Can Fanfiction Authors Transcend the Binary?

Male homoerotic relationships in the Harry Potter Universe.

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1. Introduction:

People are divided into strict categories based on gender expectation. In this, women are often depicted as the opposite of men: while men are independent and strong, women are dependent and weak. This is a patriarchal structure created by societal norms that expects people to behave in certain ways. The patriarchy is unconsciously reflected in our culture – including every form of media. It becomes a reflection of how we look at the world and how the world looks at us.

In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, Laura Mulvey’s discusses how heteronormative standards in film reflect social values: “film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual differences which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle.” The film industry caters to what is known as the male gaze, which removes the control of output for the female voice and eyes (833). Women have traditionally been excluded voices without a platform for exploring anything beyond what the patriarchal mainstream finds relevant.

The fanfiction platform means that women can take control over the output in order to explore the female gaze and go beyond traditional gender roles. Men become the object of women’s sexual pleasure and fantasies; they are turned into objects of female sexuality. Mulvey writes, “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (837). This is possibly reversed in the realm of fanfiction, which means the male gaze can become the female gaze in female exploration of male sexuality.

The gaze was created by society and therefore needs to be transformed by it. Fanfiction is an open space for anyone to create and introduce the possibility of a new perspective. The lack of outside control can allow ideas of a fair world to exist within the written words. By putting two males in a relationship, female (or male) writers can explore the power struggle between the characters in relation to the heteronormative standards forced on them by society.

The largest fandom to produce fanfiction is Harry Potter, where the most popular subgenre focuses on a homoerotic relationship between Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy. Thus, the texts show a substantial amount of interest in exploring male homosexual desire. The aim of this essay is to investigate whether fanfiction allows for liberation by disrupting traditional gender roles and if it can transcend the binary categorization of sex. This will be done by looking at the transformation of a heteronormative relationship into a homosexual one.
2. The History of Fanfiction:

Fanfiction originated in the science fiction fandom during the 1920s and 30s. The fandoms, “The collective term for fans and their activities”, started as groups as early as in the 20s, but the fanfiction writing came first during the 30s, in what was then called *fanzine*, an “amateur fan magazine” (Verba 1).

From there, fanfiction developed with the airing of the series *Star Trek* in the late 1960s. The first fanzine dedicated to this fandom was called *Spockanalia* and released in 1967, in time with the airing of season two. The magazine was first intended as a *one-shot*, which is a text that is planned to only have one issue (Barker n.pag.), but later this changed and *Spockanalia 2* was released a year later (Verba 1). The magazine kept releasing further issues and as popularity grew the breadth of the fandom increased. By 1977, ten years after *Spockanalia*, there had only been fanzines about *Star Trek*, but now the interest in other fandoms, such as *Star Wars*, had increased (Verba 35). However, the greatest change for fanfiction came with the internet. People could now publish their work online, and as accessibility increased, so did the number of stories published. The print fanzines started to disappear and by the early 2000s the concept of printed fanfiction had mostly disappeared from people’s minds (Verba 79), to now be wholly associated with online communities.

The possibility to be anonymous online makes it difficult to find information on fanfiction demographics. When creating an account for a specific fanfiction website, it is rarely necessary to add any personal information. Surveys conducted can therefore only use the information that people have chosen to provide. Even though information is limited, a survey by Charles Sendlor from 2010 estimated that 80% of all participants are female. The same survey also found that the average age of fanfiction authors was between 13 and 17, but noted that details concerning age are seldom shared (Sendlor n.pag.). This evidence suggests that fanfiction is mainly a platform for girls and young women.

Fanfiction is used to explore a current tale’s world further, rather than the current story or plot. Writers create stories which fit their desires rather than the original plotline. For example, Marianne Macdonald explains in her study on fanfiction in “Harry Potter and the Fan Fiction Phenom”: “the relationships between two characters are often altered or made more sexually explicit”. According to her research, conducted in 2006, “the most popular theme of fanfiction is Romance” (2). Macdonald comments on the wide range of eroticism in fanfiction, which can range “from tender romance with mildly erotic scenes to extreme and
sometimes violent pornography” (2). She also observes that some stories’ main focus is on the eroticism and has very little to no plot outside of that (4).

As stated above, the anonymity of the writers makes it hard to pinpoint the exact demographics of the fanfiction community. According to MacDonald, “[t]he general assumption within the community seem to be that the typical slash writer, ”Fanfiction depicting a sexual and/or romantic relationship or situation between two characters of the same gender” (Urban Dictionary), is female, in her mid-twenties, and heterosexual” (2). To get some grasp of the accuracy of this, MacDonald sent out a questionnaire to 25 different writers of slash fanfiction who wrote in English – she received answers from 10 of these (2). The information provided revealed the following:

All ten respondents were female, and the median age was 24, with the youngest respondent being 17 and the oldest 32. When it comes to sexual orientation, however, the common assumption that slashers are heterosexual is incorrect. Only four of ten describes themselves as heterosexual, and of the remaining six, three described themselves as bisexual, two as gay, and one as having no sexual preference. (3)

When asked why they wrote slash specifically, apart from their love of reading and writing, the answers fell into two categories: 1. The mere fascination of homoerotic relations between two men. 2. The politically motivated objection to a lack of homosexual representation in mainstream media (3).

When discussing the choice of Harry Potter fanfiction the respondents answered that J. K. Rowling’s story contains a lot of gaps, and that almost no sexual relations are explored. One respondent argues: “while there’s not a lot of overt homoerotic subtext, there’s a lot of possibility. Very few of the large and interesting supporting casts are confirmed heterosexual”. Another suggests: “[Rowling] never lets any of her characters have relationships (…) I think she does it on purpose so the reader could come to his or her own conclusion.” And finally another one sums it up quite clearly, “You have to admit, there are an awful lot of single men and women hanging about in the Harry Potter universe seemingly without spouses or visible love interests” (3). Furthermore, the respondents also argue that the series encourages a gay reading.
Harry discovers that he’s different from his non-wizard family at the beginning of puberty, when he is eleven. His foster family is deeply ashamed of his magical abilities and terrified the neighbours will find out. Harry’s foster father even refuses to discuss his tendencies in Sorcerer’s Stone: “I will not tolerate mention of any abnormality under my this roof!” Furthermore, the wizards keep to themselves, have a secret world about which non-wizards know nothing, have their own language and social codes, and tend to recognize each other in crowds of non-wizards. (3)

One character who easily lends himself to a gay reading is Remus Lupin. He lives a secret life as a werewolf, and when he is exposed, he resigns from his position as a teacher at Hogwarts because he knows that the parents of the students will not agree to their children being taught by a werewolf. It is extremely hard for him to get a job because of discrimination against him, and there is an immediate assumption that lycanthropy is something evil and he must therefore work together with the dark forces. MacDonald writes, “Remus has done nothing wrong but get bitten when he was a small boy (the age when many gays discover their difference)” the section is then summed up with a quote from a respondent, “He’s a werewolf and the Ministry counts him as a dangerous minority.” (4), drawing parallels to the long prejudice against homosexuals in today’s heterosexist society.

In slash fiction, the most popular pairing for Harry in the fandom is his fellow classmate and enemy Draco Malfoy, on which this analysis will keep its focus. However, it would be interesting to acknowledge that the second most popular pairing in Harry Potter slash, when this research was conducted, is Harry and his Potions teacher Severus Snape. Both characters provide a contrast to Harry in which he embodies light and they embody darkness. They are both perceived to destroy things for Harry and are the two characters that make his life at Hogwarts harder than it could have been. According to MacDonald, writers choose these two characters because they “undoubtedly [relate] to the sheer intensity of emotion – albeit negative emotions” (4). When it comes to the transformation of hatred to love, since this step could a rather vast step for some readers, there have been two known approaches. One is, as discussed before, to turn the relationship into mere porn with little to no plot or action. The most common one, however, is to turn the hate the characters have for each other into an equally intense feeling of love or lust.

The story of Draco and Harry as lovers has many obstacles. One is the mere fact that Draco’s father is a Death Eater and one of Voldemort’s primary lackeys, and that Draco himself later begins to work for Voldemort. Harry and Draco are contrasted against each
“Draco is rich, spoiled, occasionally cruel, and frequently petty (…) Harry, by contrast, is poor, generally well-meaning, and noble.” “Draco is grey-eyed and fair while Harry is green-eyed and dark” (4). Draco works for the bad side, whereas Harry works for the good. MacDonald states that according to writers of fanfiction, “Draco’s father is dark, sadistic, and powerful, so what choice did Draco really have? Rowling repeatedly shows Draco as trapped in a situation from which he cannot extricate himself.” (4).
3. Previous Research:

Even though the amount of fanfiction published is vast, it has only recently become of interest on an academic level. Previous research is limited but has increased in recent years with books such as *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *After*, two fanfiction novels that have been officially published as works of fiction. It has remained an understudied field of research, which Maria Santos discusses, in her paper “Writing About Harry Potter Boinking: The Reality of Fantasy in Pornographic Fanfiction” from 2014. She claims that even though this type of fanfiction was previously dismissed by scholars of pornography, recent studies have shown there is an empowering factor to this sexual exploration, something that now is contributing to the increase in scholarly interest in fanfiction as a respected platform (5).

She opens her paper with a discussion of the empowering aspects of fanfiction, showing how the negative portrayal of fans had brought, as early as in 1988, scholar Henry Jenkins to challenge these notions. Jenkins believe that the exploration of fictional works in different ways allow fans to express themselves in ways that reflect their own lives. In relation to slash, Santos argues that it allows participants to find answers about their exploration of sexuality and gender. It is a way to explore male sexuality beyond social constructs but also a way in which female writers can find a safe space that symbolizes a search for security (18).

Santos concludes that fans use fantasy and realism as a combination that affects their lives outside of the fandom in a positive way. The change has not only happened in how to look at the platform, but also how to look at those using it. It is no longer a lonely, masturbating teenager behind the text, but interactive participants who creatively challenge taboo subjects and set ideas of the traditional stereotypes, both in media consumption and in sexuality and gender roles (49). From another perspective, Santos argues that “Slash fiction can be seen as wish fulfillment for queer fans that want to see their orientation represented in popular media.” With a lack of representation in the heteronormative mainstream, fanfiction allows for all sort of diversity (21).

Sigrid Sindhuber continues the discussion of homosexual representation by discussing the subject of homophobia in her paper “Slashing Harry Potter – the phenomenon of border-transgression in fanfiction” from 2010. She splits it into collective and individual homophobia: as a reflection of oppression in the magical world or as a struggle in an individual character. Sindhuber acknowledges that these phobias are sometimes completely excluded from the story, which gives readers the possibility to create their own tolerant world; otherwise it is used to reflect homophobia present in today’s society. She also enters the realm
of taboo subjects, such as incest and rape, ranging from stories where the Weasley twins are more than just brothers to Draco being given to Severus Snape by Voldemort as a slave and, therefore, used for sex against his will (91-103). Sindhuber shows how fanfiction pushes boundaries and explores taboos established by society, but, unlike this essay, she does not investigate how the authors’ influences and experiences contribute to the stories.

In contrast to this, Erica Haugtvedt, author of “Harry Potter and Fanfiction: Filling in the Gaps” from 2009, puts the focus of her discussion on the reader turned author. She argues that fanfiction brings forward “our psychological tendency to imagine beyond what is written in order to specify and debate the events “behind” the text. Fanfiction squeezes into discursive gaps in order to build further, different interpretations.” (38). She indicates that fanfiction cannot be separated from its readers since it is the experiences of these readers that give the stories their meaning. Without the readers’ own experiences, it would not be possible to interpret the narrative written by the author (7). She concludes her essay by saying “Fanfiction is evidence of our imagination” and therefore also a representation of the world in which authors develop (38).
4. Aim and Approach:

As shown, fanfiction as a platform for the exploration of individuals’ own fantasies opens a universe for disrupting the ordinary and transgressing what is normally considered socially acceptable. I have chosen to investigate the Harry Potter universe, as it is one of the largest fanfiction-producing fandoms, and to focus solely on the fan-favorite relationship that occurs between Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy, to narrow it down. I will analyze the positioning of the characters in relation to gender roles and stereotypes with the help of four short stories which focus on this homoerotic relationship. The aim of this essay is to investigate whether or not fanfiction as a platform allows for liberation by disrupting traditional gender roles and if it can transcend the binary categorization of sex. This will be done by looking at the re-creation of a heteronormative relationship into a homosexual one.

To do this I will use the perspective of three different types of criticism: feminism in correlation with queer theory will introduce the perspective of the female body and how it is positioned in today’s society. I want to investigate if the homosexual relationship is defined by two opposing gender stereotypes, dominant and submissive, understood in terms of masculine and feminine, or if the power struggle in a two-male relationship allows for further development in each character’s dimensional depth. I will do this by looking at portrayals of a homosexual relationship from feminist and queer points of view.

The third theory will be reader-response, as fanfiction has created a space where reader becomes writer. By becoming an active participant in the development of an already exciting story, how does the new “co-author” introduce taboo and norm-breaking into an unfiltered platform?

4.1. The Woman as Other

Society has created distinctions between male and female that is defined by their bodies - the female as the weaker body. A woman’s body is defined by its sex because of the danger Simone de Beauvoir defines as “slavery under reproduction” in her book The Second Sex, whilst men’s bodies do not oppose their own existence through the reproduction system the way female bodies do. De Beauvoir claims: “Just like the man, the woman is her body, but her body is something other than herself” – the woman is other (64-67). Earlier philosophers, like Aristotle and Thomas of Aquino, have in their philosophical works treated the female sex as a continuation of the paradigm set up in the Bible’s story of Adam and Eve. They state that the woman is and should be perceived as an incomplete man. She is defined in relation to man
and will, therefore, be incomplete without him; she becomes what de Beauvoir defines as “the second sex” (26).

In *Gender Trouble* from 1990, Judith Butler refers to French feminist Luce Irigaray’s theory that there is only one sex, the masculine, which creates its own identity through the production of the “Other” (18). Butler continues with Monique Wittig’s argument that “the category of sex is, under the conditions of compulsory heterosexuality, always feminine (the masculine remaining unmarked and, hence, synonymous with ‘universal’).” (18). Though different in their linguistic definitions, both of them correlate to de Beauvoir’s theory that male is the absolute and women, therefore, become a reflection for male identification. In relation to these theories, and Wittig’s phrasing, Butler quotes de Beauvoir: “Gender is the linguistic index of the political opposition between the sexes. Gender here is used in the singular because indeed there are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine, the ‘masculine’ not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine, but the general.” (20). To nuance these, Butler adds: “The various explanatory models offered here suggest the very different ways in which the category of sex is understood depending on how the field of power is articulated.” (18). She continues by questioning this notion, as it would mean that sex would be “a self-identical being” (18). The concept is hidden because language “conceals the fact that ‘being’ a gender is fundamentally impossible” which means it would linguistically support the binary system as the “true index”, something Butler disagrees with (19).

In relation, Jacques Lacan changes the discussion by giving his perspective on the social structure that outlines and defines our society when he asks how, in relation to sex and gender, this “being” is established and set apart through the practices of the “paternal economy” (43). The presumption of the socially constructed law that defines human sexuality creates the binary that brings this otherness. Lacan, on the other hand, continues this discussion by changing the signifying language to either being the phallus or having the phallus. In correlation to the other theorists, being the phallus is being the object – the other – and having the phallus creates a position of being defined by that ownership. The distinction is made because by having the phallus the masculine is defined as the omnipotent gender. By a woman being the phallus she becomes the definer of which the phallus is confirmed. Thus, to find the having versus the being in this world one can ask “What or who is it that signifies what or whom in this ostensibly crosscultural affair?” (44).
In applying these theories to the short stories, I will examine if the female as other and less than male is used to describe one or both of the characters. I will examine if female characteristics are used in order to move the male body into a homosexual relationship, thus redefining traditional gender roles and perhaps revealing the institutionalized norms in the unconsciousness of the reader.

4.2. Transcending the Binary

De Beauvoir claims that women have been isolated in their otherness and have therefore never been able to escape the definitions placed on them. For example, a woman is sensual because men have used her body for pleasure. In *Gender, Sex and Sexuality – Contemporary Psychological Perspectives* from 1994, Gerda Siann illustrates that even though women have fought wars, modern culture has excluded women from certain activities deemed less suitable for the female body, which has created opposition in the definition of the sexes. Women have “the attributes of compassion and passivity, men the attributes of aggressiveness, activity and curiosity.” (89) These are what Lois Tyson refers to as traditional gender roles. She explains that “traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive (81). According to Tyson, these definitions need to be deconstructed since the opposition they are positioned in is false. Gender and/or sex cannot be placed as opposites (90).

Wittig argues that the category of sex would dissolve with the destruction of “heterosexual hegemony.” She argues for the destruction of “sex” so that women can become part of the universal (Butler 19-20). Butler continues: “Wittig refers to ‘sex’ as a mark that is somehow applied by an institutionalized heterosexuality, a mark that can be erased or obfuscated through practices that effectively contest that institution.” (26). According to Wittig, breaking the compulsory heterosexuality that signifies the binary is the only way for homosexual desire to exist. In relation, Butler argues: “The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and the differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire.” (22-23). In other words, the binary excludes all forms of sex, gender, and desire that do not exist within that construction. But, Butler then continues, if gender is separate from sex, then there is no need for gender to apply to the binary of sex. She further argues that the notion of binary sex as biologically natural automatically reduces binary gender to the same idea, thus questioning the notion of binary altogether (137-141).
She proceeds to say that if gender is something one becomes, that equals something one can never be, and adds: “gender is itself a kind of becoming or activity . . . a kind of cultural/corporeal action that requires a new vocabulary that institutes and proliferates present participles of various kinds, resignifiable and expansive categories that resist both the binary and the substantializing grammatical restrictions on gender.” (112). In relation to this, Wittig claims that a lesbian is not a woman, therefore disrupting the binary construction. A woman is only defined by the heterosexual opposition to man and a lesbian does therefore not fulfill the otherness of the female. This is what Wittig refers to as the third gender – one can choose to become neither man nor woman, male nor female, thus existing outside the binary, becoming a third (113). “To be lesbian or gay is, for Wittig, no longer to know one’s sex, to be engaged in a confusion and proliferation of categories that makes sex an impossible category of identity.” (122). This would, in the end, entail that by removing oneself from the binary of sex, one would remove oneself from the power of category and therefore the power of hierarchy. Butler disagrees, arguing that

For power to be withdrawn, power itself would have to be understood as the retractable operation of volition; indeed, the heterosexual contract would be understood to be sustained thorough a series of choices (…) If power is not reduced to volition, however, and the classical liberal and existential model of freedom is refused, then power-relations can be understood, as I think they ought to be, as constraining and constituting the very possibilities of volition. Hence, power can be neither withdrawn nor refused, but only redeployed. (124)

In line with Butler, Michel Foucault argues that changing the system of power would mean to change one discourse for another and, therefore, transcending the binary would create a new system of oppression (Hartsock, 170). What Butler instead proposes is that the repetition of power, even though a repetition, is a question of how to repeat the discourse and at the same time replace the social gender norms, taking it one step further (Butler 148).

By applying this to the stories, I will investigate if the writers can create stories that go beyond traditional gender roles to make the characters transcend beyond the binary and become what Wittig describe as the third gender, since they can no longer function within societal norms. If this is accomplished, the writer might portray the possibility that can come from disrupting the defining qualities of a heteronormative society.
4.3. Power

In “Foucault on Power: A theory of women?” Nancy Hartsock introduces the subject of power in relation to gender by stating that the answer to the question “seems to be self-evident: Power is associated firmly with the male and masculinity.” (157). In depicting otherness, Hartsock references Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized* as a metaphor for the situation women are in. Much like the woman as other, the colonized reflects the colonizer and is therefore described only by what he or she is not. Hartsock draws attention to the similarities to de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and applies the theory to show the similarity in how turning sex or race into otherness is to create a position of power defined by the lack in the created subordinate. She raises the point Memmi makes about how the other becomes opaque. The consistent perspective of the dominant colonizer or the masculine gender makes it interesting how, after years of close encounters, the subordinate other is still a question of mystery – “the colonized must indeed be very strange, if he remains so mysterious and opaque after years of living with the colonizer.” (160). The separation of people that has created power for one part, in the case of this essay the masculine sex and gender, has led to isolation in different positions. Male has become the most powerful and is therefore continually reconfirming its own fundament.

The male gaze introduced in Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” reflects how separation between genders leads to power differences, which can be continually supported by constructed social norms that become a part of the underlying normal. Power becomes a weapon in performing power – it becomes a cycle that reconfirms its own social norms. The male gaze marks the way the patriarchal world finds pleasure in narrative cinema – how heteronormative standards in films are reflections of social values. Mulvey comments “film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual differences which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle.” The film industry is created for the male gaze and has therefore removed the control of output for female voices and eyes (833). The exclusion of the female expression is parallel to the situation of otherness. Her voice has been silenced by male oppression. By actively choosing to disrupt these narrative norms, films can potentially shift the male gaze. If women take control over the output, the female gaze can be further developed. This would mean a power shift where men become the subject of women’s sexual pleasure and fantasies and are turned into the object of female sexuality. As mentioned above, Mulvey argues: “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and
passive/female.” (837). In actively reconstructing the narrative and thus deconstructing those norms that now hold and reconfirm power as an omnipotent male narrative – both as a voice and as a reflection of reality – the male gaze might become the female gaze in the female exploration of male sexuality, thus, in the end, redefining the power discourse. If the writers of fan fiction succeed, the change in sexual pleasure into something beyond oppressive powers might equalize both narratives and preferably open up for gazes beyond the binary to exist in a space of equality.

4.4. Reader-response theory

Reader-response theory exists in many versions, with different critics creating their own versions, as with all fields of discourse. But, generally, reader-response criticism builds its foundation on the readers’ interpretation of the written word. A text cannot be understood only by itself, but through the experience of the reader reading – it is through the mind of the reader that the text gets its meaning (Tompkins ix).

Stanley E. Fish writes, in his essay Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics for Jane P. Tompkins’ introductory collection of essays to reader-response criticism:

If at this moment someone were to ask, ‘what are you doing?’ you might reply, ‘I am reading,’ and thereby acknowledge the fact that reading is an activity, something you do. No one would argue that the act of reading can take place in the absence of someone who reads – how can you tell the dance from the dancer? (70)

Fish continues with the argument that a text, two-dimensional at most – either just a given fact or imposing a question in the text itself – is lifted by the reader as the words are read. The mind of the reader is creating something with every word inhaled, and behind every word is a question of its third dimension – only found in the defining psyche of the reader. Fish asks: “The concept is simply the rigorous and disinterested asking of the question, what does this word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, chapter, novel, play, poem, do?” (73). The answer is found in the relationship between words as they generate meaning in the reader’s mind.

Additionally, Louise Rosenblatt’s theory on reader-response criticism develops Fish’s argument by connecting the reader to his or her emotions and memories. The associations the reader makes when reading the text are based on interpretations founded on experience. Wolfgang Iser explained this phenomenon as determinate meaning and indeterminate
meaning. The first one is what was earlier stated as the first and second dimension of the text, “the facts of the text, certain events in the plot or physical descriptions clearly provided by the words on the page” (Tyson 165). The latter is the “third dimension”, where gaps or uncertainty in the text invite readers to create their own interpretations. Although Fish would argue that there is no need for gaps in the text, but that stated facts offer holes in themselves, there is always another dimension to the stated. Similarly, this will later happen in Iser’s and Rosenblatt’s theories as well, although in a different way. The anticipation of the determinate meaning will become indeterminate as more and different perspectives are continuously introduced to the reader— the determinate will then become indeterminate, in the end giving the text its meaning as the reader offers the third dimension (Tyson 166).
5. Analysis:

The analysis will be divided into five sections. The first one will introduce the reader and the significance this reader turned writer has in relation to the stories. After this, the next four sections will contain introductions and analyses of each of the four short stories chosen.

5.1 The Reader

If the text can never be defined without its reader, then every text will portray a different truth in every reading. Fanfiction becomes a platform where every reader’s truth is discussed. It is through an examination of these interpretations one can find on what experiences and psychological structures these created stories are based. Haugtvedt writes, in reference to H. Porter Abbott, that a text is never complete without its reader. It cannot be completely explanatory in its narrative, which means that the reader’s background and experience is needed “in order to make sense of the narratives we encounter” (Haugtvedt 7). And as Rosenblatt discusses, the reader will go into the text with an anticipation of the text itself, that will, throughout the text, become meaningful through the reader's perspective (Tyson 166).

Therefore, since the reader cannot be excluded from the text, this new reader turned fanfiction author cannot either. The text will, in itself, become a reflection of the reader’s mind. By analyzing a text’s reflection of society, the analysis will in part be a reflection of the unconscious norms within every reader.

In the survey conducted by MacDonald’s, the demographics of slash showed a median age of 24, varying in sexual preference, revealing that there is a lack of female voices in society (3). Fanfiction becomes a reflection of what a female audience might want since the male gaze has traditionally controlled the output in media. The institutionalized compulsory heterosexuality allows for little exploration for anyone outside of the norm, while fan fiction enables those silenced voices expressing their wants in a safe place. As mentioned above, in her survey, when MacDonald asked why the participants wrote fanfiction, the answers were split into two main points: the first one the sheer fascination with a homoerotic relationship between two men, and the second one a political stance because of the lack of representation of homosexual desire in mainstream media (3). The female gaze must fight for a place in the mainstream media, a place controlled by heterosexual male power, and through fanfiction more room is given to the feminine expression.

In the discussion of why the participants chose Harry Potter the main argument was that lack of sexual relationships in the story opens up the possibility for the reader’s own
interpretation. They said that the story contains a lot of gaps – the text provides little determinate meaning in relation to its characters' sexual feelings. The novels, therefore, provide a lot of indeterminate meaning from which the reader can extrapolate (3). This response to the text has created a platform where readers can discuss their own interpretations, and, as Santos stated, a place where they are allowed to break down power structures and experience a safety outside of the patriarchy (18).

J.K. Rowling’s outing of Headmaster Albus Dumbledore as a homosexual man confirms a greater sexual diversity within the Harry Potter universe than had previously been supposed, which, in correlation to the stated lack of sexual exploration and feelings, allows for a queer reading. Dumbledore’s sexuality is ambiguous and can be found if one truly reads between the lines, which also allows the reader to find evidence where they believe it to be. The fanfiction platform allows the reader to continually explore these aspects separated from the mainstream media and the reader can, in writing fanfiction, freely and anonymously choose taboo exploration without any judgment or consequences. The body of the character can be positioned in different ways depending on the desired investigation. This might also allow for the female gaze to be explored outside the control of mainstream media.

5.2. Two Pink Drops:
This story is “Two Pink Drops” by sdk from 2014 (it will be referred to as Two Drops). The story is set in Hogwarts after the war, and Harry and Draco have been placed together as potion partners – this is where the story begins. It establishes Draco as the one in power right away and uses Harry as the object for moving the story forward. In the story, feminine traits are created by a potion to remove the obstacle of how to establish a relationship without anyone becoming less masculine and therefore losing their position of power. This becomes problematic since feminine traits are used as a gateway for the two males to transcend the binary without losing their definitions as masculine and powerful. It reifies cultural concepts of gender and sex.

The opening description of the characters' different traits shows an immediate placement of gender roles. Draco is described as working in full concentration: “Draco’s face, which was screwed up in concentration as he poured their completed potion into the glass.” (sdk). He is not breaking his focus on the assignment and is therefore painted as a hard-working and determined character. Harry is the accident-prone one who creates the situation that initiates the story: “Unfortunately tipping the [love potion] he was holding” (sdk). His clumsiness puts
him in a position where he needs to be taken care of; he becomes uncontrollable due to the love potion, making him emotional and thus irrational. As his feelings become his main motivator and logical thoughts become illogical, his acts are based on irrational feelings, a feminine characteristic, whereas Draco’s acts are based on rational thinking, a masculine characteristic.

The story is moved forward through Harry’s clumsiness, but instead of using Harry as an active agent in going beyond the original characters’ power play the author uses the love potion to avoid disrupting the masculinity originally found in both male characters. Draco is, through his actions, portrayed as a man in control: “Harry didn't know how Draco managed to get them excused from class, and he didn't much care as long as Draco didn't stop touching him” (sdk). Draco is handling the consequences of Harry’s irrational behavior with logical thinking and self-control. Harry, in turn, is only motivated by his uncontrollable desire; he is overwhelmingly emotional and therefore female in his performance of an overly passionate character. But, since a force outside of his control creates his desire, he is not responsible for his behavior. The female characteristics that define him in this state are therefore placed on the potion, not Harry. The potion that controls Harry’s mind and body becomes the female that makes him act the way he does. Harry himself is not weak, nor female, since he has been made into a victim of his emotions. The potion is therefore the female in this situation and both males still maintain their power.

Instead of communication, there needs to be a medium through which their love or desire can be brought to attention. Because of their previous hatred and rejection of each other, something must be used as a catalyst for the desire to take shape. As MacDonald stated earlier, the storyline is often created in one or two ways (4). Here the intense hate they had for each other in the original story get turned into an equally intense feeling of lust. A common way to get to this point, Sindhuber explains, is through, as in this story, potions, magical accidents or bonding. She writes: “a forced bond is a useful trick within a narrative, as it results in more plausible ways and explanations on how two characters – formerly enemies or friends – overcome their issues and develop their relationship” (82-83). The potion allows the characters to move from enemies to lovers without disrupting their original roles as males of power. The potion's power over Harry becomes the catalyst.

The potion possesses Harry with feminine characteristics, which means that instead of active male agency the potion, representing a sexual woman, is used as a catalyst. She is used as a temptress in order to make the males lose their power. “Harry badly, badly wanted to lick
These traits could be associated with the competent and erotic male, in control of his body and therefore in control of what he wants – he goes after it and gets it. Instead, the potion is responsible for the female agency and her, the potion’s, sexual desire then places her in the Madonna and the whore complex. She is a sexual female that weakens the male by luring him – she becomes a temptress. Because of the female sexual agency, she is defined as bad, “‘bad girls’ violate patriarchal sexual norms in some way: they’re sexually forward in appearance and in behavior” (Tyson 86). Her sexuality is making him weak and vulnerable as she is using her body to gain power over male logic.

Not even Draco, the dominant and rational male can, in the end, resist the temptress, which allows the author to fully remove the obstacle of masculine power from the situation. Harry’s uncontrollable desire first results in Draco becoming the agent of the situation – giving him power. In one scene, he pushes Harry into an alcove and traps Harry’s body between his and the wall. By pushing his body over Harry’s, he is exerting power as the dominant male; he is yet again taking control over the situation – he is strong and decisive.

But, as Harry’s desire takes control over him and he licks Draco, the temptress, the potion, lures the male desire in Draco to betray his logic: “[Harry is] trying to figure out if he could risk another lick without Draco shoving him away in disgust. But he hadn't the first time, had he? No, he'd come to a stand-still, breathing slowly in and out, like he was just waiting for Harry to do it again” (sdk). The female potion has therefore gained power over both characters through the temptation of sex. Harry and Draco are both powerful males in control, but once the female weakens them they lose their ability to self-control and end up, as the female sexual temptress lures the male, losing their positions of power.

Since the female is no longer needed she can be removed from the story. When Harry ejaculates, he is turned back into his real self: “It was as if he’d been splashed awake with cold water, yanking him out of a wonderful dream” – sexual release removes the temptress from his body. This can now allow the story to explore the power relation between the two males as a unity and couple instead of enemies. However, it turns out that the two drops were too small to have given that kind of impact if feelings had not been there from the start, knowledge that Draco uses to benefit from the situation, which turns him into an agent and makes him able to maintain his power even though possibly lured by the female. “’Just two drops! I didn't even ingest it,’ Harry protested. Draco's lips—still thin and pink and, now that Harry knew how they tasted, nearly as irresistible as before—slid into a slanted smile. ‘Yes, it should’ve barely affected you, unless you were already harboring…certain desires.’” (sdk,
ellipses in original). Draco asserts control and positions himself in a place of power. Knowledge is power, and this Draco uses for his own benefit. He asserts this power by ending the scene with “Perhaps next time, you’ll wait and have an accident after class” as he walks away from the situation with the last word and all the power, quickly establishing his role as the powerful male in the relationship (sdk).

The problem in Two Drops is found in how the author uses feminine characteristics as a way of breaking the barrier between the males’ desire for each other. Homoerotic narratives disrupt the category of sex because the removal of female bodies allows homoerotic relations to be explored between two men and how they might function in a relationship beyond heteronormative standards. By putting the focus on male desire onto two male bodies, the story breaks the perspective of the male gaze. However, it is the female potion that breaks the power struggle between the two male bodies. When the female potion controls the situation, responsibility is removed from both Harry and Draco. This means that neither one loses nor gains any power from the actual situation. That is, until Draco is found out to have taken advantage of the potion, therefore having power from the start. The story portrays Draco as in control the entire time or weakened by a temptress in disguise. In both cases, the story reifies cultural concepts of gender and sex – reifying the patriarchal society where men are active agents, in control of their feelings and logical beings.

5.3. We’re Bobbing for Sand:

This story is “We’re Bobbing for Sand” which was written in 2006 by Bittersplendor (it will be referred to as Bobbing for Sand). In contrast to the other stories, when this one starts, Harry and Draco are already in a sexual relationship. They do not have an obstacle to overcome in how to transform the hatred from the original story into romantic feelings or lust, and the story is therefore solely focused on the relationship itself. This story is chosen because, compared to Two Drops, the roles are reversed. Draco is the vulnerable one and is, due to his fear of losing his power, unable to show any emotions. In relation to Two Drops, this one uses feminine characteristics to draw out his feelings. However, this one uses it as a conscious choice, which therefore helps the characters to move beyond the binary definition of gender.

Draco fears that any lack of control would put him in a situation where Harry can place himself above Draco as the masculine and dominant partner. Draco struggles with this throughout the story and it is initiated as the story is introduced with a description of Draco’s
body. He is primarily described by his shape, form, and taste, as an object of desire. Although Harry’s description shows vulnerability in Harry's love for Draco it places Harry in a more powerful position from the start. “Harry thinks he’s memorized the exact curve of Malfoy’s neck. It’s not a mathematical thing, he can’t say it in numbers or words or degrees. He can tell by touch and taste, the way his lips change course at the dip of Malfoy’s throat” (Bittersplendor). The story then continues with a change of focus, and the next section is told from the perspective of Draco who accidentally trips on a crack in the floor. He is clumsy and not in control of his own coordination, placing him in a distressed situation where his body needs to be saved or taken care of. This elaborates on the power dynamic between the couple and Draco struggles as he feels that anything that positions him as a weaker person would make him lose his masculine power. To handle the situation Draco uses magic to erase Harry’s memory, thus regaining his power through magic, which helps him put his body back in a masculine position.

Even though Harry’s character does not know what has happened, the reader knows the truth and Draco’s fall has created an understanding as to how the characters fight against the internalized fear of emotional weakness. “Draco’s cheeks flush” (Bittersplendor) is the evidence of his uncontrollable emotions. If he had instead been portrayed as strong, his body would not have fallen in the first place and he would not have changed to a rose color. The reader has therefore seen sensitivity in both of the characters, understanding the power struggle from the perspective of an observer. The relationship between the characters becomes a reflection of the compulsory heterosexual norms that define gender roles. The male should be strong, active and in control – in power. If not, he loses his masculinity and will therefore be rejected by the standard, excluding him from the binary and, therefore, society in general.

In this power struggle, the dominant Harry is willing to place himself in a submissive position in order for the pair to become equals. By bringing himself down to a place of sensitivity he is trying to remove otherness from Draco and allow a power exchange between the couple. Even though Harry is more in control of his feelings, he is the one who expresses vulnerability both in a verbal and physical way: telling Draco he loves him and, as Draco describes it, wanting to hold Draco’s hand in public even though they are not dating. Harry tells Draco that he loves him during sex – an act of vulnerability that becomes intensified through their sexual exposure. Harry is willing to place himself on a subordinate level in order to express his emotion for Draco, whereas Draco is obsessed with the power relation between the two of them. Draco is controlled by his fear of his emotions. He is scared that what he
feels is going to put him in a position of weakness and therefore fights harder to keep his appearance as a dominant male. There is a constant struggle within him between what Lacan called having and being the phallus (Butler 44). The author depicts the situation with Draco on the bottom of their sexual act, putting Harry in the literal position of having the phallus. His body is positioned over Draco’s passive frame and he is penetrating him. The female body, the one being the phallus, is here described as the weaker one, the one that Draco fears. But, to reconstruct this stereotype, Harry finds strength in the vulnerability of the other character and puts himself in a sensitive and vulnerable position to let Draco be dominant. This allows for two masculine sides to find emotional exploration and solicitude in each other. The story allows the characters to explore emotional depth between two male counterparts. From Siann’s perspective, we can see that Draco has the female characteristic of passivity, whereas Harry has the female characteristic of compassion (Siann 89). In the masculine contrast Draco responds with aggressiveness: “Draco roughly pushes Potter away, practically throws Potter off of him with sheer will alone” (Bittersplendor). This means neither of the two fit the binary or traditional gender roles and Harry is willing to place himself in a situation where he has little to no control in order to help Draco find a way to become more emotionally available, and for them to become equal in their relationship outside of the binary, which needs to be transcended.

For Harry and Draco to have a relationship both characters have to transcend the binary. By using both characters as narrators for the story the author uses Harry's perspective as an emotional male to show a binary transcending contrast to the compulsory heterosexuality Draco is fighting. As a character with both feminine and masculine traits Harry has already gone beyond the binary and the author is therefore able to describe complexity through Harry’s observations. Harry describes Draco’s hands as white and thin – fair and slender, as the ideal female body should be. Harry points out that they are thinner than his, making Draco the smaller and more vulnerable one as Harry’s body is positioned in protective and dominant position. However, he continues by describing Draco’s knuckles as “an angry contusion”, giving masculinity to the otherwise female hands, giving them the dimensional perspective that reflects a powerful decision making agent. “Malfoy’s sharp knuckles graze against Harry’s face, gently” (Bittersplendor). His hands, in relation to his action, are described by contrasting features, which makes him a gentle man. This means that the character cannot be contained within traditional gender roles. The binary system is too limited to define a character that lends itself to both genders. This destruction of the binary is what Wittig argues
needs to happen for homosexual desire to exist and is the struggle the couple is fighting (Butler 22-23).

To finally become equal in their relationship, Draco needs to ultimately transcend the binary and lose his fear of emotional weakness. Draco primarily locks himself away because of this fear of being too close, too emotional, too vulnerable, too weak – female. Harry, the masculine woman or feminine man and third gender as outside the norm of heterosexual compulsory, is trying to get Draco to accept the feminine in himself. Harry wants to get Draco to show his vulnerability so Harry can show him that it will not make him weak. In the end Harry goes to where Draco lives in order to try to get something more. He is again the active agent who is trying to cross the boundaries Draco has built up inside himself. Draco fears his female nature and Harry is trying to show that it is not harmful. The scene begins with Draco opening the door in pajama bottoms, taken off guard and half dressed, again putting Draco in a vulnerable position in contrast to Harry’s self-control. As Harry moves into the house with his hands in his pockets, taking a defensive stance, he repeats the phrase “I love you” with intent and agency – again portraying contrasting features. Draco responds with rage, thinking that “if Potter was going to be a sentimental asshole, Draco had an answer for that, too. ‘Get out.’” (Bittersplendor). Harry becomes aggressive: “Potter’s eyes flare. ‘No,’ he says, then ‘Fuck, Draco, it’s been three months.’” (Bittersplendor). Draco tries to control the situation by showing a hard exterior, but Harry will not allow the conversation to take a turn where Draco, yet again, can hide any sort of feelings.

‘Because you won’t let it be anything more!’ Potter shouts, and even as Draco steps back, Potter’s still too close. ‘You don’t talk to me about things that matter, but I care about you, and I try to read you but I couldn’t and I still can’t, and I just hoped that you’d let me know about your nightmares and what they were about so I could— I could make it better somehow, except you won’t let me!’

Draco looks at Potter as he breathes hard, doesn’t realize his back is already up against a wall. (Bittersplendor)

Draco is trapped and has little to no control of the situation, and thus, needs to react in a way that either destroys the relationship entirely or puts him in a situation where he finally transcends the masculine gender role.
‘Can’t even call me by my name,’ Potter adds, whispers with his head bent, looking at his own feet.

Draco doesn’t know what to do for a whole minute, with Potter looking like that, so-- sad, and it was all Draco's fault and nothing can make him better. (Bittersplendor)

Harry’s defenseless appearance makes Draco realize that the dominant position Harry just embodied was in fact sheer emotion. He is in Draco’s control, not the other way around.

And then Draco knows what will, and it worries him that it's so simple.

‘Harry.’ Draco wishes his voice didn’t quiver like it did.

Potter’s- Harry’s head sort of snaps up, but he looks down again before his eyes reach Draco's face.

‘Harry,’ Draco says again, evenly this time, and cautiously rests a hand on Harry’s shoulder.

Tentative and so, so scared (…) Draco's still terrified and Harry slowly, carefully- as if he were catching something fleeting- pulls Draco to him and kisses his ear. Whispers, “It’s okay.” (Bittersplendor).

Draco finally understands that vulnerability will not make him weak and that perceiving the characteristic as weaker is a cultural concept that eliminates the possibility of mutual relationships. To tie the story together it ends as it started – Draco trips on a crack. Again, he flushes, but this time, as he reaches for his wand, he uses it to smack Harry over the head. Harry is laughing and Draco is okay with it, smiling himself. Finally, the characters have found a mutual ground of sensitivity and strength. They can become equals in their partnership as both are allowed to go beyond the binary gender role that limits them to the institutionalized norm. Draco can transcend in his acceptance of being an emotional and therefore feminine man or masculine woman and third gender.

By merging masculine and feminine characteristics the characters are able to move beyond the binary. The story initially portrays female submission and weakness as something to fear, but ultimately reveals a dynamic where both feminine and masculine traits need to exist in parallel in order for any mutual partnership to exist. The power dynamic between the couple is a constant battle, which Harry does not want it to be, but where Draco, as the more scared one, feels like his masculinity lies in his ability to not show any vulnerability at all. Harry is, according to Tyson's explanation of traditional gender roles, the nurturing one. He wants to care for Draco, which means putting Harry in a feminine role and Draco in a
submitted one, ultimately placing both in feminine gender roles. For Harry to be able to nurture Draco, Draco must show his emotions. Because they both reach over traditional gender roles they disrupt the traditional binary of masculine and feminine. The entire story becomes an exploration of how male emotions possibly exist within a homosexual relationship. They begin by fighting the constructed norms placed on them by society, but transgress those restrictions as they allow for other characteristics outside of their own macho culture to steer them in their relationship. This correlates to Santos’ reference to Jenkins: “Jenkins found the motivation behind slash enjoyment is as ‘a way of rethinking and rewriting traditional masculinity’ (1988b: 71)” (18). The author gets to play with male emotions, being able to play in a field outside of socially constructed norms. The author is therefore able to disrupt the confining structure that defines society and societal standards with the help of the characters. Santos adds, in relation to sex: “fans may enjoy imbuing straight male characters as more sensitive than they are canonically depicted, and having stereotypically feminine – that is, emotional – sex with each other. “ (18), which can be seen in correlation with the macho culture as well, since masculinity eliminates the possibility for emotions. In contrast to Two Drops where the story stayed with traditional gender roles, the submerging of feminine and masculine traits allows this relationship more authenticity since it is challenging the binary. Both characters must transcend in order to reach a position where they can become equal, something that does not work in the former story since both cannot be more powerful than the other.

5.4. Non-Breakfast, Breakfast:

The third story is “Non-Breakfast, Breakfast” by Holly_heart from 2012 (it will be referred to as Non-Breakfast). This is the only story where the characters are not placed within a school environment. The story takes place as they are older and both work at the Ministry of Magic. It begins after a night of free alcohol and bad decisions. Like Two Drops, this one uses a mind-altering substance to bring the characters together, but is closer to Bobbing for Sand in its focus on the dynamics of male assertiveness and power. However, this story is chosen because both are fighting to maintain their position as a powerful male, which makes it hard for them to transcend the binary.

Masculinity becomes the primary mode for both characters in order for them not to lose face and therefore power. The story opens with a situation in which feminine and masculine traits are compared in order to establish how to face said situation. Harry, described as a
rational and competent character, has, in a moment of “surprise”, lost his rational thinking and sense of calm – he is in bed right next to Draco, which is something that should not happen. As he is lying in bed he needs to make a decision.

He does need to make some decisions and as he can see it, he has three options. Option one: he waits until Malfoy wakes up and employs a wealth of Auror-training experience by pretending he was also dead-to-the-world and not in a frozen state of internal pre-crisis. Harry did not exactly score highly in the “acting and incognito” module of his training, but he is positive he can do a convincing 'sleeping man' and it's an attractive scenario none the less. Option two: he bails out and takes refuge in the kitchen. Slightly more balls are required for option two, because there will be no faux drowsiness to fall back on when making actual sounds is required. But then there is the promise of a scolding hot cup of reality-kick caffeine. Or Option three: he legs it. Ron's flat is in clapham. He could probably lay low for say, 3 or 4 days, by then he should have come up with some way to fix this. (Holly_hearts).

The first option would, perhaps, be cowardly, but would also mean that he gets to sustain his power by pretending he was in control the entire time, unfazed by the knowledge of how he ended up in the situation. The second option is the brave one where he needs to take control of the situation. It is also the riskiest one: if he fails, he might be perceived as subordinate to Draco. The third and last option would mean he lost entirely. Running away would be the definition of cowardice, both as a characteristic within the character and in the eyes of the characters around him, therefore making him subordinate to everyone – especially Draco. The choice is that of staying a masculine male in power or become submissive and therefore female. In the end, he goes for the bravest option of number two and he compares it to the braveness of Gryffindor, his house at Hogwarts. Harry does not see himself as a coward, but a man who takes responsibility for his action, which he considers as a masculine quality. He comments on the fact that if he does not decide fast he might punch Draco in the face, resorting to violence, which could be a primitive form of masculine expression. He tries to attain a certain appearance, hiding the fact that he is actually nervous and scared by projecting something that is relaxed. “Coffee is cool and calm, in a 'I do this a lot, I am not phased by your nakedness or the fact your come face is tattooed to my eyelids' kind of way. Coffee is not breakfast in bed. It's also not a 'let yourself out' post-it.” (Holly_heart). By acting like a man in control he will remain in power as a masculine man.
By turning the male gaze into the female gaze the gazes can become equal. In Harry’s description of Draco’s body Draco is described in an objectifying fashion as a “wank-worthy body. All flat, long lines and tight muscles.” (Holly_heart). And although the long lines resemble those of a slender woman’s body, his tight muscles and flat build disrupts the stereotype and sexualizes the male body. This objectification of the male body turns the male gaze into the female gaze. This sexualizing of the male body can also be used in relation to homoerotic perspectives to observe one’s own gender. By visually finding pleasure in looking at one’s own gender one would go beyond the binary. This would be the in line with Wittig’s theory. She argues that if one describes oneself as neither male nor female, one lives outside of the binary as the third gender (Butler 113). By creating homoerotic gazes, one could possibly equalize the objectification of both the female and the male body, reaching beyond the oppressive powers structure that Foucault insists would always be a part of social dynamics no matter who has the position of power (Butler 148). The creation of the homoerotic gaze can therefore be the next step in disrupting the binary, which could be done with the help of fanfiction as a platform that explores these dynamics.

For either of the characters to go beyond the binary they have to lose their power. This story, just like Bobbing for Sand, is working with contrasting features of the power dynamics between the characters. They are both unwilling to lose control and become the submissive female in the relationship, but both are showing traces of feminine characteristics that disrupt their position as powerful masculine males. They are anxious and nervous, neither of them in control of the situation, which portrays the feminine in them. As Harry awkwardly tries to start a conversation Draco is described as conveying nothing but steadiness in his voice. “Malfoy’s voice betrays nothing, cool and steady as usual,” which gives him power over the situation (Holly_heart). However, Draco betrays himself slightly, “but the little shuffley toe dance he is performing with one foot gives him away” showing that he is, in fact, not as composed as he might seem (Holly_heart). Draco’s nervousness gives Harry more confidence since it removes some of his power. As Draco then turns to leave, running up the stairs, Harry suddenly has a feeling of hesitation. He bolts up after Draco and blurts out “Don’t leave”, suddenly acting in haste and pure irrationality (Holly_heart). This act of impulsive emotions is taken advantage of by Draco as he now finds himself in a position of power. He has control of where he wants the conversation to be headed next. As Harry awkwardly spurts out illogical emotions, Draco can observe the situation with a smile, knowing that whatever he chooses to do, he can walk out with his dignity intact, something Harry now has lost. “Malfoy
is definitely humouring him, he knows it because he's doing that slanty-eye fake-smile thing, that Harry sees around the office, indulging your stupidity right before he goes off on a 'this is why you're fucking wrong' rant.” (Holly_heart). Harry’s emotional willingness opens up for feminine characteristics to be applied to the character, thus making him lose his power in relation to Draco, who uses the situation to gain the control that was formerly shifting between the characters. This shifting control allows the characters the possibility of moving beyond the binary.

The story uses the catalyst method seen before to move the characters forward without their losing their power. Alcohol has been the medium used to push the characters together. Just as with the potion in Two Drops, something beyond their power takes control of their bodies. It destroys the barriers between them and it helps to move the characters into a position where sexual desire performs a leading role. This force makes them behave irrationally and impulsively, like stereotypical women. As he is about to leave, Draco adds: “we can just, um, pretend this whole incident didn’t happen. Put it down cheap ministry Champagne and temporary insanity” (Holly_heart). The alcohol has made it possible for them to reach the step where their rage for each other is turned into equally intense lust or love.

Harry tries to find common ground by commenting on how good the sex was, something that, according to him, should not have been possible between the two of them. Draco replies: “Because Potter, we hate each other – simple as. People who hate each other always have good sex it’s well documented” (Holly_hearts). In the end, the conversation results in Harry asking, as Harry is the one losing the battle of power, if Draco would like to go out for a drink sometime. Draco answers: “If I say yes, will you let me leave?” again taking himself out of the choice and putting it on Harry, thereby keeping his power. They agree and later Draco drops by to put a note in the hem of Harry’s underwear – intimate and definitely not as nonchalant as earlier. “When Harry wakes it’s 4.30 in the afternoon (…) Harry can see a white crumply thing tucked in his waist band that definitely wasn’t there before his recuperation” (Holly_heart). Here, Harry has gained some power through his emotional reactions, but by avoiding personal confrontation Draco does not have to lose power in his decision to accept Harry’s vulnerability.

The story is, like Bobbing for Sand, more equal in its representation of the characters. However, the mind-altering substance certainly makes the story problematic, just like Two Drops. They put the power of choice in a liquid that removes their minds from the situation. It is out of their control and they do, therefore, not have to be challenged on who is supposed to
be the agent in going over the obstacle that limits them to the original storyline as enemies. With this first obstacle removed they are then allowed to explore each other as equals. As seen earlier Harry is the one of action, which could entail that he is the leader and the one of power. However, this agency is instead what is giving him a vulnerable stance in their discussion. Hence, Draco gains power to control whether Harry will be accepted as an equal. Although Draco is constantly described as the smaller frame, fair and often sensitive, Harry is the one who loses his power as Draco asserts control. Their relationship becomes a dynamic of gaining versus losing power – being versus having the phallus. Harry is the one who gets Draco to subvert the masculine gender role to become equal in their emotional reactions. To do this, Harry must first lose his position of power, something that might have been given to him in his role as the chosen one in the original story. Even though the result is closer to Bobbing for Sand, the relationship between the characters functions in a similar fashion to Two Drops. Neither is willing to give away his power in order to move the relationship further, but it concludes with the same fact as in Bobbing for Sand: neither can be defined as the masculine gender and in power if a relationship is desired. The story does not transcend the binary completely since both males are still struggling with how to remove power from their relationship without being defined as weak and therefore female.

5.5. And I’ll Tell You No Lies:

The fourth and last story is “And I’ll Tell You No Lies” by Anna Fugazzi from 2010 (it will be referred to as No Lies). In relation to Two Drops and Non-breakfast, this one follows the path of liquids and external factors to bring the characters closer together. The interesting part in this story is that, unlike in the others, the main characters are sexually explored as masculine and not described with feminine characteristics, which truly allows the female gaze to be explored. This story also contains characters beyond Harry and Draco since it is a bit longer than the other three. These characters introduce the topic of homophobia, something that is not discussed in any of the other stories, which brings another dimension to the text.

This last story is an interactive one. The author has built the story into three days. On the second day, as the chapter ends, the reader is presented with two choices: Harry is either in love with Draco or he is in love with Ron. Readers must decide which character they want Harry to be with, which opens up for different readings of the same story, thus reflecting a duality in how the reader has interpreted the original story. But, since the focus of this essay is on Draco and Harry, it will continue to explore that side. However, the creation of two
storylines shows that the reader has found two indeterminate meanings in the text, which will allow the new reader of this fanfiction to interact with the author in a way not possible in the original story. The author purposefully gives the new reader the power of choice in its reading. Like Fish argued, reading is an act, not something that happens passively. Here the reader has been invited into the text, and given the opportunity of creating their own meaning and interpretation.

Using the same method as in Two Drops to move the situation forward, the story makes sure Harry will not be responsible for any emotion that could have made him lose his position of a powerful male. Harry has been paired with Draco to commit a crime as part of their auror training. They are told the storyline of their crime and are then given a potion to make them believe it. A bonding spell is used to create a relationship between them, which means they will not betray each other. It is then Ron’s responsibility to get them to admit what they have done as part of his interrogation practice. When wizards are interrogating someone they use veritaserum, which is a potion that makes people answer questions truthfully. “Remember, he's under Veritaserum. He can't help answering.” (Anna Fugazzi 1). Harry is, through this potion, unable to lie even if there is a need to. Therefore, his only option is to confess his feelings for Draco if someone should ask him. Harry is supposed to get the antidote as class ends. However, there is nothing left and Harry must wait until later that day to get it. Again, this follows the trend where a potion is used to initiate a situation instead of the actual mind, desire or agency of a person.

Through the eyes of other characters the author is able to bring in the perspective of homophobia. In this lesson, it is confirmed that Draco and Harry have been made out to be deeply in love through the bonding spell. In response to this, the teacher states: “Thanks for not making a fuss about it. It’s all part of the ‘respect for diversity’ rubbish the Ministry’s so keen on these days,” which shows that this interpretation of the Harry Potter universe has consciously been made into a reflection of the institutionalized heteronormative society that is part of the writer's actual experiences (Anna Fugazzi 2). The reaction the teacher gets from his students is all but a pleasant one: “Harry’s eyes narrowed, and Ron looked up from his notes, a frown on his face. Malfoy looked away, a small smirk playing on his lips.” (Anna Fugazzi 2). The teacher understands the situation and as he is trying to save his skin he is only making it worse. The outside threat of a homophobic teacher brings the students together in the defense of diversity. They compare it to Voldemort’s hatred for muggleborns, a historic event parallel to the holocaust. Harry, still under the influence of veritaserum, admits in front of the
teacher that he is gay, which later reaches the entire school. His teacher reacts in dismay, and as Harry tries to give back the antidote the teacher hesitates, not even wanting to touch Harry because of his sexuality. "Thanks," [Harry] said, and handed the goblet back to Philips, who hesitated a moment before taking it from him (…) [Philips] then hastily stood up and nearly ran from the room.” (Anna Fugazzi 2). By creating this reflection of the heteronormative society, a discussion about same-sex rights can now be brought into the light. This has not been portrayed in any of the other three stories previously analyzed and so far, the relationship between Harry and Draco has only been portrayed in a limited environment where they act in isolation from the outside world. This gives another perspective on the relationship, which also gives the characters more dimensions and development since we get to see them in relation to other characters and not just each other. It also gives a greater perspective on the author’s environment, which has previously been limited to the mere exploration of sexuality.

Both institutionalized and internalized homophobia is explored within the story, which allows for a reading closer to the author and the current situation in the author’s life. Philips, a superior, a person who has been given actual power by the institution, challenges their beliefs. They stand up against him, but, in the end, he is the one who controls the room – and therefore the conversation. This brings up the power of institutionalized norms that reconfirms an already stable belief system. The Ministry is working for diversity, but it is still rooted in people that the norm should not be disrupted. This institutionalized homophobia can later reflect Harry’s struggles against internalized homophobia. He is trying to comfort himself in the face of rejection from society and the different responses from people around him.

*You have nothing to feel ashamed of.*
*You are who you are.*
*If other people don't like it, that's their problem, not yours.*
*Anybody who can't accept you for who you are is a prejudiced idiot, and you don't want them in your life anyway.*
*Ron is not one of those people. He's just having trouble accepting this right now. You hope.*
(Anna Fugazzi 2)
In correlation, in a conversation with Ron about the fact that everybody needs time to take it all in, they normalize this internalization by making the behavior of people around him seem like a natural reaction.

Ron hesitated for a moment, then clapped Harry on the back. ‘Listen, mate, things are a little weird right now, with what… well, you know what, but… we’ll get used to it. We just need a bit of time, right?’

Harry nodded

‘I mean, I doubt even you were all right with it right away, after you figured yourself out.’

‘Harry chuckled, ‘No, I wasn’t.’ (Anna Fugazzi 3)

This might be a conscious decision from the author’s side – to highlight that internalized homophobia is very real. However, it might also reflect the author’s unconscious and programmed norms that a person of a sexual preference outside of the heteronormative needs to deal with an internal struggle of being other because society places that desire outside of its defining law. By confirming Harry’s own feelings of insecurity in relation to his sexual preference as something everybody needs time to handle, the behavior of those around him is placed on him as guilt for stepping outside of the binary. This internalized guilt, instead of being confirmed as an acceptable behavior by his surroundings, could have been questioned as institutionalized heteronormative standards.

Both Harry’s and Draco’s sexual desires are uncovered by an external influence, which removes the obstacle of their having to find out for themselves. Harry is exposed through the potion as gay and has no choice but to confirm that it is true. It is later exposed, through a radio broadcast, that Draco is homosexual as well, and that he has been in love with Harry since they went to Hogwarts. “I should know, the freak, why do you think he was always such a drama queen whenever Potter was concerned? He wanted him, that's why. Wanted to take Potter and bend him over a desk--" (Anna Fugazzi 3). This exposes Draco in an equally mortifying way, and with no control over it himself. They are not in control of their choices, but are also pushed together because of this, which functions in a similar way as the earlier used mind-altering substances.

By placing both characters on an isolating sideline they are allowed vulnerability and to find comfort in each other as being similar instead of their previous contrasting descriptions as light and dark (MacDonald 4). In contrast with the other stories, Draco is here portrayed as
a gentler character from the start. The many hardships in his life have turned him into a more compassionate character. He isolates himself more and puts his focus on tasks and blending in with the crowd. “The many trials Malfoy [had] to endure had changed him profoundly, and the brat Harry had hated for so long had become a man worthy of admiration and respect.” (Anna Fugazzi 2). Both characters are, in the face of external threat, placed in a more vulnerable position. Both embody a gentleness that was a struggle in the earlier stories, which means they can find comfort in their sameness and the fact that they stand outside of constructed gender.

Their masculine determination and capability is what continues to move the story forward as they explore their emotions and feelings for each other. By trying to get Draco to realize Harry has a crush on him, Harry is placed in a position of sensitivity – although he is brave in his agency by telling Draco how he feels, again going beyond the traditional gender roles. Harry is dropping hints, which fail and get Draco to pursue another gay boy. Realizing Draco showed more courage in the situation than he did, Harry acts by actually telling Draco how he feels. He tells Draco everything, pointing out to the reader that he is babbling because Draco is not responding as quickly as he desired. Instead, to break his uncontrollable talking, Harry takes the fact that Draco has not broken eye contact as a sign and goes straight in for a kiss. Draco is taken aback at first but then kisses him back. The courage in Harry brings out the bravery in Draco, instead of fighting they are lifting each other up. It is their masculinity that allows the characters to meet as two males with desire for each other whereas in the other stories feminine characteristics have been used to reach the same result.

In contrast to the other stories analyzed, this one uses masculine traits to explore sexuality and is therefore the only one to fully allow the female gaze to be explored. The characters do not transcend the binary in their sexuality but differ from the rest because no femininity is used to show weakness. In the description of Draco’s body, his masculine traits are sexualized.

The exhilaration of having a man's body at his fingertips, all firm planes and the scent of Quidditch leather and wind and maleness, the hands running over his body sure and firm and strong, a rough tongue caressing his. He ran [his] lips down Malfoy's neck, feeling him moan, hands wandering down his back to his arse, pulling them closer until he could feel Malfoy's hardness against his own. (Anna Fugazzi 3)
Here, the author can be seen to explore male sexuality using the female gaze to objectify the male body. Although she does not explore dynamics beyond the binary, the body is only described with masculine traits, she allows the audience to find sexual pleasure in the description of the male body. The female gaze has been discussed earlier, but in this scenario the focus is not of a contrasting matter, a crossing between masculine and feminine, but solely focused on presenting the male body as a sexual object. Santos comments,

Similarly, in her review of the literature of Japanese slash, Stanley (2008) concludes that recent literature on slash suggests that slash’s main purpose is to ‘interrupt the dominant narratives of television and even pornography by giving females a chance to play with boys and the male body in ways that male authors/artists have traditionally assumed to be their right to manipulate and play with the female body’ (2008: 107). Rather than simply imagining themselves male, a thought that originated with Penley’s 1992 essay, in this view women have rendered themselves the controller rather than the controlled. (20)

The female writer can, therefore, explore the male body from the perspective of objectification, where she usually finds her own body. This is allowed by fanfiction as a platform. The female reader can be allowed to fully enjoy it without having to find any oppression reflected onto her body as to how and what she needs to live up to society’s expectations of her. Santos continues, “One fan says she identifies with the male characters depicted, as it ‘means liberation from one’s own gender-related taboos’ (1988b: 68).” (18). The female gaze is fully present as no feminine characteristics are presented or positioned in any way.
6. Conclusion:
A common way of finding agency within the characters, to move them forward in their relationship, is to turn hate into love or lust by using an external force to do it for them. By putting the change in the hands of something out of their control, they can remain masculine and, therefore, in power.

In the story “Two Pink Drops,” this force took complete control over Harry, making him irrational, weak and submissive to his desire. He was placed in the position of the lesser female. In “We’re Bobbing for Sand,” the fight of the weaker female continues with Draco’s fear of being lesser than Harry. The fear of losing control makes him fight off any emotion that could be perceived as less than strong. In this story and in “Non-Breakfast, Breakfast,” we see Harry respond with submission. By putting himself in a position of sensitivity, he can get Draco to go beyond the border of traditional gender roles, which results in them disrupting the binary as male characters with feminine characteristics.

By removing their bodies from the gender norms, they move into what Wittig would call the third gender. They disrupt the category of sex by not being able to define themselves within the binary that shapes society. In correlation, the story “We’re Bobbing for Sand” describes Draco’s body with both masculine and feminine traits. This allows the author to explore male emotions without restrictions of what is considered appropriate. In this case the characters become the vessel for the author’s exploration, which we also find in “And I’ll Tell You No Lies” where the male bodies are sexually described by their masculinity. By removing the female body entirely in this story, both physically and in relation to feminine features, the female gaze can be used to explore male sexuality removed from heteronormative standards, compulsory heterosexuality and oppression placed on a weaker female frame.

Fanfiction as a platform can succeed in allowing exploration without any restriction or elimination of taboo subjects. It develops a world where traditional roles can be removed by going beyond the binary system of sex and gender. It reflects what is lacking in the physical world and in cultural representation. The problem in this exploration is possibly found in the use of stereotypical characteristics to go beyond the binary. When the stories use a weaker female body and a stronger masculine one as a base for exploration, the bodies are primarily redefined in their positions – masculine traits are never defined as weak, and feminine as strong. Albeit, the next step found in the exploration is a unification of these characteristics, which positions the qualities as equal and the ultimate form of a three-dimensional character.
The male is always the one in power and must be brought down with the help of feminine traits. The nurturer cares for the male, his emotions and emotional stability. Despite this, the reflection of what is produced in the realm of fanfiction shows a need to go beyond the heteronormative, because this is the result in the four stories analyzed. The reader turned writer shows that it is possible to go beyond the binary and that it would bring liberation to women, men and non-binaries. By using a platform that has created a space for diversity and equality, it can be shown that the mainstream needs to change – and perhaps is in the process of changing, as diversity is continually influencing modern mainstream media.
7. Works Cited:


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Urban Dictionary, “Slash Fanfiction”
