CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SCHOLARSHIP AS GEEK FEMINISM: SUBVERTING GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN *GLEE* FAN FICTION

NICOLLE LAMERICHS

Figure 14.1 Kurt and Blaine by ZephyrianBoom.

I first met Kelly, the author of *The Lost Nightingale* (2011), through a private message. I was looking for participants for my study on fan communities or "fandom" – the online and offline spaces where fans of popular culture such as television shows or video games meet. I noticed that the popular high school series *Glee* was gaining a large following (2010-ongoing). This television series follows the events of several teenagers, in the conservative American state Ohio, who participate in a show choir or "glee club" called New Directions in the high school setting of McKinley High. I could not help being drawn to *Glee* for its songs, cheeky wit, fast dialogues and overly stereotyped, ironic characters.

Glee "fan fiction" became one of my research sites to explore the creativity of media fans and this is where I stumbled upon Kelly's stories. Fan fiction is a type of interpretive reception that allows fans to study existing characters deeply, as well as a productive activity in its own right. Fan authors transform existing texts by infusing them with other texts and images or by transferring the characters to a new setting. Kelly's *The Lost Nightingale*, for instance, darkens the conservative, contemporary Ohio setting into a crime narrative that does not shy away from gay erotica. Its theme and setting immediately appealed to me as a critic and I asked for permission to analyse her story. Kelly was immediately enthusiastic and warmly recommended different *Glee* stories to me. She also introduced me to many of her online friends including some that she had co-authored texts with. I still have not met Kelly face-to-face offline but her work has inspired me tremendously. Her passion for noir resonates with my own interests.

Moreover, Kelly frequently writes about two of my favourite characters, the young homosexuals Kurt and Blaine. Their romantic relationship is often shorthanded as "Klaine" and has drawn a large following over the years. In the featured drawing, fan artist ZephyrianBoom depicts the boys maturely with a hat, a cigarette and an open coat in a nostalgic gray colour scheme (figure 14.1). This erotic tableau reminded me of Kelly's fan fiction. The online drawing, hosted at the social media platform deviantART.com, is characteristic of how audiences mediate the bodies of their beloved characters time and again. Its title, *Gift for Lie*, plays with dubious moral standards and perhaps sexual bribery, themes that also emerge in *The Lost Nightingale* story. Though the drawing and text are not explicitly related to each other, they connect thematically. That is to say, both the fan story and the fan illustration are rooted in complex historical and contemporary gender patterns that negotiate queer identity. The authors, both women, may qualify as geek feminists, like me, though they perhaps would not say it.

In this chapter I focus on the intermediality of *Glee* fan fiction and discuss how this genre constructs new representations of gender and sexuality. After explaining the concept of intermediality, I detail my methodology and analyse three stories written by fans. Then I will conclude with some final remarks about the critical potential of fan fiction and geek feminism.

Intermediality

Kelly is but one example of a female fan who mixes portrayals of gender and sexuality both in her writing and online identity formation. Her texts, as those of any fan, are more complex than outsiders often assume. Fans combine various media texts and modes. In this study, I use the concept of intermediality to capture the structure of these texts circulating online. Intermediality refers to the dispersion of media content across various media platforms. It considers the individual medium as entwined with other media, both in terms of content and form, and as embedded within a broader cultural discourse. For instance, the fan fiction of *Glee* is deeply connected to form and content of television, creative writing and social media.

The term intermediality is derived from *intermedium,* coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1812) to discuss aesthetic modes in various media and revisited in 1966 by Dick Higgins in his manifesto "Statement on Intermedia"; it became associated with the art scene through the artistic network Fluxus. The concept has been developed further in Germany in the late 20th century aesthetic and literary studies and is sometimes combined with discourses on intertextuality (Helbig 1998, Rajewsky 2005, Meyer and Simanowski 2006).

Today, intermediality has again become relevant. Creators of art, media, and literature make use of multiple media sources, either to make a new product or to adapt existing content. With the advent of new media and the interest in combining various forms of media, modes such as opera, film, and novels may now also rely on other media, thus becoming hybrids (Helbig 1998). There is also an increasing trend toward intermediality in the media industry itself, described by Henry Jenkins (2006) as "transmedia storytelling." In this process, various media are combined to tell one story. *The Matrix*, for instance, told its story across three movies and a video game that allowed audiences to make full sense of its characters and plot. Each medium retains its own characteristics, and ideally, these texts need to be combined to fully understand the narrative. However, this concept pertains primarily to the franchises of the industry

and does not advance our understanding of fandom where particular texts, such as the *Glee* television show, are still hailed as the source text.

The field of fan studies has often considered the relation between fan fiction and its source text as intertextual—as a complex interplay between a text and other texts that shape its interpretation (Hellekson and Busse 2006). Intertextuality however seems too narrow a term for such writing which is given shape by interactivity. User comments, recommendations and favourite options structure fan fiction and its reception. Authors and readers thus share a creative space and advance each other's creations and interpretations. This writing is, in other words, highly medium-specific (Hayles 2004). Fan fiction is often characterized as a "participatory culture" in which authors, readers, critics and industry personnel communicate on a similar level (Jenkins 2006). Intermediality embraces the media text and also creates ample role to discuss media platforms themselves. Thus, I analyse the online fiction of *Glee* fans and how it mediates the television text. Specifically, I consider how these narratives allow for emancipative gender performances, such as the construction of an adolescent gay identity or an asexual identity. Thus, I will argue *Glee* fandom constitutes a space of creative writing where feminism flourishes through new representations and voices.

Geek girls

The cultural domain of fan fiction has been qualified as a unique feminine space where women mediate intimacy through stories (Lothian, Busse, and Reid 2007). *Glee* fan fiction is a female space constructed by women in their teens and twenties. In fandom, such gendered differences can amply be observed, not only by examining which texts draw female or male audiences, but also by exploring the activities that fans undertake. A blog post by Obsession_Inc (2009) caused much attention when she suggested that men engage in "affirmational" activities that celebrate the media text and mastery over it. In her dichotomy, male fans are characterized by figures as the collector or reviewer that celebrate the unity of the text. She instead aligns female fans with autonomous spaces and activities that are transformative and creative. Women explore the blanks of the texts, she suggests, while men honour its textual unity and facts. Though this gendered divide may be criticized, studies have shown that creative and interpretive activities are partly gendered (Pearson 2012, Bacon-Smith 1992). Female fans are still subjected to patriarchal discourses as particular domains and activities are portrayed as male, such as gaming

(Nakamura 2012). Both in media representations (e.g.: narratives, visuals) and sociality, gender functions as an exclusionary mechanism.

To explore these issues, I adopt the viewpoint of "geek feminism" which promotes the critical online activity of women and their engagement with media technologies. In her studies on female computer users, linguist Mary Bucholtz coined the term *geek feminism* to outline a theoretical and socially engaged view point informed by the legacy of feminism while retaining geek identity: "Geek feminism, like all political affiliations and identities, is not a category with which to classify individuals but a stances that shapes and is shaped by social practice" (2002, 282). Bloggers have been quick to pick up this concept and founded the platform GeekFeminism.org in 2009. This blog articulates female geek identity and critically assesses media representations and user cultures.

Today, the term "geek" refers to a positive alignment with popular culture rather than being a pejorative. Geek connotes enthusiasts and hobbyists, and even suggests a particular life-style that swirls around internet or gaming capital. Increasingly, the merchandise lines of Hot Topic and ThinkGeek cater to "geek girls" as well. Geek is becoming a female, marketable identity. These emerging cultural repertoires also influenced early *Glee* fans who labelled themselves "gleeks," a portmanteau of *Glee* and geek. Not much later, the industry stamped *Glee* DVD covers and tours with the same word. This exemplifies the broader participatory climate in which the industry caters to its fans and commodifies their language and tokens. The identity of the female geek is re-invented through these commercial paradigms. She is often overlooked or excluded as a creative fan that operates outside of the media industry, but increasingly she returns through the backdoor as a loyal consumer.

Female fan authorship is a fertile testing ground to see how geek feminism can take shape through media interaction. While fandom seems niche, its ideas increasingly perpetrate the mainstream industry. The popular BDSM-romance *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2010-2012), for instance, is a rewriting of a *Twilight* fan text of E.L. James. This text cannot be separated from the social context in which it emerged, and from the common acceptance of "kink" as an erotic genre in fandom. The emergence of *Glee* kink and its narrative tropes have been detailed by Hannah Elison (Ellison 2013). Fandom thus suggests a unique field of creative and erotic writing that needs to be explored further.

Methodology

Geek feminism captures an independent critical perspective that unites my roles as a fan and scholar. Like my informants, I invest in creativity and free culture. I do not shy away from interventions with my subjects and progressive discussions on gender and sexuality. As an anime fan and science fiction enthusiast, I am well aware of the (gendered) communicative styles and social protocols within fandom. Since my early teens, I painstakingly articulated myself online through art and interaction. I engage in many fan practices and I also help organise the annual fan convention YaYCon, since 2010, that celebrates gender patterns in Japanese media. Geek feminism to me means a critical pursuit of media content and its social wealth together with an agenda for social change.

My study focuses on the female fandom of *Glee* fan fiction. With over 80.000 fan texts, *Glee* is the most popular television series on Fanfiction.net (15 October, 2012). *Glee* fan fiction draws a largely female demographic that came to the fore in online profiles. The anonymous fan authors who revealed their gender to me for the purpose of this research were all women as well. I believe that these gendered observations are not a norm but I still perceive them as an analytical context to explore the cultural backdrop of fan fiction. I followed the guidelines as formulated by fan scholars in the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* (2012) who recommend asking for permission to use fan works. I followed this guideline because the status of fan works—both in an ethical and legal sense—is liminal. I contacted the authors and asked them whether I could conduct an analysis of their work and use their nicknames. This also meant that I could not use some outstanding fan fiction because the author did not respond.

In my sampling, I used different media platforms and contacts. As Roberta Pearson (2012) argues, this multi-platform methodology is not unethical but rather a must in today's media landscape. Fan practices take place on different sites and platforms, and the same text might even be uploaded on various sites. The methodology of a fan scholar should reflect this heterogeneity. She/he should focus on social protocols that are characteristic of the fandom, rather than isolating traces of its lived online culture. While I did not restrict my sample to one media platform, the selected texts were all uploaded on the blogging platform LiveJournal. com. Here, the blog architecture allows readers to comment on the uploaded fan texts. While authors commonly do not modify the fan text, they do engage in interpretation with their readers.

The focus of this chapter is on three *Glee* texts. These three texts are selected based on their appraisal within the fan community. All three rank highly within TV Tropes—a renowned Wiki that collects the narrative tropes in media. Users of the site also collect and recommend their favourite fan fiction. I consider the three texts to be exemplary and representative of the literary qualities and genres of fan fiction. Other key criteria were the text's relations to the source text, the thematic qualities of the text, its coherence and the focalisation of the characters. The three texts narrate Kurt's queer identity and incorporate gay motives or, in fan terms, *slash*. While slash connotes erotic intimacy between men; the term *femmeslash* (also spelled *femslash*) is used to more specifically refer to fiction depicting sexual relations between women. Slash involves the queering of characters who are emotionally confronted with homosexual feeling (Jenkins 1992, Penley 1991, Pugh 2005). Slash emerged as an exploration of homosocial and latent homosexual texts in television and movies. While slash used to be based on subtext, modern shows such as *Glee* include gay characters, thereby problematizing the phenomenon of slash. By now, slash and femmeslash both provide complicated representations of gender and put emphases on different types of sexualities, including asexuality as well as same-sex sexuality.

To assure for internal coherence, the fan fiction that I selected mediates an important character in the series, namely the young homosexual Kurt Hummel. After his coming-out, Kurt is bullied by the closeted homosexual Dave Karofsky, and as a result leaves McKinley High to attend the all-male boarding school Dalton Academy. There, he joins The Warblers, a glee club that rivals with New Directions, where he meets his first boyfriend Blaine. The three stories explore the character of Kurt and some of the other members of New Directions. I conduct a narrative and intermedial analysis of the three fan works and I specifically explore their mediations in terms of focalization, genre and characterization.

Pick Up Where We Left: Narrating the Bully

Pick Up Where We Left (2011) by Lookninjas fills the blanks after Kurt is transferred to Dalton Academy. Dave Karofsky, the boy that bullied Kurt, decides to pay him a visit. Throughout the text, focalized by a confused Dave, the reader is unsure whether he wants to apologize to Kurt, intimidate him or whether he is possibly longing for him. Dave has to come to terms with his identity as gay but even at the end of the story, he cannot.

The title, *Pick Up Where We Left,* is an allusion to Amanda Palmer's song *Guitar Hero*. Palmer's song, which describes the game *Guitar Hero*, mediates depression and anger. It narrates the loneliness of the addressed gamer, portraying him as a false hero, who sits at home "making out to faces of death." The lyrics suggest that the game provides a deep, immersive context that is at once shallow and possibly a waste of energy. The bridge of the song builds up to: "I could save you baby but it isn't worth my time," thus abandoning the narratee, who resembles Dave Karofsky. The story opens as follows:

> Sooner or later, someone's gonna stop him. It hasn't happened yet, although he's been waiting for it for a long time. Waiting for a teacher to step in before he can slam the next kid into the lockers; waiting for Coach Beiste to throw him off the football team […]; waiting for his dad to do something more than shake his head and sigh when he comes home with another shitty report card.

The beginning of the fan text suggests that Dave has low self-esteem and that his negative acts are signals he sends to the outside world. The responsible adults that he addresses—all of them in a position of power—overlook him because they do not read his behaviour as it is meant, as being full of signals of self-destruction. The reader knows that Dave hopes to be stopped, as the excerpt above highlights. Though Dave is well-aware of his wrongdoings, he persists because there are no repercussions to his actions. Dave successfully manages to infiltrate the boarding school and confronts Kurt.

The characterization of Dave in the fan text is not that of a mere bully but reveals a character that projects his anger upon others. The narrative refers to him as "Karofsky" rather than Dave. The choice for his last name in part results from the source text in which the glee kids often refer to Dave as Karofsky to create a distance from him. It also closely resembles the language of *Glee*, in which the athletes or jocks—to which Dave belongs—often address each other through their last names. However, I propose that this stylistic device also stages Dave as a persona and stresses his inability to accept himself.

Similarly, the inadequate style of the narrative draws out Dave's ineptitude through chaotic sentences, curse words and casual indicators (e.g.: "yeah," "whatever"). The narrative tone supports his rudeness, anger but also his pretence and flaws. Despite this limited perspective, Dave's narration is clever on several occasions as he expresses unpopular insights about the glee club and reveals its fraught sentiments and dreams.

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

In the comment section, the readers of the blog appreciate that Dave's actions towards Kurt are not interpreted as romantic but rather as a type of queer projection. Whereas Kurt is comfortable with his homosexuality and is successful, Dave cannot acknowledge his desire and lashes out to Kurt as a result. Within *Glee* fandom, Dave's actions in the source text have led to interpretative conflicts rather than consensus. Some fans romantically invest in the relationship between Kurt and Dave, and develop this within their own slash fiction. They seek to explore Dave's desire and resolve the source text by narrating forgiveness and intimacy between the two characters. Other fans purposely do not want to do this and even dismiss romantic motives as false since they are not in line with the characters or with Dave's psychological state.

Though both readings have their own merits, the fans make clear distinctions between those that romantically support the pairing and those that closely rework their tensions (e.g.: possible forgiveness or friendship on the one hand, and intimidation on the other). *Pick Up Where We Left* suggests a more complex view. The intimidation of Dave is understood in this fan text as a pleasure of its own and reveals his motivations as slightly sadomasochistic. When Dave finally goes to Daltons to apologize to Kurt, this dark queerness can be read very clearly:

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

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

> "I'm *not -*" Karofsky's voice is too loud, and he cuts himself short before he even knows what he was going to say next. Not a fag? Not scared? They're both lies, and they both know it, even if Hummel's the only one who'll actually say it out loud. "You *are*," Hummel replies, and his voice

> is flat but his eyes are wide, glittering like he's about to cry or something, and his hands are shaking.

Dave apologizes to Kurt, but like he envisioned, Kurt only laughs and says that he cannot accept his gesture. Dave has come to Kurt to redeem himself but first he needs to accept who he is. One theme clearly suggests that Kurt is not ready to forgive him. Dave tries to atone for his deeds in the fan text by returning the wedding cake topper to Kurt, a symbol from the source text. In the TV series episode *Furt* (2011), Kurt attentively bought the centrepiece for his father's wedding but Dave taunts him by stealing the topper from him—a scene with much innuendo as he traces Kurt's chest and snatches the centrepiece. In the fan text, Dave returns the topper to Kurt who ultimately refuses this peace offering, upon which Dave aggressively breaks the topper. This act suggests that Dave's relationship with Kurt, but also with himself, is still fragmented and damaged. He is not at ease with himself. Although the author suggests in her comments that she does not perceive Dave's feelings towards Kurt to be romantic, symbols as this cake topper show that Kurt and Dave's struggle is deeply emotional and intimate.

The Lost Nightingale: Queer noir

The Lost Nightingale rewrites the popular teen drama to a mature crime story that stars Blaine—Kurt's love interest at Dalton—as a queer detective in 1940s Los Angeles. We meet Blaine as he is asked to solve Kurt's disappearance and we slowly learn about the detective's past through first-person narration and flashbacks. While Blaine is matured in the fan text, Kurt seems hardly any older than in *Glee*. Slowly the reader finds out that Dave Karofsky is behind Kurt's disappearance in an attempt to cover-up the crimes of his boss, Jesse St. James. When Blaine finds Kurt, their love story unravels parallel to the detective story. The ending is grim as Blaine admits his love for Kurt but lets him return to Ohio.

The Lost Nightingale (2010) takes place in a sort of post-war noir film landscape, thus depicting the social anxiety of urban life. The text deeply associates itself with early Hollywood cinema and its ideals. The characters Kurt and Rachel (one of the other New Direction's member in the TV series) have retained their ambition from the source text *Glee* to become stars, but now they mention as their idols people such as Bette Davis. The writing is specked with intertextual one-liners reminiscent of the nineteen forties movies. "Frail must not like you much, bub" (chapter 4), "Always with the Quips" (ibid.) and "Wise crack all you want, Gum

Shoe" (ibid.) are highly intermedial transfers of this use of language. Through these references, the text explicitly frames itself as part of a historical and cultural tradition. Blaine's narration in *The Lost Nightingale* echoes the sense of disenchantment characteristic of the noir genre (Silver & Ward, 1992). He describes the rottenness of the town and its characters.

> I leaned my head back and tried to clear my mind listening to the drone of the shower. After a while my eyes shut and I began to drift. Drift from car crashes that left innocents maimed. Drift from thugs who tied men to chairs and killed them. Drift from boy's with pretty faces and big problems (*The Lost Nightingale* 2010).

In the fan text, this dark tone is countered by romantic narration as Blaine describes his desire for Kurt. "Watching him go, I put a hand to my chest. My palm rose and fell with every breath. Still alive." Kurt is portrayed as fragile, an innocent in need of protection. "He placed a hand onto my arm. It felt like a stray eyelash" (ibid.). Blaine describes Kurt's skin as "ivory" (ibid.) which not only makes him seem fragile and pale, but also rich and precious. Though Blaine's narration signifies queer desire, his idolization of Kurt also purposely distances himself from a love that cannot be.

The motives of Kurt as frail and exotic are furthered by comparisons to birds. Kurt's first stage name is "Nightingale" (ibid., chapter 2) while the owner of the Pavarotti Club considers renaming him "The Black Bird" (ibid., chapter 6). Club Pavarotti refers to the name of the bird from *Glee*, named "Pavarotti" in honour of the famous opera singer. Pavarotti is the pet mascot of the Dalton student choir, the Warblers; and it carries much symbolic meaning in the series. Wes, one of the Warblers, explains to Kurt: "This bird is a member of an unbroken line of canaries who've been in Dalton since 1891. It's your job to take care of him, so he can live to carry on the Warbler legacy. Protect him. That bird is your voice." (*Glee* episode: "Special Education" 2011). The metaphoric linkage of the bird and the voice is significant. When the canary dies, shortly after The Warblers competed in the regional competition for show choirs, Kurt and Blaine are reminded of their relationship (*Glee* episode "Original Song" 2011). During the pet's funeral, Kurt sings The Beatles' *Blackbird* which the fan text alludes to.

Kurt's beauty is admired by Blaine as well as by Dave Karofsky. Similarly to the previous fan text discussed above, Karofsky is initially portrayed as an aggressive individual. The reader assumes that he is to be blamed for Kurt's disappearance. As Mercedes, the singer in night club The Fury, explains: "He'd work Kurt until his voice was hoarse and still want it again. Better. Louder. More" (*The Lost Nightingale,* Chapter 2).

Her last observations give an erotic and sadistic dimension to Kurt's singing practice. One night, Karofsky makes Kurt practice even longer than usual and Mercedes hints at sexual harassment. Karofsky battles against his feelings and kisses Kurt—an echo of the kiss scene in the TV series episode *Never Been Kissed* (2011), interpreted by some viewers as a threat and by others as repressed desire. The fan text explores Dave Karofsky's dark love but ultimately ends the motif romantically as Karofsky turns out to protect Kurt.

Homosexuality shapes the transgressive public sphere of *The Lost Nightingale* which emphasizes the dark aspects of modern urban life. In his analysis of the film *Double Indemnity* (1944), Barton Palmer notes that the public sphere in the genre of noir cinema is charged "by a desire for the illicit," ranging from alcoholic abuse to extramarital affairs (Palmer 1994, 52). Although these morals are reflected in *The Lost Nightingale*, which amongst others features alcohol addiction, its public sphere is characterized by an inability to perform desire rather than by a desire to escape from traditions. Homosexuality, for example, is only accepted in the gay night club, Pavarotti, a place that even Blaine is hesitant to enter.

The incorporation of a gay plot, and possible hate crime, connects the gay detective to the gay victim. Even though the erotic interest of the detective in the victim is nothing new in noir, the engendering of the victim as a gay male deconstructs the role of the female victim. Kurt's character is presented as an understanding lover that could possibly redeem the detective. Kurt is not portrayed as many heroines in noir that are "vicious, deadly, venomous or alcoholic" (Borde, Chaumeton, and Hammond 2002, 12). The role of Kurt is that of the "good woman," the one woman in noir detectives that is faithful, morally just and not promiscuous (ibid., 94). Except that now, the good woman is a man.

The focalization of the queer detective becomes a means to escape the anti-women sentiment common to noir. The portrayals of women in the fan text are generally favourable because the detective does not desire them and objectify them. The male gaze in *The Lost Nightingale* is directed at men rather than at women. The fan text does not only mediate relationships and events from *Glee*, by emphasizing queer desire, the text plays with and deconstructs the heterosexual genre topography of noir.

Mostverse: Friendship and asexuality

While the previous texts discussed Kurt's relationship with Karofsky, Miggy's *Mostverse* (2010) represents the rivalry between Kurt and Rachel in *Glee* and develops their relationship into an intimate friendship. Set

after graduation, *Mostverse* describes Rachel and Kurt's disappointments when moving to New York and the loss of contact with their former friends, while its sequel focuses on the beginning of their careers. *Mostverse* is a universe consisting of various stories that are all connected. While the stories are focalized by different characters, the butting friendship of Kurt and Rachel is a central motif.

The story begins as the *Glee* characters graduate. Rachel and Kurt are both accepted to schools in New York, Rachel at the classical performance school Julliard and Kurt at the Fashion Institute for Technology (F.I.T.). Since Rachel's school is quite expensive, she asks Kurt to move in together and he agrees. They hardly go out and they invest all of their time in their study. Both of their schools are demanding and among like-minded, ambitious individuals, they do not stand out as much anymore as they were in Ohio in the *Glee* narrative. Though Rachel and Kurt do not get along at first, they slowly become aware that they share many qualities, drives and ambitions. The plot swirls around break-ups and other severe themes, such as eating disorders, depression and possible sexual harassment. Eventually, both characters land a job and consider staying together and having a baby together as friends, not as lovers.

The fan fiction develops the relationship between Kurt and Rachel as portrayed in the first season of the TV series, in which they tolerate each other as best. In New York, the two behave awkwardly around each other. Though *Mostverse* is narrated in third person, the first stories are focalized more through Rachel and they emphasize her loneliness. Rachel is afraid that she is getting in Kurt's way and tries not to bother him. She is in his apartment, after all, and it is because of her expensive education that they have to move in together. She feels that she forced herself upon him. Eventually, Rachel realizes that they should communicate and bond as friends.

The two friends become more sociable by uploading movies to the online video sharing platform YouTube together but it is clear that Rachel fills her own void with these movies. She uses them to show that she does have friends and to remind her old friends of Kurt and herself. YouTube also fills the emptiness of her unsuccessful, lonely Manhattan life. From an intermedial perspective, this theme holds much meaning as these online videos are included in the written text and emphasize Rachel's interest in stardom. Making these movies is free from the pressure to excel and gives instant gratification, unlike school.

> Their sessions were so easy. They would practice performances, record them, and finally find a take they were pleased with. Up it went to YouTube. No auditions. No permission needed to step forward. And,

stupid as it was, Rachel looked at every single thumbs up that came in and it felt like a round of applause.' (*Most Changed since High School*, 2010).

This online presence on the YouTube and Facebook platforms helps Kurt and Rachel to stay in touch with their old friends who live elsewhere. Slowly, the two become better friends.

The characters' struggle is at the heart of this fan universe. One of the most emotional passages in the story is when Finn (Kurt's step-brother) notices Kurt's eating disorder. The pressure of school and his own perfectionism is getting to Kurt, and as a fashion designer he feels that he needs to look at his best. Kurt's problems have escaped Rachel's attention and she feels bad that she did not notice that her best friend was this seriously ill. Since Rachel focalizes the narrative, the disorder may also come as a surprise for the readers. Rachel explains the disorder to Finn as a result of their perfectionism: "We have to be perfect. The entire world will seek reasons to cast us aside" (ibid.).

The possibility of failure and the need to compensate through perfectionism is furthered in the fan fiction by the idea that relationships and self-images do not grow stronger but instead become more brittle. While the characters began as confident young people, they struggle as they grow older. Rachel and Kurt also grow more dependent of each other:

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

While the characters are unhappy, they make little changes for the pursuit of their dreams and thus remain immature in their social lives. Their psychology—Kurt's eating problems, and later his anxiety about sexual harassment and Rachel's loneliness and depression—reflects the bitter truths and harshness of their lives. Kurt and Rachel endure each other's support only because they share similar positive and negative character traits. Nonetheless, Rachel realizes that this relationship is insufficient for them to mature and that they need to look at other "good things" too (*Least Likely Couple*, 2010). The fan fiction initially ended with this insecurity about the characters' future, until Miggy decided to make this sequel to the popular text.

The new ending of *Mostverse* closes on a happier note. Rachel realizes that no one understands her better than Kurt, and she suggests that they

might have a baby together. The premise of asexual romance between a heterosexual girl and homosexual man goes beyond common paradigms of family, gender and sexuality. In sum, *Mostverse* furthers some of the textual motives present in *Glee*: friendship between outsiders, dreams and ambitions, popularity among peers, the meaning of social media in everyday life, and the pressure of education. Through careful development, Miggy's versions of the characters gain credibility and make them advance from rivals to possible co-parents. *Mostverse* does not only mediate and continue *Glee* but effectively deconstructs its teen ideals as the characters are forced to grow up.

Conclusion

I have focussed on *Glee* fan fiction as exemplary of the female space of media fandom. Through the concept of intermediality, I analysed three fan works and their relations to the original *Glee* text. The three narratives show that fan fiction cannot be analysed as a mere derivative genre. The repertoires and literary strategies of fan authors are diverse and cannot be taken at face value. These fan authors create innovative portrayals of gender and sexuality as they integrate coming-out problems, historical queerness or portray the possibility of asexual family life. However, no matter the transformation, the authors show that the characters are still themselves in these new settings and retain their recognizable qualities and histories.

Critically, this creative process is transformative, which means that some aspects of the source text might be lost in the mediation process. For instance, the fan texts focus on the interiority of the characters and their emotional lives but are not invested as much in the comedy or musical aspects of *Glee*. Moreover, fan fiction flourishes within a particular media space—an online domain that is characterized by interactivity with the audience. The influence of fandom and appraisal of fans directly influence the text. It is no wonder that these representative fan fictions flourish around the most popular character Kurt and value queer fiction, which is a dominant genre within fandom. It also seems that especially *Mostverse* has benefited from the interaction with its readers. After the original ending, the author wrote a sequel that provided better prospects for the characters instead of an insecure future.

Within fan fiction, geek feminism emerges in two ways. First, it signifies a concern with representation as fans establish new portrayals of well-known characters. Their attention to gender and sexuality creates a vital platform where we see how audiences interpret fiction and construct

new images. Second, geek feminism is also a methodological stance, one that effectively connects the endeavours of scholars, like myself, and informants, like the fan fiction writers that I am studying. My dialogue with authors such as Kelly and artists such as ZephyrianBoom has shaped the ethics of my research as well as my critical stance. Rather than distancing myself from the fans, I showed that we have similar interests and share a common critical agenda. For me, conducting quality research means paying attention to regimes of exclusion. I learned from my research on the audience that the starting point for any feminist scholar should be to include her subjects, share their space and focalize their concerns; that is to say, proper feminist analysis can only advance through dialogue.

References

Bacon-Smith, Camille. 1992. *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth, Series in contemporary ethnography*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Borde, Raymond, Etienne Chaumeton, and Paul Hammond. 2002. *A Panorama of American Film Noir, 1941-1953*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.

Bucholtz, Mary. 2002. "Gendered Practices in Language." In *Gendered Practices in Language*, edited by S. Benor, M. Rose, D. Sharma, J. Sweetland, and Q. Zhang. Stanford: CSLI Publications.

Ellison, Hannah. 2013. "Submissives, Nekos and Futanaris: a Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of the Glee Kink Meme." *Participations* 10(1).

Hayles, N. Katherine. 2004. "Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis." *Poetics Today* 25(1):67-90.

Helbig, Jörg, ed. 1998. *Intermedialität: Theorie und Praxis eines interdisziplinären Forschungsgebiets*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag.

Hellekson, Karen, and Kristina Busse. 2006. *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co.

Jenkins, Henry. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture, Studies in Culture and Communications*. London; New York: Routledge.

—. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Lothian, A., K. Busse, and R.A. Reid. 2007. "Yearning Void and Infinite Potential: Online Slash Fandom as Queer Female Space." *English Language Notes* 45(2):104-11.

Meyer, Ulrike, and Richard Simanowski. 2006. *Transmedialität: Zur Ästhetik paraliterarischer*. Verfahren: Wallstein.

Nakamura, Lisa. 2012. "Queer Female of Color: The Highest Difficulty Setting There Is? Gaming Rhetoric as Gender Capital." *Ada: a Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* 1.

Palmer, R. Barton. 1994. *Hollywood's Dark Cinema: The American Film Noir, Twayne's Filmmakers Series*. New York; Oxford: Twayne; Maxwell Macmillan International.

Pearson, Roberta. 2012. "'Good Old Index'; or, the Mystery of the Infinite Archive." In *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom: Essays on the BBC Series*, edited by Louisa Ellen Stein and Kristina Busse. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Penley, Constance. 1991. "Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics, and Technology." In *Technoculture*, edited by Constance Penley and Andrew Ross. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Pugh, Sheenagh. 2005. *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context*. Bridgend: Seren.

Rajewsky, I. O. 2005. "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation." *Intermédialités* 6:43-64.

Fiction

Lookninjas. 2011. *Pick Up Right Where We Left*.
  http://lookninjas.livejournal.com/123513.html. (accessed October 15, 2012).

Miggy. 2010. *Mostverse*.
  http://miggy.livejournal.com/851279.html#mostverse
  (accessed October 15, 2012).

Mothergoddamn. 2010. *The Lost Nightingale*.
  http://goddamnwrite.livejournal.com/3048.html (accessed October 15, 2012).