184; see also chapter three). Rowling began writing her

novels when the Internet was young and the remix culture of today barely existed. Although, as

we will see in chapter three, Rowling has attained a more sophisticated understanding of the

complex way that fan activity intersects with authors' intellectual property rights, she still feels

very protective of her work and is not entirely comfortable with seeing it manipulated by others, whether for profit or not.

It would be easy to attribute Dickens's and Rowling's efforts to police the boundaries of their intellectual property to a greedy capitalist money-making scheme, or perhaps to a formerly poor person's lifelong paranoia about having enough money. Another notable similarity between these two authors is their well-known rise from the edge of poverty to fabulous financial success. In an episode immortalized in *David Copperfield*, the young Dickens's improvident father was incarcerated for a short time in the Marshalsea debtor's prison, and during the same period Charles's parents sent him to work in a shoe-blacking warehouse, a humiliating experience that haunted him for the rest of his life. Although he became very successful financially, he was frequently bothered by begging-letter writers (Forster 124) and relatives who needed his support. As we will see in chapter four, the opportunity to earn money was a significant reason, though not the only reason, why he began his public readings.

In a story that is now equally as famous as Dickens's, J. K. Rowling was a single mother on welfare when she began writing the first *Harry Potter* book. Her meteoric rise to wealth will be discussed further in chapter three, but suffice it now to say that she was able easily to donate the entire proceeds of her two most recent novels to charity. Nevertheless, as she confessed to Oprah Winfrey in a 2010 interview, she still worries about money.

Despite these similarities in their backgrounds, Dickens and Rowling have very different personalities that affect their attitudes toward their readers. Dickens—perhaps because of a lingering feeling of childhood neglect—had an almost pathological need for people (see Forster 372-73 for an exception). He enjoyed walking in crowded streets, but even more he loved having an audience that could understand him and laugh and cry with him. The public readings,

the subject of chapter four, simultaneously indulged and fueled this need. Rowling, on the contrary, seems to have no such need. Her critics, even those who love *Harry Potter*, have perceived her as cold, having little regard for whether her audience understands her or is pleased with her work. This striking difference in personality may be one reason why Dickens chose an aural, physical platform for connecting with his fans—the public readings—while Rowling has chosen *Pottermore*, a textual, distant form of connection. Of course, the difference in time period plays a part here as well: people today are used to communicating through text over distance.

Although their attitudes toward their fans differ, Dickens and Rowling express remarkably similar feelings about their books. In their role as ultimate fans, they do not want the worlds and characters they created to fall into the hands of someone who would misrepresent them. That may be a naïve and uncritical way to think about fictional people and places, but it is a view that these authors consistently, if not always explicitly, express. One reason, perhaps the main reason, why Dickens and Rowling are so keen to assert their authorial presence, even as they make overtures toward collaborations with their readers, is that they consider themselves best able to speak on behalf of very *real* people with names like Harry Potter and David Copperfield.

In my dissertation, of course, I support and complicate this position with not only direct testimony from Dickens and Rowling but also critical readings of their novels and other productions, especially the public readings and *Pottermore*. But I want to close this introductory statement with two examples, one of each author, that illustrate the blurry boundaries between the roles of author, fan, and character.

In 1889-90, after the literal death of the historical person Charles Dickens (if not of the author "Charles Dickens"), J. R. Brown executed a now-famous pen and pencil drawing called *Dickens Surrounded by His Characters*.[2]   In the drawing, Dickens is seated at a writing desk that is placed outdoors on a road that winds through a green meadow toward a city (which presumably is London, in which case the desk probably is a synecdoche for Dickens's home at Gad's Hill, outside the city). Probably around fifty of his characters—some of whom, like Pickwick, are recognizable, while others seem to represent general types—are gathered on the ground next to the desk, on the road coming from the city, and on the desk itself. The characters would reach only to Dickens's mid-calf if he were standing. A few of them seem to be talking or gesturing toward Dickens, but his face registers no engagement in any particular conversation; instead, he seems to be surveying the scene at his feet with detached interest.

Dickens is inside the picture, but in a sense he is above it, removed from the main action. He seems to be one of the characters, yet he is unique among them. As theologians have said of a greater Creator, he is both immanent and transcendent. In the drawing Dickens fulfills three simultaneous roles: he is one of the characters, but his large stature and the writing desk mark him as the sub-divine author, while his position as observer of the scene makes him a reader. In his public readings, Dickens would enact a similar incarnation: while he remained physically onstage, above his audience, he gave and personally experienced the impression of sitting among his audience and reacting along with them.

My example from Rowling comes from what I consider to be the most autobiographical passage in all of her novels, from chapter 37 of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*.

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[2] Probably because Dickens's characters were so closely identified with the author's persona, there is a small subgenre of Victorian art portraying scenes similar to the one in Brown's drawing. A very famous example is the unfinished painting *Dickens's Dream* by Robert W. Buss.

Professor Dumbledore is speaking to Harry, but I am convinced that Rowling is using this opportunity to express her own feelings toward her protagonist:

> "I defy anyone who has watched you as I have—and I have watched you more closely than you can have imagined—not to want to save you more pain than you had already suffered. What did I care if numbers of nameless and faceless people and creatures were slaughtered in the vague future, if in the here and now you were alive, and well, and happy? I never dreamed that I would have such a person on my hands." (838-39)

Here, in a sense, Rowling becomes Professor Dumbledore; she makes herself a character in the story. But she is also a reader, as seen in the reference to careful observation, and not just any reader but a fan who has become emotionally invested in Harry. Finally, and probably more importantly for her than for Dickens, Rowling is also the authoritative creator. Dumbledore can, and does, manipulate Harry's fate to an extent, but his power is eclipsed by Rowling's; only she can truly keep Harry "alive, and well, and happy."

Of course, if fan fiction has any authority, then perhaps even Rowling does not ultimately control Harry's destiny. But I think the reason she has been as tolerant of fan fiction as she has is that she relies on the love for the characters that she and her readers share. It is the same love that connected Dickens with the audiences at his readings. They did not come to hear Dickens the man speaking in his own voice; they came to hear Scrooge and Nancy and Pickwick and Mr. Micawber. So it is possible that Dickens and Rowling and their fans achieve a balance between authorial control and reader empowerment by mutual respect for the world of the story and mutual love of its characters. My dissertation is an effort to demonstrate how that happens.

CHAPTER ONE

"THEIR FAITHFUL FRIEND AND SERVANT":

THEORIZING THE AUTHOR/READER BOND

The theoretical work surveyed in this chapter lays a groundwork for the central argument of the dissertation: Charles Dickens and J. K. Rowling, as creators of highly detailed worlds populated by characters who have the illusion of independent existence and whose fame may eclipse that of their authors, have an unusually interdependent (mutually perceived, if not actual) relationship with their devoted readers (or fans). This author-reader relationship is promoted by a number of factors, including publishing circumstances, such as the serial/series format, and deliberate efforts, such as the public reading tours and *Pottermore*, but ultimately it is made possible by the characters for whom the author and readers share a love.

The remaining chapters examine the various factors facilitating this sense of a bond between the author and the audience. Chapter two traces Dickens's early development as an author in control of his own work but responsive to his readers' reactions. Chapter three is an overview of Rowling's responses to her unexpected celebrity and the growth of *Harry Potter* fandom. Chapter four shows how Dickens built rapport with his audience and embodied author, reader, and text in his public readings. Finally, chapter five offers a close reading of the in-progress website *Pottermore* and an interpretation of what it could mean for Rowling's relationship with her readers.

First, however, I will give an overview of the uniquely self-conscious sense of authorship and readership that marks the careers of both Charles Dickens and J. K. Rowling.

Dickens and Rowling and the Author/Reader Connection

On 14 July 2013, *The Sunday Times* revealed that *The Cuckoo's Calling*, a crime novel published earlier that year under the name Robert Galbraith, had been written by J. K. Rowling, author of the phenomenally popular *Harry Potter* series and the tepidly received 2012 novel for adults *The Casual Vacancy*. The announcement unleashed a flood of amateur author theory across the Internet, as reviewers on *Goodreads*, *Amazon*, and other sites attempted to determine what made *The Cuckoo's Calling* a "J. K. Rowling novel." These discussions made concrete some of the most pressing questions of modern author theory, including perhaps the most basic question of all, "What is an author?," which was Foucault's major inquiry in his 1969 essay of that name.

This event was not the first time that J. K. Rowling's words sparked a debate over authorship. At a public reading at Carnegie Hall in October 2007, shortly after the publication of the final volume of the *Harry Potter* series, J. K. Rowling "revealed new information"[3] about several characters, most notably Professor Albus Dumbledore, who, according to this information, was gay (Ingleton 177-78). Following the announcement (or pronouncement) of Dumbledore's sexuality, and in general as the book and film series drew to a close, fans, theorists, and theorist-fans questioned the ownership of the *Harry Potter* characters. Some echoed Lene Yding Pedersen's claim that Rowling's "attitude to her own fictional world suggests that it still exists . . . and that its characters will 'live on' independently of her as their author" (39). Others, such as Pamela Ingleton, were more skeptical; with reference to both the Carnegie Hall reading and the website *Pottermore*, Ingleton mentions "Rowling's need to . . .

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[3] Throughout the dissertation, I enclose this phrase and others like it in quotation marks to indicate that they represent language used commonly by fans and by the Rowling franchise, not necessarily to mark a direct quote.

assert the prominence, as she emphasizes, of *her* version of *her* world" (178). But commentators on both sides of the question recognize that Rowling created such a detailed, internally consistent world that she is able to act, however disingenuously, as a reporter or emissary rather than a creator.

Rowling's assertion of her intellectual property rights, discussed in the introduction, has been viewed as a cause for suspicion by some critics, including Ingleton. I owe a great deal to Ingleton's essay for suggesting the conceptual framework of this study. I agree with Ingleton's conclusion that Rowling refuses to die the "death of the author." But I want to question Ingleton's assumption that this refusal is made at the expense of fans.

My argument is that Dickens and Rowling want to set boundaries on their worlds because they see themselves, however naively, as the guardians of a world, and especially of characters, for which they and their readers share a love. Or to put this idea another way, they see themselves as journalists bringing back information about a real place they have visited (a particularly apt metaphor for Dickens, who was at various times a court reporter, a sketch writer, and an author of travelogues). Given the supernatural aspect of both Dickens's and Rowling's works, throughout this dissertation I will be using yet another metaphor, that of clairvoyance. In his definitive biography, Peter Ackroyd calls Dickens a "medium" (904), referring to the author's practice of playing all the characters' roles at his public readings. Malcolm Andrews, author of the most thorough recent account of the readings, uses the same metaphor: "It is as if Dickens were voluntarily possessed by the characters" (197). Both Ackroyd and Andrews cite contemporary accounts of audience members who reported their impression of a "'subtle essence of sympathy'" (qtd. in Andrews 251) or "a mesmeric effect" (Ackroyd 982) in which "[h]is own characters inhabit[ed] his body" (983), concluding that "it is truly as if the novels themselves

spoke through him" (986).[4]   Though some people attended the readings primarily to see the

famous author (Ackroyd 784), in the majority of his readings Dickens gave no preliminary

remarks in his own persona (982), spending the entire duration of the event as a vehicle for his

characters' voices. Andrews goes so far as to describe this process as "self-annihilation" (260), a

paradoxically performative act of humility that I will explore further in my chapter on the

readings.

Dickens also had a habit of referring to his characters as if they were real people existing

outside the novel in which they appeared. In the postscript to *Our Mutual Friend*, he attributed

an opposing philosophical viewpoint to "[m]y friend Mr. Bounderby," a character from *Hard*

Times (qtd. in House 104). Though Charles Dickens was a celebrity in his lifetime, even then he

was known more for his characters than for his personal appearance, manner, or style—unlike,

say, a later Victorian, Oscar Wilde. Even today, the name "Dickens" is more likely to conjure

images of Ebenezer Scrooge or Oliver Twist than of their creator.

Although any enduring legacy of J. K. Rowling remains to be seen, it is already apparent

that she, too, is known more as a creator of memorable characters than as a memorable character

herself. Rowling rarely appears on magazine covers, but Harry Potter does (usually in the form

of actor Daniel Radcliffe). Interviews with Rowling, even after the conclusion of the *Harry*

Potter series, focus far less on details of her life and her other projects than on *Potter*.

Furthermore, both Rowling and her interviewers tend to speak of the characters as real people,

which is a common discursive practice of fans (Jenkins 18). In a conversation filmed for the

Blu-Ray disc of the final film, both J. K. Rowling and Daniel Radcliffe explicitly comment on

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[4] Andrews uses language even more closely suited to the nature of this dissertation, calling Dickens "a magician" (168) and quoting an observer's use of the word "spell" to describe his effect on the audience (251).

their tendency to do so (*Conversation*). Elsewhere, Rowling has said of Harry, "[H]e's a very real character to me, and no one's thought about him more than I have . . . No one has mourned more than I have" (qtd. in Ingleton 183). *Pottermore*, in particular, employs language that characterizes Rowling as a privileged observer of an existing world, as in a recent notification that mentions "a new entry that reveals more about the intricacies of the Floo Network." In the months before the final *Harry Potter* book was released, fans treated Rowling as an oracle—or "seer," to use the wizarding term—who could look into the future and know all the secrets of how the story would end: whether Harry would die, which romantic relationships would come to fruition, whose side Severus Snape would turn out to be on (Anelli 254-58). If Dickens was a medium through whom his characters could speak, Rowling is a seer with special insight into a world the rest of us can only experience at second hand. Paradoxically, while this increases Rowling's aura of importance as a revealer of secrets, it also diminishes the significance of her creative work, almost making her disappear as the author.

In this study, I argue that while Dickens and Rowling both have strong personalities (and personas) of their own, they are known best for inventing worlds and characters that have eclipsed the fame of their creators. Though they do sometimes assert their authorial authority, Dickens and Rowling more often position themselves as the ultimate fans of the stories they have brought to life, creating a bond of affection between author and reader that exists in their shared love for the characters. At several of his public readings, Dickens encouraged the audience to think of themselves as "a small group of friends assembled to hear a tale told" (qtd. in Ackroyd 804). (Apparently, the audiences complied; in a later chapter I will quote from Dickens's exhilarated accounts of the warm responses he received.)

Similarly, when the webmasters of two of the major *Harry Potter* fan sites visited Rowling for an interview in 2005, the three, according to a firsthand account, seemed to be a small group of friends assembled to chat about their favorite tale (Anelli 256-58). Though most *Harry Potter* fans will never have this opportunity, and though most of the thousands who crowded auditoriums for Dickens's readings never got to speak to him, many fans still sense a strong note of authenticity in Rowling's welcome video on *Pottermore* and in Dickens's prefaces in which he often refers to himself as the reader's "friend." The title of this chapter is from the preface to *A Christmas Carol*, a book in which Dickens, in the guise of a ghostly narrator, invites himself into his readers' private domestic spaces. The present study attempts to demonstrate how both authors reached the point of being able to approach their readers this way. The key, I will argue, is the characters, who are—to borrow a Dickens title—the "mutual friends" (cf. Hayward 21) who bring author and reader together.

Theoretical Overview

The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of the theories that will inform this study, beginning with the major works of author theory. Next, a brief summary of reader-response theory will lead into a section of more sustained focus on one of its offshoots, the study of fan communities. Because both authors make use, one way or another, of the series/serial format, there will also be an overview of the scholarship on serial fiction. The chapter will conclude with a statement of the study's limitations.

Author theory. The author theory of the nineteenth century, when Dickens was writing, was deeply involved in the "great man" school of historiography that prevailed in that day. An influential early essay in this vein is Percy Bysshe Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), which expands on Philip Sidney's 1579 work of similar title, focusing not only on the uses of poetry

but, even more, on the person of the poet. According to Shelley, poetry does have application—as he famously states, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (535)—but the poet's primary concern is his own pleasure; the edification of the audience is merely a byproduct: "A Poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why" (516). Shelley espouses what could broadly be called a Romantic view of authorship, which downplays the work of writing—"Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will" (531)—and mythologizes the author as a special person called to a special task: "A Poet, as he is the author to others of the highest wisdom, pleasure, virtue and glory, so he ought personally to be the happiest, the best, the wisest, and the most illustrious of men" (533). Shelley and his contemporaries, because of not only ideas like these but also their newsworthy lives (e.g., Byron's travels and scandals), were early examples of celebrity authors.[5]

Thomas Carlyle, in his 1840 lectures on heroism, picked up on this theme of the author as a "great man." Two of the lectures collected in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* are entitled "The Hero as Poet" and "The Hero as Man of Letters." Although Carlyle is not often categorized as a literary theorist, his ideas on authorship are worth noting not only because of their relevance to the topic of the celebrity author but also because of his connection to Dickens. Carlyle was one of the most respected thinkers in England during the time Dickens was writing and was influential on Dickens, who knew Carlyle and could justly be called a Carlyle fan (Newsom 67).

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[5] According to Leo Braudy, the first English celebrity author was probably Laurence Sterne (13).

In "The Hero as Poet," Carlyle echoes Shelley by suggesting that the greatness of a poet is broader than merely skill in the art of writing verse: "I fancy there is in him the Politician, the Thinker, Legislator, Philosopher" (69). His biographical sketches of Dante and Shakespeare create the impression that the poet is almost a messianic figure, endowed with unusual gifts and specially prepared for a specific time and place. (It is interesting to consider the fact that at the time Carlyle gave this lecture, Charles Dickens, who eventually attained nearly mythic status as the voice of Victorian England, had just entered the early period of his great fame.) Yet Carlyle is careful to point out that the poet's artistic sensibility differs from that of the ordinary run of humanity in degree only, not in kind. He sounds like a twentieth-century reader-response theorist when he says, "We are all poets when we *read* a poem well" (71). This acknowledgement of the reader's creative power is particularly relevant in the context of nineteenth-century serial fiction, which, as we will see later, invited the audience's active intellectual engagement in a number of ways.

Authorship studies in the remainder of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth were dominated by the same biographical methods that Carlyle uses in his work on Dante and Shakespeare. The next major canonical work of author theory is usually held to be William K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley's 1946 essay "The Intentional Fallacy." In this New Critical classic, Wimsatt and Beardsley argue that critics err when they make discovery of authorial intent their primary goal. Because the author's intent is never fully knowable, the attempt to find it is a distraction from the real work of literary criticism. Unlike later critics, Wimsatt and Beardsley do not go so far as to reject the persona of the author as a meaningful interpretive category. But they make a clean break with the methods of critics, like Carlyle, who looked to an author's biography in order to understand his or her work.

In one sense, however, they echo Carlyle and, like him, prefigure reader-response theory by insisting that the interpretation of literature is a collective act: "The poem belongs to the public" (470). They also make a statement that has some bearing on several of the specific concerns of this study, including intellectual property and fan fiction: "The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it)" (470). Wimsatt and Beardsley liken the work of literature to the author's child, a simile both Dickens and Rowling have used of their own books, but according to them the "child" becomes a sort of ward of the state, subject to the interpretive and even the re-creative powers of the public.

An important voice in the discussion of authorial control, though not a frequently anthologized work of theory, is Dorothy L. Sayers's *The Mind of the Maker* (1941), a curious work of both theology and literary criticism that draws an analogy between the human and divine creative processes. Sayers applies the Christian debate of predestination versus free will to the process of creating characters. Taking many of her examples from Dickens, she argues that characters can cause problems for their authors when they outgrow the plot function they were originally intended to fulfill yet the author continues to attempt to force them to fulfill that function (69). However, "[i]f each [the character and the situation] is allowed to develop in conformity with its proper nature, all will arrive of their own accord at a point of unity, which will be the same unity that pre-existed in the original idea" (75).

By describing characters in terms of real human existence—e.g., "free will" (*passim*), "true and living creatures" (67), "a character looking for a situation to exploit" (71), "asserted the freedom of its nature" (74)—Sayers is speaking the same language that Rowling uses when she makes statements such as "It was sort of borne in on upon me that Lupin had to die" and "I got to

know Dumbledore . . . I just knew he was gay" (*Conversation*). It is the same language used by fans (considered as a specific category of readers, to be defined shortly) of any fiction, who tend to take a psychological approach when they discuss characters, asking hypothetical questions about what characters would have done in a particular situation, rather than dismissing such questions as irrelevant because outside the boundaries of the text.

Wimsatt and Beardsley, as well as Sayers, acknowledge the limitations of authorial control, but Roland Barthes, in his provocatively titled 1968 essay "The Death of the Author," goes a step further to deny that the term "author" has any interpretive significance. The title does not refer to some sort of heroic act of postmodern philosophy in eradicating the concept of authority; rather, it refers to the death of each individual author, which occurs as soon as writing takes place and words take on an existence separate from the person who wrote them down. Barthes claims that "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (1466). The essay could be summarized by saying that the author is a mother who dies the moment her child comes into the world—though Barthes does not use this metaphor, which jars slightly with his characterization of the author as a patriarchal divine figure. Though the death takes place automatically, the author needs to be "buried" (1468), since the idea that a piece of writing is "a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God)" (1468) still "remains powerful" (1466). In other words, the myth of the author has always been exactly that, a myth, but a "revolutionary" (1469) action is necessary in order to break the influence of that myth over readers.

In the following year, 1969, Michel Foucault wrote "What Is an Author?," taking up a practical question left unanswered by Barthes's brief, declamatory essay: If the term "author" is unhelpful and potentially pernicious, how can we talk about where texts come from? Foucault

offers a brief survey of the concept of authorship, pointing out that whereas in the Middle Ages, anonymous "literary" texts were accepted without consternation, scientific propositions required the name of an authority for validity (1628-29). During the Enlightenment period, the situation was nearly reversed; in scientific discourse, "the role of the author disappeared as an index of truthfulness," while in literature, the concept of a single, identifiable author came to dominate the way texts are categorized and discussed, meaning that "anonymity was of interest only as a puzzle to be solved" (1629). (This continues to be the case: The "puzzle" surrounding the authorship of *The Cuckoo's Calling* eclipsed the murder mystery that propels the plot.) According to Foucault, the persona of the author has several uses: It authenticates a literary work, separating it from, say, a textbook or another text that does not require a named author for the purpose of validity (1628-29); it helps to explain the apparent contradictions in a body of work by attributing each text to a different aspect of the author's thought and/or personality (1630), and it has a legal function whereby a piece of "intellectual property" (also a relatively recent concept, as Foucault demonstrates) can be determined to belong to a specific person or entity (1628). Foucault's main point is that all of these uses cannot always be attributed to a single human being, and therefore it is more accurate to speak of an "author-function" than of an author (1631). By eliminating the need to determine the "real author" and discover his intent, Foucault claims, critics will be free to focus on more pertinent questions about the circulation of texts and the powers that control them (1636). These kinds of questions are prominent in most of the essay collections on *Harry Potter* that have been published to date—questions, primarily, about who is benefitting from the *Potter* phenomenon.

One such essay is Pamela Ingleton's "'Neither Can Live while the Other Survives': *Harry Potter* and the Extratextual (After)life of J. K. Rowling," which I mentioned earlier as

being highly influential in the shaping of my argument in this study. Even my title, with its reference to Barthes, echoes hers. Ingleton's study, like mine, cites Wimsatt and Beardsley, Barthes, and Foucault—though this is hardly surprising considering these critics' position at the center of the author-theory canon. Ingleton's title comes from a prophecy, significant within the *Harry Potter* series, which foretells that Lord Voldemort must either kill Harry Potter or be killed himself, and vice versa. Ingleton applies the quotation to Rowling and her text, invoking Barthes's concept that the author must die the moment the text comes into the world. She argues that J. K. Rowling refuses to die, which leaves her story in a state of suspended animation: it is ostensibly "finished," but it does not yet truly belong to the world (the fans), since Rowling continues to assert control through *Pottermore* (188-90), authoritative statements made at press conferences and other appearances (177-78), and legal actions (184). As Ingleton demonstrates, many fans seem to accept and even encourage the idea that the *Harry Potter* universe still belongs to Rowling, though she has been gracious enough to share it (182-83). Ingleton uses the term "secret keeper" in basically the same way that I am using the term "oracle"—to refer to the way that Rowling can extend her control indefinitely by periodically revealing new information (177). Ingleton's application of author theory to Rowling's situation is incisive, but she ventures into less firm territory when she explicitly (176) and implicitly (by surmising that she may have been tempted to kill Harry in order to close down the possibility for competing interpretations; 182) compares Rowling to Lord Voldemort, who fears death above all else. In the conclusion of this study, I will argue that in her approach to her own authorial death, Rowling actually bears a greater resemblance to a more positive character, Albus Dumbledore.

I argued earlier that Charles Dickens and J. K. Rowling are less famous than the characters they created. Nevertheless, the facts remain that Dickens, in his day, was

enthusiastically "lionized" (he puns on the term in *Pickwick* and bemusedly describes the phenomenon in *American Notes*) and that Rowling has experienced both the benefits (an invitation to give the commencement address at Harvard in 2008) and the drawbacks (paparazzi digging through her trash, as she shared in an interview with Oprah) of twenty-first century celebrity. Therefore, the relatively recent subset of author theory that focuses on celebrity authorship/authorial celebrity is relevant here as well. The major works include Leo Braudy's *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (1986), which is not specific to authorial fame but explores numerous examples of it; Joe Moran's *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (2000), Loren Glass's *Authors Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980* (2004), Aaron Jaffe's *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005), and Faye Hammill's *Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture between the Wars* (2007). Although most of these books concentrate on America and on periods other than those of Dickens and Rowling, their general principles are more widely applicable. In addition, Hammill's book includes a chapter on L. M. Montgomery that has specific application to my study, since Montgomery was also frequently conflated with and overshadowed by her most famous character, Anne of Green Gables, who became a commercial phenomenon in the category of Pickwick and Harry Potter.

Jaffe's book, though it deals primarily with literary modernism, includes an interesting discussion of an anonymous interview published in *Le Monde* that was later revealed to have been given by Foucault. The whole situation demonstrates Foucault's author-function principle in action. The opening descriptors of the interview and the accompanying illustration make abundantly clear that the purportedly mysterious interviewee is male, French-speaking, and a major name—despite the pose of namelessness—in philosophy. But even without these identifiers, readers could reasonably be expected to recognize Foucault in the interviewee's

provocative, declarative style and in his argument's resemblance to that of "What Is an Author?."

The point (both of the interview's argument and the experiment with anonymity) is that in the

modern world, neither authors nor readers are willing to allow anonymity to exist, and therefore,

even if an anomalous author attempted it, the publication system—in which writers, publishers,

and readers are all participants—would reject the attempt and the author's identity would quickly

be revealed, much to the book's increased publicity (cf. *The Cuckoo's Calling*).

As this brief survey has demonstrated, the figure of the author, though perhaps

increasingly important to the production-consumption system of texts, has been greatly

diminished in literary criticism over the past two centuries—even while, as Moran observes,

"this figure still seems to be very much alive in non-academic culture" (58). But the death of the

author has not left a gaping hole; the author has been replaced with another persona that stands in

a particular relation to a text: the reader. As Barthes strikingly concludes his essay, "[T]he birth

of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (1470). Not surprisingly, reader-

response theory became an important school of literary criticism in the 1970s, just a few years

after Barthes declared the death of the author.

Reader-response theory. One of the earliest canonical works to focus on the experience

of the reader was actually published the same year, 1969, as "The Death of the Author."

Georges Poulet's "Phenomenology of Reading" begins with an attempt to describe the mental

processes that take place during the act of reading. Simply put, readers find themselves thinking

the thoughts of another consciousness. Poulet uses the word "possession" to characterize this

experience of allowing another "self" to take control of one's thinking and feeling (1324), a

concept that fits well with the clairvoyance metaphor that I will employ in the chapter on

Dickens's public readings, in which Dickens's physical being seemed, to audience members, to

be taken over by another personality. This other consciousness, according to Poulet, is not the author but rather the text itself (1325).

Nevertheless, Poulet does not thoroughly dismiss the author as an irrelevant or dangerous concept. He tentatively puts forth the proposition, nearly opposite to Barthes's, that a book is "the means by which an author actually preserves his ideas, his feelings, his modes of dreaming and living. It is his means of saving his identity from death" (1324). Poulet puts this proposition to the side not because it is false in itself, but rather because it can encourage the overly simplified and ultimately misleading "biographical explication," in which a perfect knowledge of the author is thought to result from an understanding of the work, and vice versa (1324). On the contrary, Poulet insists that while an author's "works may be seen as an incomplete translation of the life . . . [t]he subject who is revealed to me through my reading of [each work] is not the author" (1324). Though Poulet dismisses the notion that the reader can fully and truly encounter the author through the work, his insistence that reading brings about a deep connection with another consciousness is crucial to my argument that characters can create a bond between author and reader. As chapter two will illustrate, readers of Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* experienced strong (and often, but not always, positive) emotional connections with the author when they read about the death of a beloved character, and Dickens reciprocated by using the language of friendship in his prefaces and speeches. Rowling is less effusive about her bond with her readers, but she has nevertheless spoken in interviews (some quoted in chapter three) about Harry Potter as a mutual friend who has enabled her to connect with other people. These examples fit within Poulet's concept of the meeting of minds facilitated by reading.

Poulet's essay is not generally considered a founding document of reader-response theory; rather, it is classified under the heading of the critical school known as phenomenology.

Louise Rosenblatt's work is also commonly omitted from the reader-response canon, due probably to her reputation as an educational rather than a literary theorist. Though Rosenblatt was attempting to reintroduce the reader into the critical discussion as early as the 1930s (Rosenblatt xi), the fullest statement of her theory is the 1978 book *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*. In it, Rosenblatt contends that the reader is vital to the existence of a work of literature (the "poem"); without the reader there is simply a text. A poem is created from the chemical reaction of reader with text. Rosenblatt's focus is on reintroducing the hitherto underrepresented presence of the reader into the field of literary criticism. (The first chapter is called "The Invisible Reader.") She leaves the author out of her transactional theory, but this is simply because she considers the author's role so obvious as to be taken for granted. That Rosenblatt believes the author to be a critical component of the production of a text is evident in the concluding lines of chapter one: "The purpose will be to admit into the limelight the whole scene—author, text, and reader" (5). As she situates her theory within twentieth-century literary criticism, she repudiates what she perceives as the New Critics' "neglect of both author and reader" (xii). Thus, Rosenblatt's goal might best be summed up as an effort to reintroduce *people* into literary criticism. Rosenblatt foreshadows the possibility of doing reader-response criticism and still valuing the author, which is exactly what I attempt to do in this study of Dickens and Rowling.

Rosenblatt also addresses the affective connection that occurs between a reader and a text. She defines her term "aesthetic reading" by using a quotation from a sonnet by Keats about reading a Shakespeare play. According to Rosenblatt, "The special mark of the literary work of art is indeed that it is 'burned through,' lived through, by a reader . . . Seeing the work of art as a special kind of lived-through experience and formulating the aesthetic experience in terms of the

inner-oriented focus of attention save us from the untenable opposition of art and life" (27). In other words, reading is not only an absorbing experience that requires our full, and not merely cognitive, attention, but it can also have an effect on the kind of people we become. Although here, once again, Rosenblatt does not mention the author, she uses language that implies the type of association that it is not literally possible to have with words on a page, referring to "the relationship with . . . the text" (29). This leaves room, I think, for the author-reader bond. The affective experience—encompassing more than mere emotional response, although that is important—will be a key theme throughout this dissertation.

Despite having Poulet and Rosenblatt as antecedents, reader-response theory is generally held to have begun with Stanley E. Fish, who introduced the concept of "interpretive communities" in his 1976 essay "Interpreting the *Variorum*," which is based in his work as a Milton scholar but makes a much more broadly applicable argument. In the first section of the essay, Fish compares variant readings of several of Milton's sonnets in order to posit that the purpose, or at least the most interesting purpose, of textual study should not be to resolve difficulties, thus creating an authoritative version, but to examine the thought processes of readers as they arrive at their preferred reading (2074). In the procedure of determining a fixed meaning, Fish contends, "the reader's activities are at once ignored and devalued. They are ignored because the text is taken to be self-sufficient—everything is *in* it—and they are devalued because when they are thought of at all, they are thought of as the disposable machinery of extraction" (2079). Fish proposes a system of literary criticism in which "the reader's activities are at the center of attention, where they are regarded not as leading to meaning but as *having* meaning" (2079). In the second section of the essay, Fish gives a demonstration of this system

in action and then answers possible objections that his theory is simply reinforcing the concepts of authorial intent and/or meaning as pre-existing within the text.

The most significant claims of Fish's essay for the purposes of my study, those which he expands upon in his collection *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980), are found in the final section, on interpretive communities. According to Fish, members of the same interpretive community share the same assumptions and are therefore likely, if not guaranteed, to interpret a text in a similar manner. This explains why, if a meaning is not embedded in the text, identical interpretations do nevertheless occur. The concept of interpretive communities also answers a charge commonly leveled at reader-response theory: "The fear is of interpretive anarchy, but it would only be realized if interpretation (text making) were completely random. It is the fragile but real consolidation of interpretive communities that allows us to talk to one another, but with no hope or fear of ever being able to stop" (2088). An interpretive community can organize itself according to any number of persuasions, including religious, political, or academic. It can also be a community of fans. The fan activities that appear throughout the remainder of this dissertation should be understood as the product of interpretive communities. The concept helps to explain, for example, why *Harry Potter* fans are generally in agreement about the relative canonicity of various texts, and why the phrase "out of character" is such a harsh critique of a fan fiction story. Fans are the key subject of a subset of reader-response theory that came into legitimacy in the early 1990s.

Fan theory. Though some ethnographic studies of fandom exist under the rubric of cultural studies (e.g., Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*), for the purposes of this study I am more interested in work produced by scholars who position themselves as fans, writing from within the world they are describing. One of the earliest collections of this kind of

scholarship was *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, edited by Lisa A. Lewis (1992). Containing essays by notable media scholars Henry Jenkins and John Fiske, among others, the collection offers a compelling demonstration that fan-scholars' bias toward their subjects does not necessarily lead to critical blind spots or shoddy argumentation. In the introduction, Lewis briefly introduces a challenge to the then-dominant Marxist conception of mass culture as a controlling force operating on passive consumers: "[F]ans must be given credit for responding with energy, creativity and optimism to difficult, and often unjust, social conditions" (6). Later studies extend and complicate this argument.

One such study is Jennifer Hayward's *Consuming Pleasures* (1997), of particular relevance to my project because of its focus on serial fiction and, in one chapter, specifically on Dickens. In her introduction, Hayward, a self-identified fan of television soap operas, pointedly critiques the work of authors who have contributed to the myth of fans as victims of hegemonic thought control and ignored "the ways serial audiences use their texts and the processes of collaborative interpretation, prediction, metacommentary, and creation that engage them" (2). This concept of fans reimagining their shared texts obviously bears on the issue of fan fiction, though Hayward does not deal at any length with original fan productions. Because Hayward's subject is serial fiction, I will return to her study at a later point in this chapter.

In her introduction, Hayward points out that fans' evaluative discourse can often replicate the same hierarchies seen in discussions about traditional or "high" culture (10-11). She is drawing from a concept that was often used as a framework for fan studies in the 1990s: Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural economy and cultural capital. This concept was first applied to fan studies by Fiske in his essay that appears in Lewis's collection; he claims that fans "create a fan culture with its own systems of production and distribution that forms what I shall call a 'shadow

cultural economy' that lies outside that of the cultural industries yet shares features with them" (30). Jenkins also cites Bourdieu in his discussion of taste in the introduction to his book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), which has been cited almost as a matter of course in most fan studies since then.[6] Jenkins demonstrates that fans' choice of culturally denigrated or transgressive texts does not entail a rejection of aesthetic judgment; rather, fans often use evaluative terminology borrowed from high-cultural criticism to distinguish their chosen text from lower-quality alternatives (17-18). While Hayward seems to consider this borrowing counterproductive—she calls it "attempting to dismantle the master's house by borrowing the master's tools" (11)—perhaps fan communities are preventing "interpretive anarchy," to borrow Fish's term, by developing their own standards of quality and canonicity.

Several scholars have taken on the task of describing the self-regulatory practices of fan communities. One such description comes from an unexpected source, a legal studies article by Nathaniel T. Noda (2011) that looks to fan activity as a useful model for approaching the thorny issue of intangible cultural property. Noda's operative terms are *teleology* and *canonicity*. Teleology has to do with perceived intent. Disagreements sometimes occur when fan creators produce work that demonstrates an understanding of the source material that competes with that of the author or of other fans—i.e., a competing teleology (449-50). Canonicity is a more commonly encountered concept within fan discourse, perhaps because, while teleologies often go unchallenged and even unnoticed, canons are clearly marked and sometimes rigidly enforced. Noda makes the interesting point that, far from being imposed from above on helpless fans,

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[6] In their historical survey of the field, Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington associate Bourdieu's influence with what they call the second wave of fan studies, which tended to identify fan practices as reinforcing cultural norms, but place Fiske and Jenkins in the more celebratory first wave. This division makes sense chronologically and conceptually, but it is worth noting that Bourdieu was being cited in fan studies almost from the beginning.

canons are usually set by the fans themselves: "The premium that fans inherently place on the creative output of the source author compels them to vest that author's works with inherent economic and creative superiority over fan-based works" (453). From that baseline, the discussion of canonicity becomes much more complex as a number of factors are added, including source author-fan collaborations (such as *Pottermore*), commercial adaptations (such as films) versus unofficial fan productions, and competing teleologies that may affect the canonicity of a text based on its apparent degree of affinity with the "spirit" of the source material.

Despite this complexity, designations of canonicity tend to be relatively consistent across a particular fan community, as I discovered in an informal survey administered online to 200 *Harry Potter* fans. The survey asked respondents to rank five "sources of information about the Harry Potter universe" from most to least canonical; ties were allowed. All but seven respondents considered the novels to be the most canonical source, and a majority considered fan fiction to be the least, while 191 respondents chose either *Pottermore* (90 responses) or J. K. Rowling's extra-textual statements—e.g., at the 2007 Carnegie Hall reading— (101 responses) to be the second most canonical. The only source of information about which the respondents showed no clear agreement was the eight movies[7] ("Harry Potter Canonicity Survey"). Though this survey has limitations, including a lack of testing for validity and reliability, it seems to indicate that *Harry Potter* fans have a fairly unified understanding of what constitutes a canonical source.

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[7] I will address the films in a later chapter. While the *Harry Potter* adaptations were commercially successful, earned Academy Award nominations in several technical and artistic categories, and were created with the active participation of J. K. Rowling, fans are nevertheless divided in their feelings about them. For a good discussion of fan expectations of popular novel adaptations, see Todd.

A number of studies have focused on fan activities such as network petitioning (Jenkins 28-30, Brower, Sabal), pilgrimage (Brooker, Couldry), and convention attendance (Jenkins 253-60). For the purposes of this study, perhaps the most interesting fan activity is the production and consumption of fan fiction.[8] The term refers to narratives of varying length that are written by fans, using the worlds and characters of traditionally-authored and -published source texts, and distributed through less traditional, typically Internet-based, modes of publication. While the very concept of fan fiction suggests a degree of appreciation for the source text, the stories often are not as purely laudatory as the name of the genre might suggest. Fan fiction may be used to express dissatisfaction with perceived stereotypes or inequalities in the original text (Jenkins 167, Marlowe) or to transgress societal norms, especially by portraying relationships between characters of the same sex or of disparate ages (Jenkins 185-222, Millman 47-48). Although, as Beth Marlowe points out, "fan fiction" in the sense of placing familiar characters into unfamiliar adventures has existed for millennia, the genre is emblematic of the late twentieth-century image of the reader as an active participant, a central image of both reader-response theory and fan studies.

One of the most memorable representations of fans as active participants is Jenkins's characterization of television fans as "textual poachers" (24, borrowing the term from Michel de Certeau), which is applicable more broadly to fans of all media types and perhaps most fittingly to creators of fan fiction and other forms of fan art. Poachers, instead of accepting a text

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[8] Of the many individual fandoms represented on the near-exhaustive site fanfiction.net, *Harry Potter* is by far the largest category, with 665,000 postings—almost twice as many as the second most represented fandom. On harrypotterfanfiction.com, there are over 80,000 stories. To use the term anachronistically, "fan fiction" about Charles Dickens's novels has existed since before his first serial was complete, in the form of stage adaptations, plagiarisms, and speculated endings; more recent examples include traditionally published books such as Dan Simmons's *Drood* (2009) as well as online stories. There are 517 Dickens-based stories on fanfiction.net.

wholesale, extract those elements that are pleasurable to them, which may mean reading against the grain. As Jenkins explains it, "Because popular narratives often fail to satisfy, fans must struggle with them, to try to articulate to themselves and others unrealized possibilities within the original works. Because the texts continue to fascinate, fans cannot dismiss them from their attention but rather must try to find ways to salvage them for their interests" (23).

Jenkins's description of fan activity sounds similar to Rebecca Tushnet's definition of "transformative use" of copyrighted material (61). Transformative texts, which can include parodies, fan fiction, and "parallel novels" that critique canonical works (such as Jean Rhys's *The Wide Sargasso Sea* or Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone*), identify issues latent in the source texts, making explicit what was originally subtext (Tushnet *passim*). Tushnet demonstrates that these reinterpretations may conflict with the source text author's vision (or teleology, to use Noda's term), but that American court precedent has shown them to be legal if they contribute to a transformed understanding of the original text, rather than, on the one hand, mimicking too closely or, on the other, departing to the extent that the connection with the original is unrecognizable.

From the brief survey given here, it should be clear that as a general field, fan studies has focused mainly on reader practices, often with either a celebratory or a disparaging tone. However, recent essays by Cornel Sandvoss and Matt Hills suggest that fan studies might benefit from a renewed focus on texts (Sandvoss) and aesthetics (Hills). Sandvoss predicts that if the field will incorporate the methods of reception aesthetics, fan studies "will move further toward exploring why fan texts mean so much to so many people and the meaning of this affective bond between text and reader in a mediated world" (32). "This affective bond" is exactly what I want to explore in this study, while also reintroducing the author into the equation—something that

the publication of Tushnet's essay on transformative use and authors' rights suggests fan studies may be ready to do.

Serial fiction. All of Charles Dickens's novels were originally published in serial format, most in monthly parts and a few in weekly parts. During the time Dickens was writing, and largely due to his influence, the serial was a major form of fictional publication. While the form waned in relevance and popularity as the nineteenth century ended, the practice of publishing series of novels (rather than serialized novels) became more common during the twentieth, especially the second half of the century—though it was, and continues to be, most associated with genre fiction rather than literary fiction, and particularly with often-denigrated genres such as children's fiction and fantasy. An exemplar of both of these genres that emerged at the end of the century is, of course, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, which consists of seven books published a year or more apart. Although the *Harry Potter* books are not "serial fiction" as the term is most commonly used in scholarship on the topic, they nevertheless share many characteristics with books published in weekly or monthly parts. Therefore, the following brief survey applies to Rowling's work as well as Dickens's, especially in terms of the serial/series format's effect on reader identification with the text.

Part of the reason for the strong connection between the serial form and a sense of reader identification is identified by Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund in *The Victorian Serial*: When serials are read or viewed under conditions replicating the experience of the original audience (rather than being read or viewed all at once), they become intertwined with the everyday life of the reader or viewer (8-9). We have to go on living our lives in between the installments, but we never totally stop thinking about what is going to happen next. In *Novels of Everyday Life*, Laurie Langbauer makes a similar observation, with the distinction that she conceives of

"everyday life" as a construct rather than (as the Victorians would have understood it) a fact. She uses a Freudian analysis to contend that both serial fiction and the category of "the everyday" are products of the repetition compulsion (219, 234). Perhaps protesting too much in her eagerness to demonstrate that "the everyday" exists only because "we" have named it, Langbauer calls it "the stone we kick to reassure ourselves that we're here, we exist—that we know that existence means" (234). Regardless of whether "everyday life" is natural or constructed, the concept contributes to an explanation of the continued popularity of the serial format: It helps us shape and give meaning to our own experiences.

A frequent theme in scholarship on serial fiction is its association with women, especially during the nineteenth century. Langbauer explores this association through the concept of "minor" fiction, which specializes in "the everyday" rather than in life-defining actions, is typically not considered canonical, and was (and still is) often not only read but also written by women, such as Margaret Oliphant and Charlotte Yonge. Langbauer quotes several nineteenth-century sources that state or imply that women are better suited than men for writing "domestic realism" because they are more attuned to the trifles (to borrow the ironic title of Susan Glaspell's play about gender relations) of housekeeping, etiquette, and other details that "major" novelists tend to take for granted (47-49). Even today, a similar logic may lie behind the deliberate marketing to women of the soap opera and book series in genres such as romance and historical fiction. Though these stories might be set in times and places far different from the readers' own, the emphasis on "everyday" interactions allows readers to identify with the characters and situations.

An often-cited reason for the persistence of the serial form is that it is an ingenious marketing device because, as Jennifer Hayward states, it "re-creates fiction in capitalism's image

by providing what is essentially a payment plan for narrative, thus simultaneously increasing profits and lowering costs" (29). Throughout her book Langbauer combines her Freudian conception of "the everyday" with a Marxist analysis to account for the success of a literary form that perpetuates demand: "It translates the reader's desire to repeat into a form available to commodity capitalism" (51). Though Langbauer complicates this picture by demonstrating that the serial format could have "worried capitalism" by creating readers who refuse to read any text but their favorite serial, she concludes that the result is basically the same, since "the series may encode the attempt to manage this risk" (51).

The connection between the series and capitalism is not only theoretical; Shawn Crawford points out that the nineteenth-century serial had an economic origin—"a loophole in English tax law" by which newspapers could pay lower tax rates by adding some extra text and calling themselves "pamphlets" (par. 5)—and an economic reason for its continued existence: More people were able and willing to pay for monthly issues than for completed, bound volumes (par. 7). Those who enjoyed the entire novel and had the means to purchase the complete volume could choose to do so later. The dual publication formats had an economic benefit for authors, who could appeal to a different demographic in the volume than in the serial, sometimes by making substantial revisions. Today it remains clear that the series format is a highly effective tool for creating sales through hype. This is partly because of the excitement and curiosity that develop organically during the periods between installments, but this excitement and curiosity can be helped along by marketing practices such as the recent phenomenon of midnight book releases. The waiting period is also a key time for selling tie-in merchandise and cross-promoting other series that are expected to appeal to the same audience.

A less cynical reason for the success of the serial format is that short installments lend themselves to community reading, which in turn often leads to fan community activity, as discussed in the previous section. The serial form also gives readers something to talk about between installments. Crawford (par. 10) and Hughes and Lund (10) describe the Victorian equivalent of water cooler chat about the show everyone is watching, and Melissa Anelli explains how the phenomenon now known as *Harry Potter* fandom grew out of this kind of inter-installment reader discussion. Hughes and Lund point out that the series format creates forced pauses during which reflection and analysis can occur (70). Richard Altick found that readers often went through an installment twice before the next one was released: the first time purely for plot and the second time to discover details they might have missed (qtd. in Hughes and Lund 34). In contrast to the common stereotype of serial readers as inattentive, hungry for cliffhangers, and caring only about plot, the uniquely paced serial format may actually foster a more analytic style of reading, as well as the opportunity to have one's own interpretation queried and challenged by other readers.

The serial form fosters interaction not only among readers but also between authors and readers. On the extreme end of the continuum of such interaction lies the famous story about how Charles Dickens wrote an alternate ending to *Great Expectations* because his friend and fellow author Edward Bulwer Lytton did not like the original one. There is a less famous but more interesting story, which I will explore in more detail in chapter two, in which Dickens changed the direction of a particular *Dombey and Son* plotline mid-novel because a different friend found it implausible. But Dickens's meticulous working notes, along with their interpretation by editor Harry Stone, make it clear that this kind of reader-prompted course correction was very rare.

Regardless of the author's response or lack thereof, however, the serial format still gives a unique opportunity for audience members to express their thoughts about a story before it is complete. My second chapter will also examine the outpouring of emotional response Dickens received before and after the death of Nell, the protagonist of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. In this case, audience input did not change the direction of the plot, but "readers' sense of closeness with the author" (Hughes and Lund 11) ultimately may be more important than any tangible effect that reader feedback might have on a novel. Serial audiences can, however, have a very measurable influence by voting with their dollars. Nineteenth-century periodical editors sometimes canceled novels in progress when sales declined (see Crawford par. 12, 13); the same thing happens every year to numerous television shows that do not achieve the desired Nielsen ratings or internet hits.

The serial format also allows authors to believably portray the development of a character over a long period of time. Hughes and Lund compare reviews of the complete volume of *Dombey and Son* with those of the serial version, demonstrating that whereas at least one whole-volume reviewer found the adult Florence's changing feelings toward her father to ring false, serial readers could believe that Florence was developing off-stage, within the pauses between installments (33). In the *Harry Potter* series, since each book represents one school year, the summers (which, if portrayed at all, are described more quickly and in less detail than the school years) are spaces for non-narrated, implicit change, especially in characters other than Harry.

A final reason for the success of the serial in the nineteenth century, identified by Hughes and Lund and cited by many (e.g., Crawford par. 9; Hayward 29), is that the format mirrors the worldview of nineteenth-century readers. Two of the most obvious Victorian values supported by the serial novel are progress and persistence. Discussing the historiography of *A Tale of Two*

Cities, Hughes and Lund state, "In the view of Dickens and his age, there is a fixed, linear order to time and progress" (72). But each individual has the choice whether or not to participate in this order: "Evangelical and Utilitarian ethics also insisted on steady application over great reaches of time to achieve distant rewards" (Hughes and Lund 5). The inevitable, satisfying ending of a novel is the reward for sticking with it. Hughes and Lund explicitly identify this causal relationship with the investment structure of capitalism (4). Lana L. Dalley makes a similar point in a recent article about a Victorian novel that, while not released in serial, still reflected the expectations of the times: "According to the conventions of realist and economic narratives, readers expect a happy ending, a payoff for *their* labor" (162).

While this concept of time is neither as powerful nor as widely-accepted today as in the nineteenth-century, most of today's popular fiction still fulfills the expectation that a narrative is supposed to be linear, culminating in a clear conclusion that is, if not always happy, at least identifiable as an ending. As Frank Kermode puts it in his collection of lectures on literary endings, "We cannot, of course, be denied an end; it is one of the great charms of books that they have to end" (23). Though endings are expected, they are also dreaded—hence the bittersweet atmosphere at midnight showings of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2*. The serial format creates an ideal situation for fans: It allows them the narrative satisfaction of knowing that an ending is on its way, but it delays that ending indefinitely, at least in theory. My last two chapters will explore in detail efforts on the part of Dickens (the public readings) and Rowling (*Pottermore*) to continue delaying that final closure.

Limitations of the Study

I am a fan, not just an appreciative reader, of both authors. I have even written fan fiction using Rowling's world and characters. While I agree with Lewis's and Hayward's assertions

that fans can produce legitimate scholarship on fandom, there is always the danger that my

closeness to the subject may distort my perception. My admiration of the two authors as people

could similarly threaten my objectivity, particularly when engaging with theorists who take a

tone of suspicion toward either author. However, as Matt Hills points out, all academics,

whether fans or not, are media consumers, which renders the ideal of objectivity largely

unhelpful (46-47).

Another limitation of the study is the fact that any comparative study between two

authors so widely separated by time and genre will inevitably have to stretch uncomfortably at

times. Even more, in a study that deals with the historically disparate authors' use of available

technology to communicate with their readers, the comparison will sometimes break down

entirely. As I have established in this chapter and the introduction, however, enough strong

points of commonality exist between Dickens and Rowling that a comparative study is

warranted. Even in some specific areas that might seem to have nothing to do with one author—

for example, Dickens and fan fiction (addressed in chapter two)—historically adjusted parallels

exist. Despite all this, some applications and theories simply relate better to one author than to

the author, as has likely already been evident in this introduction. Therefore, I have chosen to

organize the remainder of the dissertation into four main chapters, two focusing on each author.

A final limitation is the relatively small amount of serious criticism that has been written

on Rowling, especially compared to the glut of work on Dickens. The challenge is to avoid

groundless speculation in one case and overreliance on critical commonplaces in the other. To

address the former problem may require readers of this study to adjust their expectations of what

constitutes an academic source. Plenty of texts on Rowling exist, but they tend to take the form

of televised interviews, blog posts, and newspaper articles rather than journal articles or

scholarly monographs. Especially considering the topic of this study, those interviews and other non-traditional sources may prove more valuable than the alternative. In relation to Rowling's novels, they function as paratexts, to use Gerard Genette's term: elements that exist in proximity to a text and aid in its interpretation.

To avoid the potential pitfall of uncritically retreading familiar ground when writing about Dickens, I have attempted to read with an eye for comparisons between the two authors. Even when a source has yielded no such comparisons, or only shallow ones, the practice of reading this way has given me a fresh perspective. I have also made use of a number of paratextual elements in relation to Dickens's novels, such as his letters and working notes.

Chapter Summary

This dissertation finds a compromise between traditional author theory and reader-response theory by illustrating the ways in which these theories' key categories, author and reader, no longer fit the definitions they once held. The study of fan practices shows concretely how readers are becoming authors, while still remaining readers. This study requires analysis of fans' creative output, which necessitates the use of sources that fall outside the traditional boundaries of scholarly work. Genette's theory of paratext is one way to explain the importance and function of sources such as DVD special features and authors' public appearances.

Author theory and reader-response theory have tended to focus on the discovery or construction of meaning in a text, whereas this dissertation is concerned with an affective rather than an interpretive phenomenon. So, for example, whether or not authorial intent is discoverable is not an important question for this study. Instead, the important question is whether or not Dickens and Rowling believe they are being understood (cognitively as well as sympathetically) by their readers, and to what degree they care about being understood.

Rosenblatt's concept of aesthetic reading—an "intense experience [that] would leave [the reader] renewed for actual life" (27)—is applicable here because it defines reading as something more than an objective, intellectual exercise in determining meaning. Rather, it is a pursuit of understanding. As chapters two and four will demonstrate, Dickens was deeply invested in his audience's understanding; being misinterpreted (according to his definition) was frustrating for him because it drove a wedge into the emotional bond he believed he shared with his readers and listeners. The following chapter shows how Dickens developed that bond and strove to preserve it while maintaining his authority as creator.

CHAPTER TWO

DICKENS BECOMES "THE INIMITABLE"

This dissertation is structured around a tension between the author's assertion of control over his or her own work and the author's affective bond with the reader, which often leads to an intentional or unintentional sharing of control with the reader. Of the two authors, Rowling has made the most explicit and well-publicized statements of control, especially early in her career— after all, many people think of her as the author who sent cease-and-desist letters to teenage administrators of amateur fan sites (see chapter three). Dickens's assumption of an authoritative persona was more gradual, more subtle, and always conflicted. This chapter traces Dickens's early-career progress, never simple or linear, from a writer of sketches peopled by a rapidly-changing cast of characters to a weaver of complex plots enacted by characters that had to develop realistically. Throughout the change, Dickens never lost sight of his audience. He often tried to get a sense of how his readers would react to a specific plot move before he committed to it, but in most cases, rather than giving in to the whims of his audience, he trusted that they would understand, sympathize with, and accept his authorial decisions. The chapter also briefly examines the tension created when these decisions were not accepted—when various adaptors pushed back against Dickens's claim on the authoritative interpretation. Whether or not Dickens recognized them as such, these adaptors, too, were and are part of the audience for whom he was writing.

Dickens was writing for an audience from the very beginning. In *Sketches by Boz*, published in 1836 before he ever wrote a novel, his narrative persona sometimes takes the form of the tour guide who will return in *American Notes* and *Pictures from Italy*—for example, when he issues direct commands to the reader: "See [the beadle] again on Sunday in his state-coat and

cocked-hat" (18). Other times, the *Sketches* narrator becomes the mutual friend who will appear during the public readings just long enough to introduce his larger-than-life friends, the characters, to his appreciative friends in the audience and then step back to enjoy the sight of his beloved readers being entertained by his beloved characters. Both narrative techniques support the image Malcolm Andrews evokes of Dickens's readers being present with him in his room as he composed (158)—just as, in turn, the author would be there "in the spirit at [their] elbow" (*Carol* 23) as they read. George Ford attributes this evident need for an audience to Dickens's lifelong involvement in the theater and respect for the actor's craft: "To him, awareness of an audience did not make the actor any less of an artist than the type of writer who seems unaware of his public, only a different kind of artist" (23). Long before he began his public reading tours, Dickens was addressing his work to people who, like his characters, were far more than an abstraction to him.

Dickens relished the immediacy of the stage, and the serial format was the nearest way for a novelist working in an age before the Internet to approximate the experience of performing in real time for a live audience. All of Dickens's novels were originally published in some type of serial form. More than half of them were published in monthly parts; the others took the even more immediate form of weekly serialization. This on-demand composition might be likened not merely to acting but specifically to improvisation. Indeed, Dickens's first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, had an improvisational origin: it was intended by the publishers as a series of verbal sketches to accompany the pictorial sketches of Robert Seymour. After Seymour committed suicide, the text took precedence over the pictures (which became illustrations in the full sense of the term, provided by Hablot Knight Browne, who would go on to illustrate many of Dickens's novels), and the novel, while remaining picaresque, took on a plot. Readers of

Pickwick can sense Dickens feeling his way toward a plot (most people agree that the story does not really take off until the introduction of Sam Weller several numbers in), but this is not the blundering of a man in over his head. Stephen Marcus notes that when the project was first proposed to him, Dickens had definite ideas about how the text and illustrations should work together, and that before he began writing, he had conceived of the central character (19-20). Even the loosely-plotted *Pickwick* was governed by what Dorothy Sayers in *The Mind of the Maker* would call an Idea. Dickens's skill in plotting improved over time, perhaps culminating in *A Tale of Two Cities*, in which the plot, highly unusually for Dickens, is more memorable than all but a few of the characters.

At the same time, his novels also increased in unity of theme and tone. The purpose of this chapter is to observe Dickens's gradual assumption of greater control over the plots of his novels, which he achieved while continuing to create characters that provoked responses from readers. The chapter will focus primarily on two novels: *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41), which elicited the strongest immediate reader response to the fate of a particular Dickens character, and *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), the first novel for which Dickens used extensive working notes, as well as being the site of two major mid-novel plot changes. Besides Dickens's working notes, other primary sources will include his letters to John Forster, and reviews of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. The secondary sources used in this chapter may seem dated, but this is mainly because the area of Dickens scholarship this chapter fits into—the study of Dickens as a planner and craftsman—experienced its peak of activity during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. I have also cited a few more general works from these decades because of their classic status.

***Dombey and Son* and the Advent of the Number Plans**

Aside from the obvious factors of practice and maturity, one way to explain Dickens's career trajectory is to examine his working notes. All of Dickens's novels give the impression of a writer who knows what he is doing, even if what he is doing does not always meet the expectations of what criticism in a particular period calls good novel writing. But only in the 1950s did critics begin to examine Dickens's art as a planner or, to use a term from the title of a 1970 essay collection, a craftsman. Previously, the view that Dickens was an "instinctive" writer who achieved effects almost by accident had been institutionalized into a commonplace by numerous reviews and critical works. Sylvère Monod, perhaps the first twentieth-century critic to focus on Dickens's composition process, quotes several examples of the accidental-brilliance view before proposing to counter it by an in-depth study of the Forster Collection of Dickens's notes and letters (xiv). Monod's book was followed a few years later by John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson's now-famous *Dickens at Work*, and eventually Dickens's working notes were released in a facsimile edition edited by Harry Stone.

Taylor Stoehr offers a crucial corrective to what he sees as a false dichotomy; according to him, neither the instinctive view nor the careful planner view is "analytical enough" (74). He offers ample evidence that individual scenes and characters often came to Dickens's mind fully formed, as in a dream (41-44), but argues that this does not preclude the author's control in organizing these scenes and characters into a coherent whole (74). In my fourth chapter, on the public readings, I will return to what George Henry Lewes calls Dickens's "vividness of imagination approaching so closely to hallucination" (qtd. in Stoehr 42), but for now I want to focus on Dickens the craftsman and planner.

The argument in favor of Dickens as a conscious and deliberate artist rests largely on his system of number-plans: for each installment ("number") of a novel, he would fold a piece of paper in half length-wise and write a topic outline on the left side, with chapter summaries and queries on the right. Studying the number-plans is fascinating because it offers something like a snapshot of Dickens working in real time. Sometimes the right-hand column would consist of nothing but a list of characters' names, each followed by the word "yes" or "no" as Dickens decided whether or not to incorporate these characters into the latest number (Monod 425, 428). Comparing the plans with the published texts sometimes yields discoveries about mid-novel course corrections, as we shall see later in this chapter. But most of the time, the plans simply offer a glimpse into the rapid decision-making process of a highly imaginative novelist working in a time-constricted format.

As far as we know, Dickens did not use number-plans for his earliest novels. Some working notes for the later chapters of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Monod 203-04) and for *Martin Chuzzlewit* (Monod 238) have survived, but *Dombey and Son* is the first novel for which detailed number-plans exist. *Dombey* is the seventh of Dickens's fifteen novels, so it is numerically the last of Dickens's early career works. But it signals the opening of a new period in more ways than can be accounted for by mere placement. Critics have identified a number of other "firsts" regarding the novel. In his study *Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey*, Marcus notes that in contrast to the often overbearing narrative tone of the earlier novels, *Dombey* provides the first example of "subdued" prose: "a voice that seems to be listening to or overhearing itself" (293).[9]

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[9] This voice is probably the same as that which Albert J. Guerard refers to variously as the "detached contemplative voice" (146), "roving conductor," "*auteur*," or "alleged author" (147). Guerard associates this voice with the third-person sections of *Bleak House*, which followed four years and two novels after *Dombey*.

Monod calls this Dickens's "new style," which includes shorter and less explicit chapter headings, use of refrains (such as the term "old-fashioned," relentlessly applied to Paul Dombey) and repetitions (such as the description of Florence Dombey's loneliness, repeated with slight variations throughout chapter 23), and impressionistic descriptions of locations mediated by characters' mental states (243-45). According to Marcus, *Dombey* is also the first Dickens novel with a strong religious sensibility (355), the first "whose movement seems to obey the heavy, measured pull of some tidal power" (296—an allusion to the novel's ocean motif), and the first of his domestic novels (297). Andrew Sanders adds that along with *David Copperfield*, it may be Dickens's "most intimate" novel (xi).

One of the most interesting assessments of *Dombey* as a landmark novel comes from Stone, editor of the published collection of Dickens's number-plans. Stone calls it "the first novel of Dickens' maturity: the first novel to exhibit that profound and sustained integration of theme, fable, image, and mood that would characterize all his later works" (*Notes* 49). In another work, *Dickens and the Invisible World*, Stone argues that it is the first novel in which Dickens uses a fairy-tale plot structure (146), calling it a Cinderella story (169). Fairy tales, as Stone observes, were ingrained into Dickens's consciousness from a very early age, but never before *Dombey* had he used their motifs to organize one of his novels. Although most readers do not identify the Cinderella story, they can sense a unity and purpose in the novel, and an inevitability in the plot: that "tidal power" that Marcus refers to, or as Stone puts it, the understanding "that the universe in interdependent and sentient, full of mysterious affinities, secret signatures, and magical correspondences" (*World* 168).[10] That inevitability, supernatural

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[10] See also Stoehr 86-87. Stoehr coins the term "super-naturalism" (vii, *passim*) to name Dickens's literary "manner" and claims that "Dickens' world is full of magic" (86)—one of the many affinities I see between the world of his novels and that of J. K. Rowling's.

as it may seem, derives largely from the prosaic fact that Dickens was now carefully planning his novels from the beginning, allowing him to add a breathtaking variety of characters and subplots—and even, as we will see, to alter the trajectory of certain subplots—without straying from the essence of the story.

Stone is careful not to draw a one-way causal relationship between the advent of the number-plans and the increased unity and depth of the novels beginning with *Dombey and Son*. He suggests that both were natural, co-occurring consequences of Dickens's growth as a writer: "Dickens's growing concern to concentrate on the overall design and make all elements contribute to it made some sort of systematic planning necessary, while the systematic planning allowed him to achieve a deeper and more felicitous integration of means and ends" (*Notes* 49). I want to suggest as well that the number-plans allowed him to gradually achieve a more confident hold on his authorial control of the direction of his novels—even, as we will see later in this chapter, as the serial format allowed his readers to feel like participants in the process. Dickens had always been able to conceive of memorable characters, scenes, and themes as if in a burst of inspiration, but the number-plans enabled him to channel that imaginative force into a set of motifs that gave each novel unity—such as the sea and seafaring motifs in *Dombey*.

The very first page of working notes for *Dombey* indicates that Dickens already had the death of Paul Dombey, the key event of the first quarter of the novel, in mind when he began planning the first chapter. Paul first appears in the notes as "Boy born, to die" (57).[11] The notes also make clear that Dickens was well aware of the novel's magical atmosphere: for example, Mr. Dombey is said to "haunt[]" the boarding school where Paul is sent (65), and the mansion

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[11] Quotations from Dickens's working notes in this paragraph will be cited by page number only. They are from *Dickens' Working Notes for His Novels*, edited by Harry Stone. The page number is that of the typed transcript of the notes, rather than the facsimile of the original manuscript.

where Florence lives alone for a time is "[l]ike an enchanted house" (77). Furthermore, the notes, rather than merely outlining the plot, often describe specific images that Dickens wanted to include. For example, the notes to chapter 29 portray the marriage-breakfast table as a "Dead sea of mahogany, with plates and dishes riding at anchor" and reveal "Edith ~~lying~~ kneeling on the ground, and lying her head on the pillow beside Florence" (81). Both of these images were used in the published text. The first evokes two of the novel's main motifs, seafaring and the lifelessness of the furnishings surrounding Dombey; the second is a key tableau that closes a chapter of the novel and a chapter of Edith's and Florence's lives. Both images are highly visual, representative of what has been called Dickens's cinematic style (see Eisenstein). The inclusion of images like these in the notes indicates the immediacy and vividness of Dickens's imagination. Even as he was working methodically to sustain a logical and unified plot—for example, he spends two pages calculating Florence's age at various periods in the novel (71-73)—he was attempting to capture specific scenes as they appeared in his mind.

To supplement the working notes, it is often helpful to read the letters Dickens sent to his friend John Forster, who read all of the novels in proof except for *Pickwick* and part of *Oliver Twist*. In a letter written on 25-26 July 1846 and sent to Forster along with the first four chapters of *Dombey and Son*, Dickens illustrates and defines a key principle of his planning. He provides a summary of the relationships among Mr. Dombey and his two children as they will evolve throughout the novel. (All of this remains basically consistent in the published novel.) He then states, "So I mean to carry the story on, through all the branches and off-shoots and meanderings that come up" (Hartley 170). Later in the letter, after naming some characters he plans to "rely on" throughout the book, he writes, "This is what cooks call 'the stock of the soup.' All kinds of things will be added to it, of course" (Hartley 170). As anyone who has read *Dombey*—or even

looked at the size of it—knows, the "off-shoots" and the extra things added to the soup consist of a vast array of characters and subplots—some comic, some tragic, some more obviously relevant to the Dombey family story than others. This letter shows that one of the central paradoxes of Dickens's novels from *Dombey* onward—the astonishingly wide range of people and scenes that nevertheless do not utterly dilute the unity of the novel—results from a deliberate planning strategy.

This letter to Forster is interesting also because it includes Dickens's original intentions for Walter Gay, a young man who works for Dombey's firm and rescues Florence at the end of the first number. Dickens writes, "I think it would be a good thing to disappoint all the expectations that chapter seems to raise of his happy connection with the story and the heroine, and to show him gradually and naturally trailing away, from that love of adventure and boyish light-heartedness, into negligence, idleness, dissipation, dishonesty, and ruin" (Hartley 170-71). He explains that this decline, in its truth to life, would have a moral purpose. But Dickens was never very interested in giving his readers what they needed, without regard to what they wanted, and his question to Forster reveals where his true concern lay: "Do you think it may be done, without making people angry?" (Hartley 171). Forster's response has not survived, so it is impossible to know whether it had any bearing on what Dickens ultimately chose to do with Walter: send him to Barbados on a trading mission for the firm, cause his ship to be lost at sea, and then return him to England to marry Florence, fulfilling the expectations of some loveable comic characters (such as Captain Cuttle's absurd confidence that Walter, like the famed Dick Whittington, will marry his employer's daughter) rather than bearing out the darker hints of the powerful, including, of course, the author himself.

Edmund Wilson cites Walter as an example of Dickens's "difficulty" in being able to "get good and bad together in one character": "He had intended . . . to make Walter Gay turn out badly, but hadn't been able to bring himself to put it through" (65). Although Wilson does not elaborate on this example, his wording ("bring himself") suggests an emotional rather than an artistic difficulty. In her theoretical work *The Mind of the Maker*, Dorothy Sayers describes a tendency of Dickens that may explain this emotional difficulty. She uses Dickens as an example of what can happen when a character takes on a personality that cannot be aligned with the planned plot without harming the story's believability. Because Dickens thought of his characters as real people and sometimes "fell in love" (Sayers 74) with them, he ran the risk of allowing their personalities to hijack the plot.

Sayers's main example, via Chesterton, is Noddy Boffin from *Our Mutual Friend*, whom many critics consider an artistic failure because of the awkward device whereby he reveals that he has only been pretending to be a miser throughout the long middle of the novel, despite all appearances to the contrary. Sayers quotes Chesterton's belief that Dickens had intended for Boffin to have really become a miser but then changed his mind (73). While Chesterton argues that the pace of the plot is what caused the difficulty, Sayers claims, rightly, that "what really stood in the way was the intrinsic sweetness and modesty of Mr. Boffin himself" (74). She asserts that difficulties like this one happen "only to those [characters] that have received a full measure of the author's life" (Sayers 74).

It seems that something similar must have happened with Walter Gay—though one could argue that if *Dombey and Son* is a fairy tale, miraculous reversals bringing about the fulfillment of unlikely prophecies are not at all out of place. Also, Hughes and Lund point out that critics have overemphasized Dickens's idealistic endings, forgetting how long, especially for serial

readers, the often painful, difficult, and realistic middle parts are (289). Hughes and Lund make

this assertion in their discussion of another criticized character in *Dombey and Son*, Florence

Dombey. Florence has been faulted for her lack of development: the novel begins when she is a

little girl and follows her into adulthood, yet many readers see little to no change in her character

(Hughes and Lund 30, 286-87). A partial explanation for this has to do with Dickens's life-long

concern, tantamount to obsession, with preserving unchanged states of childhood and innocence,

which will be explored further in chapter four.

But Hughes and Lund contend that Florence really does develop—slowly and gradually,

and therefore more noticeably to serial readers than to volume readers (30, 33, 39, 41). She

represents the truth that, in life as in story, change can happen silently and invisibly—Hughes

and Lund use the term "offstage," echoing the theatrical language Dickens would have enjoyed

(36, 39). Serial readers were able to view Florence through her father's eyes: like them, he goes

through periods of separation from her (e.g., her time at Brighton, his honeymoon) that

sometimes span multiple monthly parts (Hughes and Lund 37-38). As we have already seen

from the two pages of notes calculating Florence's age, the working notes evince that Dickens

gave a great deal of thought to this character's development, and the novel, especially when read

at a serial pace, bears out this thought.

As a survey of his working notes and letters to Forster makes clear, by the time he wrote

his seventh novel Dickens had achieved, within the exacting format of monthly parts, a

considerable measure of control over the unity and trajectory of his plots. At the same time, he

believed that he and his readers had forged, over the course of six serial novels, an affectionate

relationship that he kept always in mind as he considered the effects his literary decisions would

have. The next section focuses on a particular moment within that relationship-building period.

Readers Respond to the Death of Little Nell

In a novel controlled by a force of inevitability, one of the most predictable (in this case, the adjective is not a criticism) events is the death of six-year-old Paul Dombey, whose passing away is preceded by pages and pages of heavy yet effective dramatic irony, in which everyone but Paul, who is puzzled about why everyone seems so sad and kind, understands that he is dying—though even Paul has occasional premonitions that he will never grow up. Paul's is neither the first nor the most famous child death in Dickens's novels: those distinctions belong to the death of Nell, the adolescent but childlike protagonist of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Nell's death has received little textual analysis, but the scene and the public response to it have been perceived to embody, at various times, everything that was right, wrong, or simply fascinating about the Victorian period. As James R. Kincaid writes, "More than any other Dickens' [*sic*] novel, this one has tended to be rewritten in critical mythology and has become grossly oversimplified in the process" (66). For example, many people forget that Nell's death takes place off-stage. In chapter 71, during the surprisingly brief deathbed scene, she is already dead. In chapter 72, the people who were with her in her last illness give an account of the days leading up to her death, but the moment of her death, far from being the lugubriously drawn-out affair that many people claim to remember, is actually not pictured.[12]

Dickens's friend and biographer Forster claims to have convinced the author that Nell needed to die: "I was responsible for its tragic ending. He had not thought of killing her, when, about half-way through, I asked him to consider whether it did not necessarily belong even to his

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[12] *The Old Curiosity Shop* has been misremembered (or mythologized) by admiring readers as well. See Guerard's account of Dostoevsky "remembering" a scene that does not appear in the novel. Guerard says that "Dickens's story . . . lived and grew in the minds of readers" (79).

own conception, after taking so mere a child through such a tragedy of sorrow, to lift her also out of the commonplace of ordinary happy endings " (117).[13] Nevertheless, Dickens gave an apparently contradictory account in a letter: "I never had the design and purpose of a story so distinctly marked in my mind, from its commencement. All its quietness arose out of a deliberate purpose; the notion being to stamp upon it from the first, the shadow of that early death" (qtd. in Marcus 132). Marcus suggests that there is a grain of truth in both accounts (132), and indeed, Forster elsewhere wrote that in the origin of the novel, Dickens exhibited "less direct consciousness of design . . . than I can remember in any other instance of all his career" (qtd. in Monod 171). Regardless of which story is correct, it is clear that Dickens's own immediate response to writing Nell's death was a very personal sorrow: "I shan't recover it for a long time. Nobody will miss her like I shall" (Hartley 74).

Perhaps nobody would miss Nell quite in the way that Dickens did, but many people would miss her nonetheless and mourn her loudly. The responses of readers before and after Nell's death constitute one of the most famous anecdotes of the nineteenth-century serial. According to Shawn Crawford, "Dickens received hundreds of letters asking for the life of Little Nell" (par. 10). Peter Ackroyd cites the famous, though undocumented, story of American fans crowding the New York harbor to wait for the ship that brought the installment that would let them know of Nell's fate (319). And the responses after Nell's death were equally strong. A reviewer in the *Metropolitan Magazine* tried to argue on ethical grounds that it was a bad plot decision: "Moral, mere moral justice would have awarded a happier fate to the poor girl" (*Master*

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[13] A vague reference in a letter from Dickens to Forster seems to confirm this claim: "When I first began (on your valued suggestion) to keep my thoughts upon this ending of the tale, I resolved to try and do something which might be read by people about whom Death had been,—with a softened feeling, and with consolation" (Hartley, "To John Forster" 17 January 75).

Humphrey's Clock 94). Ackroyd describes the highly emotional reactions—whether anger (the politician Daniel O'Connell, who threw his copy of the book out a train window) or tearful sorrow (the critic Lord Jeffrey)—of well-known readers, representative of the reactions of countless others (Ackroyd 319). There were exceptions—for instance, Thackeray, who would later be strongly affected by Paul Dombey's death, but was unmoved by Nell's (Monod 252). But by all accounts, the general response to Nell's death resembled mourning for a real child, not a fictional character.

A favorite activity of Dickens critics is to speculate on the causes of this outpouring of collective grief, especially because the narration of Nell's death—not to mention most of her life—tends to strike post-Victorian readers as overly sentimental to the point of ineptitude. Indeed, *The Old Curiosity Shop* was a common target of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century diatribes against Victorianism conceived as an ideology. On the other hand, Oscar Wilde doubtless spoke for others when he declared, in a famous epigram, that Nell's death simply made him laugh. According to Kincaid, it is partly chronological snobbery (to borrow a term from C. S. Lewis) that makes us avoid identification with the fans of *The Old Curiosity Shop*—both in their grief over Nell and their breathless anticipation of each succeeding number—but also "there is something challenging and therefore frightening about the openness with which they invested so much of themselves in Nell" (67). What brought about this openness?

A number of explanations have been proposed. Ackroyd refers to the novel's historical context, a time when the child mortality rate was high and, more abstractly, there was a prevailing sense of loss of innocence, easily allegorized by the death of a child, especially a beautiful yet pure young girl (320-21). John Ruskin describes his own personal connection to

the story: "the power of the fiction rests, I suppose, on the fact that most persons of affectionate temper have lost their own May Queens [a Tennyson character who also died young] or little Nells in their time. For my own part of grief, I have known a little Nell die" (101). Edgar Johnson echoes the contextual assessment (323) but goes further to suggest that Nell's story might cathartically appeal to the guilty feelings of a society dealing with the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution: "Nell is transfigured from a single suffering child into a symbol for all the victims of a society that might discover too later, as Midas did, that it had killed its children, but not even gained his gold" (327). Johnson also makes a more general, timeless claim: "Nell herself is a pathetic symbol of all the forgotten and ignored, left to wander through the difficulties of their existence as best they may" (319).

Despite Johnson's assertions that Nell became a symbol, the general tenor of reader responses indicates that most people loved and mourned her as a concrete personality. Perhaps they were actually mourning the spirit of innocence, but that was not the language they used. In keeping with the interpretation of Nell as a real personality, Marcus looks to a traumatic event in Dickens's life, the death of his beloved sister-in-law Mary Hogarth, to provide a psychological explanation for why Nell's death was so heartbreaking for the author (159-60), but this does not account for why his readers felt about it as he did.

Detractors of the famous deathbed scene have tended to lambast the writing style and the sentiment equally and at the same time, as in Aldous Huxley's assessment, which faults both the "sticky overflowings" of Dickens's heart and the "atrocious blank verse" in which they are expressed (qtd. in Johnson 322). The key to understanding the contemporary reaction to the scene may lie in separating the style from the message. As Johnson puts it, "The medium is inferior, but the feeling is noble. That was what moved Dickens's contemporaries" (323). In

other words, Dickens had already succeeded in gaining a readership who trusted his sincerity and felt along with him. The author was well aware of "that particular relation (personally affectionate and like no other man's) which subsists between me and the public" (qtd. in Collins "Self-Estimate" 23), and he frequently referred to it in the prefaces to his novels.[14] Philip Collins claims, citing serial publication as a reason, that the Victorian period was "a time when 'friendly' relations between novelist and the public were common" ("Readers" 53), but he offers no examples of authors who stood in relation to their audience in the same way that Dickens did. Certainly, none of them attempted to get as literally close to their readers as Dickens did in the public readings, and it is unlikely that any of their obituaries included phrases like "personal friend," "personal bereavement," and "personal loss" (qtd. in Collins "Self-Assessment" vii-viii). Dickens's readers mourned for him, a person they had never met, much as they had mourned for Nell, a character who had never, strictly speaking, lived. Yet in the connection forged by words, these bare facts of reality mattered little.

As Collins notes, the shared mourning for Nell was not only an effect of the relationship between author and readers but also a cause of that continued affinity ("Readers" 52). Collins quotes a speech Dickens gave in Boston: "At every act of kindness on your part, I say to myself 'That's for Oliver; I should not wonder if that was meant for Smike [the neglected teenager who dies of consumption in *Nicholas Nickleby*]; I have no doubt that is intended for Nell'" (qtd. in "Readers" 53).[15] The readers loved Nell and mourned her death because Dickens had done so first. Nell's death, in a sense, was like the death of a close friend's child.

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[14] See, for example, the preface to the 1857 edition of *Little Dorrit*, in which he states that he is "[d]eeply sensible of the affection and confidence that have grown up between us" (36).

[15] There is a similar sentiment in the preface to *Dombey and Son*: "If any of [my readers] have felt a sorrow in one of the principal incidents on which this fiction turns, I hope it may be a sorrow of that sort which endears the sharers in it, one to another.

The term "sympathy" is important to understanding what was happening between Dickens and his readers. During the nineteenth century, the word had a greater range of meaning than it does today, when it tends to refer simply to feeling sorry for someone. In her novels, especially *Middlemarch* (1871-72), George Eliot would develop a philosophy of sympathy as imaginative participation in another person's circumstances and thought processes. Earlier in the century, the term was associated most closely with the newly fashionable practice of mesmerism, or animal magnetism, which fascinated Dickens and which he attempted with some success on more than one occasion (see Kaplan, *Mesmerism*). The connection between the person practicing mesmerism and the person being practiced upon was sometimes called sympathy.

As we have already seen, attendees of Dickens's public readings often used the language of mesmerism to describe the power that Dickens seemed to have over the audience. The play between "sympathy" as a mesmeric term of art and "sympathy" as feeling along with someone else suggests that Dickens's relationship with his readers fell somewhere along a continuum between an exercise of the enchanter's power to fascinate and an exercise of the reader's deliberate attempt to feel what the author is feeling. Forster emphasizes the importance of the reader's receptive attitude to a correct evaluation of *The Old Curiosity Shop*: "All cannot fail to recognize [Dickens's art] who read the book in a right sympathy with the conception that pervades it" (qtd. in Monod 185).[16]

Not every reader made this connection with Dickens while reading Nell's death scene. O'Connell, for example, when he threw the book out the window, supposedly said, "He should not have killed her!" (qtd. in Ackroyd 319). Here, Dickens is cast as a murderer rather than a

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[16] Forster also uses the word "sympathy" when he describes Dickens's strong dislike of negative criticism. He claims Dickens had a "susceptivity almost feminine and . . . eager craving for sympathy . . . [He was] sensitive in a passionate degree to praise and blame" (qtd. in Collins "Self-Estimate" 28).

grieving father. The *Metropolitan Magazine* review quoted above casts him as an unjust judge, a less vehement accusation but still implying an emotional detachment between the author and the character that he created and then destroyed, seemingly without remorse. In his working notes, Dickens sometimes did use jarringly brusque language when referring to characters' deaths, as in this memorandum for *Our Mutual Friend*: "Kill Gaffer retributively" (qtd. in Monod 429). This kind of language could be interpreted as a coping mechanism to help Dickens separate emotionally from his characters as he neared the point of their death. On the other hand, perhaps Dickens did not care as deeply about Gaffer Hexam as he did about some of his other characters, especially the children. As we have already seen, Dickens felt sorrow upon Nell's death—not guilt, and not a second-guessing of the plot decision, but real grief. Clearly, however, some readers did not experience the sympathetic connection with the author, but they still responded emotionally to Nell's death. An alternate explanation must exist.

Historians and critics have frequently pointed to the broad context of the Victorian period in their explanations for the response to Nell's death, but they have rarely credited the specific publishing conditions of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Like all of Dickens's major works, the novel was published as a serial; in this case it appeared weekly in the author's odd and short-lived periodical *Master Humphrey's Clock*. Those who read the installments as they appeared received a weekly update about Nell, much like a weekly letter received from one's own child away at school. This meant that she could never be far from their minds. As Langbauer, Hughes and Lund, and others have noted, experiencing a narrative in serial causes it to become woven into the fabric of the reader's experience. Readers (or viewers) may begin to think about the plots, settings, and especially characters throughout their daily lives. They may begin to interpret their own experience through the frame of the story, and vice versa.

All of this is even more the case for the author of a serial narrative, and by all accounts, it was particularly true for Dickens. Engaging in some speculation based on his extensive biographical research, Johnson puts it this way: "The world in which his spirit dwelt was identical with the world of his novels, brilliant in hue, violent in movement, crammed with people all furiously alive and with places as alive as the people. 'The Dickens world' was his everyday world" (vii). This is not the stuff of one of those psychological thrillers in which the protagonist can no longer distinguish imagination and reality; Dickens knew the difference between his characters and the flesh-and-blood people in his life. There is an obvious disingenuous wink implied in Dickens's writing in a letter to a friend, "I often say to Mr. Gradgrind that there is reason . . . in much that he does" (qtd. in Andrews *England* 71).

But neither was his tendency to treat his characters as real people entirely a pose. Dickens felt his characters very deeply (see Marcus 148-49). When his daughter Katey was asked whether she was her father's favorite child, she countered that David Copperfield was his favorite (Hawksley 66). Dickens himself, in his preface to the 1867 Charles Dickens Edition of *David Copperfield*, writes, "I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child. And his name is DAVID COPPERFIELD" (10). It is evident from the context that he is referring to the novel rather than the character, but his language is ambiguous, and there is certainly some slippage between the two. Dickens also referred to Nell as "my child" (qtd. in Monod 184). In the number-plans, his comments on specific characters sometimes sound like notes a teacher would make about students, or a counselor about clients, as in these notes on *Dombey and Son*: "Florence's purpose. Remember her old loneliness, and observe her present state of mind"; "Be patient with Carker" (*Notes* 85). Stoehr notes that Dickens went even further, engaging in exercises by which he imaginatively became the characters while writing about them, even

sympathizing (in the technical sense discussed above) with characters who might colloquially be called unsympathetic (42-44). Stoehr paradoxically interprets this process as having a depersonalizing effect—"This identification with all the characters is especially important because it seems to prevent his taking any one role and identifying himself deeply with it" (45)— and I would add that by avoiding self-identification with one particular character, Dickens allowed himself to see all of the characters as his friends.

Dickens's sense that his characters are larger than the boundaries of the novels has been shared by his readers from the very beginning. In a reference to the early, unsuccessful numbers of *Master Humphrey's Clock*, before the serialization of *The Old Curiosity Shop* had begun, Dickens wrote that he had "insensibly fallen into the belief that [these gentle spirits] are present to his readers as they are to him" (qtd. in Monod 170). But when the characters are well-drawn, as they are not in those unusual opening numbers, they *are* present to the readers. G. K. Chesterton speaks for many when he says, "There is no reason why Sam Weller, in the course of his wanderings, should not wander into *Nicholas Nickleby* . . . the units of Dickens, the primary elements, are not the stories, but the characters who affect the stories—or, more often still, the characters who do not affect the stories" (245). Adaptors of Dickens's work, beginning with Dickens himself in the public readings, have long understood this and often boiled a lengthy work down to a character sketch, as in (to cite just two examples among many) the 1928 short films entitled *Scrooge* and *Grandfather Smallweed* (Richards 329).

In a few rare cases, characters that become famous enough can become detached not only from their specific novel but also from their author's name. In his book tellingly called *The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge*, Paul B. Davis demonstrates the progression from Dickens's book *A Christmas Carol* to the "culture-text" (13) "A Christmas Carol," which is not a

single text but an accumulation of all adaptations, interpretations, and connotations. In his final chapter, Davis gives many, primarily journalistic, examples from the 1980s of the use of characters from *Carol*, usually Scrooge or one of the three spirits, to discuss everything from economic crisis to NBA basketball.

Although *A Christmas Carol* is probably the only one of Dickens's works whose characters have become floating signifiers to the degree that they can be invoked in such a wide range of contexts, and even recognized by people who do not know the name "Dickens," characters from other books have become similarly famous in their own right. Oliver Twist is probably the best post-Victorian example due to the musical *Oliver!*, made into a 1968 film, which bears only superficial resemblance to Dickens's novel in setting and diverges widely from it in tone.[17] In the nineteenth century, characters who eclipsed their stories and author in this way included Mrs. Gamp (considered by many to be one of the few strokes of brilliance in *Martin Chuzzlewit*), Sam Weller, and Nell herself.

When a character becomes thus detached from its creator, later interpreters may believe they are improving on the original when they introduce changes. An extreme example of this comes from a 1960s studio executive who claimed that "Dickens is a terrible writer," citing a lack of explanation for why Ebenezer Scrooge became an unpleasant miser and touting his film version's psychoanalytical insights (qtd. in Davis 189). Claiming to understand or love a character, especially a minor character, better than the author does is not uncommon within fan communities, and is a major impetus for fan fiction, an idea we will revisit later in this chapter

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[17] Disney took the "Oliver Twist" culture-text a step further from its origin with the 1988 animated animal story *Oliver and Company*. As a child, I knew nothing about Charles Dickens prior to watching it, and it did not introduce me to Dickens. That distinction belongs to *The Muppet Christmas Carol* (1992), which retains much of Dickens's language and makes a very deliberate effort to associate the story with the author, even casting Gonzo in the role of a narrator who calls himself "Charles Dickens."

and in the J. K. Rowling ones. The same type of thinking may have provoked the reactions to

Nell's death, of which I am perhaps unfairly using Daniel O'Connell's as a representative, that

accused Dickens of cruelty in "killing" her. These readers had not established an affective

connection with the persona of the author, but they had established one with his characters, or at

least this particular character.

Thus, there are two reasons, which probably coexisted in many people, for the public

outpouring of grief for Nell: readers' sympathy with their "friend" Dickens (they loved Nell

because he did), and the fact that his characters seemed real to them. They were living with the

characters, reading in serial and, also significantly, reading in the company of other people who

also perceived the characters this way. When Nell died, they lost part of their lives, so their grief

mirrored that of Dickens, who had lost an even larger part of his life. And just as Dickens used

his writing to work through grief and other strong emotions, some readers also turned to creative

expression as a vehicle of affective response to Dickens's writings.

Creation as Response

One of the topics of chapter three will be the phenomenon of fan fiction, which became

one of the signature activities of *Harry Potter* fandom due to the Web-based distribution and

consumption opportunities that became available around the same time Rowling's series was

being published. Although the term "fan fiction" originates from 1960s *Star Trek* fandom, the

activity, when loosely interpreted as placing familiar characters in new situations, can be traced

as far back as classical mythology (Marlowe par. 17). As mentioned in chapter one, the concept

of fan fiction is applicable to many of the reader-generated creative responses to Dickens's

novels. Nothing akin to an organized Dickens fanfic community exists or has ever existed (or

probably will ever exist) in the way that a *Harry Potter* fanfic community does, and therefore the

following section, which offers several examples of creative response to Dickens's work, will necessarily seem a bit fragmented. Nevertheless, they all illustrate the phenomenon of "culture-text" explored in the previous section, showing how Dickens's stories, and especially his characters, have transcended the novels in which they originally appeared.

In Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, one of the many ways the March sisters bring their reading to bear on their everyday life is the formation of a Pickwick Club. In the newspaper they produce at home, each sister writes in the persona of one of the four members of the original club in Dickens's novel. Although the content of their writing is far more closely related to the domestic and imaginative interests of adolescent girls in Civil War-era America than to the picaresque adventures of middle-aged bachelors in late Regency England, the newspaper and the club meetings are both forms of creative response to Dickens's work. The March sisters' newspaper articles are a type of fan fiction, and even their meetings, conducted in the personas of the Pickwickians, can be read as embodied fan fiction. *Little Women* is, of course, a novel itself, not a historical document, yet Alcott is known to have based some of the characters and scenarios on her own growing-up years. Even if the Pickwick Club episode is entirely fictitious, it suggests that four teenage sisters forming such a club would have been considered realistic by contemporary readers.

In England and America, the nineteenth century was a particularly fruitful time for creative reader response, one major reason being the increasing amount of leisure time that the Industrial Revolution opened up for many people, though by no means all. The serial format was also a factor, since it not only allowed readers to stay with the same characters for a long time, thereby getting to know them, but it also created the impression that a story was a fluid and

indefinitely continuing entity, rather than a discrete unit enclosed between the covers of a volume.

Dickens's novels are particularly suited to fan fiction-type responses because of their large casts of characters, some of whom, inevitably, receive more (or more favorable) attention than others. Focusing attention on characters who, in the original work, appear as minor, unsympathetic, or even villainous has long been one of the creative impulses of fan fiction. Another impulse that inspires fan fiction is the desire to speculate on possible futures for characters and plots, if not necessarily to establish closure through an authoritative ending. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, which Dickens left unfinished and not even fully planned when he died, has proven to be an inexhaustible playing field for Dickensians and would-be detectives of various literary persuasions and skill levels. Dramatic adaptations of *Edwin Drood*, proposing various solutions to the mystery, appeared as early as the year following Dickens's death (Allingham par. 2). More recent riffs on the theme include Matthew Pearl's *The Last Dickens* and Dan Simmons's *Drood*, both novels published in 2009, which concentrate more on the circumstances surrounding the composition and publication of the novel than on the mystery.

Even during Dickens's lifetime, there was an industry based on anticipating his endings while the novels were still being published. While there is little data on unpublished creative responses by Dickens's readers—what we typically think of as fan fiction—we know much more about the commercial ventures of theatrical adaptors and those who wrote cheap (literally) imitations of his novels for the consumption of those less equipped, financially or educationally, to obtain or appreciate the originals. These, too, however mercenary their origins might have been, can be defined as fan fiction, if fan fiction is understood as work using the characters and settings of, and created by and/or for avid readers of, a particular author.

In the nineteenth century, due to the weak copyright laws that Dickens often spoke out against, it was almost as easy to publish and sell a work using a current author's characters as it is today to distribute such a work on the Internet without the intent to profit. Slater lists just a few of the adaptations and imitations of *Pickwick* released while Dickens was still writing the novel, including Edward Stirling's play *The Pickwick Club, or the Age We Live In* and Thomas Peckett Prest's book *The Penny Pickwick: the Post-Humorous Notes of the Pickwickian Club. Edited by Bos with engravings by Phis* (96). This book, like other imitations, avoided the charge of misrepresentation by slightly altering the spelling of Dickens's pseudonym (Boz) and that of his illustrator, Browne (Phiz). The adaptors and imitators sometimes guessed correctly where Dickens was going; other times they introduced sensationalistic connections that Dickens found artistically offensive. Slater illustrates how both of these happened in a theatrical adaptation of *Nicholas Nickleby* and how Dickens responded by inserting a withering criticism of the playwright into the novel (134). In this case, the creative activity of a reader traceably and concretely influenced the content of Dickens's work, which is significant regardless of that reader's motivation.

Fictional and dramatic texts based on Dickens's works have continued to proliferate, with certain works, such as *A Christmas Carol* with its culture-text status, being adapted more frequently. Although Dickens, compared to *Harry Potter* and other more recent texts, is not a popular topic within the fan fiction community, a keyword search for "Dickens" on *FanFiction.net* generates a respectable 519 hits. Only 41 of these are tagged with the "Charles Dickens" category marker (most of these are based on characters from *A Christmas Carol*, *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*, or *A Tale of Two Cities*); the others are mainly variations of

the *Christmas Carol* plot set in other fictional worlds. Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, 66 of the pieces found in the "Dickens" keyword search belong to the "Harry Potter" category.

One story in the "Charles Dickens" category on *FanFiction.net*, "One Minute until Midnight" by Valkyrie War Cry, is framed as a conversation with the dying Dickens, covering basic questions regarding the author's life and works, all of which are answered in keeping with the received biographical tradition—no extracanonical twists here. Biographer Peter Ackroyd uses the same metanarrative trope, the imagined conversation with Dickens about Dickens, in his *Dickens* (1990), in which chapters of more conventional historical narrative (the bulk of the book) are interspersed with dreamlike interludes during which Ackroyd encounters Dickens and asks him questions that probe into his psyche. The treatment of Dickens as a character has a long history that begins with Dickens himself, who wrote his earliest works under the pseudonym Boz, called himself "the Inimitable" and more generally wrote about himself in the third person, put himself in conversation with his fictional characters (see examples above), and enjoyed playing an exaggerated version of himself for the benefit of visitors (House 18). Dickens surrounded by (and sometimes interacting with) his characters was a favorite motif of cartoonists and painters during his lifetime. Biographers and critics have long noted the resemblance between Dickens's own childhood, at least the way he portrayed it in his autobiographical fragment, and that of several of his characters, especially David Copperfield.

The transformation of Charles Dickens into a Dickens character is a logical consequence of understanding the author as a correspondent from the independently existing world(s) he writes about. In this interpretation, Dickens is a boundary-crossing figure who can exist with equal reality in the world of his characters and the world of his readers. This allows writers of fan fiction, loosely defined, to manipulate Dickens as a character, but it also means that the most

authoritative accounts of the textual world are those of Dickens himself, since he has been there. The following section examines how Dickens asserted this authority in choosing to accept or reject plot suggestions made by his friends and other influential readers. These suggestions were, of course, also a form of creative reader response.

Dickens Alters the Plot

Thus far, we have discussed the number-plans, which are evidence of Dickens's gradually increasing control over his plotting, and reader responses, exemplified by the extreme but not atypical response to Nell's death and by creative productions by readers during and after Dickens's lifetime. Those two elements come together in the last section of this chapter, which examines plot changes Dickens made in response to reader feedback. According to Hughes and Lund, the serial form heightened not only the perception of intimacy between authors and readers but also their actual connection, since readers could write to an author mid-novel (11). As we have seen, many readers wrote to Dickens asking him to let Nell live when they noticed the plot of *The Old Curiosity Shop* tending toward her death. In this case, Dickens did not change the course of the novel, but in two later instances, he did change plots to accommodate suggestions from others. After briefly narrating the accounts of these plot changes, I will propose some reasons why Dickens chose to make alterations in some cases but not in others.

The first anecdote concerns advice offered by Lord Francis Jeffrey, editor of the *Edinburgh Review* and a critic who praised Dickens publicly, in his reviews, and offered him advice privately, in letters, remaining one of Dickens's greatest supporters until his death midway through Dickens's career (Chittick 302-03).[18] Dickens had originally intended for

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[18] A good example of Jeffrey's praise, showing that he was one of the earliest critics to consider Dickens as more than a comic sketch writer, is his assertion that there had been "nothing so good as Nell

Edith Dombey, like her foil Alice Marwood before her, to become the villain James Carker's

mistress; apparently he had also intended for her to die (Forster 273). According to a letter from

Dickens to Forster (the original letter from Jeffrey has not survived), Jeffrey read chapter 47 of

Dombey and Son, guessed where the plot was tending, and wrote Dickens to say he did not

believe Edith could be Carker's mistress. Dickens's note (qtd. in Butt and Tillotson 109) does

not make clear whether Jeffrey's objection was on the grounds of morality or characterization.

In any case, Dickens took Jeffrey's suggestion and changed his plan, creating an ending for Edith

that allowed her to preserve her moral dignity, if never to be happy. Meanwhile, to borrow

Dickens's own language, he killed Carker retributively.

In the second and more famous instance, Dickens actually changed the already-published

ending of *Great Expectations*. According to Monod, "Dickens is known to have been very

reluctant to introduce major changes into his works after they had seen the light of print, after

they had been, so to speak, consecrated by the public's affectionate approval" (173), which

makes this account particularly striking. Edward Bulwer Lytton, Dickens's friend and fellow

novelist, disliked the rather depressing original ending, which takes place after a number of years

have passed and suggests that there is still no possibility of Pip and Estella being together. In

response to Bulwer Lytton's suggestion, Dickens wrote a happier, if less probable, ending in

which Pip and Estella finally enter a romantic relationship that is requited on both sides (Roberts

63-64).[19] In a letter to another novelist friend, Wilkie Collins, Dickens writes, "Bulwer . . .

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since Cordelia" (qtd. in Johnson 338). This was far from the last time that Dickens would be compared to Shakespeare, another author whose characters often transcend the stories in which they appear.

[19] Interestingly, the 1999 Masterpiece adaptation of *Great Expectations* acknowledges both endings but avoids committing to either. It ends with Pip and Estella, who has separated from her abusive husband and moved back into Satis House, sitting down to play a game of cards after Estella has suggested that they can be friends. Also interestingly, I found six alternate endings to *Great Expectations* on *FanFiction.net*.

stated his reasons so well, that I have resumed the wheel, and taken another turn at it. Upon the whole I think it is for the better" (Hartley 360). He does not explain either Bulwer Lytton's reasons or his own reasons for believing the change was an improvement, nor does he state that he was thinking about his broader audience in this case; however, it is likely that he expected that readers would be satisfied with this more conventional happy ending.

To understand why Dickens changed the plots of *Dombey and Son* and *Great Expectations* but refused to let Nell live, it is important first to recall that Dickens did change the plot of *The Old Curiosity Shop* in response to feedback from a reader—his first and perhaps most influential reader, Forster, who read the proofs to all but the earliest of his friend's novels and who, as discussed above, apparently convinced the author that the story demanded Nell's death. Significantly, Lord Jeffrey and Bulwer Lytton were personal acquaintances of Dickens and were also well-educated fellow writers with conservative tastes, all characteristics of Forster as well. Dickens never changed a plot in response to a "fan letter," conventionally understood.

It is also frustratingly difficult to learn about what the "average" reader thought of Dickens's work, since many of those who enjoyed it did not have the time, resources, or ability to write to the author or even to write their impressions in a diary. A significant proportion of Dickens's audience consisted of illiterate adults and children who listened to the monthly parts being read aloud. Their responses have been lost to history, although the fact that they kept listening is telling in itself. George H. Ford's *Dickens and His Readers* goes some way toward representing the unpublished views of those who wrote letters and diary entries about Dickens's novels, but it still focuses disproportionately on the opinions of contemporary critics and later influential writers.

Nevertheless, there is overwhelming evidence that Dickens wrote with the intent to please his large, diverse audience, which included readers from almost the full range of socio-economic classes. In his prefaces to the novels, as quoted above, and his prefatory remarks to the public readings, he repeatedly expressed his affection for his audience, but there are also specific examples of decisions he claimed to have made with them in mind. As we saw earlier in the chapter, Dickens was keen to know whether his plan for the degeneration of Walter Gay would anger his readers. In the same novel, he reversed the planned order of two chapters and wrote retrospectively in his notes, "plan altered to leave a pleasanter impression upon the reader" (qtd. in Monod 263). Even when he did not directly refer to the readers in planning, his language evoked them, as when he declared that the story of Nell and her grandfather was "SURE to be effective" (Patten 48)—focusing not on the story itself but on what it would accomplish.

One memorandum in the working notes to *Dombey and Son* is interesting because of its concern with emotional effect coupled with ambiguity regarding who the affected party would be. In the notes to chapter 17, when Florence is trying unsuccessfully to connect with her father just after Paul's death, Dickens advises himself "[n]ot to make too much of the scene with the father, or it may be too painful" (*Notes* 69). But painful for whom—the readers, Dickens, or Florence herself? Due to the sympathetic connection among readers, author, and characters, the scene could be painful for all three at once. When Dickens's characters suffered, so did he, and so, he expected, would his readers. The preface to *Martin Chuzzlewit* expresses Dickens's belief that if he had caused his readers to feel as he felt about the characters, he had succeeded: "And if they part from any of my visionary friends, with the least tinge of that reluctance and regret which I feel in dismissing them; my success has been complete, indeed" (23).

Furthermore, in Dickens's role as the editor of a periodical, his advice to contributors often had to do with pleasing readers (Collins "Self-Estimate" 24-25). While this advice could sometimes be so practical as to seem calculating, Dickens's tone when writing about readers, even in private, was never cynical. Nor was his desire to make people happy financially motivated, although much has been made of Dickens as a man with a lifelong anxiety never to be poor again after his childhood brush with extreme poverty. According to Collins, "Not only or even primarily to get their money, Dickens hated disappointing people; he had an endearing desire to cheer them up" ("Self-Estimate" 26). If this is the case, perhaps Dickens's concern for pleasing his audience had just as much, or more, to do with his childhood experiences as a performer. According to Michael Slater, Dickens's father, John, "coached [Charles] to perform comic poems and songs before admiring audiences at the . . . Mitre Tavern and also at his school's 'show day'" (8). The audience's admiration was crucial to the young performer and would continue to be so as he grew up. Dickens seriously considered becoming a professional actor before he began writing fiction, and he was involved in acting and theater production throughout his life. Although actors, just like authors, can choose to ignore their audiences, a stage actor's audience is far more difficult to ignore than an author's. Dickens wrote as if his audience were in the same room with him.

If Dickens was so deeply invested in his readers' good opinion, why did he ignore their pleas for Nell's life? Collins interprets this decision not as a subversive refusal to please but rather as an insistence on achieving "a conventionally accepted dénouement of tender pathos" ("Self-Assessment" 26). In other words, even when Dickens disappointed the temporary, specific expectations of some readers, he did this in the service of an ending that would ultimately satisfy many more readers, including those who initially had wanted Nell to live. As

Forster pointed out, Nell's death would raise her story out of the everyday (117)—would, in a sense, apotheosize her, while providing the readers with a cathartic experience. This argument makes Nell rather abstract, which does not chime with the personal, embodied language (e.g., "killed") that some readers used of the character. However, if Dickens had a sympathetic connection with his readers, he would be able to intuit that they would eventually find satisfaction in a plot development that they initially reacted against. He could reasonably expect that they would come to agree that Nell's death, while unpleasant, was appropriate.

This chapter has demonstrated that Dickens's planning system, his relationship with his readers (influencing his readers' original creative responses), and his choices regarding his plots and characters, were all intimately connected. In chapter four, we will return to the author-reader-text (or character) triangle as a strategy for interpreting Dickens's public readings. But first, chapter three will provide a counterpart to this chapter on early Dickens as it focuses on J. K. Rowling's early career, the construction of her authorial persona, and the formation of a network of reader responses to *Harry Potter*. As we will see, Rowling is less concerned than Dickens about whether her readers understand the message and themes of her work. Her comments about readers who judge the series as too dark, thus missing the points she is making about death, have been dismissive. Rather than regretting or trying to help those who misinterpret her, she focuses on those who do understand what she is saying and perhaps even have felt similar emotions, speaking of the deep connections that *Harry Potter* has allowed her to make with other people. Therefore, although Rowling's concern for audience is narrower than Dickens's, it is no less strong.

CHAPTER THREE

"OUR NEW—*CELEBRITY*": ROWLING RESPONDS TO HER FAME AND HARRY'S

Critics of J. K. Rowling have sometimes concluded that she is unfeeling toward her fans,

citing her somewhat brusque persona in public appearances, as well as the famous cases from the

2000s in which she attempted to silence fans whose work seemed to threaten her authorial rights.

Compared to Charles Dickens, Rowling certainly is more restrained in her communications with

and characterizations of readers. This difference can be attributed to a number of probable

factors, including personality, gender, and historical era. Dickens, despite often being

considered the quintessential Victorian, was born in 1812 and was thus a product of the

Romantic period, when displays of emotion were often considered evidence of sincerity (Wu

755). In addition, nineteenth-century celebrity culture had not reached the fever pitch of

surveillance that exists today. Famous people had not yet been trained by experience to fear

stalkers, pushy journalists, and other threats to privacy. Dickens, therefore, could think of his

reading public as friends and family without considering the sinister consequences of opening

himself up to them emotionally or in any other way. In other words, while Dickens was a

celebrity author, he did not have to deal with the implications of this role in the same way that

Rowling has had to.

The celebrity author is a distinctly modern and relatively recent figure. Although several

earlier authors are legitimate candidates for the title, Charles Dickens has sometimes been

identified as the first celebrity author, perhaps because he was the first to inspire a major

merchandising phenomenon. Although he sometimes complained about having to make public

appearances, and his enthusiasm markedly waned after the first two decades of his career (more

on this in chapter five), Dickens gave the overall impression of reveling in his fame and even

playing it up, signing his name "the Inimitable" and making frequent references in his letters and prefaces to his adoring readers. In the nineteenth century, authorial celebrity was not yet an object of scholarly analysis or a source of conflict for the celebrity author himself or herself. In Dickens's day, being a celebrity author could simply be fun, if tiring. J. K. Rowling, on the other hand, became famous just a few years before authors like Moran, Glass, Hammill, and Jaffe began analyzing the celebrity author phenomenon. In this very different world, becoming a celebrity author is no longer a simple pleasure.

One major theme of the *Harry Potter* series is the difficulty of grappling with a celebrity that one has not always possessed. In *Sorcerer's Stone*,[20] eleven-year-old Harry learns that he is not only a wizard but the most famous wizard of his generation, known as "The Boy Who Lived"—the only person Lord Voldemort has tried and failed to kill. Because Harry was a baby when he survived the attack, he has been famous for most of his life but has not been, properly, a celebrity, since the term implies consciousness, even participation, on the part of the celebrity. As he becomes integrated into the wizarding community at Hogwarts School, he finds that his friends (Ron Weasley), enemies (Draco Malfoy), and authority figures (Severus Snape) all tend to relate to him in terms of his celebrity. Harry learns that his fame causes people to set unrealistically high expectations for him, regardless of whether their hope is for his success or for his failure.

As the series goes on, Harry becomes, additionally, a star athlete (*Sorcerer's Stone*), the hero who saves the school (*Chamber of Secrets*), and a Hogwarts representative in an international wizarding skills competition (*Goblet of Fire*), and he gains the messianic epithet

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[20] I am using the American (Scholastic) title of the first book in the series. Throughout this chapter and chapter five, I will abbreviate the titles, dropping off the initial *Harry Potter and the*.

"the Chosen One" when rumors based on a mysterious prophecy tag him as the person destined to defeat Voldemort (*Half-Blood Prince*). A shadow of infamy also haunts Harry's celebrity, growing larger throughout the series: He is suspected of being the Heir of Slytherin who is unleashing havoc on the school (*Chamber of Secrets*), accused of illegally entering the Triwizard Tournament (*Goblet of Fire*), and labeled as deluded (*Order of the Phoenix*) and dangerous (*Deathly Hallows*) by the very same news media that call him "the Chosen One." Harry receives personal visits from the Minister of Magic, the highest-ranking official in wizarding England (*Prisoner of Azkaban* and *Half-Blood Prince*). Strangers approach him in public places and ask to shake his hand (*Sorcerer's Stone*). Harry's celebrity is an integral part of his story.

J. K. Rowling, of course, did not know that she would become an international celebrity when she introduced the theme in *Sorcerer's Stone*. But the series' continually evolving focus on the issue, along with the increasingly prominent role of the news media and an emphasis on the negative effects of celebrity on relationships and self-concept, surely reflects Rowling's initially sudden and still ongoing negotiation of her celebrity status. The fact that Harry moved from unconscious fame to celebrity, whereas Rowling moved from actual obscurity to celebrity, is relevant only in that Harry had to learn his backstory, while Rowling was able to participate in constructing hers. But the experience of living in the transition was essentially the same for the author and for her character.

This chapter is about Rowling's concept of herself, and other people's concepts of her, as a celebrity author. The chapter title, a sarcastic comment about Harry by Professor Snape in the first book, is meant to suggest some ambivalence on the part of Rowling herself as well as others who have commented on her phenomenal fame. Each section of the chapter makes a comparison between her early career and late career. The first section will examine two representative

television interviews from the early days of the *Harry Potter* series' popularity in the United States (during 1999-2000) and two major interviews Rowling has given since completing the writing of the series (2007-present). The second section will consider Rowling's use of pseudonyms in her authorship of the *Harry Potter* series and, later, *The Cuckoo's Calling*. The chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of the origins of online *Harry Potter* fandom and Rowling's responses to it. This discussion will be resumed in chapter five, which will be a case study of *Pottermore*, Rowling's fan-collaborative website launched in 2012.

Rowling Fixes Hair, Develops Interviewing Poise

In 1999, just after the third *Harry Potter* book had been released in the United States, the CBS program *60 Minutes* did a segment on the astounding popularity of the series, including clips from an interview with Rowling. The presenter who introduces the piece opens by assigning agency to "a little boy named Harry Potter" who "is working magic" and then goes on at some length before mentioning Rowling. Evidently, Harry Potter in 1999 had already begun to eclipse his author in the way that Oliver Twist or Ebenezer Scrooge had eclipsed Charles Dickens. (See also Hammill on the similar situation of Anne Shirley and L. M. Montgomery [114].)

Rowling appears in the interview with relatively unflattering hairstyle, makeup, and clothing, and a distinctly uncomfortable affect—she rarely smiles and often breaks eye contact with the interviewer, Leslie Stahl. When asked about her organizational system for keeping the series' wide-ranging plots in order, Rowling hoists onto the table a deep cardboard box that contains loose-leaf notes that appear to be inserted at random. Like Dickens's monthly number-plans, this filing system may not appear particularly useful or revelatory to the observer, but it clearly makes sense to the author. Stahl, as narrator, states, "This may look like random

scribbling, but it's all part of a master plan"—using language typical of the destiny narrative that the segment will pick up on later. Nevertheless, the apparently haphazard organizational system adds to the impression, created by her appearance, of Rowling as someone who is not totally "together," who is still reeling from the shock of her unlooked-for success. She does not yet have the look of a celebrity.

The *60 Minutes* segment focuses almost exclusively on the *Harry Potter* phenomenon, especially the sales figures and the "enormous pressure to turn *Harry Potter* into a marketing machine" (Stahl), rather than the texts themselves. Its intended audience appears to be not people who have already read the novels, but people curious about their success, especially parents, who are addressed from the very first words of the segment: "If you don't know it, your children almost certainly do." The discussion of the text does not extend far past Stahl's pointing out some of the "funny names," such as "Dumbledore," which she pronounces in an exaggerated manner. In addition, Eden Ross Lipson, a *New York Times* children's book editor who is also interviewed, makes the perceptive comment that while the wizarding world is slightly "off center," it is very familiar, with a banking system, newspaper, and governmental ministry.

As for the makeup of the audience, Stahl asserts, "It's not just kids—adults are into *Harry Potter* too," and she mentions the adult-targeted book covers released in England. Ross Lipson also refers obliquely to the age diversity of *Harry Potter*'s audience when she mentions that three books featuring the same characters had never been on the adult bestseller list all at once. However, the specific readers discussed during the segment—such as the "kids" Stahl mentions "who've read it 7, 8 times" and the dyslexic boys whose success story Rowling shares—are all children. Stahl briefly talks with a small group of elementary school students

whom she says are "typical of the fans creating the *Harry Potter* avalanche." Most of the children's conversation is about the organic way in which the series' popularity spread, though one boy offers this perceptive assessment of Rowling's style: "It's so detailed; it's almost like watching the books instead of reading them." Late in the segment, Rowling says that "[c]hildren are grossly underestimated"—a comment that acknowledges the still predominantly juvenile makeup of her audience while also accounting for the novels' increasing popularity among adults. By refusing to underestimate children, Rowling creates something that adults also can enjoy.

The middle portion of the *60 Minutes* segment is spent narrating the rags-to-riches story that, like Dickens's blacking-factory episode or Harry Potter's cupboard-to-castle transition, has become the most familiar part of Rowling's authorial legend. As nearly everyone knows, Rowling was a single mother on welfare when she wrote the first *Harry Potter* book. Stahl does not belabor this point, but she does put emphasis on Rowling's search for a publisher—what Rowling calls her "last-ditch attempt"—and the fact that she wrote most of the first book in the only restaurant that would let her and her sleeping baby daughter sit there for hours without purchasing more than a cup of coffee. At one point in the interview, Rowling pokes fun at the expanding mythology surrounding the origin of her novels when she quotes a journalist who asked her, "So, you wrote your whole first novel on napkins?" Yet the *60 Minutes* segment is also complicit in this mythologizing process. Stahl uses language similar to the destiny rhetoric surrounding the "chosen" Harry Potter when she says, "It's very apparent that Joanne Rowling was born to play with words." Similarly, when Rowling's literary agent Christopher Little is interviewed, he claims that upon picking up the unsolicited manuscript of the first novel "just by

chance" and reading the beginning, he knew right away that *Harry Potter* would be a success: "My toes curled."

All in all, the almost 15-minute segment provides a thorough introduction to J. K. Rowling and the *Harry Potter* phenomenon, if not to the texts themselves, for parents of potential readers and other casually interested individuals. It is a good representative of the traditional news media's response to Rowling and her novels' early fame. In contrast, a shorter 1999 interview on the *Rosie O'Donnell Show*, also given in the wake of the third book's U.S. release, provides an early example of a fan response to *Harry Potter*. The interview is about seven minutes long, including the introduction but not including a *Potter* trivia contest pitting Rosie O'Donnell against a nine-year-old reader, which will not be discussed here.[21] This was Rowling's second appearance on the show. Throughout, O'Donnell's comments and questions exhibit a tension between her own evident enthusiasm for the series and the topics she is expected to cover as an interviewer.

The segment begins with O'Donnell recommending the recently released *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* as a selection for "older" child readers—although she adds that both she and her four-year-old son enjoyed it, virtually eliminating the age category. O'Donnell mispronounces "Azkaban" twice, but this does not seem to be a result of carelessness, since she later makes a point of asking Rowling how to pronounce some names from the books. Using the type of affectionate language associated with Charles Dickens's characters, O'Donnell states, "Children and adults, myself included, have fallen in love with a magical boy named Harry Potter." She introduces Rowling eagerly, saying before a commercial break that she "can't wait

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[21] However, the enthusiasm with which O'Donnell describes the upcoming contest supports my argument that she is a fan: "I will kick [the nine-year-old's] sorry butt."

to have her" on the show. In this appearance, Rowling still has a relatively unflattering haircut, although her hair is now blonde instead of brown. Her manner is a bit abrupt, but she seems less reticent than in the *60 Minutes* interview and maintains a quick banter with O'Donnell, even laughing loudly at one point.

The interview opens with the obligatory references to the *Harry Potter* "phenomenon" (O'Donnell uses the term), including mentions of the first three books' top positions on the *New York Times* bestseller list. O'Donnell displays a recent *Time* cover that features Harry Potter's face (not Rowling's, significantly) as illustrated by Mary GrandPré for the Scholastic editions of the novels. When O'Donnell asks Rowling how she feels about the phenomenon, she makes her ambivalence explicit: "I try not to read about it . . . it's overwhelming."

But the conversation rapidly transitions to fan talk when O'Donnell mentions a rumor that a character will die in the fourth book. "It could be Hagrid," she suggests. "Am I close?" When Rowling offers only the vaguest possible answers, O'Donnell begs her not to let Ron die, and Rowling notes that "[k]ids are most worried about Ron." It is clear that fans, including O'Donnell, were already relating emotionally to the characters as to real people, petitioning the author—as Dickens's readers did on behalf of Nell—to preserve the characters in whom they were most deeply invested.

Next, O'Donnell asks Rowling to read aloud a passage from *Prisoner of Azkaban*. Unlikely the apparently random selection that Leslie Stahl reads on the *60 Minutes* segment, this one was chosen because it "really affected" O'Donnell. The passage is about the Dementors, grotesque beings who drain humans of their happiness. O'Donnell's commentary on the Dementors is interesting. She first states, laughing but evidently sincere, "There are people in my adult life who I feel are Dementors." But she then qualifies her assessment: "It's a wonderful

little moral fable to give to kids." O'Donnell seems torn between her adult emotional response to the characters and her perceived duty to discuss the books as children's literature.

Nevertheless, O'Donnell continues to acknowledge the popularity of the *Harry Potter* series among adults, asking Rowling if she is surprised by this trend. Rowling responds, "I wrote this for me . . . I never wrote this with, like, a focus group of children in mind." I will return to this comment in a later section of this chapter when I discuss Rowling's apparently conflicting attitudes toward her readers. In the context of the interview, however, Rowling's statement seems to confirm her claim from the *60 Minutes* segment that "[c]hildren are grossly underestimated." That she considers work written to please herself appropriate to children is an indication of her high evaluation of children's intelligence and maturity.

Near the end of the interview, O'Donnell says something that has been echoed by countless *Harry Potter* fans over the years and that is also reminiscent of the way Charles Dickens and his readers talked about his characters: "I literally feel like they're my friends."[22] This comment, along with the fan language that O'Donnell uses inconsistently but frequently throughout the segment, marks this piece as an unusual example of a fan response to *Harry Potter* within the mainstream media as opposed to podcasts and other web sources dedicated specifically to *Potter*. It is also an early example: although *Potter* fan websites existed as early as 1997, two of the largest online communities, *MuggleNet* and *The Leaky Cauldron*, did not emerge until 1999 (the year of the O'Donnell interview) and 2000, respectively (Anelli 89-90).

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[22] The book *Kids' Letters to Harry Potter from around the World*, complied by Bill Adler (2001), attempts to literalize this concept. Many of the contributors write to Harry as if they are already acquainted with him. The book is also evidence of the way Rowling is conflated with (some of the letters offer plotting advice for future books) and overshadowed by her protagonist.

The *60 Minutes* segment and the *Rosie O'Donnell Show* interview represent two major currents in the media commentary on *Harry Potter*, both of which have analogues within the scholarly commentary. The *60 Minutes* piece represents the type of response that focuses on the phenomenon, emphasizing such topics as sales figures, child and adult readers, the series' contribution to child literacy, the films and tie-in merchandise, and, to a lesser extent, fan activity. The 2003 essay collection *Harry Potter's World* and its 2009 update *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter*, both edited by Elizabeth E. Heilman, contain many examples of this strand of inquiry within the scholarly literature. On the other hand, the piece from *The Rosie O'Donnell Show* represents the type of response that focuses on the text and/or the "world" of the novels. This type of response often takes a psychological approach to the characters, examining their motives as if they were independently existing people, and it typically uses a variety of traditional literary critical methods, including close reading, and applies them with varying degrees of skill and complexity. Scholarly responses of this type were less common while Rowling was still writing the series but are appearing with greater frequency and higher quality now. The 2012 casebook *J. K. Rowling:* Harry Potter, edited by Cynthia J. Hallett and Peggy J. Huey, contains several good readings of the books and the films.

Next we examine two later examples of filmed interviews that represent each of these types of response. The first is a lengthy (about 42 minutes) televised interview with Oprah Winfrey conducted in 2010 in the Balmoral Hotel in Edinburgh, where Rowling wrote the final chapters of the last *Harry Potter* book. The segment begins with a voiceover by Winfrey accompanied by brief clips of fans in costume buying the book and lining up for signings. Layered over the clips are large numbers, representing the sales of the novels and the profits of the films, in the familiar lightning-bolt font that immediately evokes *Harry Potter* but that also

might hint at the shock viewers are expected to feel when presented with these numbers. The voiceover makes heavy use of the mythologizing rhetoric so often associated with Rowling. Winfrey explains that Harry Potter has a destiny and asserts that it is "a destiny shared by his creator," and she uses the word "empire" to describe the wide-ranging success of Rowling, her books, and the films and other texts and products based on them. She continues to use this kind of language throughout the broadcast, especially during the brief recap/introduction segments after each commercial break, during which she repeatedly points out that Rowling is a billionaire and calls her "the queen of the publishing world."

In this interview, eleven years later than the two previous examples, Rowling has the self-presentation of a celebrity. Her hair, makeup, and clothing are stylish without being distracting, and her mannerisms are more relaxed than in the earlier interviews. Although Rowling and Winfrey had never met previously, their interaction seems relatively natural. Rowling claims, "This feels very easy." This ease may result in part from the two women's shared experience of transitioning from poverty to wealth. In one of the most candid (and most Dickensian, some critics might add) exchanges of the interview, Winfrey asks Rowling, "Are you in a place where you can finally accept that you're always going to be rich?" Rowling answers in the negative, adding, "I still worry," but quickly adds that she realizes the worry is irrational.

In the first few minutes of the interview, Rowling herself contributes to what Winfrey calls "the Rowling legend." Referring to her stunningly fast propulsion into celebrity, she asserts, "I went from utter obscurity . . . It was like being a Beatle."[23] Later, she echoes the prophetic claims of her agent Christopher Little (and sounds like a more accurate version of

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[23] Rowling also makes a reference to the paparazzi ("They will want long-lens photo of me on the beach in my bikini.") confirming that she is indeed a celebrity, even if she is often overshadowed by her characters.

Hogwarts Divination professor Sibyl Trelawney) when she says, "I'm going to call it a flash of

clairvoyance . . . It was like another voice speaking to me . . . 'If it's published, it'll be huge."

But the interview as a whole focuses less on the *Harry Potter* origin story than on endings,

specifically two: the closure of the book series and the death of Rowling's mother. Because

Winfrey was also ending her long-running television series around this time, she and Rowling

discuss endings at some length, concluding that they are inevitable. Both women agree that it is

crucial, psychologically, to let go of one's "phenomenon" and not to try to recreate or surpass

it.[24]

A few of Rowling's similarities with Charles Dickens are on clear display in this

interview, one of them being, of course, their legendary transformations from relative poverty

and obscurity to wealth and celebrity. Rowling also mentions her interest in folklore and her

enjoyment of "a kooky word," both of which are shared with Dickens. But Rowling's affinity

with Dickens is best seen in the way she speaks about the ending of the *Harry Potter* series.

Dickens often used affectionate leave-taking language in his prefaces, which he wrote after

completing each serial novel; Rowling goes a step further and uses the rhetoric of mourning.

She talks about her characters as departed friends: "We all know that the people we love are

mortal . . . it was a bereavement . . . I had to mourn Harry." She also grieves her loss of the

opportunity to enter the world of the books: "If it was an escape for all these children, you can

imagine what it had been for me." This statement exemplifies one of the central claims of this

study: Rowling, as Dickens did, positions herself as the ultimate fan of the world and characters

of her own work. In one sentence, she both establishes a sympathetic bond with her readers and

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[24] In the context of this discussion, they refer to Michael Jackson, who appears as a topic more than
once in this interview. The intended audience is evidently not *Harry Potter* fans—there is very little
discussion of the text—but people interested in celebrities more generally.

qualifies that bond, asserting that her grief is greater than the children's because she knows the

world and the characters better than the children (who know them well) ever could.

The topic of grief appears again in the interview when the conversation turns to the death

of Rowling's mother, which took place in 1990, several years before she began writing novels.

Winfrey makes a rather heavy-handed transition to this subject, intoning in one of her narration

segments that the event "sen[t] Jo into an emotional tailspin."[25] Interestingly, it is during this

discussion that the interview makes one of its closest approaches to a textual analysis of *Harry

Potter*. As in the interview with O'Donnell, the Dementors are mentioned in connection with

extra-textual life experience; in this case, they are identified with Rowling's clinical depression

after her mother's death. Even more significantly, Rowling states, "[My mother's] death is on

virtually every other page . . . The books are what they are because she died." The books, then,

provided both a temporary escape from grief and a place where she could explore and creatively

process that grief. As Dickens included his readers in his mourning for his sister-in-law Mary

Hogarth when he wrote versions of her into his novels, Rowling invited her readers into her

mourning when, for example, she wrote about the sacrificial death of Harry Potter's mother.

Although readers are rarely discussed explicitly during this interview, toward the end

Rowling makes two statements that confirm that though she may have written the *Harry Potter*

novels for herself, they became a bridge to others. First, she says, "I've met extraordinary people

through *Harry Potter* [*or* Harry Potter]." Here, the books—or possibly Harry himself, since the

context does not distinguish—are "mutual friends," vehicles of connection. The second

statement comes at the end of the interview when Rowling refers to the lengthy dedication at the

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[25] Watching the interview as a *Harry Potter* fan, I saw here a less deceptive and less sinister echo of
Rita Skeeter's sensationalistic style of journalism (see her pieces on the Triwizard champions in *Goblet of
Fire*).

beginning of *Deathly Hallows*, the final novel. The dedication has seven parts, and the last part is addressed to the readers: "And to you, if you have stuck with Harry until the very end" (xi). In the interview, Rowling states simply, "I love them."

Rowling's claim that she loves her readers is complicated, though not discredited, by the final object of analysis in this section, a "conversation" with Daniel Radcliffe, the actor who played Harry Potter in all the films, which was included as a special feature on the Blu-Ray of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2*, released in 2011. The term "conversation" is used in the title of the piece because, although Radcliffe's questions provide a loose interview structure, the discussion is more of an equal interchange, signaling the fact that Rowling and Radcliffe are both celebrities within *Harry Potter* fandom. Nevertheless, Radcliffe's questions position Rowling as the oracle who "knows" (a term used throughout the conversation) the wizarding world better than anyone else. The intended audience of this piece seems to be people who read the books or at least watched the films avidly, since the discussion of the texts reaches greater depth and specificity than in any of the other interviews previously analyzed. As in the interview with Oprah Winfrey, Rowling has an attractive personal presentation, and here she appears even more relaxed—perhaps because she is being asked about her characters rather than herself, perhaps because her interviewer is a young person with whom she has worked closely and who is intimately associated with her beloved Harry.

The brief introductory sequence, before the interview begins, includes narration layered over a series of character images from the films that have the look of pen-and-ink drawings on parchment-style book pages. At the end of the sequence, Rowling herself appears as one of these characters. The interview bears out this trope, suggesting that Rowling, rather than being a detached and solely transcendent creator, lived (and continues to live) among her characters.

Because the conversation is quite long and wide-ranging (though it concentrates heavily on the making of the films), this analysis will not cover every topic discussed; rather, it will concentrate on three strands within the conversation: the *family strand* (Rowling's references to the books, characters, and those involved with the film as family members), the *knowledge strand* (Rowling as oracle—occurrences of the word "know" in discussing plot developments), and the *reality strand (*Rowling's and Radcliffe's assertions that the aspects of the books or films were or seemed real). Finally, two quotations from Rowling about her audience, which seem to convey conflicting attitudes, will be discussed.

The family strand. Most of these references occur near the beginning of the piece. Echoing Dickens's description of David Copperfield as his child, Rowling states, "Harry feels like this ghostly son that I've had in my life." She uses even more intimate language to characterize the books, which she calls "my baby," and talks about leaving this baby "in safe hands" when she entrusted director Chris Columbus and writer Steve Kloves to oversee the making of the film version of the first book. The filmmakers apparently succeeded as well in fostering a warmly affectionate atmosphere during shooting: Rowling, who was a producer on all eight films, claims that "it felt like family" on the set.[26]

Later in the conversation, Rowling makes a more subtle allusion to her familial relationship with her characters: "Not many writers have ever been with the same characters for that long." Her use of the general verb "been with" (rather than "worked with" or "worked on")

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[26] Although the extent of Rowling's involvement in the filmmaking is not entirely clear, throughout the conversation she evinces her familiarity with and approval of the cast. For example, she states that the actor Devon Murray, who plays a secondary character named Seamus Finnegan, "really looks like I imagined Seamus." The mutually comfortable exchange between Rowling and Radcliffe also suggests that Rowling was more than nominally involved in the production. Nevertheless, the films represent a significant loosening of authorial control on Rowling's part. Unlike Dickens, who in the public readings was able to do all the character's voices himself, Rowling had to place her ideas in the hands of an astonishing number of other people.

suggests a shared living experience. Rowling subsequently clarifies the length of that "long" time: seventeen years, almost exactly the duration of time that Western young people typically live in their parents' homes. When the characters moved out of Rowling's life, her emotional response was strong: "I cried as I had not cried since my mother died . . . 'I can't go there anymore.' . . . It had been a place I could go to escape for seventeen years." Here Rowling echoes the bereavement and escape language she used in the Oprah Winfrey interview and employs the analogy of a literal familial relationship to emphasize the impact of the change created by the ending of the series.

The knowledge strand. If the family references throughout the conversation illustrate Rowling's affection for her characters, the knowledge references support Rowling's prophetic stance as an interpreter between the wizarding world and her readers. Radcliffe encourages the use of this rhetoric, asking Rowling, "How much did you know from the beginning?" She replies with a series of disclosures about her conception of the fates of various characters. Sometimes she uses the term "know"—e.g., "I knew that Harry would walk to his death"—but even when she does not, the idea is still present in statements such as "Hagrid was never in danger" and "It was sort of borne in on upon [*sic*] me that Lupin had to die." Even a statement that begins with a strong assertion of authorial power—"I hated killing [Lupin and Tonks]" (active voice)—ends up confirming the impression that Rowling is simply the messenger: "but they had to go" (passive voice).

Rowling explicitly employs oracular language at one point when she says, "It felt quite [like] automatic writing when I wrote Dumbledore. He was telling me things I needed to hear sometimes." To understand that Rowling sees Dumbledore as an independently existing character is crucial in the debate over her famous announcement of his sexuality at the 2007

Carnegie Hall reading discussed in chapter one. When Radcliffe prompts Rowling to comment

on this announcement, she replies, "I got to know Dumbledore . . . I just knew he was gay."

While critics may, not without justification, classify Rowling's extra-textual declaration as an

attempt to shut down alternate, reader-generated possibilities for her characters' futures, Rowling

claims to view it as simply a revelation of something that, in turn, had been revealed to her.

In two final examples of the knowledge strand, two actors from the films use the term

"know" in this way, though for different purposes. First, Rowling recounts a story about Alan

Rickman, who plays Severus Snape: "I told him really early on that Snape had been in love with

Lily"—a disclosure that Rickman kept secret until the books caught up with Rowling's

"knowledge." However, according to Rowling, Rickman began making enigmatic comments

such as "I don't think Snape would do that, given what I know." Although this story is evidently

meant to be humorous, it provides an example of the use of the knowledge trope in order to

wield influence over those who lack such knowledge. On the other hand, Rowling tells another

story about actor Matthew Lewis, who plays Neville Longbottom. When Rowling encountered

Lewis at a film premier, she told him that there would be "some great stuff for Neville" in the

last book. Lewis exclaimed, "I don't want to know!" Unlike Rickman, who used his privileged

knowledge to shape his portrayal of his character, Lewis chose to experience the final book for

the first time as a non-privileged reader. The key feature of both of these stories is that in each

one, Rowling the oracle is the provider of the information that the actor chooses to accept or

reject.

The reality strand. Both Rowling and Radcliffe use the term "real" or similar language

several times in order to describe the world of the novels and films. After the discussion about

the fates of the various characters, Radcliffe makes the bemused meta-critical observation that

"[w]e're talking about these characters as if they're real people." Rowling adds, "They're in your life like real people." It seems from the context that the "your" in this sentence refers not only to Radcliffe but also to Rowling and anyone else who has invested time, thought, and emotion into the *Harry Potter* series. Later in the conversation, Radcliffe says of the characters, "Because they exist in the collective consciousness of an entire generation, they do exist in some sense." His remark fits into the tradition of Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory, which posits that texts (and hence characters) become "poems," or active and dynamic entities, only because of readers.

Rowling also uses the term "real" to characterize the craftsmanship of the film sets: "It feels like a very real world . . . it's so real." The reality of the sets derives from the reality of the texts themselves, which results largely from their internal consistency. As Rowling states earlier in the interview, "Part of what I think fans enjoyed about the world was there was a logic to it." This logic, of course, adds to Rowling's sense that she was not creating a work of pure imagination but was reporting about an independently existing world. As critic Lene Yding Pedersen writes, "All in all, [Rowling's] attitude to her own fictional world suggests that it still exists . . . and that its characters will 'live on' independently of her as their author" (39). As we will discuss in chapter five, the *Pottermore* project both confirms and complicates this statement.

Rowling's attitude toward her audience. Early in the conversation, after Rowling's comment about leaving her "baby . . . in safe hands" with filmmakers Columbus and Kloves, she speaks of her feelings of "protectiveness" and "loyalty to the readership." Of the first movie, she claims, "I wanted to make it right for the readers." But later, in another context, Rowling seems to express a less warm and caring attitude toward her readers. When Radcliffe asks for her thoughts about those who believed the *Harry Potter* series became too dark, she replies, "I never

really considered my audience in that way; I just wrote what I wanted to write." (This comment echoes the one she made on *The Rosie O'Donnell Show* about not writing for "a focus group of children.") What accounts for the apparent inconsistency in attitude?

The context of each comment is crucial. The "protectiveness" and "loyalty" comment occurs within a discussion of the films, which required Rowling and the readers alike to loosen their imaginative hold on the books and allow an additional interpretive voice to color their perceptions of the world and characters of *Harry Potter*. Rowling's loyalty to her readers, though sincere, is thus enmeshed with doubts about her own diminishing control over her creation—which also belongs, in a lesser sense, to the reader. The later statement, on the other hand, occurs within a discussion of a specific type of reader who, Rowling would argue, misunderstands one of the central purposes of the series. Shortly prior to this comment, Rowling says, harking back to her discussion of her mother's death in the Oprah Winfrey interview, "[*Harry Potter*] is the prism through which I view death in all its many forms." The series can be judged as too dark only by those who miss the significance of death as a theme.

It is also important to note that Rowling does not state, "I never really considered my audience"; she states instead, "I never really considered my audience *in that way*." Unlike Dickens, who was often preoccupied with the effect his plot decisions would have on readers, Rowling professes not to be concerned about offending or disappointing readers by specific choices. But this is very different from being completely unconcerned about her readers.[27] In

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[27] Some of those readers have noticed that Rowling seems to have written certain parts of the *Harry Potter* series for herself. Of the controversial epilogue, which, as many critics have noted, limits the range of possible futures for the central characters, a student named Jaime García writes, "I really despise it, but I comprehend it. I now think J. K. was writing for herself and she needed an epilogue to make sure every character would be as happy as she was (or to avoid them being as miserable as she herself had also been) . . . I think that many parts of *Harry Potter* are by and for J. K., which is not essentially 'evil,' but just forces criticism to adapt itself" (qtd. in Martín Alegre 37-38).

general, Rowling seems to appreciate her readers and care what they think, but she is willing to

make choices that may be unpopular with them. Indeed, just as Dickens declined to spare Nell's

life in spite of letters begging him to do so, Rowling disappointed the writers of pleas such as

"Please don't kill Fred or George, I LOVE THEM!" (qtd. in Rowling "Foreword" x) when she

wrote Fred Weasley's death into the final novel. Here again, the death theme is crucial.

Rowling's plot choices are most likely to satisfy, if sometimes sadden, readers who share her

understanding of the central themes of the series. In other words, Rowling cares what her

readers think insofar as what they think agrees with what she thinks. If read in terms of author-

reader sympathy, this assessment is less cynical than it at first appears.

The four interviews analyzed in this section raise a number of issues relevant to

Rowling's authorial persona, including the *Harry Potter* origin myth and "the Rowling legend,"

her attitudes toward her readers, her emotional connection with her books and characters, and the

common impression that the wizarding world and its people exist independently of Rowling as

creator. Comparing the interviews, with their widely different interviewers and audiences, also

provides an introduction to the two major types of discourse on *Harry Potter*, the type that

focuses on the publishing phenomenon and the type that focuses on the text and the world it

describes. Finally, tracking Rowling's interview style over time shows that she gradually came

to inhabit her role as celebrity more comfortably.

From Joanne Rowling to Robert Galbraith

In three of the above-discussed interviews, Rowling is asked about the name that appears

on her books. As the now-famous story goes, her original publisher was concerned that boys, a

demographic the children's fiction industry has struggled to capture, would not want to read

adventure stories written by a woman. Instead of using a full pseudonym, Joanne Rowling used

her first initial and the first initial of one of her grandmothers, Kathleen, since she herself did not have a middle name. Although there is no documented evidence that the publisher or Rowling made this connection, the use of initials in place of a first name carries strong suggestions of two earlier authors of male-protagonist, ensemble-cast, Christian-inflected fantasy series, J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis.

The secret of Rowling's gender was quickly let out, but nobody seemed to mind; the name on everyone's lips was not hers but Harry Potter's. As Rowling wryly comments during the Oprah Winfrey interview, "It hasn't held me back." The fact that Rowling continued to use the initials after they no longer served the purpose of concealment is a commentary on today's publishing industry: "J. K. Rowling" had become a brand name.[28] The first, largest, and most distinctive (with its lightning-bolt typography) name on an American (Scholastic) *Harry Potter* book is "Harry Potter,"[29] but J. K. Rowling's name also has its own consistent font and anchors each cover, stretching across its width. Both names lead readers to have reliable expectations of what they will find inside. In fact, the expectations created by the "J. K. Rowling" brand name undoubtedly influenced many readers' disappointed or shocked reactions to *The Casual Vacancy*, the adult novel Rowling published under the same name, which differs greatly from the *Harry Potter* books in style, tone, characterization, and theme. As one *Goodreads* user writes, "[T]he problem that many fans had is that they're accustomed to the J. K. Rowling who writes about morality on a large scale . . . *The Casual Vacancy* is also a morality tale—but the

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[28] See Jaffe on the concept of the imprimatur—the accumulation of distinguishing features that distinguish one author's style from another's. I am using the term "brand" in a similar way, focusing less on the legal protections that surround a brand name.

[29] On the original English (Bloomsbury) editions, Harry Potter's is also the first and largest name, and a quick Google image search of covers from around the world reveals that "Harry Potter" is almost invariably the most noticeable name, even when it is not the first listed.

characters are so clueless, self-destructive and human, that a fan of the *Harry Potter* books can't help but emerge disappointed" (Jason).

Rowling's choice to continue using the initials rather than her full name also suggests a comparison with another of her Victorian predecessors, George Eliot/Mary Ann Evans, whose pseudonym became the name by which she is known to history. Mary Ann Evans had established a successful career writing book reviews for periodicals when she decided to try writing novels. She published her first work of fiction, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857), under the name George Eliot because she did not want to put her journalistic career at risk in the event that the book failed. Although her primary reason for taking a pseudonym was not to conceal her gender, she must have known that her book would be taken more seriously if it were perceived as male-authored. Evans herself had acknowledged and corroborated the stereotype of the female fiction writer in an essay called "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists." Early reviewers assumed that George Eliot really was a man—probably a clergyman—but the pretense did not survive very long. (Charles Dickens claimed to be one of the first to recognize that the author of *Scenes of Clerical Life* must have been a woman.) Nevertheless, "George Eliot" quickly became a name that led readers to expect a book to have certain characteristics, such as a philosophically-minded narrator and a country setting, and it therefore became a useful label—a brand.

Although Rowling exercised less control than did Evans/Eliot over the initial decision to use a pseudonym, her choice to continue employing it long after she was legally equipped to insist on publishing under her full name (or any name) demonstrates that she recognizes the symbolic power the name "J. K. Rowling" has taken on. Indeed, her publication of *The Casual Vacancy* under that name may have been intended as a deliberate statement of J. K. Rowling's versatility as an author. In an interview shortly before the novel's publication, Rowling makes

this point: "If you love something—and there are things that I love—you do want more and more and more of it, but that's not the way to produce good work. So as an author I need to write what I need to write. And I needed to write this book" ("Exclusive"). Seen in this light, the book's more controversial content (profane language, adolescent sex, unlikeable and morally ambiguous characters) sends the unmistakable message that the author of *Harry Potter* can write an "adult" novel.

Rowling took a different tack with her second adult-audience work of fiction, the detective novel *The Cuckoo's Calling*, which she published under the pseudonym Robert Galbraith.[30] Although the "mature" content in this novel resembles that of *The Casual Vacancy*, the book is closer to the *Harry Potter* series in genre, pacing, and trajectory (i.e., the endings of the *Harry Potter* series and *The Cuckoo's Calling* are more conclusive than that of *The Casual Vacancy*). As noted in chapter one of this dissertation, readers have noticed Dickensian features to both *Harry Potter* and *The Cuckoo's Calling*, whereas *The Casual Vacancy* feels more like a George Eliot novel with its semi-rural setting and its point-of-view shifts that force readers to think the thoughts of morally ambiguous characters.[31] Several readers posted online that they

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[30] Early printings of *The Cuckoo's Calling* described Galbraith as a retired member of the Royal Military Police, but the hardcover I bought in August 2013 identifies the name as a pseudonym for J. K. Rowling. Although the sequel to *The Cuckoo's Calling*, *The Silkworm* (2014), uses the pseudonym, and Robert Galbraith does have an official website, the persona does not have a strong online presence (not even a Wikipedia page). See Spak for a reason why Rowling may have backed away from promoting or adding to the Galbraith myth.

[31] Interestingly, Rowling does not include Eliot in a short list of Victorian authors she mentions in an interview after being told that a representative of her publisher had compared *The Casual Vacancy* to a Dickens novel. According to Rowling, "I did want it to be like a Trollope or a Dickens or Mrs. Gaskell in the sense that I'm taking a small community, literally a parochial community, and trying to analyze it and anatomize it in the way that they did. I really like those 19th-century novels. That's the kind of thing I love reading" ("Exclusive"). Dickens, however, never sets an entire novel in a parochial community, other than *Hard Times*, which many critics have labeled the least Dickensian Dickens novel.

were able to identify Galbraith as Rowling because of correspondences between characters; for example, *Cuckoo's Calling* protagonist Cormoran Strike bears at least a physical resemblance to Hogwarts gamekeeper Rubeus Hagrid (see, for example, Vineyard). Given that *The Cuckoo's Calling* is a detective story, Rowling may have enjoyed adding an extra layer to the mystery by setting up an unknown-author case and embedding clues in the novel.[32] As many readers speculated, this mystery could have been a deliberate, elaborate marketing scheme, with the media buzz serving to sell more copies of the novel, but this is hardly sinister considering the fact that Rowling donated her royalties for it to ABF The Soldier's Charity ("FAQS").

Rowling's stated reason for writing under a pseudonym reveals an attempt to escape temporarily from the more stifling aspects of literary celebrity: "I enjoyed a long period of writing and researching without pressure or expectation and it was wonderful to receive feedback from publishers, reviewers and readers under a different name" ("FAQS"). Perhaps she also derived some creative pleasure from writing a character who could exist outside of her fictional worlds. In the FAQ section of the Galbraith website, Rowling writes of both Galbraith and the author "J. K. Rowling" as separate from herself: "Robert's success during this period [the three months before the pseudonym was compromised] compared favourably with J. K. Rowling's success during the equivalent period of her published career and I was very proud of him!" Rowling's delight in creating characters may thus be the most powerful explanation for her latest experiment in writing under a pseudonym.

That *The Cuckoo's Calling* was always intended to be the first book in a series may also help to explain why Rowling chose to use a pseudonym for it. Much as the Harry Potter/J. K.

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[32] Recall Foucault's claim that in modern literary discourse, "anonymity was of interest only as a puzzle to be solved" (1629); see also page 12 of chapter one of this study.

Rowling combination of names became a brand that signaled what readers should expect, the Cormoran Strike/Robert Galbraith combination would (and still can, even after the Rowling "outing") become a brand of its own. The general fan response to *The Casual Vacancy* may have made Rowling cautious of using the name "J. K. Rowling" for anything other than stories set in Harry Potter's wizarding world. Initially, the pseudonym "Robert Galbraith" allowed Rowling to work independently of the expectations set by her name. Even now, it designates the Cormoran Strike books as a unique entity, while at the same time it transfers the positive associations of the name "J. K. Rowling" to this other series, attracting readers who might not normally choose a detective novel.

Joanne Rowling's experiments with the use of pseudonyms have numerous implications for the studies of gender, genre, reader expectations, authorial autonomy, and branding. For the purposes of this chapter, they demonstrate Rowling's evolving conception of her persona as an author, and with regard to the topic of this dissertation, they represent one piece of the constantly renegotiated contract of expectations between Rowling and her readers. In the final section of this chapter, we turn from Rowling to her readers as the primary agents of that contract.

The Big, Happy, Open World of *Harry Potter* Fandom

Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* was the first, and probably is still the most thorough, book-length study of fan practices. It was published in 1992, just a few years after the World Wide Web was invented, and before fan communities had begun to make use of the Internet on a significant scale. Jenkins focuses on practices, such as convention attendance, that continue to be part of many fans' experience but no longer hold the essential place they once occupied in fandom. Other practices discussed in the book, such as the production of fan fiction and music videos, have proliferated exponentially

since its publication, due to the ease of distribution that the Web has made possible. Even the methods that Jenkins's exemplary fans use to share source texts—such as mailing VHS recordings of TV episodes—now seem quaint in this era of YouTube and the Internet Archive. (The simplicity of obtaining a free full-text copy of a popular novel, like the one of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* that I just located in seconds, would probably depress Charles Dickens, who would have to seriously adjust his anti-piracy platform if he lived today.)

Although *Textual Poachers* draws instances from a number of television fan communities, it focuses disproportionately on *Star Trek* fandom. No doubt this is not only because Jenkins is a *Star Trek* fan himself but also because members of that particular community are the iconic example of the (non-sports) fan in the pre-Web era. To this day, suggesting that one is a *Star Trek* fan remains a shorthand way to characterize a real or fictional person as a nerd or an obsessive, as Jenkins points out in his 2013 update to *Textual Poachers*, in which he compares the current TV series *The Big Bang Theory* to an older *Saturday Night Live* skit making fun of "Trekkies" (xv, 9). *Star Trek* fans, as the stereotype goes, are "social misfits" who come out of their "parents' basement[s]" (Jenkins 10) only for an annual convention, during which their interactions with other fans are often more competitive than generous (9). Although Jenkins demonstrates throughout his study that this stereotype is clearly untrue (see, for example, Jenkins's chapter on the communal bonds created through group singing of "Filk" music), it still holds mythic power.

Harry Potter fans, according to the popular imagination, are a different breed. Though still nerdy, they are significantly hipper than *Star Trek* fans because they are younger and they know their way around the Web. They tend to be more interested in literature and the arts than in science. And perhaps most interestingly, they are friendlier, more inclusive (indeed, the major

convention for *Potter* fans, LeakyCon, also prominently features sessions on *Dr. Who* and

Sherlock, among others), and more socially aware, even if that simply means they are aware of

their misfit status.[33] All of these stereotypical characteristics contain a grain (or more) of truth,

and nearly all of them can be categorized under the theme of connectivity. Because of their

eagerness to share—whether "sharing" means tweeting a link to a fan-produced song,

volunteering at a charitable organization's convention table, or declaring their love for Draco

Malfoy all over the Internet—*Harry Potter* fans have become the emblematic types of

postmodern, Web 2.0 fans.

The timing that made this happen could hardly have been more perfect if J. K. Rowling

had plotted it. The first *Harry Potter* book was published in 1997, less than ten years after the

1989 debut of the World Wide Web. The people who grew up alongside Harry, reading the

books as they were released throughout their late childhood and adolescence, were part of the

first generation of digital natives (see Anelli 91-92). Part of the reason why online *Harry Potter*

fandom took hold so early and remains so active and relevant is that the first and most frequented

websites about the books were not created by publishers or educators but by readers, often young

readers.

In chapter five of *Harry: A History*, Melissa Anelli provides a thorough overview of the

origins of online *Harry Potter* fan activity. Anelli is the long-standing, though not the founding,

"webmistress" of *The Leaky Cauldron*, one of the most popular *Potter* fan websites. There is no

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[33] A 2005 *New York Post* article called "Potterheads: Wizards of Odd," despite a general lack of perceptiveness even in its use of stereotypes, picks up on this personality distinction between *Star Trek* fans and *Harry Potter* fans. A chart within the article shows the "Future employment" (why "future" is unclear, since the article is about adult fans) of "Potterheads" as "Extrovert IT help work [*sic*] desk worker" and of "Trekkies" as "Introvert IT help desk worker" (Callahan 46). This comparison misses the perhaps more obvious stereotype that *Star Trek* fans tend to align with the STEM disciplines, while *Harry Potter* fans show more interest in the humanities.

need for me to retread the ground she has already covered in her book, so here I will simply

mention a few of the landmark events in this history. Fan websites were being created as early

as 1997, the year of the first novel's publication. That year, before the book had even been

published in the United States, a Nevada teenager named Jenna Robertson founded the *Unofficial*

Harry Potter Fan Club, which "quickly became the most comprehensive Harry site of the day"

(Anelli 89); it remained active until 2005, by which time it had a number of rivals with more

advanced web design and more up-to-date information resulting from connections with people

close to J. K. Rowling, her publishers, and Warner Bros.

One of those websites, *MuggleNet*, was founded in 1999 by Emerson Spartz, also a

teenager (Anelli 90). MuggleNet, which currently bills itself "The World's #1 Harry Potter

Site," is still very active, and its staff participate regularly at conventions and other events. *The*

Leaky Cauldron, the only website that has equaled *MuggleNet* in quality, endurance, and

popularity, was started in 2000. Neither Anelli's book nor the website's information page says

much about the founders; their age is not disclosed, but the crucial bit of information is that they

were themselves fans, not simply marketing to fans ("Brief"). *The Leaky Cauldron* also hosts a

popular podcast, and its staffers were the originators of the major fan convention LeakyCon. A

banner on the site calls it "The Most Trusted Name in Potter."

According to Rowling, she first looked at a fan website in 2002 ("Foreword" x)—rather

late in the game, in terms of the rapidly-increasing expansion of online *Harry Potter* fan activity.

She claims to have been impressed by what she saw during her "first, mammoth trawling

session" ("Foreword" xi). Indeed, Rowling has shown a perhaps surprising desire to cooperate

with fan sites, inviting Spartz and Anelli to her home for an exclusive interview in 2007 (Anelli

254-58) and giving *The Leaky Cauldron* her own personal "Fan Site Award" ("Brief")—a move

that almost certainly helped to fuel the palpable, if civil, rivalry between that website and

MuggleNet. Throughout all this, the two sites have remained independent and unofficial, with no

effort (at least none that has been made public) by Rowling or her representatives to buy out

either of them.

Rowling has been less tolerant of fans that are less willing to cooperate with her. As

Henry Jenkins (a *Harry Potter* as well as a *Star Trek* fan) bluntly puts it, "So, it is abundantly

clear that she likes some of her fans more than others and that any effort to facilitate fan

interactions also represents an attempt to bring fandom more under her control" (qtd. in Ingleton

189). Jenkins's major example is *The Harry Potter Lexicon*, a project by fan Steve Vander Ark,

which he originally intended to publish as a book. Rowling may have seen the *Lexicon* as a

threat not only because it was a print publication venture, and therefore a sales rival to her books,

but also because a lexicon, unlike a fan fiction story, signals an attempt to authoritatively fix the

meanings of terms within the text. She sued Vander Ark and his publisher and won (see Ingleton

184-85), but although publication of the book was prohibited, the *Lexicon* still exists as a website

designed by a team headed by Vander Ark. According to the site, "Warner Bros. has given its

permission for the Lexicon to use the graphics drawn by Mary GrandPré for the books," and,

amazingly, Rowling has accorded the site her personal Fan Site Award, the same one she gave to

The Leaky Cauldron ("About the Harry Potter Lexicon"). Perhaps this is cleanup work after the

bad PR Rowling received after suing Vander Ark—or perhaps it represents a genuine effort

toward improved relations with the fan community. It could be both.

Anelli does not mention the *Lexicon* dispute in her book (she did, however, post news

about it on *The Leaky Cauldron*), but she does narrate the debacle sparked by Warner Bros.'

mass mailing in 2001 of "cease-and-desist" letters to fan site operators, many of whom were

teenagers. Outraged fans and activists launched an online "PotterWar" in support of the site

owners, and Warner Bros. eventually retracted the order (Anelli 94-100). As Anelli puts it,

"Warner Bros. seemed to be struggling to fully grasp what it meant to have such an ardent,

young, preexisting fan base, as well as involvement from the author" (97). Although Rowling's

name, inevitably, became associated with Warner Bros.' in the PotterWar fiasco, she was not

personally involved as she was in the Vander Ark case.

   Harry Potter fan fiction began proliferating very early as well; two of the most popular

sites, *The Sugar Quill* (now inactive) and *Fiction Alley*, were founded in 2001. Rowling's

official stance toward fan fiction has evolved along with her stance toward Web fandom in

general. Discussing "adult" fan fiction (which represents a significant portion of the stories

published online), Millman contrasts a series of "cease and desist" letters sent by Rowling's

solicitors in 2002, asking adult fan fiction sites to remove "pornographic and sexually explicit"

Harry Potter content, with a 2004 statement in which Rowling claimed to be "flattered" by

Potter fan fiction in general (49).

   Rowling uses the same word in an interview with Melissa Anelli: "It was largely kids

writing for kids—initially. I felt that we needed to be hands off, accept it as flattering . . . It *is*

uncomfortable for the writer of the original work . . . You appreciate what's flattering about it

and yet, it's not a comfortable feeling to see a kind of cardboard version of that world erected

and stuff moved around and the laws contravened" (93). Just prior to this quotation, Rowling

admits that she has never read any online fan fiction. If she had, perhaps she would be willing to

admit that not all of the stories are "cardboard" and that those writers who "contravene" the

"laws" of Rowling's world often do this with critical or creative purpose rather than out of

carelessness or disrespect. Suffice it to say that Rowling has maintained a laissez-faire attitude

toward fan fiction, especially when compared to an author such as Anne Rice, who attempted in 2000 to prohibit fan fiction based on her work (Anelli 92; Millman 40).[34] I say "attempted" because even if Rice could succeed in eradicating all online fan fiction about her work (which she has not; there are stories and poems featuring her characters on fanfiction.net), she could not prevent writers from privately distributing their stories. Rowling appears to understand this concept better.

Harry Potter fans themselves have varying attitudes toward fan fiction. Many write and read it avidly, and some contributors even become celebrity authors in their own right, a subcategory of BNF (Big Name Fans): people who become famous for their *Harry Potter* fan productions (Anelli 225). Others take an attitude similar to that which Rowling displays when she says, "I just don't want to go there" (qtd. in Anelli 93). Fear of what we might find, whether that could be poor quality work or transgressive plot possibilities, has kept many *Harry Potter* fans, including myself, away from fan fiction. As Millman asks, tongue in cheek, "After you have taken the leap and read fan fiction, is it possible to be a Potter virgin again, to be satisfied with what Rowling gives you?" (40) Other fans oppose fan fiction on the principle that Rowling knows her world best. Even fan fiction readers often find themselves using the language of these Rowling purists: Anelli notes that one of the highest forms of praise on a review board is a comment such as "*OMG are you sure you're not J. K. Rowling?*" (214) and that, conversely, one

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[34] Rice's website still includes the following message: "I do not allow fan fiction. The characters are copyrighted. It upsets me terribly to even think about fan fiction with my characters. I advise my readers to write your own original stories with your own characters. It is absolutely essential that you respect my wishes" ("Anne's Messages to Fans"). This quotation should not be taken to imply that Rice disregards her readers. The statement is posted within an extensive section of her official website called "Anne Rice Reader Interactions," in which she acknowledges fan letters, even posting a few in full, and explains why she has and has not taken certain suggestions commonly made by fans. One subsection is entitled "Anne's Questions to Fans"; apparently Rice posted a number of questions here in 2007 and personally responded to many of them. The questions and answers have been removed from the site.

of the harshest criticisms is "OoC," or "out of character" (221). Fan fiction is thus a site both for resistance to Rowling's portrayal of the wizarding world (a resistance best exemplified in "slash" fiction, which pairs up same-sex couples) and for homage to her portrayal and confirmation of her authority.

With all of this history in mind, *Pottermore* seems to be Rowling's belated contribution to an already very active online exchange that constitutes, more than any face-to-face event, the hub of *Harry Potter* fandom. While some, such as Ingleton, have speculated that the website is part of Rowling's attempt, begun with the controversial epilogue and Carnegie Hall reading, to control the imaginative future of her characters, the size and influence of *Harry Potter* fan activity would make any effort to regulate this activity an exercise in futility. Whatever Rowling's varying feelings on fan fiction may be, she seems to realize that she cannot prevent other writers from playing in her world, but she wants to keep playing in it herself. Rowling is intelligent enough not to have any illusions of being able to center online *Harry Potter* fandom in one place at this point. *Pottermore* does not shut down or replace fan fiction; it is, instead, Rowling's own version of fan fiction. Right now Rowling's voice is just one (particularly loud) fan voice among many.

Some fans consider the Rowling-authored sections of *Pottermore* to be canonical, such as the 90 (out of 200) respondents to my survey, as discussed in chapter one, who ranked *Pottermore* as the second most canonical *Potter* text after the novels. Others deny authority to the site, such as the vendor at LeakyCon 2013 who was selling buttons that read, "Pottermore sorted me . . . WRONG!" The diversity of responses to *Pottermore*, just like the diversity of responses to fan fiction, bears out Jenkins's claim that fans are not merely "brainless consumers" (10) but that, as "textual poachers" (24), they accept, reject, or transform source material at will.

It also confirms Hayward's (10-11) and Jenkins's (17-18) argument that fans use evaluative criteria to distinguish good texts from poor ones, as well as Noda's argument (*passim*) that fan communities set their own standards of canonicity.

This chapter has demonstrated how one of today's largest, most inclusive and collaborative fandoms was made possible, ironically, by a very private and restrained author. Whether or not Rowling's own perspective has changed is unclear, but a survey of fan practices over the eighteen years since the first *Harry Potter* books was published demonstrates that fan fiction and other forms of non-authoritative interpretation not only are inevitable in the current climate but can also (within certain limits) add to the richness of the readers' and author's shared experience. In the next chapter, we return to Charles Dickens, who valued this shared experience so much that he began to crave the physical proximity of his audience. An imagined bond, facilitated by the printed page, was no longer enough for him—he wanted to enjoy his books in the presence of his readers.

CHAPTER FOUR

"I SHALL TEAR MYSELF TO PIECES":

DICKENS AND THE PUBLIC READINGS

The two final chapters of this dissertation are about two efforts by authors to connect with their readers in unprecedented ways, as well as to prolong their own enjoyment of their own work. Despite the obvious differences between Dickens's public readings (an oral performance that brought him into the same physical space as his audience) and Rowling's *Pottermore* (a text-based website that does not allow Rowling and her readers to interact in real time), both are opportunities for the authors to act as fans by continuing to enjoy—by rereading, reinterpreting, and adding to—their favorite worlds and characters. The fact that readers can enjoy them along with the authors is significant in both cases, but more so for Dickens than for Rowling. Dickens, as we have already seen, was an extrovert and an entertainer, which meant that he needed people.

Although he never appeared in plays professionally like his friend William Macready, Dickens was a lifelong actor. As a boy, he performed recitations at the local tavern; as an adult, he managed and acted in private theatricals with his friends and family. He acted even when he was playing himself. Humphrey House tells how, later in life, Dickens got a great deal of pleasure out of performing the role of the English country gentlemen in a style that harked back to *Pickwick*: "[W]hen friends whom he wanted to entertain in a marked, dramatic way (they were often Americans) came to Gad's Hill, he himself became a Dickensian" (18). But Dickens's thespian sensibility showed itself most strongly in his writing—not only in his quickly-delineated characters (written with emphasis on the observable) and sometimes melodramatic dialogue, but also in his concern for the effect that each of his decisions would have on his audience, as discussed in chapter two.

Biographer Fred Kaplan makes the acting comparison explicit: "Placing great importance on the affective quality of his writing, he felt a compelling desire to see his audience's reaction to what he had written . . . Like an actor, he wanted the pleasure of spontaneous applause, the immediate confirmation of his command of other people's feelings" (*Biography* 177). The context of this quotation is Kaplan's account of Dickens's 1844 sojourn in Italy, where he felt disconnected from the people (his closest friends as well as the English reading public) whose emotional responses gave vitality to his writing. Kaplan writes about Dickens's desire to return to London: "Among other things, he wanted to have the emotional reward of seeing the faces of his dearest friends respond to his reading *The Chimes*," his latest Christmas story (177). As soon as he arrived back in London, Dickens did read *The Chimes* to different acquaintances on two consecutive nights, and the emotional reaction was famously intense. The first night, he gave a private reading to Macready, the actor, whose response to Dickens's dramatic performance must have been particularly valuable to the author. The next day Dickens wrote to his wife, Catherine, "If you had seen Macready last night—undisguisedly sobbing, and crying on the sofa, as I read—you would have felt (as I did) what a thing it is to have Power" (qtd. in Ackroyd 446). The following night he read the story for a select group of friends. A drawing of the event by Daniel Maclise, who was in the audience, shows the listeners with serious and distressed faces. Two are holding their heads in their hands, and one's face is completely obscured by a handkerchief. Maclise wrote to Catherine, "We should borrow the high language of the minor theatre and even then not do the effect justice—shrieks of laughter—there were indeed—and floods of tears as a relief to them—I do not think that there ever was such a triumphant hour for Charles" (qtd. in Ackroyd 447). Perhaps for the first time, Dickens was able to judge the effect

of an entire work on an audience in real time. Up to this point, he had only been able to imagine

his power to sway the emotions of others; now he saw and felt it.

Although Dickens did not begin his public readings until more than a decade after the

Chimes readings, the memory of this experience and the near-mesmeric connection he had

experienced with his audiences probably influenced his eventual decision to make performance

of his works a major part of his career. Beginning in 1853, Dickens gave a number of non-profit

readings at working men's institutions, fundraisers, and philosophical societies. At most of these

readings he gave some version of a brief speech, first presented at a reading of *A Christmas*

Carol in Bradford in 1854, which set out the conditions of the atmosphere he wanted to create:

"The first is that you will have the kindness, by a great stretch of the imagination, to imagine this

a small social party assembled to hear a tale told round the Christmas fire; and secondly, that if

you feel disposed as we go along to give expression to any emotion, whether grave or gay, you

will do so with perfect freedom from restraint" ("Bradford" 169). Dickens hoped to recreate,

with a crowd of 3,700, the experience he had had with his friends to whom he read *The Chimes*.

Apparently he succeeded in this at the Bradford reading, as he had done the year before at a

similar reading in Birmingham, where he reported that it would be "impossible to imagine . . . a

more delicately observant audience . . . They lost nothing, misinterpreted nothing, followed

everything closely, laughed and cried with the most delightful earnestness" (qtd. in Kaplan

Biography 304). The experience was not only enjoyable for the audience but positively

transcendent for Dickens: "I felt as if we were all bodily going up into the clouds together" (qtd.

in Kaplan 304).

Dickens made the decision to begin reading for profit in 1858, just after his awkward and

very public separation from his wife (Andrews 48). There were several reasons why he decided

to do so. Dickens derived so much joy from performing his own work, especially in the presence

of his readers, and he did it so well, that it seemed logical to add the extra benefit of making a

profit. Money would, indeed, be a true benefit, at least to Dickens's peace of mind. As he wrote

in the autobiographical fragment he gave to Forster, it took very little for the adult Dickens to be

transported psychologically back to the short yet deeply traumatic period when he was "a little

labouring hind" (qtd. in Ackroyd 59). The breakup of his marriage robbed him of some stability,

which probably exacerbated his felt financial insecurity. In the speech that preceded his first for-

profit reading, which took place in London in April 1858, Dickens addressed the issue, stating

that appearing at benefit readings, while enjoyable, had become costly in both money and time:

"I have had definitely to choose between now and then reading on my own account, as one of my

recognized occupations, or not reading at all. I have had little or no difficulty in deciding on the

former course" ("First Reading" 264). Whether or not Dickens needed, in an accounting sense,

the money he made from the readings (he had recently bought a new home, Gad's Hill Place, and

was supporting a number of children and relatives, so the money must have helped), he needed it

in a psychological sense.

Dickens's separation from his wife had also put him in great need of human contact,

especially with people whom he felt would understand him—as his readers had always done.

His relationship with his readers was the last and seemingly the most heartfelt reason he gave in

his speech before the first reading: "I have had a pretty large experience of the interest my

hearers are so generous as to take in these occasions, and of the delight they give to me, as a tried

means of strengthening those relations—I may almost say of personal friendship—which it is my

great privilege and pride, as it is my great responsibility, to hold with a multitude of persons"

("First Reading" 264). The physical proximity of the audience, the love and respect symbolized

by their attendance and applause, and the ability for him to see the immediate effects of his

"power" would all be invaluable to Dickens. Indeed, a letter Dickens wrote during his first

reading tour attests that his need for company and understanding was being fulfilled as he had

expected: "I consider it a remarkable instance of good fortune that it should have fallen out that I

should, in this Autumn of all others, have come face to face with so many multitudes" (qtd. in

Andrews 170).

Dickens also needed an outlet for his creative energy and the restlessness that must have

been particularly acute at this period. He did not have a novel project to work on at the time,

having finished *Little Dorrit* in June 1857. In the fall and winter of 1857-58, he was working

only on shorter sketches and stories such as *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* (a

collaboration with Wilkie Collins) and some pieces for the Christmas number of his periodical

Household Words. None of these provided the all-consuming task that a novel would have given

him. In March 1858, when a successful benefit reading at Edinburgh had all but made up his

mind to begin the for-profit readings he had been considering for some time, he wrote to Forster,

"I must do *something*, or I shall wear my heart away. I can see no better thing to do that is half

so hopeful in itself, or half so well suited to my restless state" (qtd. in Fielding 260). In a letter

to a different correspondent, a few months before, Dickens had called himself "the modern

embodiment of the old Enchanters, whose Familiars tore them to pieces. I weary of rest, and

have no satisfaction but in fatigue" (qtd. in Fielding xxiv). I will return to the spiritualism

metaphor later in this chapter; for now, it is enough to note that Dickens needed a project to

literally throw himself into.

But not everyone agreed that reading for profit would be to Dickens's credit. Forster,

whom Dickens asked for advice on this issue as on so many others, objected to the scheme on

several grounds, including, as Andrews puts it, "the question of the Readings[35] derogating from the artistic status of the writer" (48). In Forster's words, "It was a substitution of lower for higher aims; a change to commonplace from more elevated pursuits; and it had so much of the character of a public exhibition for money as to raise, in the question of respect for his calling as a writer, a question also of respect for himself as a gentleman" (374). The readings, in other words, would move Dickens closer to being an actor—a dream come true for him, but not for those concerned with his reputation. Indeed, a continual topic of discussion for reviewers of the readings was whether Dickens followed the accepted practices of a public reader or crossed over into acting; the reviews were mixed (Andrews 76-77).

As for Dickens himself, though he cared little for such nebulous concepts as the dignity becoming an author, he did take this issue into consideration in an 1846 letter to Forster: "in these days of lecturings and readings, a great deal of money might possibly be made (if it were not infra dig) by one's having Readings of one's own books" (qtd. in Collins "Introduction" xix). However, he eventually came to dismiss this particular objection, stating in the speech before the April 1858 reading, "I have satisfied myself that it can involve no possible compromise of the credit and independence of literature" ("First Reading" 264). A related but more characteristic concern that he expressed while deciding whether or not he should pursue the project was whether it would affect his relationship with his readers. He wrote to ask his publisher, Evans, "[W]ould such an use of the personal (I may almost say affectionate) relations which subsist between me and the public, and make my standing with them very peculiar, at all affect my position with them as a writer? Would it be likely to have any influence on my next book?" (qtd.

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[35] Throughout his book, Andrews capitalizes the term "Reading(s)," in reference to the public events, in order to distinguish them from the general act of reading.

in Slater 447). Given the recipient of this query, Dickens almost certainly meant financial

influence, but given the general tenor of the way he spoke about his readers, he almost certainly

did not *only* mean financial influence. Evans evidently returned an answer that took care of

Dickens's concern.

With the exception of a long break between June 1863 and March 1866, the readings

became, in his words, one of Dickens's "recognized occupations" for the remainder of his career

and life. They were popular, lucrative (Collins "Introduction" xxviii-xxix), and immensely

gratifying to Dickens. Some biographers and critics have suggested that the physically,

mentally, and emotionally demanding reading schedule was what killed Dickens; some have

even specifically blamed the "Sikes and Nancy" reading, in which he reenacted the brutal murder

from *Oliver Twist*.[36] Despite the negative effects that the readings probably did have on his

health, Dickens never came to regret or hate the nightly performances. On the contrary, he came

to need them (see Slater 595).

In her article "Dickens' Public Readings and the Victorian Author," Susan L. Ferguson

argues that Dickens the amateur actor drew from his theatrical experience to enact, in the public

readings, the role of both consummate reader and celebrated author. Ferguson also mentions a

third role, that of the actor, but I want to shift the focus onto the characters whom he was

enacting, through which he came to embody the text. In other words, the readings allowed him

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[36] The verb "reenacted" is not an exaggeration, especially with regard to this unique piece, which Dickens added to his repertoire relatively late in his reading career. While performing "Sikes and Nancy," he screamed, grabbed an invisible Nancy by the throat, and violently pounded the reading desk. Andrews calls it "the most fully theatrical of all his Readings" (199). Dickens was notoriously exhausted after this piece and would have to lie on his dressing-room couch, without speaking, for ten minutes or more before reappearing for the next portion of the performance. See Andrews 219-24 for a description of what one of these performances must have looked like.

to occupy all three points of the rhetorical triangle. The remainder of this chapter is organized according to these three roles.

The first section explores the most obvious role, that of the author. In this role, Dickens was both the ultimate interpreter, who established authoritative readings of his work, and a mesmeric operator, who could "'resolve' his thousands of eager auditors into 'one creature'" (Slater 467). In this section I will also discuss Dickens's ability, as author, to arrest his characters' development, subverting the effect of serial fiction and causing his characters to stay in the state in which he preferred them to be. The second section is about Dickens as his audience's friend and fellow reader, who laughed and cried along with them, enjoying the effects that he had created. In this role he also modeled for his audience the best (according to Dickens) way to read his works. Finally, the third section explores perhaps the most fascinating aspect of Dickens's public readings, in which he seemed to embody the text and become the characters. In this role, he performed the self-emptying work of a medium, allowing voices not his own to speak through his body. To use a different metaphor from spiritualism, if Dickens the author was a mesmerist who could use his "Power" to sway his audience, Dickens in this role of text/character was the mesmeric patient whose out-of-body experiences provided a release from ailments, physical and otherwise.

Mr. Dickens Himself

As most people do (though most people are perhaps not quite so good at it), Dickens brought forth different versions of himself depending on the context—for example, he felt that he could behave differently around his young, bohemian friend Wilkie Collins than around the more conservative Forster. One role he took very seriously was that of the public figure. He was a noted after-dinner speaker with good reason: the transcripts of his speeches still demonstrate

quick wit, geniality, and an unexpected (give the time period and situation) lack of floridness or bombast (see Fielding *passim*). Dickens sometimes complained privately about having to appear at various ceremonies and charitable functions, but it was generally the other speakers (such as city government figures) and what he perceived as their humbug that he took issue with. The readings, therefore, gave him the opportunity to do what he enjoyed—appear before his public—without the intermediary influences of ceremony or co-presenters. He could simply be with his readers. Dickens mentioned this reason in his address before the first paid reading: "[I]n these times whatever brings a public man and his public face to face, on terms of mutual confidence and respect, is a good thing" (qtd. in Slater 450).

Despite this genial relationship between the public and Dickens the public figure, I argued in my introduction that the readings audiences did not come to hear Dickens the man speaking in his own voice; they came to hear Scrooge and Nancy and Pickwick and Mr. Micawber. This is true to a great extent. Dickens's pre-reading remarks were very short, and the events never included a question-and-answer session of the kind that most author appearances include today. People were not there to pick up writing tips from Dickens or to learn about his composition process—although, whether or not they realized it, he was composing before their very eyes, since he introduced nightly variations on his reading texts, which were already variations of his published works.[37]

While the primary draw of the readings was evidently the opportunity to hear beloved characters brought to life by an unusually skilled performer who knew those characters more intimately than anyone else, an added enticement was the chance to be in the same room with a famous person and to compare the man they saw and heard from the image they had formed in

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[37] Slater describes Dickens's nightly riffs on one particular joke from *The Trial from Pickwick* (467).

their minds. Photography was still in its infancy during the mid-nineteenth century, and people sat for photos as if they were sitting for painted portraits. This meant that every new Dickens novel or every mention of him in the newspaper was not accompanied by a recent photograph as it would be today. A now-famous painting of Dickens by William Powell Frith was completed in 1859, the year after the public readings began, but many of those who attended the events would not have seen it.

In fact, many people may still have imagined Dickens to look as he did in the famous 1839 "Nickleby Portrait" by Daniel Maclise, so called because an engraving based on it was included as the frontispiece of *Nicholas Nickleby*. (Subsequent novels did not include a portrait of the author.) Dickens had become not only a very different writer over those twenty years but also a very different man, physically. A number of people who attended the readings remarked that Dickens looked older than his chronological age (Andrews 164-65). A few commented on his small stature (Andrew 160). Some were disappointed by the foppishness they noted in his dress and hairstyle, believing it to be inappropriate for a great author and public man (Andrews 165-66). Others had expected his voice to be richer, more cultivated—more authorial. Andrews notes that at least one observer found Dickens's voice "monotonous" and that he had a barely noticeable lisp (183).   The general consensus was that Dickens cut a less imposing figure than England's greatest living writer would be expected to cut.

But Andrews found that whatever criticisms contemporary observers made about the author's appearance and voice were quickly overshadowed: "He transcends his sometimes disconcerting physical appearance, and any perceived mismatch between that appearance and his established distinguished-author status, through the charismatic power of his performance" (168). Perhaps his unassuming presentation made it all the easier for "Charles Dickens" to

disappear when it was time for his characters to come on the scene, a process we will discuss in the third section of this chapter.

One way that Dickens's authorial role was made manifest in the public readings was in his interpretations of characters and scenes. Multiple stage versions of popular Dickens characters already existed, and of course there was the conception that each reader carried in his or her mind. One function of the readings, therefore, was to establish a consensus. According to Andrews, "It was not only a form of interpretation: it was an act of recuperation in the face of diaspora. Night after night, all around the country, for two hours up there on his Reading platform, the author himself came to retrieve his texts from their dispersal among thousands of readers" (230). Though, as I have mentioned, Dickens sometimes introduced variations into the script of his readings, the persona of the characters—their voice, mannerisms, and facial expressions—remained constant throughout the many performances over the years; thus, the readings "fixed, as if by some public and pontifical pronouncement, what was Dickens's interpretation of Dickens's work" (Chesterton 229). Andrews found that, just as fans of beloved novels are often disappointed by film actors' portrayals of their favorite characters, "[f]or quite a number of people, surprisingly, Dickens's interpretations of his own characters were a disappointment and permanently damaged their cherished impressions formed from reading the books" (228-29). However, ticket sales and the many favorable reviews indicate that the majority of audience members were ready and willing to accept Dickens's interpretations, which "after all, must have unique authority, since he was that character's author—or so the deferential feeling ran" (Andrews 228). According to one contemporary reviewer, speaking probably for many, "It can honestly be said that Mr. Dickens is the greatest reader of the greatest writer of the age" (qtd. in Ferguson 739).

Interpretation was, indeed, one of Dickens's main concerns throughout the readings, as well as one of his main goals for them. He wrote in 1867, looking back on almost a decade of for-profit readings, "When I first entered on this interpretation of myself (then quite strange in the public ear), I was sustained by the hope that I could drop into some hearts, some new expression of the meaning of my books, that would touch them in a new way" (qtd. in Andrews 226). Interestingly, Dickens speaks here not only of interpretation of his works but also of "interpretation of myself." Just as he was appearing before the public in a new persona, that of the performative reader, he was also presenting his works in a new light. But it is important to note that he does not refer to a new meaning of his books, but rather to a "new expression of the meaning" of them. For Dickens, the meaning remains fixed, but the readers are given a new way of looking at it as they see it pronounced and enacted on stage by the author.

As we have seen, Dickens had a deep psychological need to be understood, and this extended into his relationship with his reading public. The prefaces he sometimes wrote for later editions of his novels often served the purpose of correcting misinterpretations, as Dickens saw them, of which he had become aware. On the other hand, correct interpretation was immensely gratifying to him. Writing to a friend about the reading of *A Christmas Carol* that he gave to working-class people in Birmingham, he commented on the listeners' intellectual as well as emotional attunement with him: "They lost nothing, misinterpreted nothing, followed everything closely, laughed and cried with most delightful earnestness" (qtd. in Kaplan *Biography* 304). In an era before modern and postmodern literary theory, Dickens had no concept of multiple possible "correct" interpretations of a text. If his readers did not understand the characters in the same way, if not to the same degree, as he did, this indicated a breakdown in the sympathetic connection that he shared with them.

In chapter two, I defined the sympathetic connection between Dickens and his readers as falling somewhere along a continuum between an exercise of the enchanter's power to fascinate and an exercise of the reader's deliberate attempt to feel what the author is feeling. The word "enchanter" and similar terms appear often in scholarly studies of the readings. Slater uses the adjective "[e]nchanter-like" to describe Dickens's apparent ability to get his large audience to listen and react as a unit (467). Andrews says that the readings audiences must have seen Dickens as "a magician—a storyteller . . . who reaches into his listeners like an invasive force" (168), and he later refers to the author's "charismatic presence" (251). Kaplan makes a comparison between Dickens and the Ancient Mariner from Coleridge's poem, and although he is making a point about Dickens's "compulsive need to have an audience" (*Biography* 179), there may also be an implication that Dickens, like the Mariner, could "fascinate" people with his eye and compel them to be part of that audience.[38] The academics who use these terms are merely following the usage of the eyewitnesses, one of whom wrote to Dickens, "You play with the heart, like the Japanese juggler with his paper butterfly, as tho' it were a creature of your own construction, turn it this way and that at a breath, and make it rise or sink just as you will" (qtd. in Andrews 251). An observer of Dickens's American readings tour agreed but chose a different metaphor: "There is something indescribable; a subtle essence of sympathy that can only be felt, not described, that puts him in *en rapport* with the most antagonistic spirits and makes them his, while the spell is upon them" (qtd. in Andrews 251). Here, Dickens is shown to have his audience captivated and enthralled in a stronger sense than that in which those two words are typically used.

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[38] In Kaplan's other major contribution to Dickens scholarship, *Dickens and Mesmerism*, he quotes from a letter in which Dickens refers to a houseguest, whom he feels has some sort of mesmeric power over him, as "the Ancient Mariner of young ladies" (65).

The association of Dickens with magic and with sympathy in the technical sense is not random, since, as we saw in chapter two, he was interested both as a writer and as a private individual in mesmerism. Crucial to the concept of Dickens the author-enchanter is the fact that although he famously practiced on a number of subjects, he never submitted himself to be mesmerized: "Dickens always found reasons to avoid putting himself in the power of an operator's manipulations, born as he was to be an operator rather than a subject" (qtd. in Kaplan *Mesmerism* 65). Although there is no evidence that Dickens actually used mesmeric techniques on the audiences at his readings, his experience as an "operator" may have helped him to achieve the reactive effects he desired. Later in this chapter I will argue that Dickens, during the readings, allowed his identity to be taken over by his characters; this phenomenon, which I will compare to the work of a medium, should not be confused with the process of mesmerism. In the bond between Dickens and his audience, whether it is conceived as sympathetic, mesmeric, charismatic, or magnetic ("animal magnetism" was another nineteenth-century name for mesmerism), he was always the one in control—although, as we will see in the next section, his power depended on his audience's willingness to be controlled.

Though he did not use mesmeric techniques, Dickens did make a number of deliberate choices with the staging conditions of the readings in order to regulate the audience's experience. According to Andrews, "He ensured the minimizing of all distractions: there were no opportunities to relax concentration for the duration of the story, to let particular moments resonate for a while in silence" (235). Dickens the reader acted as an unusually knowledgeable tour guide through the world of his novels; he was also a brisk tour guide who allowed no stragglers to stay behind for extended, private contemplation of an artifact.

Andrews notes the methods Dickens used in order to create this concentrated experience: he narrowed the stage into a "small brightly glowing red chamber"; he restricted, much as Alfred Hitchcock would later do with showings of *Psycho*, audience members' ability to enter and exit the hall; and, as we have seen, he opened many of his readings with a brief speech encouraging his listeners to openly express emotion if they felt so inclined (235). Ackroyd notes another feature of the staging (not using the word "trance" in its technical, mesmeric sense): "The audience were in a kind of trance, a state deepened by the absence of ventilation and the consumption of oxygen by the gas flames, which in turn provoked a mild form of hysteria" (985). Furthermore, Andrews points out, the slower pace of the readings as compared to the act of silent reading caused a defamiliarizing effect, forcing the audience to notice different emphases and inflections than they likely had noticed on their own (234). Of course, any reading or theatrical performance would create a similar effect, but, as discussed above, Dickens's persona gave a particular authority to his interpretations.

A final aspect of Dickens's authorial role during the readings is his ability to determine his characters' fates. Although he did not use the readings as a way to revise plots that had been published and "consecrated by the public's affectionate approval" (Monod 173), they did allow him to change his stories in one important way. Through the readings, Dickens was able to keep extending the illusion of perpetuity that serialization had given his fiction. In other words, he put his characters back into circulation, in more ways than merely the economic. The dead characters, like little Paul Dombey, came back to life every night; the characters who were most charming and memorable when they were children, such as David Copperfield and Little Em'ly, returned to their childhood every night. Obviously, any rereading of one of Dickens's novels provides this kind of experience. But the author's own public readings provided it to a unique

degree because they were live performances, because they were authorized by the creator of those characters, and because, in spite of the general consistency of Dickens's delivery, no two performances were exactly alike.

The readings, in keeping the characters alive, provided a special experience for the audience, but they were even more valuable in this sense to Dickens himself. Throughout his novels, he demonstrated a keen interest in preserving the youth and innocence of his characters, especially the female ones. Biographers and critics agree that this interest was probably rooted in his close early relationship with his sister and, later, in his severe reaction to the death of his young sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, whom he idealized. Dickens was aware that such a strong desire for immutability could easily turn pathological; in *Great Expectations*, he displays no sympathy for Miss Havisham's refusal to dispose of the trappings of her wedding that never happened. However, when combined with other virtues that he valued—such as cleanliness and helpfulness—changelessness was one of Dickens's favorite ways of indicating that he meant for a character to be good or loveable. For example, David Copperfield is delighted to see that his dear friend (and soon to be wife) Agnes carries a little basket of keys at the waist of her dress just as she did when she was a little girl. Similarly, in *Dombey and Son*, Walter Gay is almost obsessed with making sure that Florence Dombey, whom he had admired in childhood, stays, at least in his mental image of her, "the same artless, gentle, winning little creature . . . precious, unattainable, unchangeable" (243). As we saw in chapter two, Florence does go through a slow and subtle process of development. But throughout these changes, both active and passive, Florence's central sweetness remains the same.

Perhaps a more sinister way in which the novels manifest Dickens's desire to preserve his favorite characters in their innocence is the early death of good and/or unworldly characters,

such as Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and Paul Dombey. Yet another variation is the scenario

in which an adult brother and sister live together in an indefinite extension of their childhood

relationship; this is the case of John and Harriet Carker in *Dombey and Son*, as well as Tom and

Ruth Pinch in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Another of Dickens's favorite themes, one of the ways in

which he most strongly echoes Shakespeare, is the reversal of death. In *Dombey and Son*, the

presumed-drowned Walter Gay returns after an absence of many years. *A Tale of Two Cities* is

thick with resurrection imagery. The protagonist of *Our Mutual Friend* fakes his death in order

to create a new identity. Dickens used all of these plot devices to resist the inexorable "fixed,

linear order to time and progress" (72) that Hughes and Lund argue is implicit in the worldview

of the nineteenth-century novel.

In the readings, Dickens was able to perform even more radical acts of preservation and

reversal. He found a way to halt the inevitable progress toward an ending that is inherent in the

serial form, and he could even resurrect characters who had truly and finally died in the novels,

the brutally murdered Nancy most notably. By repeating night after night the same scenes taken

out of the context of his novels, he puts his characters into arrested development, or permanent

circulation. Not only the repetition but also the selectivity of the readings helped Dickens to

preserve his characters as he wished to remember them. For some readings, such as *The Trial*

from Pickwick, he selected one scene that had become iconic or that was beloved by the author

himself, or he focused on one particular character, such as little Paul Dombey or Mrs. Gamp.

For others, such as *David Copperfield*, he created a drastically abridged version of the novel,

focusing on one or two plot lines. Dickens's abridgements and emphases, like his character

voices and mannerisms, probably became authoritative for audience members, which means,

strangely, that Dickens himself contributed to the gradual process of simplification his works

have undergone, eventually resulting in drastic abridgements such as the less than thirty minute-long *Mickey's Christmas Carol*.

Even for readings of comparatively short works, in which Dickens did not need to do much cutting that would be perceptible to the reader, he still introduced subtle shifts in emphasis. For example, in the *Carol* reading, the role of the narrator was reduced in order to heighten the immediacy of the relation between characters and audience (Ferguson 737), and the sociopolitical message was toned down (Collins "Introduction" xxxvi; Slater 464). Some of these edits were made with an eye to pleasing the audience and adapting the works, some of which were decades old, for a new context. Others, however, Dickens likely made in order to allow him to share his favorite parts of his favorite writings with his favorite people. As Slater observes of *David Copperfield*, "Aware as he was of how closely his readers associated him personally with this novel, Dickens would surely have looked forward with a particular zest to sharing this reading with his public" (503). Not coincidentally, many of the favorite parts that Dickens chose to perform, especially in the readings that had a more serious tone (such as the David/Little Em'ly plot), had to do with childhood, death, or sibling (or sibling-like) relationships. Those themes, combined with the actions of resurrecting and recirculating his characters and rearranging his stories to show the characters at their best, allowed Dickens to fulfill a deep psychological need through his readings. Meanwhile, the *David Copperfield* example shows that Dickens's authorial control was intimately bound up with his affectionate relationship to his readers. The next section addresses this relationship and Dickens's role as reader.

Dickens Laughs at His Own Jokes

In chapter two, I described the view, shared by many readers, that Dickens gives the impression of being a reporter from the world of his novels, where he can live alongside his characters just as naturally as among his "real" contemporaries. This view, I mentioned, makes Dickens into a boundary-crossing figure—a trickster of sorts. In his readings, Dickens gave a similar impression of being in two places at once. He was on stage performing, but he was also, observers felt, down in the audience, listening, laughing, closely observing the effects he was having on individual auditors, and reveling in those effects himself. One who attended a reading wrote, "Dickens, the author, comes in at intervals to enjoy his own fun; you see him in the twinkle of the eye and the curve of the mouth" (qtd. in Ackroyd 985). The observer calls Dickens "the author," but everyone knows that it is considered an artistic weakness for a comedian to laugh at his own jokes or an actor to appear to be moved by his own performance. When Dickens expressed the reactions noted by the observer quoted above, he was functioning not as the author but as a fellow reader. In his discussion of the collaborative nature of the readings, Andrews quotes Dickens: "So real are my fictions to myself that, after hundreds of nights, I can with a feeling of perfect freshness to that little red table, and laugh and cry with my hearers, as if I had never stood there before" (243). Conversely, when his listeners did not evince the desired emotional responses, Dickens was unable to perform with his usual ease: "He told one acquaintance that during his London Readings he had sometimes been scarcely able to continue his reading, 'for the "genteel" frigidity of his audience'" (Andrews 71). Despite his mesmeric capability, therefore, Dickens was not in sole control of the atmosphere of the readings. According to Andrews, "It was a two-way process, though, with Dickens apparently just as capable of being mesmerized by the emotional energy from his audience as they by him"

(252). His power depended, in large measure, on the sympathy of his audience—their

willingness to have their emotions manipulated. Dickens, too, allowed himself to be emotionally

swayed. His control, paradoxically, involved a voluntary loss of control.

In placing himself, at least an aspect of himself, on an equal footing with his audience,

Dickens was playing another role: that of the exemplary reader. Ferguson spends a great deal of

time on this point, demonstrating that in the readings Dickens was not, despite the theatricality of

his performances, acting. In order to grasp why her argument is necessary, we must first

understand why the binary between reading and acting mattered in the nineteenth century. As

we have seen, Dickens tried to maintain throughout the readings the atmosphere of a private,

domestic gathering similar to that of his triumphant 1844 reading of *The Chimes*. He did this not

only because of his fond feelings toward his readers and the energy created by their emotional

responses, but also because of the lingering stigma against the theater as a place of low morals.

As dramatic as some of Dickens's performances were, he had to retain at least the semblance of

an intellectually improving lecture or reading so as not to offend the middle-class demographic

from which the majority of his book and ticket sales were drawn. As Andrews puts it, "The

Readings were Dickens's attempt to bridge those culturally determined separate spheres, the

theatre and the drawing room, the public and the private" (78). Some reviewers of the readings

saw through Dickens's precautions and realized what he was really doing: "Mr. Dickens is not a

reader. He did not look upon his books but once last evening . . . He is simply and emphatically

a very natural and delightful actor" (qtd. in Andrews 78).[39] Other reviewers attempted to draw a

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[39] This quotation, it should be noted, is from a review of an appearance in Springfield, Massachusetts.
It is possible that the binary between the propriety of the private reading and the licentiousness of the
theater was less pronounced in America than in England at this time, but such speculation is beyond the
bounds of this study.

distinction between Dickens's craft and that of the actor: "Mr. Dickens, having to read, not to act, before large audiences, so tones his manner that, whilst every varying change of character or incident is so strikingly marked as to arrest and fix the attention of his hearers, there does not appear to be the slightest tinge of exaggeration" (qtd. in Andrews 76).[40]

Ferguson analyzes the staging of the readings to argue that Dickens functioned as a reader as well as, or perhaps more than, an actor. She notes that even though Dickens rarely used the prompt-copy that sat on his desk during the readings (see also Andrews 210; Collins "Introduction" xxxi), the book was an important prop (734). As dramatic as many of the performances were, Dickens never used costumes or props related to the content of the stories; instead, the few props that sat on his reading-desk were used to construct a scene of private reading. They included the book, a water glass, and sometimes a paper-knife, used by nineteenth-century readers to cut apart the pages of brand-new books so that they could turn over the leaves. Ferguson notes the symbolic importance of the paper-knife: "As a part of the set and costuming, it served to associate Dickens with the reader encountering the book for the first time and actively cutting open the pages of the text. It was not a pen that Dickens held, a prop that would reinforce his position as writer, but instead a tool identifying him as a reader even of his own work" (736). Also significant is the fact that even though he remained standing throughout the readings, Dickens positioned himself behind a desk—but not a writing-desk. It was specifically designed by Dickens for the readings and probably would have been inconvenient for any other purpose (see Andrews 128-36). The book, the paper-knife, and the desk, regardless

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[40] This was an early review. Dickens apparently crossed more boldly into acting territory later in his career, but he always used his reading-desk as an anchor for his movements, preserving at least the semblance of a genteel lecture.

of their practical usefulness, indicated that Dickens was "stag[ing] . . . a scene of reading" (Ferguson 733) and thereby modeling the behavior of a reader for his audience.

As we have seen, many of Dickens's early, not-for-profit readings were given at working men's institutions and were intended to have an educational function. Although Dickens loved to entertain and never mentioned a didactic purpose among his goals for the readings, perhaps a vestige of those original performances clung to the later readings as Dickens demonstrated to his audience the proper way to read his novels.[41] Noting the drastic reduction of the narrator's part in the prompt-copy of *A Christmas Carol*, Ferguson argues that "in Dickens's enactment of reading on stage, a particular idea about what 'reading' means came to life—an idea focused *not* on the controlling authority of the narration, but on the characters, and particularly the different voices of the characters" (735). She cites David Cole's observation that "playing all the parts," as Dickens chose to do, is more in line with what a reader does than what an actor does: even a private reader plays all the characters inside his or her head (733-34).[42] It is unlikely that Dickens was consciously advancing a philosophy of literature through his readings, but he was certainly emphasizing what was most important to him about his novels: not the plots, not even the social criticism, but the characters. In doing so, he was showing his readers what they should pay closest attention to when they read. Andrews makes the similar argument that Dickens in the readings brought a unique depth of imagination to his novels, bringing out effects and profundities that his unaided readers had never noticed. He quotes an awed newspaper reviewer:

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[41] See Andrews's fascinating characterization of Dickens as a "cultural activist" determined to make sure that all of his countrymen, regardless of class, would have opportunities to experience color and beauty (241-42).

[42] Ferguson also makes an extensive comparison between Dickens's readings and the "monopolylogues" of Charles Mathews, who had been famous for his one-man shows during Dickens's youth (731-32). See Collins "Introduction" xvii for Mathews's influence on Dickens and a stylistic comparison between the two.

"'I never knew how to read a book before,' was the exclamation of a friend of ours at the close

of the 'Christmas Carol.' . . . He only expressed what the whole audience felt on each occasion"

(qtd. in Andrews 242). Although Dickens, as the author, understood his books to a degree and in

a way that no one else could match, by emphasizing the role of the reader rather than the author

he showed his audience that they could attain greater satisfaction from their own reading.

Dickens represented himself not only as the exemplary reader but also as the fellow

reader. He never tired of mentioning, both in his private correspondence and in his brief remarks

at the readings, that he had a uniquely close relationship—as he put it, "personally affectionate

and like no other man's" (qtd. in Collins "Introduction" xxii)—with his readers. This

relationship affected his choice of material. Explaining why the story of Paul Dombey's death

was appropriate for a reading, Slater points out that when the novel was being published, that

narrative "had occasioned periods of particularly strong empathy between Dickens and his

readers, an empathy that surely might not only be revived but also enhanced by his actually

telling the story in person to a live audience" (462).[43] With the exception of *Boots at the Holly-*

Tree Inn and *Doctor Marigold*, both based on Christmas stories that Dickens wrote for

periodicals relatively late in his career, all of the most popular readings were adapted from early

and beloved texts—ones that had built the foundation for that affectionate relationship (see

Collins "Introduction" xxiii-xxvii). Even *Boots* and *Marigold* included plot and character

elements more prominent in Dickens's early works, such as Cockney dialect, rapid alteration

between comedy and pathos, and childhood romances (*Boots*) or deaths (*Marigold*).

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[43] It is interesting that Dickens never based a reading on the death of Little Nell (or any part of *The Old Curiosity Shop*), but this may have been for the simple reason that her death occurs off-stage and is only foreshadowed and then later outlined in retrospect.

Having chosen material that he and his audience would be able to enjoy together, Dickens was able to watch the effects of it on the faces of individual listeners. Andrews describes the gas lighting system, another original Dickens design, as contributing to the "isolation and distinctiveness of the Reader" (143; see 142-46 for full description). Considering Andrews's emphasis throughout his book on the dynamic interchange between Dickens and his audience, it is strange that Andrews does not mention that the lighting was achieved in such a way that the reader was able to see his audience too, and not just as a mass of shadowy figures. Dickens gave an incredibly detailed report of two men he observed during an 1858 reading of *Little Dombey*, one "who exhibited—or rather concealed—the profoundest grief," and another "who found something so very ludicrous in Toots that he *could not* compose himself at all, but laughed until he sat wiping his eyes with his handkerchief" (qtd. in Slater 467). Without missing a beat in his performance, Dickens watched these men not with clinical detachment but with imaginative participation in their emotions, discerning that the first man had probably "lost some child in old time" and sharing the second man's delight: "It was uncommonly droll, and made me laugh heartily" (qtd. in Slater 467).

Dickens's correspondence during the reading tours is full of more general references to the atmosphere of the lecture halls. As we have already seen, he was keenly aware of the degree to which the audience was tracking with him intellectually and emotionally. He had come to know the stories so well that he was able to perform them, enjoy them, and watch others enjoying them all at the same time.

Dickens played one additional role during the readings: that of the text itself. He did not merely play all the parts; he seemed to *become* the characters. The final section of this chapter

demonstrates how Dickens identified with his characters to such a degree that eyewitnesses of the readings described something similar to a haunting or possession.

Dickens Disappears

In the previous section, we saw that Dickens was relatively successful at keeping the atmosphere of the theater out of his readings so that they would remain genteel and morally acceptable entertainments for his middle-class audience. Nevertheless, he seems to have given up some of his caution as his reading career went on. A reviewer of *Sikes and Nancy* performance in 1868 wrote, "He has always trembled on the boundary line that separates the reader from the actor; in this case he clears it by a leap" (qtd. in Andrews 199; see also Collins "Introduction" lix). As he enacted the famous murder scene, Dickens entered physically and emotionally into the performance to a degree that frightened audiences, a fact which Dickens recognized, noting that they had a "horror of me after seeing the murder" (qtd. in Ackroyd 1039).

Yet the *Sikes and Nancy* reading only intensified a phenomenon that had been there all along. From the very beginning of Dickens's professional reading career, eyewitness accounts observed that he seemed to *become* the characters, even those most physically unlike himself. Andrews cites contemporary descriptions of three of Dickens's most striking character interpretations, all of them transformations that seem to go beyond mere alteration of voice and expression, but without the use of costume, makeup, or any other technical effects. When Dickens played Fagin in the *Sikes and Nancy* reading, "[T]he impersonator's very stature, each time Fagin opened his lips, seemed to be changed instantaneously" (qtd. in Andrews 194). An audience member who witnessed *The Trial from Pickwick* made a similar point about the instantaneousness of Dickens's change into Justice Stareleigh, tellingly making a supernatural comparison: "The face and figure that I knew, that I had seen on the stage a moment before,

seemed to vanish as if by magic, and there appeared instead a fat, pompous, pursy little man, with a plump imbecile face, from which every vestige of good temper and cheerfulness . . . had been removed" (qtd. in Andrews 195). The observer goes on to describe how specific facial features, such as Dickens's chin, appeared to be drastically altered.

On the other hand, Dickens's transformation into Mr. Micawber was, according to one observer, more gradual, but it nevertheless involved a dramatic physical alteration unaided by anything but Dickens's effort: "I see him 'swelling wisibly before my wery eyes,' as he tips backward and forward, first on his heels and then on his toes. Before he stops swelling, he becomes just about the size of our ideal Micawber" (qtd. in Andrews 196). Dickens could even "become" women and children, as attested by Charles Kent, a frequent attender of the readings: "[H]is individuality, so to express it, altogether disappeared, and we saw before us instead, just as the case might happen to be, Mr. Pickwick, or Mrs. Gamp, or Dr. Marigold, or little Paul Dombey" (qtd. in Ferguson 735). He threw himself into these roles so thoroughly that the experience of hearing a small boy's or old woman's voice coming from a middle-aged man's body apparently was not ridiculous for the audience.

Kent's observation is important also because it refers to the submersion of Dickens's "individuality" into the personas of the characters. This theme of the disappearance of Dickens is frequent throughout the accounts, though not universal (for example, the person who described Dickens "swelling" into Mr. Micawber noted the importance of Dickens's hair in the performance, whereas Micawber was bald in the novel). Elsewhere in the passage just quoted, Charles Kent writes, "It mattered nothing, just simply nothing, that the great author was there all the while before his audience in his own identity" (qtd. in Ferguson 735). Listeners were aware of Dickens's presence; they simply did not pay attention to it, after the initial novelty of seeing

the famous author. And Dickens encouraged this focus on the characters by keeping his opening

remarks very brief and cutting much of the narrators' parts.

Andrews refers to this disappearing-author phenomenon as "self-annihilation" (260), and

the violence of the term is fitting. We have already seen, after all, that Dickens called himself

"the modern embodiment of the old Enchanters, whose Familiars tore them to pieces" (qtd. in

Fielding xxiv). Dickens is not talking about his public readings here, for he had not yet begun to

perform regularly, but he is almost certainly referring to the products of his imagination,

particularly his characters, when he uses the word "Familiars." Dickens later used the same

phrase in reference to the *Sikes and Nancy* reading: "I shall tear myself to pieces" (qtd. in

Andrews 260). Andrews, too, uses the language of bodily fragmentation, calling Dickens "a

magician—a storyteller who suddenly fractures into different individuals up there on the stage,

who reaches into his listeners like an invasive force" (168). Andrews seems to be describing a

double possession: Dickens is possessed by his characters, and then each of these author-

character hybrids (see Andrews 197) in turn possesses the audience members.

If Dickens in his authorial role, exercising his power over the audience, can be compared

to an enchanter, the Dickens who allowed himself to disappear into his characters can be

compared to a medium. Séances were popular in England during the latter half of the nineteenth

century (Diniejko par. 1), making the comparison an apt one.[44] In his admittedly imaginative

biography, Ackroyd describes the readings in language suited to a séance, stating that Dickens

"turn[ed] himself into a veritable medium" (904). He speaks of the wide range of character

voices "emerging from the mouth of Charles Dickens. His own characters inhabiting his body . .

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[44] While Dickens disbelieved in the phenomenon of contacting the dead (Diniejko par. 4), many
people claimed to have communicated with Dickens after his death, including a man who wrote an ending
to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* that he said had been dictated to him by Dickens's spirit (par. 6).

. it was a kind of haunting" (Ackroyd 983). Hauntings, of course, happen to people who have

had a deep (positive or negative) emotional connection with a deceased person. In most of the

readings, Dickens portrayed characters who had long since passed from his imagination into the

world, but who had never truly departed. These were the characters he could not get out of his

head, so he let them speak and act through his body.

Dickens's highly physical identification with his characters was not unique to the

readings; it was not "just part of the act." In a famous anecdote, Dickens's daughter Mamie,

unobserved, was watching him writing, "when he suddenly jumped from his chair and rushed to

a mirror which hung near, and in which I could see the reflection of some extraordinary facial

contortions which he was making. He returned rapidly to his desk, wrote furiously for a few

moments, and then went again to the mirror" (qtd. in Andrews 103). Mamie went on to report

that she heard him speaking, apparently in the voice of the character he was writing. Her

assessment is astute: "He had thrown himself completely into the character he was creating, and .

. . for the time being he had not only lost sight of his surroundings, but had actually become in

action, as in imagination, the creature of his pen" (qtd. in Andrews 103). Here is another

instance of Dickens's sympathy, but in this case it is sympathy with his characters rather than his

readers. Critics have long faulted Dickens for what they perceive as the unreality of his

characters, but it cannot be denied that the characters felt real to Dickens—indeed, *were* real in a

sense, because they had moved with his limbs and spoken in his voice.

The public readings restored the physical connection that was missing when readers

passively absorbed the text on their own. Far from introducing a histrionic exaggeration to the

characters, Dickens's performances enhanced the characters' reality by giving them bodies. And

the audience generally seemed to understand what was happening, as attested by one repeat

viewer: "His characters were real to us, because they were so real to him. As he wrote of them or read of them, they were not so much creations of his brain as persons whom he knew" (qtd. in Andrews 243). Sympathy between author and character contributed to sympathy between author and audience.

We have seen that the readings had positive psychological benefits for Dickens in that they helped him feel financially secure and allowed him to be close to his beloved readers. The splitting of himself into multiple identities provided an additional, more complicated benefit. One of the basic tenets of this study is that Dickens had a strong sense of self, especially in his role as author. This was the man who called himself "the Inimitable," after all. But the readings began at a time when certain stable aspects of his identity—most notably his role as respectable husband and father—were being taken away or redefined. In addition, by the late 1850s, he had been famous for over two decades, and, gratified as he was by the public's affection, he was tired of being lionized and playing the celebrity author. The readings gave him an opportunity to appear before his beloved public in his own persona, but then quickly to retreat from that persona.

Apparently it was difficult for the hyper-self-aware Dickens to make this retreat without help from his characters: "Self-consciousness, in fact, almost entirely absorbed Dickens except when he was engaged in his imaginative work" (Fielding xxii). Literary creation, whether writing or reading, allowed him to take on the consciousness of others. Andrews quotes a comment by Dickens that seems to prefigure modern psychology—"The platform absorbs my individuality"—and then interprets it: "I take this to mean that in the Readings he could disappear into his imaginary worlds and characters, and revel in becoming other personalities" (174). Possession, haunting, being torn to pieces—the analogies suggest that mentally,

emotionally, and physically becoming another person may have been painful for Dickens (quite literally so in the fatiguing *Sikes and Nancy* reading), but he evidently took pleasure in the pain.

Paradoxically, the readings also increased his celebrity and created more situations in which he was forced to listen to speeches about himself, accept gifts, and be flocked by fans on the street. He told his tour manager in 1869, "I am as restless as if I were behind bars in the Zoological Gardens, and if I could afford it would wear a part of my mane away as the Lion has done by rubbing it against the windows of my cage" (qtd. in Andrews 175). The readings thus created a perpetual cycle: as they added to his fame, they fueled Dickens's need to lose his individuality every night. This need may account for the obsessiveness that appears in anecdotes surrounding his friends' efforts to convince him to give up the *Sikes and Nancy* reading when he was physically unwell. His tour manager, George Dolby, recounted a conversation on the subject in which Dickens passed quickly from violent anger (he broke a plate) to repentant tears (Ackroyd 1041-42). The readings may have exacerbated Dickens's physical illness, but—at least in his perspective—psychologically they were keeping him alive, and the threat of losing them sent him into a panic.

In the discussion of Dickens's effort to preserve his characters in the state in which he wanted them to be remembered, I used the analogy of death and resurrection. Every night, characters died, and every night, they were reborn. The same imagery works here[45]: every night, Dickens died a little authorial death, letting his characters appear on stage as if independent from their creator, and then returned to life as he received applause in his own

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[45] Ackroyd points out one specific sense in which the readings were a symbolic death for Dickens. In the *Sikes and Nancy* reading, Nancy used Dickens's body to enact her death every night: "[A]ll the time he was delivering himself up to be 'murdered' by Bill Sikes, just as he in turn became the foul murderer of a woman" (Ackroyd 1040).

persona. Dickens was not ignorant of the reality that his characters had, in some sense, become

public property, and that some audience members at his readings may have been more familiar

with a stage version of an iconic character such as Sam Weller than with the original from the

novel. It had not taken long for some of Dickens's works, or at least individual characters, to

become "culture-texts" (Davis), as evinced by an 1867 newspaper article that referred to

"creations which have become so real to us that their very names have passed into national

proverbs" (qtd. in Andrews 228). The readings represented Dickens's insistence that, while he

could never fully reclaim his characters from the adaptations they had undergone publically (in

plays, journal reviews, imitations, abridgements, advertisements) and privately (in the

imaginations of individual readers), he still stood in a unique relationship toward the characters

and could offer an interpretation unlike no one else's. That he presented this interpretation,

knowing that people would listen, was his authorial assertion; that he presented it not as a lecture

in his own voice, but as a dramatic reading in his characters' many voices, was his authorial self-

annihilation.

In the final chapter, I will argue that J. K. Rowling's *Pottermore* project is similar to

Dickens's public readings, not only because it is an effort, made after attaining fame and having

no need to employ gimmicks to boost sales, to connect with and, in a limited sense, collaborate

with readers. It also represents an attitude toward her continuing relationship to her characters

that is very similar to the attitude Dickens displayed in the readings. Both authors are realistic in

that they recognize that they cannot stop readers from interpreting and recreating their characters,

and both welcome such reimagining, within limits. The public readings and *Pottermore* are

Dickens's and Rowling's way of saying that they, too, are readers who would like to join in the

interpretive conversation—and, further, that they are uniquely qualified to interpret because, as

the original creators, they understand the characters better than anyone else can. This is true for Dickens not only because he had explored his characters' minds, but also because they had inhabited his body. The connection was physical, tangible, and real.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHO IS WRITING *POTTERMORE*?

Unlike Charles Dickens, J. K. Rowling does not seem to have a psychological need to be in the physical presence of her fans (indeed, some might argue that she has a psychological need to stay away from them). Like him, however, she seems reluctant to stop thinking about, rereading, and reshaping the stories and characters that first made her famous. As we saw in chapter three, Rowling has used the metaphor of mourning to describe her feelings about finishing the *Harry Potter* series. In this chapter, we will see that despite statements to the contrary, Rowling has not left the wizarding world behind. The opening anecdote finds her doing something she claimed she was finished doing: writing another *Harry Potter* story.

On 8 July 2014, J. K. Rowling created some Internet buzz by posting on *Pottermore. com* an article, written in the persona of her fictional gossip columnist Rita Skeeter, about several of the most prominent *Harry Potter* characters' appearance at the final game of the Quidditch World Cup. *Pottermore* had been publishing articles all summer about the Cup in conjunction with the real-world FIFA World Cup, but those had been strictly sports-related and had attracted little attention outside the website. The Skeeter piece is brief and contains few revelations (about characters' marriages, children, careers—the stuff of fan fiction) that have not already been stated or suggested in the epilogue to the last novel or explained in public appearances by Rowling and duly reported on the Internet. Nevertheless, the article sparked news items from major media sources such as *Today*, the only non-*Pottermore* outlet with which Rowling shared the story, and *The Guardian*. It also made the grassroots rounds as *Potter* fans sent each other the link or became embarrassed and apologetic when forced to confess they had not yet read it.

Fan responses to the article, as well as to J. K. Rowling's other recent pronouncements on the

wizarding world (such as her controversial February 2014 statement that Hermione and Ron

probably are not a compatible couple), could constitute the topic of an entire dissertation.[46] But

in this final chapter, I want to focus on the venue Rowling chose to publish the new piece:

Pottermore.com.

I argue that *Pottermore* has several functions, and one of them is to provide Rowling with

a constant platform for anything, short of a new book or screenplay, she wishes to write about

the world of *Harry Potter*. In this sense, the site is like an unusually elaborate and well-funded

blog or single-authored fan fiction site. It allows Rowling to do what many *Potter* fans have

done: to use short pieces of writing to experiment with the characters, objects, and rules of the

wizarding world. The difference between *Pottermore* and the average fan's blog is that

Rowling's writings carry the force of canonicity, at least for many readers. But a piece published

on *Pottermore* has less authority than a traditionally-published novel because of lingering

cultural biases toward print, because of the narrower audience (only *Pottermore* members, who

are likely to be serious fans), and because of the ephemeral nature of the Web—Rowling could

more easily revise or retract and eradicate statements made on the site than she could statements

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[46] The 23 comments on the *Today* article are fairly representative of the general response. Nine of them, the largest category, are enthusiastically positive assessments of the story and/or wishes that Rowling would write more. One comment points out that the story offers little new information. One reader, a fan fiction writer, comments four times, referring each time to the story's connection to existing fanfic or its potential impact on future works (evidence that those active in the fan fiction community consider *Pottermore* neither irrelevant nor solely authoritative, and are identifying ways to incorporate it into the fanfic network), and several other commenters focus on specific plot points within the novels and/or the new story. Only two commenters make the criticism, leveled frequently against Rowling in other contexts, that this is a scheme to boost sales. The other comments either are irrelevant or share general *Harry Potter* news with no direct connection to the article.

made in a print novel.[47] Therefore, *Pottermore* is a relatively low-stakes forum for Rowling,

fan-like, to keep playing in the world of her beloved stories.

Related to this function is the concept of *Pottermore* as a "reading experience" (to use a

phrase from Rowling's introductory video)—not primarily a gaming experience or a viewing

experience. A number of elements of the site encourage users to navigate the site while

simultaneously reading the novels, or even to read the site itself like a book.[48] The

content is organized into chapters, and the site quotes extensively from the *Harry Potter* books.

The construction of *Pottermore* as a book allows the construction of Rowling as an author.

The second major function of *Pottermore* that I will discuss is its provision of a "safe" (a

key term on the site) space for fans to explore the stories. The site's policy statements, which I

will examine in detail, emphasize that children constitute a primary audience, and various

precautions on the site seem aimed toward protecting children not only from predators and

sexually explicit content but also from age-inappropriate discourse that might be intellectually

alienating. More subtly, *Pottermore* also seems concerned with maintaining an exclusive focus

on the *Harry Potter* books, excluding content that is extra-canonical, speculative (as fan fiction

often is), or not directly related to *Potter*. Thus, the site is "safe" not only for children but also

for purists.

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[47] Of course, I realize that it would be practically impossible for Rowling to remove all quotations and other references to a particular piece from the Internet. Even if she could do that, it would be truly impossible, short of a massive Memory Charm, to reverse the effects of her statements on individual and collective understandings of the *Harry Potter* world. However, while it is probably true that nothing ever really disappears from the Internet, links can be broken, and things can be lost. In citing the ephemeral nature of the Web, I am simply making the point that Internet publication requires a lower level of commitment, because of its perceived impermanence, than traditional print publication.

[48] To reflect this aspect of the site's design, throughout this chapter I will use the term "readers" interchangeably with "users."

The third and final function explored in this chapter is one that received a great deal of attention when plans for the site were first unveiled: *Pottermore* offers opportunities for reader contributions. Although the site is set up as a book, it transforms the private experience of reading, allowing readers to talk back to the text and talk to other readers. Readers may submit artwork, comment on the pages corresponding to each character, item, and "moment" (more on this term shortly), and operate under the persona of a Hogwarts student created within a set of options predetermined by the site. One of the goals of this chapter is to reflect on the ways that *Pottermore*'s interactive and collaborative function contradicts and/or is limited by its other two main functions. This final section will also separate the concept of collaboration, which Rowling seems to promise in her video, from the concept of interactivity, which is much more prominent in the site as it currently exists.

Pottermore has other functions—for example, it provides a compendium of information regarding the wizarding world (though other sites, such as the *Harry Potter Wiki*, which is not produced with Rowling's collaboration, do this more comprehensively), it allows fans to establish connections and make like-minded friends, and it also has an advertising function, since its store is the only official place where *Harry Potter* e-books and audio books may be purchased. However, these functions, while important, are not directly relevant to the topics of authorial identity and author-reader interaction; therefore, they will not be explored in this chapter. The three main functions already introduced will be discussed in sequence after a detailed description of *Pottermore*'s history, appearance, and content.

Pottermore: What, When, and How

The website *Pottermore* began as a partnership between J. K. Rowling and Sony, though Sony left the project in 2014. Rowling's announcement of plans for the site on 23 June 2011,

shortly before the release of the final *Harry Potter* film, elicited a great deal of speculation, including predictions about what it might mean for the future of fan engagement with the world of the story (see Ingleton; Jenkins "Three Reasons"). After a lengthy "beta" period, during which a limited number of people were allowed to create accounts, experience early content, and offer feedback, *Pottermore* became open to the general public in April 2012. (It was originally slated to open in October 2011; the delay was due to technical complications.) The content is being released serially; readers can now, as of 24 June 2015, explore moments nearly through the end of the last book (two chapters remain to be unlocked).

One major vehicle for announcing, advertising, and explaining *Pottermore* was a trailer that appeared in several places, including DVD and Blu-Ray copies of the last *Harry Potter* movie, a special *YouTube* channel, and (temporarily) the main page of the site itself. In this brief video ("J. K. Rowling Announces"), Rowling makes several statements that, subtly in some cases, set the tone for *Pottermore*. These statements will figure as evidence throughout the remainder of this chapter, and some of them will constitute the headings of each section. The video also includes a significant visual element, cutting back and forth from a shot of Rowling speaking while looking directly at the viewer, to shots of pages from the first *Harry Potter* novel being cut and folded (seemingly on their own, without human agency) into shapes that evoke the story, such as spiders, owls, and trees. Rowling's direct address to the viewer indicates the collaborative aspirations of the site, while the spontaneous origami suggests the concept, current within the fields of composition and cultural studies, of "remixing," or creating multimodal texts by combining elements of existent works. The video shows in a literal, material sense what will happen more abstractly on the site: new things will be made from the *Harry Potter* books.

The site is organized according to the chapters in the books, with each chapter containing one or more "moments,"[49] which are visually rendered scenes that are largely static, although readers can, in most moments, manipulate objects and figures by hovering the cursor, go further into the scene by clicking, and "collect" hidden objects to earn house points or stash them for future activities, such as virtual potion-making. Most moments include ambient sound, such as wind, footsteps, or applause, and several are accompanied by selections from the audiobooks. Upon entering a moment, text from the book (usually one paragraph) appears in the center of the screen; when the reader clicks elsewhere, the text disappears, and the bookmark icon that accompanied it moves next to the "READ ABOUT" heading to the right of the moment. Under this heading are links to encyclopedia-type descriptions of characters, objects, or spells that appear in or are associated with the corresponding scene in the book, even if they are not visible in the moment—one of several elements of *Pottermore* that encourage reading the books alongside interacting with the site. The bookmark icon also symbolizes the intention that the site should be read as a book.

In some moments, designated with a red quill signifying authorship, readers can "unlock," usually by finding and clicking on a particular spot within the moment, content that Rowling has released exclusively to the site. This content may include explanation of magical concepts barely explored in the books ("Wand Woods") or not introduced in the books at all ("Hat Stall"); other pieces examine how aspects of everyday life such as "Weights and Measurements" or "Illness and Disability" differ between wizarding and Muggle society. The type of exclusive content that generates the most discussion among *Harry Potter* fans is that

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[49] From this point I will no longer enclose this term in quotation marks, but the word (both singular and plural forms) should be understood in its specific *Pottermore* sense throughout the chapter.

which concerns individual characters, such as the lengthy piece on Minerva McGonagall unlocked in chapter seven of *Philosopher's Stone*.[50] This is where Rowling's activities most closely resemble the activities of fan fiction writers; for example, the McGonagall piece includes accounts of two romantic relationships not mentioned in the books.

The exclusive texts are written in an encyclopedic style, which heightens the illusion, discussed in chapter three of this study, that Rowling is not making up information but is reporting on an independently existing world. Each of the exclusive pieces is headed by the phrase "New from J. K. Rowling." In the widely-distributed promotional video mentioned above, Rowling states that *Pottermore* will allow her an opportunity to share "information [she's] been hoarding for years," which may indicate that the content is new only to readers. Nevertheless, Rowling could easily incorporate recently-written content along with the "hoarded" material, supporting my argument that *Pottermore* offers her a platform for continued creation within the world of the novels she has ostensibly completed.

Wherever a reader goes on *Pottermore*, a bar remains at the top of the screen that includes links to the *Pottermore Shop*, where the e-books and audiobooks are sold, and the *Pottermore Insider*, the site's official blog. Below these links is another bar that includes at-a-glance information personal to each reader, such as his or her Hogwarts house (readers are "sorted" during an early moment) and the number of points he or she has earned by collecting items and participating in duels or potion-making. Anchored at the bottom of each page is an interactive horizontal table of contents that allows readers to navigate between chapters or moments. On the moment pages and the encyclopedic pages, there is a space for readers to

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[50] *Pottermore* uses the British title of the first book, which was released as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in America.

comment, and below this the most recent comments are displayed, as on a typical blog post or online news article. Finally, at the bottom of pages corresponding to characters, creatures, and objects, three popular pieces of fan art (popularity is judged by the number of people who "like" the drawing) are featured along with a link for viewing more pictures and a place for readers to upload their own artwork. The artwork section is the only place on *Pottermore* where readers can currently make significant creative contributions to the site; being located at the bottom of the page, it is also one of the least spatially prominent aspects of the site.

Other pages worth noting include the Code of Conduct, a link to which is anchored on the right-hand side of the home page; the Daily Prophet (named for the wizarding newspaper mentioned throughout the series), where the Quidditch World Cup articles are archived, and the individual reader's profile page, where minimal real-life information (home country, date of joining the site) is displayed alongside data from the reader's fictional persona (Hogwarts house, wand description, house points earned). Laid out in the style of a curio cabinet rather than as the iconic profile familiar from *Facebook*, this page lets readers keep track of online friends, badges earned, items collected, and drawings posted. The drawings section is, once again, at the bottom of the page, but it appears whether or not the reader has uploaded any; if he or she has not, a message states, "You haven't added any drawings yet," as if assuming that readers will take advantage of the site's greatest opportunity for creativity and collaboration.

Throughout the chapter, I will refer back to various parts of this description to support my argument, and I will also quote from user comments and the *Pottermore Insider* blog. *Pottermore* is, of course, a dynamic text, with chapters being added periodically and occasional adjustments made to the site's look and feel. My description represents the site as it appeared in

late July through early September 2014.[51] With this in mind, we can focus on the extent to

which *Pottermore* has fulfilled the expectations set by Rowling's video and assess the values

underlying these expectations.

"I'll Be Joining in Too."

In chapter three, we looked at the phenomenon of *Harry Potter* fan fiction and Rowling's

ambivalence toward the texts she considers simultaneously "flattering" and "uncomfortable"

(qtd. in Anelli 93). I wish to suggest here that her conflicted attitude may be related to her

similarly conflicting feelings about leaving the world of her most famous series behind.

Although Rowling claims to have felt bereaved upon finishing the last novel in 2007 and to have

said, "I can't go there anymore" (*Conversation*) she most certainly has gone there again, not only

through the medium of *Pottermore* but also by more traditional routes, such as writing *Tales of*

Beedle the Bard (2009) and the screenplay to *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, which

has a tentative release date of 2016. At the same time, however, she has written *The Casual*

Vacancy (2012) and the Cormoran Strike novels (2013 and 2014), which, despite some notable

resemblances, are widely different from the *Harry Potter* books in setting, tone, content, and

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[51]*Pottermore.com* underwent a major overhaul in April 2015. Although the layout and navigation remain basically the same, the site's interactive features have been significantly curtailed. Specifically, users can no longer comment on the site or upload drawings, and the *Pottermore Insider* blog has been closed. A site update posted 14 April details the changes, acknowledging that not all readers will be happy with them, stating that they occurred with Rowling's permission, and offering little explanation except to hint that even more fundamental changes are on the way. Although some commentators will probably decry these changes as a violation of fans' rights, my view (expanded upon in this chapter) is that the interactive features of the site were never the most compelling, and there are plenty of other websites that are better platforms for fans to engage in interactive and collaborative activity. With the reduction of the interactivity, the site's other key features have been enhanced. As the update notification points out, the elimination of the comments heightens the safety of the site, always an important feature. In addition, the site is now almost entirely a *reading* experience as well as a platform for Rowling to share her new writing. Essentially, the revisions have jettisoned many of the least distinctive aspects of *Pottermore* while retaining those things that have always made it unique. The only change that I find a bit troubling is the elimination of the *Insider* blog, which had a history of clear, up-front communication with site users. The cagey language of the 14 April update is surprising in light of this history.

audience. Though it is always dangerous to psychologize authors based on their texts, it is

probably not a stretch to note that Rowling has displayed contradictory desires to move on from

Harry Potter's world and to stay in it. (Rowling's own metaphor of grief is telling.) *Pottermore*

provides a compromise by allowing Rowling to dabble in the Potterverse without committing to

traditional publication. It allows her, in other words, to write fan fiction.

Yet there are crucial differences between *Pottermore* and a typical fan fiction site. One is

that whereas most fan fiction sites include contributions from multiple writers, *Pottermore* has a

single contributor. While readers, as we have seen, can contribute artwork and comments, the

comments are limited to 140 characters, restricting potential stories to the briefest of flash fiction

pieces. In my own observation, the typical commenter comes nowhere close to using the full

140-character space. The only person sharing stories and character theories on *Pottermore* is

Rowling. Her statement in the promotional video—"I'll be joining in too"—is thus a major

understatement.

The other major difference between *Pottermore* and a typical fan fiction site is that the

original Rowling-authored pieces, as I mentioned earlier, resemble encyclopedia articles more

than short stories. (The site never refers to them as "stories"; in fact, it generally avoids any

particular term for them, instead using phrases such as "New from J. K. Rowling." Sometimes it

uses the very generic term "writing.") Although the longer pieces sometimes include sentences

written in a literary style and that delve into emotions and motivations without the pose of

objectivity,[52] there is no dialogue and little scene-setting description, and the text is organized

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[52] Here is an example of this style from the piece on Minerva McGonagall, probably the most fully-developed piece on the site to date: "Love endured, but trust had been broken between her parents, and Minerva, a clever and observant child, saw this with sadness."

under headings similar to those on *Wikipedia*. The pieces are written in the same unobtrusive manner that Rowling uses in the *Harry Potter* novels; as many readers have noted, her voice is that of a storyteller rather than a stylist. Perhaps the best way to describe the pieces is as New Journalism-type articles condensed to the length of a typical encyclopedia entry.[53]

The important factor here is that the pieces are meant to resemble non-fiction. Rowling here resumes the role that she has assumed in countless interviews and public appearances, as well as in the metafictional "textbooks" *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *Quidditch through the Ages*: she becomes an expert on the wizarding world, whose job is not to beguile readers with an engrossing story but to inform them about another culture. Once again, the wording of the site reinforces this rhetoric: when readers unlock new content, the text that appears on the screen invites them to "[l]earn more about" the topic. Thus, while *Pottermore* on the one hand functions as J. K. Rowling's personal fan fiction site, on the other hand it resembles an informational site such as *Harry Potter Wiki* or *The Harry Potter Lexicon*.

There is a clear effort on the part of the site designers, however, to suggest a resemblance to another type of text: a book, specifically a print book. As I have mentioned, the content is arranged into chapters, which coincide with the chapters of the novels. (The chapters can, however, be experienced out of sequence.) I have also mentioned the bookmark icon that appears in each moment. More subtly, the largely static nature of the moments (movement and sound are typically repetitive and not crucial to the plot—for example, a fireplace crackling) makes them more akin to an illustration in a book than to a scene in a movie. The moments are also designed in a way that leaves some room for the imagination: for example, the people are

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[53] The Quidditch World Cup pieces, written in the voices of characters Ginny Potter and Rita Skeeter, are exceptions to most of what I have just written.

almost invariably shown from the back, leaving readers to speculate on who they are and why

they might be there. Rowling confirms the resemblance between *Pottermore* and a book in her

introductory video when she twice refers to the site as "an online reading experience," choosing

to highlight that aspect over others that might seem equally attractive, such as the games or the

social opportunities.

For all *Pottermore*'s similarities to a book, it is nevertheless a supplemental text,

designed to point readers back to its source, the *Harry Potter* novels. Although readers could

piece together a rough understanding of the series' storyline based on the scenes portrayed in the

moments, the paragraphs quoted from the books, and the descriptions on the encyclopedic pages,

the plot is too complex for the site to do it full justice, especially in the later books. The ideal

Pottermore user is someone who has already read the series or who is reading it for the first time

simultaneously with experiencing the website. A number of the site's design features seem to

target this latter group, such as the very basic reference information in the "READ ABOUT"

section to the right of each moment, the prominent link to the *Pottermore Shop* providing easy

access to the e-books and audiobooks, and the spoiler warnings that appear at the head of some

of Rowling's original pieces, symbolized by the Dark Mark (the sign of Lord Voldemort).

By steering its users (back) to the traditionally-published source text, *Pottermore*

foregrounds Rowling as a traditional author. For at least the first year of the site's existence, the

phrase "by J. K. Rowling" appeared under the *Pottermore* logo on the home page.[54] This is

unusual wording for a large website, which is, unavoidably, authored corporately. The phrase

may have been removed simply to accommodate the new design of the home page, which

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[54] I am unable to find out exactly when this wording was removed from the site, but I know that it was there at least as late as June 2013. The website gives no indication as to why the wording was removed.

features multiple textboxes highlighting recent updates, but the site designers may also have decided that the phrase indicating single authorship contradicted the interactivity and collaboration that Rowling emphasizes so strongly in her introductory video. Despite the removal of the wording from its prominent place under the logo, the phrase "by J. K. Rowling" or "from J. K. Rowling" appears in numerous other places on the site, including the "What is Pottermore?" page: "Experience the Harry Potter stories like never before with Pottermore.com from J. K. Rowling. Learn more about the wizarding world as you discover exclusive new writing from the author herself." A more subtle indication of Rowling's authorship is the quill pen icon that marks the new, exclusive content. The quill is not only an instrument used in the wizarding world but also an easily recognizable symbol of the Romantic/romanticized concept of the author as lone, inspired genius. Like the bookmark icon, the quill icon indicates a nostalgic valorization of print publication (a defining feature of the low-tech wizarding society), and, unlike Dickens's paper-knife that marks him as the ultimate reader, it marks Rowling as the traditional print author: she is the one who holds the pen.

What do the readers of *Pottermore* think about the near-monopoly that Rowling holds on the creative textual production of the site? Although I have not conducted a formal study on this question, the conclusion I have drawn from informal conversations, the canonicity survey I described in chapter 1, and the comments on the individual *Pottermore* pages is that readers are fascinated by, and want more of, the new "information" Rowling is gradually "revealing," especially about the characters. For the most part, they are ready to accept Rowling in her role as journalist/cultural informant and to treat the new material as data added to a store of knowledge, rather than as disputable speculation or simply as storytelling. In conversations with other adult *Harry Potter* fans who have joined *Pottermore*, I have gathered that the character backstories are

the second most common motivation for joining.[55] Meanwhile, 105 of the 200 respondents to

my canonicity survey ranked *Pottermore* as the most (15 respondents) or second most (90

respondents) canonical source of information about the wizarding world. (Since ties were

allowed, some of the people who chose *Pottermore* as most canonical placed it on an equal level

with the novels.) And many of the comments underneath Rowling's original pieces use language

that reinforces Rowling as informant, such as these recent, representative posts on the

McGonagall piece: "I loved to know more about Minerva. I had no idea of her life before

reading this post" (SilverCastle29239), "Love the background stories, you feel as if you really

know the people!" (LumosCat11608), and simply, "Loved getting this info!"

(PhoenixCauldron1681).

In *Harry Potter* fandom at large, there seems to be an acceptance, if not always

enthusiastic, of Rowling's *Pottermore* proclamations as canon. Part of what makes the

"Pottermore sorted me . . . WRONG!" button sold at LeakyCon 2013 funny is the mild good-

naturedness of the protest—more a friendly disagreement than a rejection of the site's authority.

Referencing a statement about Ron Weasley from the recent Rita Skeeter piece, a user comment

on a fan fiction story posted on a blog expresses a similar ambivalence: "J. K. Rowling

apparently made it canon that Ron eventually helps out with Weasley's Wizard Wheezes . . . but

I like your idea better" (Evi @ Where Books Never End). This is not to say that no fans are

actively resisting, or deliberately ignoring, *Pottermore*. But Rowling's authorial presence makes

it difficult to reject the site's authority without also questioning that of the novels.

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[55] The most common motivation is to be sorted into a house, which I will discuss in the third section
of this chapter. I have not talked to any children who have joined *Pottermore*, but I would guess that the
gaming and interactive features, which to an adult may seem repetitive and insufficiently connected to the
story, might hold more appeal for a child.

The tension between reader understandings of characters and Rowling's post-novel additions to the canon is reflected by the tension on the *Pottermore* comments pages between a tendency to treat the people and places of *Harry Potter* as real (e.g., the many variations on "What is that Rita Skeeter up to now?") and real-world intrusions that require the commenters to acknowledge that the topic under discussion is, after all, a fictional construct. The commenters are employing a form of what Henry Jenkins, quoting from a study of *Star Trek* fans, calls "double viewing": "The characters are understood as 'real' people with psychologies and histories that can be explored and as fictional constructions whose shortcomings may be attributed to bad writing or the suspect motivations of the producers. One reading privileges the fictional universe, the other the extratextual information the viewer has acquired" (*Textual Poachers* 66). Even very young *Harry Potter* fans have displayed the ability to use this strategy (see Adler), and the comments on *Pottermore* are generally in keeping with it.

Pottermore, then, has allowed J. K. Rowling to do what many of her fans have enjoyed doing for years: to write short texts featuring favorite characters and concentrating on careers, family backgrounds, and (especially) relationships[56], rather than the good versus evil conflict that ostensibly formed the main plot of the novels. Despite some reluctance and resistance, readers have been largely willing to accept Rowling's "fanfic" pieces as canon, which has solidified her position as the ultimate expert on the world of *Harry Potter*. Meanwhile,

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[56] Romantic relationships, along with deaths, are one of the plot points in which members of most fandoms become most invested and on which they express the strongest opinions. It is interesting, therefore, that on *Pottermore* Rowling has said nothing of any past, present, or potential relationship between two characters frequently paired by fans, Neville Longbottom and Luna Lovegood—even though the final film, on which Rowling was a producer, strongly implied a romantic future between the two. The famous Quidditch World Cup article on *Pottermore* has the two married to two entirely different people (one a minor character, the other not mentioned in the books). Rowling seems to have assented to fan preferences with the film, but then to have retracted this assent with *Pottermore*. Of course, this raises the question of the relative canonicity of *Pottermore* and the film. My survey found that most people considered *Pottermore* more canonical than the films.

Pottermore's bookish design has pointed readers back to the novels, suggesting that the much-discussed "afterlife" of *Harry Potter* (see Ingleton) may be closer to a resurrection than a reincarnation.

"A Fun and Safe Experience for Everyone"

As I mentioned in the introduction to this study, I attempted to submit a comment during one of my first experiences with *Pottermore*. I no longer remember the point I was trying to make, but I know that the comment was rejected because it included the following words or phrases, all of which were crossed out with a red line: "Blacks" (I meant the old wizarding family that figures prominently in the series), "conflicted," and "Charles Dickens." There was no explanation of why these particular terms were marked, and I was puzzled by the selection. What algorithm or unusually copious word list had caused these terms to be automatically flagged? I understood why "Blacks" might raise concerns, but what about the others?

More than a year later, after reading the famous Rita Skeeter piece, I tried to post a more lighthearted comment expressing my delight that at least one of the adult Weasley brothers was still single, and hinting that I was interested. The word "single" was crossed out, and this time the reason seemed clearer: *Pottermore* was never intended to be a dating site or, much more sinisterly, a place for sexual predators to lurk. I changed the word to "unmarried," a term less redolent of dating site jargon, and was allowed to post my comment. The most interesting observation I made this time was that while I was still given no reason why the word was flagged, a brief, polite statement, including a link to the site Code of Conduct, now appeared.[57]

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[57] The language monitoring extends to the status updates that readers can post on their profile pages. I recently was prohibited from using the word "dissertation" in my status, probably in an effort to maintain conceptual and linguistic accessibility for younger users.

The Code of Conduct is easy to reach from the *Pottermore* home page, since a link appears in the column on the right-hand side of the page, embedded in the sentence, "Read our Code of Conduct to help keep Pottermore.com a fun and safe experience for everyone." (This link does not appear within the moments, however.) The Code itself appears on a faux-parchment background and is worded as a message to Hogwarts students, presumably from a teacher or prefect. The word "children" does not occur, but this statement is a clear and clever reference to the site's youngest users: "First-years attend Hogwarts as well as older students, which is why we ask you to be friendly, respectful and considerate to others, especially when posting, commenting on, and uploading content." The Code goes on to prohibit plagiarized artwork, unnecessary spoilers, "rude or offensive comments or . . . unsuitable language," promotion of other websites, and sharing of personal data. After these prohibitions is a brief list of potential consequences for those who break them. The Code closes with a warning to readers not to attempt to arrange offline meetings with people they have talked to on the site; this section is clearly meant for children, although the tone is in keeping with Rowling's determination not to insult children's intelligence.

While the Code is very specific about some topics, the phrase "unsuitable language" is frustratingly vague and offers no clue as to the reasoning behind the proscriptions of certain terms. The reference to young "students," however, does suggest a goal of keeping the level of discourse accessible. I can think of no other reason (at least no other strong reason) for the rejection of a few of the terms I have attempted to use, such as "dissertation" and "conflicted."

I have not spoken with other *Pottermore* users who have been forced to censor their comments, but I suspect that this mechanism may be one reason why the comments section of any given page rarely offers intellectual stimulation. In the two years I have been a member,

most of the comments I have observed have been simplistic. Many are "add me as a friend"

pleas, and many more are brief statements that the reader "loves" what he or she has just read.

Almost all have taken a positive tone (except when commenting on unlikeable characters), and

almost none have attempted to engage in more than the simplest evaluation or criticism.

However, a series of comments posted on 31 August 2014 by FeatherSpell5195 is exceptional,

offering substantial (albeit sometimes wrong-headed) criticism of the final novel as well as the

Rita Skeeter piece on the Quidditch World Cup, where the comments are posted. In the first

comment, FeatherSpell5195, who is responding to another commenter who stated that Rowling

should not write any more books because there is nothing more to say, argues that Rowling

"ended [the series] like a woman, incomplete.[58] Obviously the story goes on, the magical

society has to be rebuilt, improved!" FeatherSpell5195, who apparently has not read *The Casual

Vacancy*, goes on to claim that Rowling "was scared to write the story begging to be written

because it meant adult subjects," but then turns this criticism into praise for the new piece: "The

great irony is she has shown in this article, that she was so capable of finding the different angle

necessary and writing about adults . . . it is GENIUS!!!!" While several of FeatherSpell5195's

assumptions and interpretations are questionable, this user deserves credit for writing several

logical, well-developed comments despite the 140-character limitation and the Code of Conduct

restrictions.

The series of comments by FeatherSpell5195 is interesting for two additional reasons.

One is that it seems to prove that criticism of J. K. Rowling is not a prohibited subject on

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[58] I felt compelled to respond to this statement, but, predictably, the site would not allow me to use the word "sexist." I also found it difficult to express what I wanted to say in 140 characters.

Pottermore. As I write this, the comments have been on the page for about eight hours according to the timestamp, and they have not been removed, either by the decision of site personnel or by user request.[59] The other interesting thing about the comment series is that, eight hours later, no one has responded to it. Four comments have been posted since then by four different users, and none of them have addressed FeatherSpell5195, either directly or obliquely. (One person did, however, "like" one of the comments.) This is in keeping with a general trend I have noticed: unlike the comments on many fan sites, the comments on *Pottermore* tend to be self-contained; there is little interaction among commenters. Explanations for this trend might include avoidance of confrontational discourse for fear of violating the Code of Conduct, avoidance of dialoguing with strangers (especially in view of the Code of Conduct's warning), and differences in reading level. Although no data is available on the ages of *Pottermore* members, several factors seem to indicate that a significant number are young children, for whom writing a simple comment such as "I love Harry" would be an accomplishment. In the case of FeatherSpell5195's comments, a relatively sophisticated interpretive ability is necessary in order to realize that the statement "She ended it like a woman, incomplete" is more than potentially insulting to women. Perhaps FeatherSpell5195 avoided running afoul of one of the Code of Conduct's restrictions, the one against "rude or offensive comments," by coming close to violating one of its values, intellectual and linguistic accessibility.

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[59] A "Report this" button appears next to every comment, allowing readers to alert site personnel to comments that violate the Code of Conduct. The Code contains an injunction against using this button for anything but clear violations, and a fuller explanation of this injunction is given in a *Pottermore Insider* blog post intended to clarify the Code ("What You Can Do"). By the way, I checked again the day after writing this paragraph, and FeatherSpell5195's comments were still there.

Thus far we have observed in action the policies intended to make *Pottermore* a "safe experience for everyone," but we need to explore why the site's administrators felt it necessary to implement and almost aggressively foreground such policies. One practical reason is that there is no minimum age requirement in order to create an account. This sets *Pottermore* apart from other social media sites such as *Facebook*, which has a stated, though widely ignored, minimum age of thirteen. According to the Pottermore Child Safety policy, a longer document addressed to parents, there are additional rules regarding members under thirteen, including a parental consent requirement, but to set a minimum age would be counterintuitive and counterproductive for a website regarding the most popular children's fiction series of all time. On the other hand, for a series marketed to children, *Harry Potter* has an unusually high proportion of adult fans, and for *Pottermore* to exclude these fans would be a missed opportunity. The self-censorship mechanism can make commenting awkward and frustrating, and it is troubling from an intellectual freedom point of view, but it is a relatively minor flaw in a largely successful effort to create a website that is safe and attractive for an enormous and age-diverse fan base.

If *Pottermore* seems at times to favor its younger audience members at the expense of its older ones, this is because, as we saw in chapter 3, there is no shortage of adult fan sites ("adult" both in the sense of a higher level of discourse and in its more narrow sense of "mature" content). At least since 2002, when her solicitors sent "cease and desist" letters to the owners of sexually explicit fan fiction sites, Rowling has been well aware of the pervasive presence of *Harry Potter* sites that are decidedly not for children. In the introductory video, Rowling indicates that safety and age-appropriateness will be primary concerns of *Pottermore*: "The digital generation will be able to enjoy a safe, unique, online reading experience built around the

Harry Potter books." More subtly, she refers to the site as "the place where fans of any age can share, participate, and rediscover the stories." This has seemingly continued to be one of the foremost goals of the site.

I suggested in the introduction to this chapter that *Pottermore* is meant to be safe not only for children but also for *Harry Potter* purists. Another way of looking at this is that the site keeps Rowling's text safe from misinterpretation (mistaken or deliberate) or addition. As we saw in chapter 3, fan productions are often speculative and sometimes socially transgressive. The fan-produced drawings on *Pottermore* never blatantly resist canon or social norms, and they are only occasionally speculative in the sense that they sometimes portray characters who do not appear in the movies and who are minimally described in the books (e.g., Charlie Weasley). While many of the drawings are clear likenesses of the actors from the films (although *Pottermore* does not officially acknowledge the existence of the films, having no affiliation with Warner Bros.), others, such as the numerous manga-style drawings, are significant stylistic departures, making this the one section of *Pottermore* that departs from the uniform look of the overall site. (The artwork for all the moments appears to have been designed by the same illustrator or team of illustrators.) Like the comments, the drawings are accompanied by a "Report drawing" button that presumably is to be used for any drawings that portray graphic violence, nudity, or sexual content—"presumably," because the Code of Conduct says nothing about the drawings except to prohibit claiming other people's artwork as one's own. While the drawings galleries offer a creative diversity that is not visible anywhere else on the site, they still offer safety from age-inappropriate and extra-canonical content.

In the previous section, I mentioned that real-world intrusions (Internet connection problems, offline friendships and conflicts) sometimes threaten the immersive, imaginative

experience of *Pottermore*. The designers and administrators of the site, however, have largely succeeded in minimizing these intrusions. The fact that I was prevented from referring to Charles Dickens in a comment has led me to theorize that the censoring mechanism automatically rejects proper names that do not occur in the *Harry Potter* series. In addition to preserving the integrity of the world of the books and the site, limiting the necessary cultural knowledge to a single shared text (counting the seven novels as one text) enables people of all ages and national origins to participate in the discourse. (Significantly, the Code of Conduct opens with a reminder that *Pottermore* is a "global community.") The restriction may also protect the site owners from copyright concerns: a story that pairs Harry Potter with, say, a favorite Disney princess may be acceptable on fanfiction.net, but the appearance of such a story on *Pottermore* would seem to imply Rowling's approval of such a remix. Despite the restrictions, however, real-world intrusions do occasionally occur, but they tend to be harmless, like the pencil drawing I found buried deep in the Ron Weasley gallery, depicting Ron eating candy clearly labeled Red Vines, not Licorice Wands.

As we have seen, the term "safe" and the concept of safety are made to do a great deal of work on *Pottermore*. Rowling's introductory video, the Code of Conduct, the Child Safety policy, the comment-censoring feature, and the "Report this" buttons all foreground the concept. While the emphasis is on protecting children from online predators and age-inappropriate language and content, several other types of safety are implied in the Code of Conduct and the choice of banned words: safety from restrictively difficult or alienating discourse, especially for children and people with non-Western cultural background knowledge; safety from non-canonical and possibly transgressive interpretations of the story and its characters; safety for *Pottermore*'s owners from copyright violation, and safety (broadly defined) for *Harry Potter*

purists from the incursion of other fictional worlds into this one. The assumptions underlying

some of these concepts of safety, as well as the mechanisms used to enforce them, may be

subject to question, but I am most interested in any real or potential conflict that might occur

between the goal of safety and another of *Pottermore*'s prominently-stated values, which I will

discuss in the next section: reader participation.

"The Most Important [Addition] Is You."

In her introductory video, Rowling emphasizes the centrality of readers to *Pottermore*.

At the beginning, she thanks her readers for their longtime support, adding that "Harry's fans

remain as enthusiastic and inventive as ever." The two adjectives she chooses highlight, first, the

"fanaticism" without which fandom would be mere interest, and second, the next step that many

fans take into producing creative works of their own, inspired by their beloved text. Next,

Rowling introduces the concept of *Pottermore*, explaining, "It's the same story with a few

crucial additions. The most important one is you." This pronouncement could be taken as a

Louise Rosenblatt-like insistence that without readers a written work is nothing but ink on paper

(or pixels on a screen), but if this is all Rowling means, then *Pottermore* is no different from the

novels, and the readers are not an "addition" at all. Rowling clarifies her meaning a bit with this

statement: "Just as the experience of reading requires that the imaginations of the author and

reader work together to create the story, so *Pottermore* will be built, in part, by you, the reader."

The dependent clause that opens the sentence may imply that Rowling is simply talking about a

mental phenomenon, but the mention of building in the main clause of the sentence seems to

suggest something more, an invitation for readers to become contributors. Now that *Pottermore*

has been open for more than two years, it is time to revisit Rowling's statements and find out

whether readers actually have contributed to the site in noticeable and significant ways.

Fan collaboration with *Pottermore* began well before the site became open to the public, with Melissa Anelli of *The Leaky Cauldron* working as a consultant for the site starting in 2009.[60] It is not clear what Anelli actually did; *Pottermore* does not display anywhere on the site the biographies or even names of its creative team. (Keeping this information quiet reinforces, at once, the traditional-individual authorial persona of J. K. Rowling, the impression that the wizarding world is a real place that does not need a creative team to continue inventing it, and the Dickensian dream of unmediated intimacy between author and reader.) Suffice it to say that by soliciting Anelli's help, Rowling and Sony demonstrated a desire to obtain a reader's perspective on the forthcoming project—not that Big Name Fan Anelli is an average *Harry Potter* reader.

Average readers did get a chance to contribute during the beta testing period that began in August 2011. In her video, Rowling mentions this period as a key feature of *Pottermore*'s unique partnership with readers: "A lucky few can enter early and help shape the experience." According to the *Pottermore Insider* blog, one million early registrants were allowed access to the site for two main purposes: to test the capacity of the website to handle high usage volumes, and to provide feedback. These early users were free to explore the site as it existed at the time, and they were encouraged to leave feedback using the "Beta feedback" button that appeared on each page ("October").

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[60] Anelli's LinkedIn profile lists her as Senior Creative Consultant (Launch) for *Pottermore* from October 2009 through November 2011; the job description says, "I worked with the Pottermore team remotely and in London to help bring the site to launch!" The profile currently lists her as Consultant for the site, with no job description. I find it interesting that Anelli is both a consultant for *Pottermore*, with its sealed-off, canon-only mentality, and the Co-executive Director of LeakyCon (discussed in chapter 3), with its gleeful embrace of all fandoms—including *Glee*, a pun I did not intend.

The blog mentions repeatedly, in multiple posts, that the feedback received from these users was valuable, but it is vague as to the content of the feedback. The main change that came out of the beta period was not in response to user feedback but simply to the number of users: "[I]t became clear that our original platform wouldn't be suitable when millions more users came on to the site. So we made a big decision: to move Pottermore to an entirely different platform set up" ("Waiting"). This process was what delayed the general opening of *Pottermore* from October 2011 to April 2012. Whether or not the beta testing generated numerous meaningful suggestions from readers, the deliberateness and length (about two planned months, plus the delay) of the testing period indicates, once again, that reader opinions were important to the site's owners and developers. In addition, the use of the *Pottermore Insider* blog to report delays and changes, and sometimes to address specific user concerns ("Welcome Emails"), shows an unusual level of commitment to keeping stakeholders informed.

Comments on the functionality and design of the site are no longer solicited, but *Pottermore* does have a *Facebook* page and a *Twitter* account, which means that readers still have an outlet for feedback. The *Pottermore Insider* blog is no longer primarily about sharing practical updates about the site; rather, it showcases fan art selections, promotes official *Harry Potter* events such as the release of new book editions and a festival at Universal's The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, and, frequently, expresses birthday wishes for characters from the series and encourages readers to share their own wishes on *Facebook* and *Twitter* with specially designated hashtags. The posts often conclude with an open-ended question, such as "What do you think Percy's perfect birthday present would be?" ("Happy Birthday"), that readers are directed to answer on one of the social media sites. These questions allow

opportunities for textual creative production that are not available on the main *Pottermore* site,

especially when readers choose to respond on *Facebook*, which does not impose character limits.

As we have seen, the only significant way in which readers can creatively contribute to

Pottermore is by uploading artwork. The site does, however, offer numerous opportunities to

interact with other users and interface with the site itself in more pre-programmed ways.

Although, as I described above, the extent to which the moments can be manipulated is restricted

to actions like collecting objects and moving further into the scene, a few moments include

single-player games, and a few particular moments, which I will discuss below, feature

interactive experiences that help shape the user's profile. Outside the moments, readers can

choose to earn points for their Hogwarts house by competing in wizard's duels with other readers

and making potions with ingredients collected from the moments. As a person with almost no

online gaming or video gaming experience, I have found the games, duels, and potion-making

challenges to be difficult to successfully complete, due to the speed and manual dexterity that are

necessary. Nevertheless, these challenges mainly involve repetition and following instructions;

they require little decision-making or creative thinking.

The duels are related to another of *Pottermore*'s interactive opportunities: the ability to

connect with other readers. This can happen in three main ways[61]: participating in conversations

in the comments sections, sending gifts (virtual items one has collected from the moments or

"purchased" with wizarding money), and challenging other users to duels. The latter two actions

require the two users to be on each other's Friend list. *Pottermore* does not have a private

messaging or a chat feature, probably because of the commitment to keeping children safe from

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[61] I am not including on this list the action of "liking" another user's comment or drawing. The
usernames of those who "like" are not displayed, and therefore this is not a true form of interaction.

predators. It is possible to turn a comments section into a makeshift chatroom (I have seen this happen), but this is difficult to do because there is no way to reply to one specific comment except by mentioning the commenter's username; the comments, in other words, appear in the order in which they were posted, rather than grouped in threads. There is also no way to search the comments. Furthermore, as we have already seen, the Code of Conduct prohibits sharing of personal data, including contact information that would allow readers to communicate outside *Pottermore*. Thus, there are significant limitations to the ability to connect with other users.

A discussion of *Pottermore*'s interactive features would be incomplete without mention of a few unusually detailed moments that readers encounter in the early chapters of *Philosopher's Stone*. In the series of moments entitled "Arriving at Diagon Alley," "Harry and Hagrid Visit Gringotts," and "Ollivanders," the reader mirrors Harry's actions by getting money from the bank, shopping for school supplies in various stores, selecting an animal (owl, cat, or toad) that will serve as the reader's avatar around the site, and taking a brief quiz that generates wand data (length, wood, core, and flexibility) specific to the user. The shopping activity is reminiscent of the process of purchasing supplies in the classic computer game *Oregon Trail*: the amount of money is limited, but guidance is provided as to which supplies will likely prove most useful. Unlike in *Oregon Trail*, readers who have passed the Diagon Alley moments can return at any point to do more shopping. (They can replenish their money by collecting coins hidden throughout the moments.) The purchased items can be given as gifts, used in potion-making, or simply displayed on one's profile page. The wand receives pride of place on the profile, reflecting the importance of wands in the fictional world. A wizard's or witch's wand is thought to say a great deal about his or her personality, character, skills, strength, and propensity toward

good or evil. Therefore, the wand-assigning activity on *Pottermore* is similar to one of the personality quizzes that are currently popular on social media sites.

But the wand is not the primary personality-defining feature for most *Pottermore* users; that distinction goes to the Hogwarts house one belongs to. In the moment entitled "The Sorting Ceremony," readers take another quiz, this one designed to place them in one of the four houses: Gryffindor (associated with bravery), Slytherin (ambition and cunning), Ravenclaw (wit and cleverness), or Hufflepuff (loyalty and hard work). Since long before *Pottermore* existed, *Harry Potter* fans have enjoyed "sorting" (the correct wizarding term for house placement) themselves, their friends, celebrities, and characters from other fictional worlds. Heated discussions often occur over the true defining qualities of the four houses, since an increasingly complex picture of each house's student and alumni population emerges throughout the series. (For instance, fans who identify with Slytherin often insist that their house cannot simply be defined as "the evil house.") The sorting activity, therefore, is probably the most common reason why people join *Pottermore*, at least among the adult fans with whom I have discussed the site. In fact, I know several people who have joined, progressed far enough to be sorted, and then never visited the site again.

The questions are written in such a way that it is difficult to cheat the test: they do not use the key words associated with each house in the books, and some of them involve abstract scenarios that seem unrelated to the topic at hand, such as the question asking the reader which of four paths he or she would take upon arriving at a crossing on a deserted road. And unlike most online quizzes, this one can be taken only once. The house assigned at the end of the test remains that user's house unless he or she creates a new *Pottermore* account, which was listed as a prohibited activity in the blog post clarifying the Code of Conduct ("What You Can Do").

Pottermore's sorting test seems to carry more authority with fans than the typical online personality quiz, including the many other Hogwarts house quizzes that have proliferated on the Web. The results often trigger denial, resistance, or mild existential crises, as exemplified by the "Pottermore sorted me . . . WRONG!" button, the soul-searching blog post I felt compelled to write after being sorted into Hufflepuff, and the co-worker who rushed into my office one day and announced that I would never guess which house she had been placed into. (It was Slytherin, which surprised us both.) One reason for the power that this test has over fans is probably the mysteriousness of its algorithm: like the magical Sorting Hat that does the equivalent task in the books, the test seems to operate by something more than mere human logic.

The other reason why *Pottermore*'s sorting test seems nearly impossible to dismiss, however strongly one might disagree with it, is that, as discussed in the first section, fans have generally (sometimes begrudgingly) accepted the site as a canonical source, and this acceptance extends past Rowling's textual compositions to include the results of the interactive sorting activity. In keeping with the absence of creative acknowledgements that I mentioned earlier, the site gives no indication of who designed the sorting test, which leaves readers to assume it was J. K. Rowling, the default, implied creator of everything on the site. In chapter three, I used the term "oracle" to describe the facet of Rowling's authorial role that makes her the ultimate authority on the wizarding world, who not only has a deep understanding of the society (as reporter/cultural informant) but who also can read the characters' minds and look into their pasts and futures. That oracular role comes into play in the case of the sorting test. Although it is unlikely that anyone who takes the test actually believes that Rowling can look into their minds, fans seem to have conceded that the test has some degree of authoritative weight, as indicated by

the fact that even those who reject their test results seem driven to defend their alternative choice rather than merely dismissing the results.

Now that we have discussed most of the opportunities *Pottermore* users have to interact with the site, a distinction needs to be made between that term, *interaction*, and another term I have been trying not to use interchangeably with it: *collaboration*. When Rowling stated in her introductory video, "*Pottermore* will be built, in part, by you, the reader," she seemed to be talking about collaboration, a joint effort between author and reader. For a long time after watching the video, I was under the impression that *Pottermore* would be, in large part, an officially-sanctioned fan fiction site. The existing site is far from such a thing. It offers numerous opportunities for interaction, defined as opportunities to manipulate the site interface in limited, encoded ways. But although clicking an object and hearing the sound of a trunk unlocking may be immensely satisfying, it is not the same experience as creating a story, song, video, or other original work inspired by a favorite story. As we have seen, *Pottermore* offers this latter experience in only one feature of the site, the art galleries, and these are not integrated into the site in any prominent way. (The *Pottermore Insider* blog does feature select pieces of fan-uploaded art in meaningful ways, but it is a separate site.) If Rowling and the *Pottermore* team initially planned for the site to be a collaborative effort between author and reader, these plans changed, perhaps during the beta testing period, perhaps earlier. Of course, it is possible, even likely, that there were never any such plans for *Pottermore* and that Rowling's statement about an imaginative team effort was, after all, meant to be taken metaphorically, or phenomenologically, to describe what goes on in a reader's mind while reading any text.

This question remains: if *Harry Potter* fans were seemingly promised a different experience than the one *Pottermore* has actually given them, why has there not been a major

outcry against the site, apart from misgivings expressed by a few theorists and cultural commentators and mostly before the site went live? The answer goes back to the three functions of *Pottermore* that have structured this chapter: it is a platform for Rowling's post-novel writings about Harry Potter's world, it is a safe place for all ages, and it is an interactive—and, to a limited extent, collaborative—experience. The success of a new venture of any kind can be predicted largely by its ability to fill a vacancy, to offer something new that consumers want and/or need. With the third of these three functions, *Pottermore* has not offered anything new. There are already plenty of online locations for uploading *Harry Potter* fan art (and fan fiction, and fan videos, and fan creations of any sort). There are already places to virtually befriend other *Harry Potter* fans and share comments—places where it is easier to do these things than it is on *Pottermore*. And there are already numerous opportunities to play *Potter*-themed digital games, from the many PlayStation and Xbox varieties to the simple remote-controlled games that are included as special features on some DVD and Blu-Ray versions of some of the films.

In contrast, the other two functions do fill a void. Although *Pottermore* is not the only *Harry Potter* site that has content appropriate for children, its tight safeguards make it a rarity: a social media site that children can browse for hours without encountering profanity, vulgarity, or concepts they are not ready to understand. The site is thorough and well-developed enough that parents can simply navigate to it and be relatively sure that their children will stay there instead of getting bored and Googling "Harry Potter," which could lead to an X-rated fan fiction site. And of course, the remaining function of *Pottermore*, to feature new writing by J. K. Rowling, provides something that readers cannot get elsewhere, since most of the original pieces have

been made available only to *Pottermore* members—although Rowling did share the recent Rita Skeeter piece with *Today*.[62]

Thus, the interactive and collaborative features of *Pottermore*, which Rowling made so much of in her introductory video, have turned out to be the least compelling aspects of the site, at least for most adult fans, who are there to read the backstories of their favorite characters and let a mysterious algorithm tell them which house they belong in. This explains why *Pottermore* has not put other sites out of business or imposed a hegemony upon online *Harry Potter* fandom: it is very good at doing what it does, but it does not give a fan everything he or she needs. *Pottermore* has certainly been successful—it had one million users just in the beta period and is adding new ones all the time—but, from my anecdotal evidence, it has not made a drastic difference in the life of the average *Harry Potter* fan. People are still making fan fiction, resisting canon, and geeking out about Harry on *Tumblr*, *Pinterest*, and hundreds of independent sites. Rowling's voice, prominent and authoritative as it is, is still just one voice among the many diverse voices of *Harry Potter* fandom. And that is what true author-reader collaboration looks like.

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[62] *Pottermore* members could, it is true, share the new pieces with their non-member friends, but the site, unsurprisingly, has made this difficult: it is impossible to copy and paste any of the text of *Pottermore*.

CONCLUSION

DEATHS AND RESURRECTIONS

This study is entitled "The Author Who Lived," but death has been a recurring theme throughout the chapters, from Barthes's striking use of the concept to summarize his theory of authorship, to the character deaths that brought Dickens and his readers together in shared mourning, to Rowling's claims that the *Harry Potter* series was her way of dealing with her mother's death and "death in all its many forms," to Dickens's nightly deaths and resurrections in the public readings, culminating with my claim in chapter five that *Pottermore*, by directing users back to the novels, brings about a kind of resurrection. In the conclusion, I will offer some brief readings from each author's novels, in order to make some observations about the concept of authorial death as it applies to Dickens and Rowling. The study will close with some suggestions for further research, pedagogical implications, and speculations about the way that authors will engage with readers in the future. Properly speaking, this section is really more of a non-conclusion, pointing to the endlessly prolonged future of the serial narrative that is the author/fan relationship.

Voldemort's Death versus Dumbledore's Death

In chapter one, as I was acknowledging my indebtedness to Pamela Ingleton for suggesting the topic of my dissertation, I mentioned that in her essay on *Pottermore*, Ingleton makes a direct comparison between J. K. Rowling and the arch-villain of her famous series, Lord Voldemort. Here is what Ingleton actually says: "Like her fictional uber-villain Lord Voldemort, Rowling's biggest fear appears to be death—in this case, the death of the author. One might say that, in the face of Barthesian assaults on conventional notions of authorship . . . Rowling refuses to die" (176). In other words, according to Ingleton, just as Voldemort (whose name, ironically,

can be translated as "will to death") is in denial about his own physical death, Rowling is in denial about her own authorial death. Comparing an author to one of her own characters is an audacious move, one that I would not venture upon if Ingleton had not set the precedent. Since the precedent is set, however, I offer my own comparison: Rowling's attitude toward the death of the author resembles the attitude of Albus Dumbledore, the most significant of Harry Potter's mentors and surrogate fathers. Though I am not suggesting that Dumbledore is an autobiographical character, Rowling has stated that she sometimes found herself writing in Dumbledore's voice without any apparent effort (see chapter two), and, as I noted at the end of my introduction, Dumbledore's fierce affection for Harry seems to resemble that of Rowling. Therefore, a comparison of any kind between Rowling and Dumbledore is not far-fetched, and indeed is better supported than a comparison between Rowling and Voldemort. An analysis of the two characters' attitudes toward death can provide an apt framework for understanding Rowling's post-textual activities with regard to the *Harry Potter* series.

Lord Voldemort is committed to preserving his biological existence at all costs. As Harry discovers while researching his enemy's history in book six, the young Tom Riddle (the given name of the man who would become Voldemort) chose to split his soul into seven pieces in order to make himself nearly impossible to kill. The relics that contain the pieces of his soul, called Horcruxes, can only be created when Riddle commits a murder; therefore, they require physical violence toward another person and psychic violence toward himself. They also ironically weaken what they are intended to protect, since they disperse Riddle's integrated self and eventually—when he creates an eighth, unintended Horcrux—leave his body without any soul at all (for more on Voldemort's fragmented identity, see Stockslager, "What It Means to Be a Half-Blood"). Another significant characteristic of the Horcruxes is that they must be hidden.

Voldemort does not disclose their existence even to his most loyal followers. This secrecy turns people into instruments, who are used to accomplish ends but never trusted with information. As Voldemort does with another fact of his existence that he finds abhorrent, his mixed racial identity, he denies the fact of his own inevitable death.

Albus Dumbledore, on the other hand, accepts his death as not only inevitable but necessary. When he is infected with a slow but sure-working poison that he knows will kill him in about a year, he plans to use the method of his death as a countermove against Voldemort. Unlike Voldemort, he trusts two capable people, Harry Potter and Severus Snape, with all of his plans for continuing the war after his death, and he trusts many others to play supporting roles (for example, he trusts the teachers of Hogwarts to take care of the students after he is gone). Although Dumbledore does not make all of his plans explicit, which Harry in particular finds frustrating, he leaves clues: his secrets, unlike Voldemort's, are meant to be discovered by the right people. Whereas Voldemort is obsessed with controlling everything, Dumbledore understands that his control will be limited after his death: he will be able to speak, but he will not be able to force people to listen.[63] Rather than insisting that he will never die, Dumbledore prepares for his death in such a way that those he cares about will be equipped to succeed in the fight against Voldemort and, to a certain extent, kept safe.

Ingleton argues that *Pottermore*, like the statements Rowling made at her Carnegie Hall appearance, is an effort to "protect, control and police her creation" (182). As we saw in chapter three, some readers would also consider the final novel's epilogue as a similar effort, since it

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[63] Because he was a Hogwarts headmaster, the deceased Dumbledore is allowed to exist in the form of a portrait in the headmaster's office. When Snape becomes headmaster, Dumbledore is able to have conversations with Snape, but his ability to control events is limited, since he can only observe, speak, and travel directly from the portrait's frame to those of any other portraits of Albus Dumbledore that might exist.

seems to close down the possibility of speculation regarding the adult lives of the central characters. To Ingleton, these efforts resemble Voldemort's obsessive actions to control the length of his life. However, if Rowling were acting like Voldemort, I think her actions would look more like denial and would display a less sophisticated understanding of the current climate of fandom. She would be doing things like ordering all fan fiction to cease (a futile effort, as Anne Rice discovered) or trying to shut down *The Leaky Cauldron*, rather than going out of her way to cooperate with its staff. Instead, I believe, Rowling is acting like Dumbledore. Certainly, Dumbledore, like Rowling, prefers to be in control, and he takes steps to tie up as many loose ends as possible before dying. But Dumbledore's and Rowling's kind of control displays a realistic understanding of the world, and it involves trusting other people. Perhaps *Pottermore* is parallel to Dumbledore's limited existence after death as a two-dimensional talking portrait. Rowling can still influence the *Harry Potter* universe from the post-textual beyond, but she will never again have the ear of fans—or of the world—in quite the way she did while she was still writing the books.

Obviously, the comparison between Dumbledore's plans for his death and Rowling's plans for the *Harry Potter* series' "extra-textual (after)life," as Ingleton aptly puts it, is not exactly parallel, since the fate of Rowling's intellectual property is not a matter of saving the world or even a life. Yet, in a sense, it *is* a matter of preserving the integrity of a fictional world that has been, for many readers as for Rowling herself, almost as meaningful as real-life existence. And if Harry Potter is like Rowling's "ghostly son" (to quote her interview with Daniel Radcliffe) and he has seemed real enough to many children that they would venture to write letters to him, then, in a sense, a life is being saved—saved not only from obscurity but also from misinterpretation at the hands of those who do not truly understand that life.

Again, I want to emphasize, as I did in my introduction, that this may be a naïve way of thinking about a fictional world and a fictional character. Who is J. K. Rowling, a critic or a fan fiction writer could validly ask, to claim she knows more about Harry Potter than anyone else does? I have tried to make clear throughout my study that when I write about Rowling and Dickens having privileged knowledge about their fictional worlds, I am representing the way that they think about their own authorial identities, which is also the way that many, though by no means all, readers have thought about them. I happen to think that they are right—that the author who invents a character or a world stands in a unique relationship to that character or world. But I do not believe that has to mean that nobody else is entitled to have insights about or to present additional or alternative interpretations—critical or creative—about those characters and worlds. That others are entitled to do so is not only a theoretical principle but also a practical reality. Twenty-first century publishing platforms, especially the informal platforms of the Internet, have given nearly everyone a voice, collapsing the binary between readers and authors. The important thing is that, as Rosenblatt reminds us, a text is nothing without people— whether those people are functioning as readers, authors, or both.

Grave-Robbing versus Resurrection

As we saw in chapter three, J. K. Rowling used the language of death and mourning when she finished the *Harry Potter* series. She made it clear that while she was grieved to be leaving the stories that had occupied so much of her life for so long, it was time to let them go. But as I described in the introduction, over the past six years Rowling has had limited success at leaving Harry and his world behind. The dead are not staying dead. The question is whether Rowling is doing something grotesque and pathetic in trying to keep alive the *Harry Potter* series (and her persona as its author), or whether the story is staying alive of its own power.

Similarly, when Charles Dickens brought out the same characters night after night in the public readings, was he merely propping up corpses, or was there still life in those characters?

Once again, looking to the novels of these two authors may provide some clues. The dead do not always stay dead in the *Harry Potter* series: deceased people can come back in a limited form as ghosts or talking portraits, Luna Lovegood is confident that she will see her late mother again one day, characters presumed dead (like Peter Pettigrew) turn out to have been alive all along, a relic called the Resurrection Stone can bring back shadowy likenesses of deceased loved ones that can be heard and spoken to but not touched, and Harry himself has an out-of-body experience in a state between life and death. The border between life and death seems to be fluid.

As I mentioned in chapters two and four, the reversal of death is also a theme in Dickens's work, and nowhere more than in *A Tale of Two Cities*. A brief analysis of some of the symbolism in that novel may be helpful in illustrating the difference between resurrection—a term I am using here to refer to the continued power of a supposedly completed text and the continued influence of its author—and grave-robbing, which here refers to an author's futile and unhealthy efforts toward maintaining the semblance of life in a phenomenon that needs to be buried.

Jerry Cruncher, who has little effect on the plot of *A Tale of Two Cities* but is important as a symbol and as comic relief, is a grave-robber. In the late eighteenth century, when the story is set, as well as in Dickens's nineteenth century, there flourished an underground trade in corpses, fueled in part by medical students' need for cadavers to study. Although grave-robbing may have indirectly contributed to scientific advancement, the practice itself was considered unrespectable and of dubious legality. In the novel, Jerry's trade, a pale imitation of

resurrection, functions as a grotesque foil to more meaningful instances of life being restored to characters who are close to death. For example, Dr. Manette has been imprisoned in the Bastille for so long that he forgets his identity, his past, and almost everyone he has known. When Jerry Cruncher overhears the phrase "recalled to life" being used to describe Dr. Manette's release, he suspects that his business is getting some new competition. The phrase perfectly describes what happens to Dr. Manette, who is reunited with his now-grown daughter and is able to reinstate his medical practice.

Another character in the novel who receives his life back—twice—is Charles Darnay. Darnay is saved from probable hanging early in the novel when Sydney Carton offers a crucial piece of evidence in his trial, and in the memorable ending, Darnay is saved from the guillotine when Carton, who looks like Darnay, arranges to die in his place. The resurrection symbolism in this last instance is striking: Carton, an alcoholic who has no satisfying relationships and believes he has wasted his life, dies so that Darnay, who has a wife and child as well as satisfying work, may live. A corrupt, spent man dies, and a good, healthy, happy man who looks just like him is raised to life. This is an entirely different order of event from the fake resurrection that takes place whenever Jerry Cruncher robs a grave.

As with the Voldemort/Dumbledore comparison, the analogy I am making here should not be taken too far. I am certainly not trying to say that the original texts of the *Harry Potter* series and of Dickens's novels are corrupt and spent and that the new creations that have arisen from their ashes—*Pottermore* and the public readings, as well as fan productions—are good, healthy, and happy in comparison. My point in proposing this analogy is that Rowling's efforts to keep alive and/or revive the *Harry Potter* franchise, like Dickens's comparable efforts, are not like Jerry Cruncher's grave-robbing: tasteless and wholly profit-driven. Instead, they are like the

gift of life that Sydney Carton gives to Charles Darnay: the story gets to live on, and the meaningful relationships among characters, authors, and readers are allowed to continue.

And as in the Carton/Darnay scenario, some kind of death must occur in order for life to result. As we saw in chapter four, Dickens nightly "tore himself to pieces," possibly hastening his physical death, to bring dead characters like Nancy back to life. While Rowling's post-*Harry Potter* efforts have not been so physically taxing, she is making sacrifices in other ways. As I showed in chapter three, Rowling has come to learn, and is still learning, that her characters do not fully belong to her. Every move she makes toward giving up some control—like giving the Fan Site award to the *Harry Potter Lexicon* after having sued its author—is a little authorial death, preparing her for the day when J. K. Rowling the person (not the authorial persona) will die. As Ingleton reminds us, "Intention aside, *in* control or not, Rowling will not always be around to protect, control and police her creation, which is inevitably bound to become less and less *hers*" (182). Harry Potter, as we have seen, is already becoming something of a floating signifier, detached from his author's name, much as Ebenezer Scrooge became some time ago. But if Dickens is a valid example, Rowling has little need to worry about disappearing into obscurity. Even if few people today can give the simplest biographical detail about Charles Dickens, they still know his name. (How many small cities and towns across America have annual celebrations called A Dickens of a Christmas?) Because of the Dickens heritage industry, facilitated largely by public television adaptations and Christmastime festivals, the name "Charles Dickens" has become a brand name, perhaps not in the commercial sense, but in that it lets people know what to expect from a book, film, or event with that label. As we saw in chapter three, Rowling's name is already becoming this type of signifier.

So we see again that Voldemort is wrong: death is unavoidable, and it can even bring about good. In one sense, my argument is not very different from Barthes's claim that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (1470). I simply think that it is no longer (and maybe never has been) so easy to draw a line of demarcation between author and reader. I would also submit that death is not final, and that authors leave traces that remain after they die. Even Sydney Carton at the guillotine dreamed of a child not yet born who would bear his name.

Suggestion for Further Research: The Changing Influence of *Pottermore*

While drafting this dissertation, I found myself writing "this topic is outside the scope of this study" quite a few times, and thinking it many additional times. I have chosen to mention just one area as a potentially strong topic for future research. Because *Pottermore* is a dynamic and still relatively new text, and *Harry Potter* fandom is ever-changing and still relatively young (compared to long-established fandoms like that of *Star Trek*), the influence of *Pottermore* on *Harry Potter* fandom would be a fruitful topic for studies both analytical and empirical, and it would also have broader implications for literary theory and media studies.

My claims throughout this study about fan perception and use of toward *Pottermore* have been based almost entirely on anecdotal evidence, primarily conversations I have had with *Pottermore* users and/or *Harry Potter* fans within my personal networks, as well as observations I made at LeakyCon 2013. I did administer an online survey on the *Potter* canon, which asked participants to rank the canonicity of *Pottermore* in relation to that of other sources of information, but this survey had a relatively small sample of 201, and I did not test it for validity and reliability. To get a better idea of the influence that *Pottermore* has had and will continue to have on *Potter* fandom, especially in light of speculations made by scholars such as Jenkins and

Ingleton before the site launched, more extensive and statistically validated research should be conducted. Questions that may be addressed include the following: Does *Pottermore* change the way new or repeat readers approach the novels? Will fan fiction authors write stories that resist, ignore, or alter the interpretations that Rowling provides on the site? What is the average age of *Pottermore* users, and do different age categories use the site in different ways? Will *Pottermore* continue to be as popular as it has been during its first few years, and will its usage rise and fall according to how active Rowling has been in posting exclusive pieces? Pursuing any of these questions could aid in understanding what, if any, lasting influence *Pottermore* may have on reader practices and fan activities. Since *Pottermore* is, to my knowledge, the only massive-scale, official, online author/reader partnership focusing on a single book series that combines elements of social networking, gaming, and new writing from the author, any study of the site could have wider implications for the literature on fan practices, authorial identity, and author/reader collaborations.

Pedagogical Implications

As a teacher and a writing center director, I think it is important to consider the implications that any research may have on the practice of teaching, whether in the classroom or on an individual basis. Here are two pedagogical applications of this study and what it posits about authors and readers.

Dickens, Rowling, and popular fiction. Recently in discussing popular fiction with students in my introductory literature course, I used Charles Dickens as an example of an author whose work has shifted from being perceived as popular fiction to being canonized as literary fiction. I explained to them that in Dickens's day, all but the very highest and very lowest classes were reading him, and his audience included children and illiterate adults. Thus, no

specialized knowledge was required in order to understand his work. His novels were driven by fast-paced plots and memorable characters who tended to display their traits externally. People talked about his books as they chatted at the office or on the street. Dickens was proud to present himself as an entertainer. In short, he was the epitome of a writer of popular fiction. Thus, from the period shortly after his death through Modernism, many literary critics wrote him off as unworthy of serious critical attention. Today, however, Dickens is considered a canonical writer. As I pointed out to my students, they probably were required to read a Dickens novel in high school, and they probably found it challenging. Part of the challenge comes from the language and cultural barriers that have arisen over time, but aside from those, Dickens's novels can often be thematically sophisticated, ethically perplexing, and heavy with symbolism. But because he could tell an exciting story and make people laugh and cry, the more literary qualities of Dickens's work have often been missed or ignored.

I then suggested to my students that while much of the popular fiction on bookstore shelves today will probably be forgotten 150 years from now, or much sooner, it is not unlikely that at least one book or series that has been popular in the past several years will make the transition from a phenomenon to a text considered worthy of critical attention. This is likely not only because of the broadening canon and changing attitudes toward what constitutes literature, but also because some of those books are like Dickens's in that they provide readers with more to think and talk about than just a shocking plot twist. Not surprisingly, I think the *Harry Potter* series might be one such text. As we saw in chapter three, the shift in critical perception of the series can already be seen as the range of scholarship has expanded to include not only books and essays that approach *Harry Potter* as a phenomenon in marketing or literacy, but also those that treat it as a text that supports close reading and analysis.

The fluidity of the labels "popular" and "canonical" has significant implications for education, especially at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Despite the now-commonplace understanding within literary criticism that everything is a text, as well as post-structuralist theory's suspicion of the canon, most high school and many undergraduate syllabi display a very traditional definition of a canonical text, sometimes due to state or institutional mandates. The more than superficial similarities between Dickens and Rowling, especially their status as both popular and (perhaps) canonical authors, might form the basis of a learning-rich unit of study. Such a unit would allow the teacher to engage students with an enjoyable and familiar story— and not merely for the sake of making a pop culture connection—and it might help to justify the use of popular fiction in the classroom in response to challenges from administrators and other stakeholders. Some students might be motivated to further reflection on why they enjoy the texts they do, and how, if at all, those texts differ from the ones they are required to read and expected to appreciate.

All writing is response. Students often have trouble simply generating something to write about, especially in basic writing courses that are isolated from any discipline other than composition. For an early in-class writing exercise in a basic freshman writing course I taught recently, I asked the students to tell a story. I told them that this did not have to be an original story; that they could narrate the plot of their favorite book or a movie they had watched recently. While many students ended up writing stories from their own lives, as their prior experience with writing narratives for school had taught them to do, two students took me up on the book/movie idea. One narrated a scene from *The Hunger Games*, without deviating from the plot. Her narrative did not break any creative ground, but it allowed her to play with the first person point of view and helped her to see the immediacy that it can create. Another student

inserted himself as a character into the *Star Wars* universe. Although his story was jokey and limited by the time constraints of the activity, it represented a rudimentary form of fan fiction. I think both of these students were surprised and pleased by the opportunity to write something that was clearly a response to an existing text, rather than having to "come up with something" on their own. Perhaps students would be more prepared for research writing, which we are so fond of telling them is like a conversation, if we exposed them early to the idea of writing as response. Book reports are one way to do this, but students need to see that response is part of all writing, not just an isolated genre.

Looking at writing as response is the same as acknowledging that the boundary between author and reader is fluid. It is virtually impossible to be a writer without first being a reader. The term "derivative" is derogatory when applied to writing, but all writing is derived from something—personal experience in some cases, but usually other texts as well. If we want to teach students how to engage with other authors (scholars, literary writers, classmates, teachers), we should give assignments that make the responsive function of writing explicit: written peer reviews, reflections on instructor feedback, letters to the editor, movie reviews, and yes, fan fiction. Such assignments may help students to understand that writing does not happen in isolation and that the binary between writers and (passive recipient) readers is a false one. Understanding both of these ideas should increase the confidence of student writers, which more than just writing center personnel can agree is a good thing.

The Future of Fandom

Although I maintain that *Pottermore* is a unique project for reasons I outlined above, J. K. Rowling is not the only author who is making an effort to communicate and collaborate with readers. Increasingly, especially in the young adult literature market, an author is no longer

merely the person in the huge photograph on the back of a hardcover. Authors are making

themselves accessible to fans both online and in person. Even the notably private Rowling

interacts with her fans regularly on *Twitter*, where she responds to their questions and theories

with her own interpretations and corrections. These conversations reinforce the image of

Rowling as the seer who has all the answers about the wizarding world, but it also offers fans an

opportunity to present their own ideas and even challenge canon.

One forum where author-reader interaction is happening in a low-tech, face-to-face (and,

in that sense, Dickensian) way is the Lit programming at LeakyCon,[64] a specially-ticketed series

of events in which YA authors—mostly in the fantasy genre, although John Green has been a

participant—interact with their readers. While this programming reinforces the concept of the

celebrity author through the entrance fees and autograph sessions, paradoxically it also

demystifies the persona of the author, allowing fans (many of whom, significantly, are writers

themselves) to engage in dialogue with their favorite authors about a subject valued by both:

books and (like Dickens again) characters for whom they share a love.

As more and more authors publish via non-traditional platforms such as e-book

publication and self-publication, which seems to have lost some of its stigma, they will become

increasingly dependent on grassroots reader support instead of corporate marketing. (The similar

transformation of the music industry has received more attention.) This will create stronger and

closer bonds between author and readers right from the outset of the author's career. I would not

be at all surprised if we hear in the near future of a source-text author collaborating with readers

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[64] LeakyCon changed its name to GeekyCon in 2014, after I had written the bulk of this dissertation.
The new name proves a point I made in chapter three: *Harry Potter* fans in general like to be inclusive,
embracing other fandoms. I could tell at LeakyCon 2013 that this was not a convention for *Potter* purists,
and the new name makes this clear. I have chosen to keep the older name in all references throughout this
study because my observations of the convention were made when it was still called LeakyCon.

on a hybrid fan fiction piece, or at least a website of stories set in the same world by various writers including the source-text writer, like what I imagined that *Pottermore* would be when I first heard about it.

I have no idea how Charles Dickens would feel about writing a story in collaboration with a fan, and I suspect that his strong sense of narrative direction and his sometimes overbearing confidence in his creative power would make it a difficult prospect. But we know that Dickens would approve of the idea of creating something new out of a well-worn and well-beloved story in the presence of others who love that story. I close with a brief anecdote showing that Dickens the authorial persona did *not* die in 1870. In December 2014, I read an article in the local newspaper about an upcoming one-man public reading of *A Christmas Carol*. Although the reader was planning to use some props, costumes, and minimal sets, none of which Dickens used, he was basically going to reenact Dickens's most popular reading. Holiday travel prevented me from going to the performance, so I was unable to find out whether the response was at all like that of Dickens's best audiences—attentive, emotionally engaged, and energizing to the performer. I can only speculate as to whether the reading was another kind of possession, with the spirit of Dickens speaking through the reader. The important thing, though, is that Ebenezer Scrooge was there. It was always the characters that Dickens's audiences came to see; it is the characters that draw readers into a bond with Dickens even today, and if people are still reading J. K. Rowling in 150 years, it will be because of the characters that they love almost as much as she does.

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