Abusing Text in the Roman and Contemporary Worlds

When studying the ancient world, one of the most frustrating things can be the lack of evidence. For many types of analysis, we lack a great deal of the information we need to reach concrete conclusions, and not least we lack a precise date or context for many works of ancient literature. However, there are advantages to such methodological constraints. They encourage us to look at the classical world from a broader perspective, taking account of the material we have in its full variety and forging comparisons wherever they can be made. One area of Classics which benefits from these necessities is the study of literary culture. With only a limited number of texts available from any particular time period, and even fewer on copies which date from that time, it often becomes more responsible to talk in terms of expected norms than precisely qualified visions of historical reality. The difficulties in illuminating such discourse frequently reveal bigger questions, such as how did classical culture work (for example, do we gain a different sense of the world from literature, a predominantly elite activity, than from the more egalitarian material record?) or else how does literary culture change over time?

Such is my interest here. For, in the spirit of such methodologies, the subject of this article is quite abstract. My intention is to discuss the discourse of text: the shared understanding of what it is to be a literary work written, read and circulated within literary culture; textuality, after one definition. Specifically, I am concerned with the anxieties different models of textuality allow for between the high Roman Empire and the contemporary world, and thus the way fanfiction today is able to operate as an abuse of text distinct in social position and assumed value from other literary practice.

As a constant shared by any work of literature within a literary culture, textuality is a concept which does not require a great breadth of evidence to examine in detail. Indeed, when taken on its own, it is not always clear what value lies in establishing the norms of textuality within a particular time and place. However, when it comes to the study of the contemporary landscape, an understanding of ancient textuality is remarkably useful. For we are all by necessity complicit in our own categorisations of what we read, which leaves the inner workings and expectations of that concept ‘literature’ opaque and difficult to get a clear sense of. By comparing contemporary ideas with those of the ancient world, certain particularities of our textual discourse may be drawn into sharp relief.

This is particularly fruitful for the discussion of fanfiction. Fanfiction, after all, is a category of literary practice which is universally understood to be something different from other types of literary composition. But why? And how? In terms of form, one might say that fanfiction is recognisable as the transformative extension of literary work already in existence – yet this is a standard habit across the whole of ancient literary culture, with no specific term to denote it. To take one example, we might trace the reuse and manipulation of Homer’s image and the Homeric epics across all areas of society: across scholarly practices of edition and interpretation;¹ literary practices of allusion, both to Homeric

¹ For recent discussion of ancient Homeric scholarship, see Montanari (2011). The volume of Lamberton and Keaney (1992) further provides extensive discussion of ancient exegesis of Homer; see Lamberton (1986) on allegorical reading specifically. On ancient scholarship more broadly, see Too
language and Homeric ideas, parody, biography and cento; visual uses of Homer’s image and epic narratives; even ritual uses within so-called ‘magic’ and medicine. We might therefore question how contemporary culture comes to find a distinct label for such practice. Indeed, this definition of fanfiction is unstable even in the modern world, since the transformative reuse of classical motifs and ideas has been a staple of western cultural production as far back as it is possible to trace, as scholars of classical reception know well. To discuss fanfiction in a more cross-cultural context, therefore, another definition is required. Beyond formal or aesthetic criteria, one might consider how the ancient world’s focus on transformational literary practice relates to the phenomenon of myth, or else the historical circumstances of literary production. One might also look at contemporary society alone, and focus on the individuals involved. Here it often seems possible to distinguish fanfiction from fiction as work whose producers and primary consumers are fans, working through fan networks, this literature therefore an offshoot of contemporary identity politics.

This has been the working assumption of many fanfiction studies to date, which analyse fanfiction through the lens of fan culture, in order to understand fan culture. Famously, in his discussion of Textual Poachers (2013 [1992]:277f.), Henry Jenkins defines fandom as something which ‘involves a particular mode of reception’, ‘involves a particular set of critical and interpretive practices’, ‘constitutes a base for consumer activism’, ‘possesses particular forms of cultural production, aesthetic traditions and practices’ and ‘functions as an alternative social community’, wherein fanfiction serves to construct fannish identity. This political appreciation of fanfiction has persisted in volumes such as Hills (2002); Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington (2007); as well as Zubernis and Larsen (2012). Focusing their attention on fanfiction specifically, Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (2014:8ff.) further suggest that the ‘central directions in fan fiction research’ define this practice politically, as ‘interpretation of the source text’, ‘a communal gesture’, ‘a socio-political argument’, ‘individual engagement and identificatory practice’, ‘one element of

(1998); otherwise, on just one of the games that was played with practices of Homeric scholarship, see Middleton (2014).

Knauer (1964) is of course the classic study of Homer’s reuse in Virgil. Otherwise Kim (2010) has recently focused on the way Homer and the Homeric epics were used in imperial Greek literature. It is otherwise an impossible task to summarise the allusions to Homer in antiquity.

For recent discussion of Homeric parody, see the volume of Acosta-Hughes et al. (2011). On the Batrachomyomachia as an explicit case of Homeric parody, see Most (1993).

Graziosi (2002) provides a convincing account of Homer’s ‘invention’ in archaic and classical Greece. Ascheri (2011) otherwise discusses some of some of the curiosities in Homer’s later imagined bibliography.


On the Tabulae Iliacae, small and puzzling images from the story of the Iliad inscribed on stone, see Squire (2011) and Petrain (2014). On the famous Archelaos relief, see Zeitlin (2001:197ff.).

On the role of Homer within Greek magic generally, see Collins (2008:104ff.); otherwise on the prophetic text of the Homeromanteion, see Schwender (2002) and Karanika (2011).

Hardwick and Stray (2008) alongside Martindale and Thomas (2006) likely provides the fullest introduction to the means and scope of classical reception studies today.

The latter is, of course, a particularly popular methodology for understanding literature of the modern era too. Two paradigmatic studies into the relationship between literary production, social discourse and literary form are Eisenstein (1979) and Gallagher (1985).
audience response’ or else ‘a pedagogical tool’, echoing many threads of Jamison (2013) and indeed reducing the scope of Hellekson and Busse (2006).

Yet the social identity of fan and the literary quantity of fanfiction do not fully predicate one another. One may be a fan without writing fanfiction, as the myriad other methods of fannish engagement reveal. Similarly, one may be a fan and yet write other types of literature, which still may be circulated within fannish networks. As the actor Amber Benson (2013) argues, it is possible too to imagine fanfiction produced by an author who does not embody the identity of fan. This problem means that the textuality of fanfiction, the way that something written may be recognised as fanfiction, cannot be accounted for by the identity of its author or readership alone.

In this paper, therefore, I claim it is necessary to set fanfiction into the broader context of contemporary literary culture. To understand fanfiction, not least how it is able to exist as its own category of literature, I argue it is necessary to appreciate certain quirks of contemporary textuality, which a comparison of the anxieties felt by imperial and contemporary authors draws into relief. This comparison reveals two key issues. The first is the relationship between ‘a text’ and an individual literary work, as it becomes clear that the contemporary text is something imagined to be much bigger and more generalised than the individual composition(s) and circulated material objects which are used to read it. This allows works of fanfiction to access and (in certain authors’ eyes) abuse a text, even if the work is very different from its source. In the imperial world, on the other hand, each text is recognised to exist within the discrete material form of the written work, which changes the nature of authorial concern. Beyond this, secondly, it is also necessary to appreciate the role of commercial exchange in contemporary reading practice. As the purchase of a work may be seen to mark the beginning of a reading experience, as merchandise and other material become increasingly important to transmedia storytelling, fanfiction finds itself marked by its non-commercial status as something which cannot be read in the same way, a distinct and extraordinary literary effort.

To establish this argument, I have structured my paper into three parts. First, I trace the anxieties felt by both ancient and modern authors around readers’ access to an authentic text, and what this means for the author’s relationship with the reader. In the second section I consider how this vision for the text informs anxieties of reproduction and circulation in the ancient world. This allows me to finally consider the way that the different circulation practices of fanfiction from contemporary commercial literature inform the value of fanfiction as a reading experience.

I

Galen’s discussion *De libris propriis* (*On His Own Books*) presents in its prologue a rare insight into the book trade of the second century AD. More than this, however, as it announces the reasons why this medical scholar has chosen to compile a discussion of the

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10 Thus Benson (2013:388) questions, ‘Also, am I somehow creating fanfiction when I interact with people on the internet – adding to my real-life, personal continuing storyline and to the now-defunct storyline of the character I played on television?’
topics addressed in his *œuvre*, the work offers a portrait of imperial authorship and its anxieties.\textsuperscript{11} It reveals an awareness of transformation practised by consumers, yet records a continuing desire for accurate transmission and representation. Such a desire is familiar from contemporary authors’ attitudes to transformative practice, specifically fanfiction. Yet, as Galen concentrates on the written style of his work and the response of the reader, rather than the imagined content of the work and the author-as-person, it becomes clear that there are different models of textuality at play between this ancient author and those contemporary: a different discourse of authorship, certainly, but also a different discourse of text.

Writing to his friend Bassus, Galen opens *De libris propriis* with an anecdote. He was recently walking in Rome’s book quarter, the Sandalarium, when he encountered two men engaged in an argument over whether a book on sale was or was not by him. So Galen writes:

\begin{quote}
 The book had been attributed to ‘Galen the doctor’. It was being purchased by one of them as if it were one of mine, though it had been written by someone else, when another man – a man of letters – was driven by the inscription to take a look at the book’s contents. Immediately on reading the first two lines he tore off the tag, and said plainly how, ‘this language is not Galen’s: this book has been falsely attributed.’ Of course, the man saying this had been given a basic education, which children brought up Greek used to be afforded at an early age by grammarians and rhetoricians. Many of those who now begin working in medicine or philosophy cannot read so well, even as they attend lectures on the greatest and finest mysteries of human endeavour, which philosophy and medicine teach us.

This manner of shortsightedness began many years ago, when I was still but a lad, yet at that time it had not reached the height it has now escalated to. On account of this, therefore, and because many of my books have been mutilated in all sorts of ways – because people in other countries present the work as their own at the same time as they take parts out, add parts in or change things around – I think it better to first discuss the reason for these mutilations, and then explain in turn the content of the works I have actually written.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

The second half of the passage makes clear Galen’s inspiration for putting together *De libris propriis*, namely the great number of distortions that his work has undergone. So he asserts that in various guises there have been parts taken out (ἀφαιρεῖν), parts added in (προστιθέναι) and parts rearranged (ὑπαλλάττειν), vividly emphasising the push and pull in different directions by transforming hands. What is striking, however, is that Galen makes no move to prevent these transformations. Instead, he is responding to the increase in such

\textsuperscript{11} This has been recognised by a number of scholars. For one discussion of this text in relation to Galen’s ideas of publication, see Gurd (2014).

\textsuperscript{12} This and all subsequent translations are my own.
transformative practice, empowering the reader to better navigate this varied material by restating what has been in fact written by him (ὄντως ὑπ’ ἐμοῦ).

This qualifies the relationship between author and reader that the opening scene suggests. Beyond the books themselves, it is clear that the reader should not expect any contact with the human person whose words they are searching after. Whether we are meant to assume this incident in the Sandalarium is a ‘real’ or imagined scenario, it is clearly not expected at all that Galen the man, as the author of the work placed under debate by the shoppers, should (or indeed could) intervene to provide the correct answer. Galen’s physical engagement with the scene is not the solution to the problem, but instead it is the reader’s education which reveals the fraud. Galen the embodied author, represented by his imagined physical presence in the anecdote, is therefore revealed to be far less important than the literary representation of his name and writing style, and De libris propriis becomes an aid towards the reader’s acquisition of such knowledge, rather than a work which might be valued as the product of Galen’s labour.

It is possible to trace this model of authorship further through imperial antiquity, as authorial identity is even more emphatically located in written style rather than the human personage. In her work on Latin pseudepigraphy, Irene Peirano (2012) discusses the numerous texts which were transmitted for centuries under the names of authors who cannot have written them, such as those poems collected in the Virgilian appendix. Grounding her discussion in the context of declamatory rhetoric, whereby students were trained to take on a number of different personae and subject positions, Peirano suggests that these texts can be seen to provide ‘creative supplements’ to their chosen author’s corpus of work (p. 10). Again, this depends on a model of authorship which is not dependent on the author’s physical agency, but the persona, style and subject matter to be found in their body of literature. Elsewhere, Pliny records an anecdote in which Tacitus introduced himself to a new acquaintance by suggesting the man would already have known him through his reading.13 Scholars such as Simon Swain have emphasised too the specific importance of language and style to Greeks under the Roman Empire, as a means to assert Greek identity,14 and the effect of this can also be felt in ancient biography, which as a genre responds to works of literature and literary personae, in order to present an image of the author.15

Of course, it is uncertain how canny ancient readers were to the games of authorial personae. However, to look now at contemporary literary culture, some key differences in our model of authorship become apparent. First of all, to think of an author today is to immediately imagine a persona which depends upon a far greater amount of paratextual information, including written biographies and images, but also videos and live events, which present the author as an embodied human being. So, to take my next example, in an article which compiles contemporary author’s attitudes to fanfiction, Emily Temple (2012)

13 Pliny Epistles IX 23.2f.
15 On the varying uses of ancient bibliography, see the collected volume of McGing and Mossman (2006).
presents those opinions underneath images of the authors in question. This reflects the authors’ imagined relationship to their texts.

In this article, Temple collates various quotations from George R.R. Martin, J.K. Rowling, Anne Rice, Stephanie Meyer, Ursula K. LeGuin, Orson Scott Card, Diana Gabaldon, J.D. Salinger and Charlie Stross: predominantly writers of fantasy and science fiction, notionally the most popular genres to inspire fannish activity. These reported opinions depend on a view of authorship which is very different from that Galen depicts, expressing views which are heavily influenced by nineteenth century Romantic rhetoric. So Temple summarises the complaints as, ‘monetary issues as well as feelings of personal violation and another sentiment that roughly translates to “if you were really creative, you’d make up your own characters.”’ The purpose of literature is seen as to express the self, and to that extent literature is seen to embody the self.

I will discuss the financial concerns of these authors, especially Scott Card, further below. For the moment, however, it is worth focusing on the ethical complaints which colour the other authors’ discussions of fanfiction. These anxieties, after all, suggest that it is no longer the reader’s responsibility to look after their own reading experience, but that this is instead the author’s direct concern.

In the words of these authors, it is clear that the circulation of imitative work is not perceived as an attack upon the reader, as Galen suggests it might become a manipulation of readerly ignorance, but an attack upon the author. So LeGuin writes, ‘it’s not sharing but an invasion, literally — strangers coming in and taking over the country I live in, my heartland’; Rice, ‘It upsets me terribly to even think about fan-fiction with my characters’; Martin, ‘My characters are my children … I don’t want people making off with them’. The readers of the original work who go no further are not discussed or focalised, apart from by Galbadon, who comments, ‘I’m very flattered that some of you enjoy the books so much that you feel inspired to engage with the writing in a more personal way than most readers do.’ Here those readers are simply used to define the deviant, overly ‘personal’ minority who present an affront to the author’s activity and highly physicalised sense of security (‘it makes me want to barf whenever I’ve inadvertently encountered [fanfiction] involving my characters’). The author’s physical self is key, and those who write fanfiction are further charged with responsibility towards their own readers as authors, such that it would become ‘a problem’, in Rowling’s terms, ‘If young children were to stumble on Harry Potter in an [sic] X-rated story’. Merely characterised as young, it appears to make no difference whether these children are familiar with Harry Potter already, from one context or another: what is at stake is not the children’s prior or on-going reading experience, but the scope for their experience of Harry Potter, the potential for Rowling as author to provide them with Harry Potter in a certain way and the fanfiction author’s irresponsible abuse of the character.

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16 It is notable that these images remained as a significant part of the article even when it was recirculated, in particular to the LiveJournal community ohnotherididnt (2012), an aggregator of celebrity gossip and entertainment news.

17 For discussion of the role biography plays in the nineteenth century, see McCarthy (2009:110ff.), who discusses the developing importance of a work’s ‘vitality’ and discernible connection between a work’s author and the surrounding world in German critical circles. See also North (2009) on the relationship between biography and English Romantic poetry.
Taken together, these opinions account for a model of authorship which values the text as a representation of the self, to be managed by an author, rather than something readers might use to construct an authorial persona. This transforms the way in which the text is imagined. In Galen’s anecdote above, style and formal qualities are so significant to the text that a poorly written Galen the Doctor simply cannot be a Galen. Under the same principle, it would be possible to suggest that an X-rated Harry Potter could not be a Harry Potter to which Rowling might lay claim. For these contemporary writers, however, the emphasis is not on style, but on setting, LeGuin’s ‘heartland’, and characters, Martin’s ‘children’. These are extensible quantities, which go beyond a single written work, and may thus be abused by fanfiction.

The nuances of this are brought out in Meyer’s comments: ‘in the beginning I hadn’t heard of [fanfiction] and there were some that were…I couldn’t read the ones that had the characters IN character. It freaked me out… but there was one about Harry Potter and Twilight that was hilarious. And then there was one that was about a girl who was starring as Bella in the movie and that was funny.’ The abuse of Twilight here takes place precisely when the characters in a piece of Twilight fanfiction appear to be the same as those in Meyer’s books, when they are ‘in character’. Conversely, the danger is reduced when a distinction between Meyer’s work and a work of fanfiction may be found – but this must be in terms of character or setting. It is Harry Potter the character who represents Rowling’s text, not each individual Harry Potter, and thus Harry Potter’s X-rated adventures do indeed become Rowling’s concern, as that quantity, ‘Harry Potter’, is not confined to one set of books alone.

Whether an individual book or else piece of fanfiction, as each literary work no longer delimits the boundaries of the contemporary text it is clear that work has a different role to play in contemporary textuality. As expressions of the author’s self, these works act as agents within an abstractly realised space, either avatars of the author’s creative control or else tools of invasion and abduction, manipulating character and setting. Indeed, this allows for conceptualisations of fanfiction – a written genre – as a practice quasi-theatrical direction, and, as I will discuss in the next section, elements of this model persist even among contemporary authors who approve of this literature. This is an aspect of contemporary textuality, however, which is specifically modern, even as parallel discourses may be observed in the ancient world.

II

The image of an author and their children has been used to decry fanfiction, as I discussed above, but it has also been used to defend it, famously by Joss Whedon (2012) in a discussion on the news-sharing website Reddit. Here the writer and director comments, ‘Art isn’t your pet – it’s your kid. It grows up and talks back to you.’ From the understanding of contemporary textuality I have just outlined, it is easy to slip between discussions of text and character as an author’s children, as both may be identified as

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18 See Coppa (2006) for this theorisation.
19 Among its frequent requotations, this comment is notably the epigraph to Jamison (2013).
products of the author, and are mutually constitutive. Indeed, it seems natural to imagine anthropomorphic characters as the ones with voice to ‘talk back’ on behalf of the text. It is no surprise when one commentator on Whedon’s Reddit ‘Ask Me Anything’ (AMA) gains eleven marks of support by agreeing with this comment in terms Martin’s views on character: ‘Very good point. So many artists want to be “helicopter” parents. I am looking at you George [sic]’ 20 However, in a different model of textuality, in which character and other abstract entities are less significant to the text’s constitution, this discussion of character and/as text is less straightforward, and less pertinent to the anxieties of textual abuse. Under the Roman Empire it was the formal qualities of text which were the most important, and thus the text as physical object which was at stake, not only at the point of initial production, but in circulation.

After all, the moment we imagine ancient literature in transmission beyond the author’s imagination and conceivable autograph draft, we encounter the imperfect practice of copywork by scribes. The capacity for human error means it is necessary to imagine a greater range of acceptable variation between individual copies of texts than today, even before we imagine the impact of the empire’s vast size and the relative lack of interconnection between its literate communities. One of the more interesting consequences of this, is that while we might imagine a great deal of variation between copies of the same work, we might also suspect a much greater similarity between the various works owned by a single reader. The provincial litteratus/πεπαιδευμένος could not expect to own a book which would be of the same appearance or precise, standardised contents as their counterpart in Rome – yet among their own collection they would have found texts generally produced in Egyptian papyrus, written in one of relatively few bookhands used by professionalised scribes, and, most significantly, amended extensively by them themselves. 21

For the reader, this meant that there was great concern for the appearance and scope of text that they read, and anxiety was located in what these objects might be taken to signify. As Michael Squire points out (2011:1ff.), many authors of the first century AD describe fantasy versions of the great and lengthy Homeric epics, most often the Iliad, written in letters so small that their entirety was able to be contained within a single nutshell. As the object in hand stood for what the text could mean, the reader’s relationship with Homer was able to be modelled by their relationship to that object, and many desired the chance to possess the work of Homer in something so small. Through typical means of production, a papyrus roll in the first century AD might be imagined to contain around twelve-hundred lines of verse, meaning that a reader’s typical Iliad would run to a box of ten to fifteen rolls: 22 something which could not be held all at once. To have this volume of text in miniature,

20 Cf. Martin above, cited in Temple (2012), ‘My characters are my children … I don’t want people making off with them, thank you. Even people who say they love my children.’

21 As Seo (2009:574) comments, ‘We know that authors were not paid a royalty per copy sold, but rather a lump sum by the primary bookseller; therefore, the modern notion of copyright seems irrelevant to the Roman context’: texts were expected to vary in form. On the growth and trade of papyrus, see Diringer (1982:125ff.). On the place of the reader in the production of legible books, see Kenney (1982:15ff.). The nature of the ancient material text is an increasingly popular topic in classical scholarship, so it is difficult to quantify here.

22 See Ebbot (2009:39) for discussion of this.
therefore, was to imagine an unprecedented level of power over the *Iliad* and Homer as an author.

This particular desire for a controlled Homer is thematised in an epigram by the poet Martial, XIV 184:

**Homer in a fistful of papers**

Ilium and Ulysses, enemy of King Priam, equally lie waiting in many folds closed by skin.

Not only the *Iliad* but the *Odyssey* too is imagined here as a tiny version of Homer’s work which might be held in a grasping, boxer’s fist, *in pugillaribus* (‘in a fistful of papers’), after its warring subject matter, the city of Ilium and the invader Ulysses, have been brought under control by the text’s physical constraints, when they are *condita pelle* (‘closed by skin’). However, the state of the text is also precarious: these epics appear barely contained, their contents lying in wait and threatening danger, as the verb *latent* (‘lie waiting’) implies. The desire to contain, control and possess the Homeric epics informs this epigram, which sits among a collection of over two-hundred, all describing gifts for the Saturnalia: such desire is what makes this gift valuable. And yet, as Squire would highlight, the threat remains that such containment cannot be achieved, that the extensive scope of the Homeric epics cannot be realised this minute form and they will break free to reassume their great size.

Such paradoxes of containment can be seen to drive many projects of literary culture throughout the early empire, including Galen’s own attempt to collect, categorise and order the information present in his own widely circulated books, but also the numerous encyclopaedias and reference works produced at this time. In the context of imperial textuality, it becomes possible to map a relationship between reader and author which is mediated precisely by the physical object in which the author’s work is produced, the content singular and inextensible but the form a point of contention.

As a text’s object form matters for the way that text is recognised, a component as important as contemporary texts’ characters and setting, so the means of transmission for ancient texts becomes crucial. As the contemporary anthropomorphised text is conflated with the characters it describes, the ancient text is anthropomorphised by means of its copies, to discuss the problems of circulation. Over the course of the first century AD, we thus find several Latin writers utilise the idea of the text as slave, an anthropomorphic commodity, which through publication might be manumitted into freedom, but never escape bonds of social dependence and control. As one of the most common Latin words for slave is of course *puer*, ‘boy’, or else ‘child’, this produces a parallel but significantly different discourse of text from the contemporary world.

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23 On the *Apophoreta* see Leary (1996).
24 On the imperial world’s encyclopaedic tendency as the project of dominion, see König and Whitmarsh (2007).
One of the most famous discussions of this, indeed the first (and only surviving ancient source) to refer to textual abuse as abduction by pirate, plagarius, is Martial in epigram I 52, which is found below in full:

I send my works to you, Quintianus –
my works, I’m able to say, scattered notes
though they are, which your poet recites:
if they complain about this heavy service,
please intervene and act as a judge with the right authority –
and when that man calls himself their master,
please say that they are mine and freed by my hand.
When you’ve said this three or four times,
you might be able to shame the pirate.

In this epigram, the poet addresses his patron, Quintianus, in regard to the use of his poems by another poet-client. If the poems (libelli, 2) suffer under their new poet, the patron is to defend them, and cum se dominum vocabit ille, | dicas esse meos manuque missos (6-7); ‘when that man [the new poet] calls himself their master, you [Quintianus] are to say that they are mine [Martial’s] and freed by my hand’. The emphasis here is on control and the bonds of patronage which would bind freed slaves to their old master, Martial, and ultimately to Quintianus as Martial’s patron. As their patron, Quintianus could exert strong social influence over both Martial and the performing poet, who in turn should not be allowed to re-enslave freedmen.26 It is worth noting that Martial does not attempt to prevent the poems’ performance by Quintianus’ other poet, but instead ensure that this text remains under Quintianus’ protection as Martial commends it to him (1). It is not any and all textual reuse which becomes a violation, therefore, but the abusive textual enslavement, which characterises the other poet as a pirate, plagarius, rather than a legitimate recipient of the poems’ service. As the libelli have been freed, this epigram follows, they may work in service of any number of different personages, but all parties must continue to observe their affiliation to Martial, their original master.

There is again an emphasis here on the ethics of textual use, familiar from Rowling’s assertion that Harry Potter should not be able to star in an X-rated fanfiction. However, Martial’s concern is not for the equivalent of Harry Potter the freedman, but Harry Potter – the text as complete artefact – nor else it a concern for his authorial self, as other contemporary writers emphasise. As J. Mira Seo (2009) argues, Martial’s discussion of plagiarism forces an understanding of the text as material, a physical commodity like the slave.27 It is the circulation of physical copies and otherwise embodied transmission of the poetry in performance, therefore, which provides the means for textual violation. This in turn is not a crime against the author as individual, but a contravention of social mores more widely, to be managed by those already in possession of the power to intervene.

26 On this particular connotation of plagarius, see McGill (2012:88ff.).
From my previous section, Galen’s anecdote concerning the booksellers of Rome’s Sandalarium might already illustrate the problem of unregulated circulation. Under the empire, and in general in the ancient world, an author could not expect to know where, when or how their work was being sold. Two centuries earlier than Galen, this becomes a point of contention in the writings of Cicero, as Sarah Culpepper Stroup (2010) discusses. Comparing the use of the words munus (‘gift’) and libellus (most literally ‘booklet’), Stroup (2010:101ff.) argues that libellus in particular evokes the connotations of uncertain distribution. In what we might appreciate as a fore-echo of Martial’s own anthropomorphic commodities, Stroup (2010:108) notes, ‘the semi-personified libelli of rhetoricians and philosophers are texts that have escaped from their owners’ control and that now circulate, virtually autonomously, with only nominal connection to their creators’. In Cicero’s work libellus gradually loses its negative connotations to the extent that, ‘The term continues to connote anxiety over authorship and “out of group” publication, but by the late 40s [BC] at least it seems to function as an ameliorative idiom for a sort of literary practice that had become increasingly common.’ And so on, we might imagine, to Martial.28

The issue of textual material is de-emphasised by contemporary authors, except as it might be related to the idea of commercial product.29 Indeed, many contemporary critics ignore the material form of text entirely, or else ask questions about circulation in order to discuss a text’s place in literary culture – rather than its individual signification.30 This de-emphasis has implications of its own, as I will discuss in the final section of this paper, but circulation norms do still matter for the idea of textual violation. In a statement collected by Temple (2012, cited in Waters 2004), Rowling’s concern is said to be ‘to make sure that [fanfiction] remains a non-commercial activity to ensure fans are not exploited and it is not being published in the strict sense of traditional print publishing.’ Echoed by many contemporary authors, this idea of ‘non-commercial activity’ and publication ‘in the strict sense’, rests upon a crafted dichotomy between different circulation practices, in which monetary exchange does or does not play a part. In 2004 it might certainly have been realised in the difference between print and digital publication, but over the last ten years those associations have become increasingly less viable.31

28 For a further echo of this usage, a generation later than Cicero and around a century before Martial, see Propertius III iii, in which Apollo describes the poet’s work such that tuus in scamno iactetur saepe libellus | quem legat exspectans sola puella virum (19-20): ‘your booklet is the sort often tossed onto a bench, that a lonely girl might read while waiting for a man’. Again there is an emphasis on the casual, uncertain nature of the circulation, over which the author cannot have control. pace Roman (2014:301ff.), who argues that Martial’s discussion of material libelli is the exception which proves the rule of a continuing aesthetic of literary autonomy, and a model of text as self-expression.

29 A notable exception to this is Anne McCaffrey, who famously in the 1990s attempted to restrict the publication of fanfiction online (see Writers University 2002). However, in recent years her policy has shifted to emphasise non-commercial distribution instead (see McCaffrey 2010).

30 See St Clair (2004) for a study of book production and trade which goes into extremes of detail, all in the service of quantifying readerly experience.

31 The Office of National Statistics (2013: table 3), shows how in recent years there has been an increase from 20% to 55% of adults in Great Britain who would report ‘reading or downloading online news, newspapers or magazines’, typically print publications; see also Rainie and Duggan (2012) on the exponentially growing preference for electronic over print books in the USA.
While the gift-economy of ancient literary culture provides an immediate counterpoint to commercial practices of circulation, it cannot be dichotomised in the same way as fanfiction is from contemporary commercial distribution. Innumerable ancient works begin with the record if not pretence of private exchange between individuals: thus Galen’s address to Bassus and Martial’s address to Quintianus. And yet we must imagine that such works only survive through their flow into public, commercial circulation, no matter the author’s proclaimed attitude towards such activity. Indeed, the necessities of this fall into commercial transmission and resultant material instability provides the dynamic for both textual violation and transformative textual practice. Unlike the contemporary world, this transformation is an expected and normal part of an imperial text’s life cycle, and cannot be prevented.

How, then, is fanfiction able to be marginalised today?

### III

The contemporary world, naturally, provides much less scope for the physical manipulation of books. A published, printed work might be cut up, reused, annotated in any number of ways, but as we live in a world where texts are standardised by publishing houses prior to circulation, these transformed objects cannot be deemed the ‘same’ as all others produced in their original print run. Moreover, this sort of manipulation is not a point of concern. The contemporary text, as I discussed in the first section of this paper, is not a thing defined by its material form, but by its ideas of character and narrative. As the distribution of fanfiction remains an area of deep anxiety for authors, therefore, it is necessary to rethink what different practices of circulation mean for a text. We must ask: how do commercial and non-commercial distribution affect these textual worlds differently?

On 21 July 2007, at 12:01 am, the final instalment in the *Harry Potter* series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, was made available for purchase. It was reportedly the biggest entertainment launch to date, with security costing upwards of ten million pounds sterling (Hastings and Jones 2007) and midnight ‘launch parties’ occurring across the Anglophone world (Rich 2007). In the UK, the launch was also met by controversy around the book’s marketing, as the major supermarket chain Asda initially listed *Deathly Hallows* at half Bloomsbury’s recommended retail price and was to sell the book on release for £5, less than a third of the recommended £17.99. On the route towards this price, which provoked complaints from independent retailers across the country, Asda found itself in an argument with Bloomsbury. This was due to a press release (Asda 2007), which claimed that the publishing house was ‘attempting to hold children to ransom’ by setting their RRP at ‘twice the average child’s pocket money and £5 more than the average kids’ hardback bestseller.’ Bloomsbury pursued legal action and further claimed that Asda was in arrears for its book.

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32 Although that record was to be beaten by sales of the computer game *Halo 3* in the same year, on which see West (2007).

33 On this price war in general, see BBC (2007) and Collett-White (2007); for international concern over this issue, see The Associated Press (2007). Clee (2008) notes that the disagreement did not change Asda’s ongoing policy of retailing *Harry Potter* at a high discount.
purchases, threatening to ban supply of the new *Harry Potter*. The dispute was settled out of court.

Rather than a matter of business which might be separated from textual space and the experience of reading, the complaints raised within this episode were repeatedly framed for distributors as ethical problems which affected readers and the book as textual entity. So Asda argued in terms of children’s access to the text; so Philip Wicks, representing the Booksellers Association, complained of the book’s apparently devalued function: ‘We think it’s a crying shame that the supermarkets have decided to treat it as a loss-leader, like a can of baked beans.’ Michael Norris, of Simba Information, made the point explicit, ‘You are not only lowering the price of the book. At this point, you are lowering the value of reading.’ Unlike the abuses of transmission in the ancient world, found in commercial and non-commercial exchange alike, this discussion of the material circulation of texts asserts that the commercial value placed on the object affects the quality of that object: it becomes inaccessible to children (with no question that they might save up or else share the book); it becomes something consumable and quotidian (‘a can of baked beans’); it ultimately has less to offer.

The significance of this follows when reading is understood precisely as an experience within the space an author governs through their work. For in this phenomenon what matters most is not what the text looks or feels like, but what the reader feels like as they engage with the textual object. So follows user disagreement over whether electronic reading devices might adequately stand in for the generic ‘book’ they are modelled to resemble: whether they physically resemble a paper book is not important, but whether that physical object can evoke the same emotions and sense of experience that the reader has come to expect from the paper book. How much a reader has paid is absolutely part of the reader’s experience, and one which such discussion as that around the value of *Deathly Hallows* made increasingly significant. More than this, when and where a reader pays is made significant, as midnight launches suggested the only time when ‘unspoiled’ access to the textual world might be available. Within this model, it is at the moment of purchase that reading begins.

What does this mean for fanfiction? As most authors suggest they are content with fanfiction under the rubric that it cannot and should not become commercial activity, they appear to address the same legal anxieties as Orson Scott Card, cited in Temple (2012), who comments, ‘if I do NOT act vigorously to protect my copyright, I will lose that copyright.’ However, as Temple’s source of the comment, Lev Grossman (2011), remarks, ‘The scenario

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35 Amazon Kindle’s marketing strategy can be seen to focus on this issue repeatedly, for example as it encourages its audience to imagine using the ereader in their living room or else while relaxing on holiday (see Wong, Doody, Crandall, Wiener 2013 and Wasserman 2013 respectively). This follows a longer-running strategy of defining reading as the act of imagination, on which see Miller (2009).
36 There is little space here to talk about the phenomenon and anxiety surrounding ‘spoilers’ within this model of textuality. However, the importance of ‘finding out what happens’ as a key element within the reading experience was emphasised by the debates surrounding pre-release reviews for *Deathly Hallows*, for example in Hoyt (2007), who responds to accusations levelled at the New York Times for reviewing the book before release.
Card describes, in which an author's rights are diminished because he or she doesn't actively defend them, is associated more with trademark than with copyright’, and the lack of commercial enterprise does not make the complicated, untested legal position of fanfiction any clearer. As I argued above, nonetheless, it is possible to appreciate in authorial anxieties the model of text which is being propagated, especially as these anxieties outline avenues for textual violation. This resistance to fanfiction as a commercial enterprise marks monetary exchange as something which might allow fanfiction to abuse the text (for surely not the author’s bank balance), and it becomes a boundary line most authors are content to see in place. This can only reinforce the model through which purchase is a key moment within the reading experience. As payment legitimises a work as a literary endeavour, allowing it to manipulate the characters and settings which make up its text, so freely distributed fanfiction becomes something which cannot.

In studies of fan culture as in literary studies more widely, the text is seen increasingly as a transmedial entity, established between the boundaries of its constitutive objects. As Lars Elleström (2010) explores in his collected volume, this leaves the borders between different components of text as particularly fruitful sites for the discussion of textual meaning. It is possible to think of a textual object not as something which represents text, but as something which interacts with text, as I have discussed. However, as transmedial enterprises become an increasingly significant mode of textual production in the contemporary world, and as the key texts we think with become not books but franchises, the possibilities for authorial control are diminished and the anxieties surrounding such control are increased.

In the ancient world, textual transformation was inevitable, but authors still worried about its effect. Today, it is manifestly not the case that authors of works which are part of transmedial texts can claim full control over what is envisaged as their expression of self. Despite this, as Suzanne Scott (2012) explores, images of single author figures are proliferated to meet reader, or else consumer, expectations. A work’s value is measured by its imagined relationship to this central figure, who provides the ‘creative’ steer behind the commercial enterprise that the text becomes. As this author figure may not produce the entirety or even majority of a franchise’s literary and/or visual output, it cannot be the labours of production or unique habits of style which defines the authorial relationship. Instead, authorship is the bond between textual product and this author figure’s imagined creative oversight, which is mediated through commercial operation and enterprise. This becomes the locus, therefore, for anxieties which surround fanfiction as a commercial prospect, especially for franchised texts such as *Harry Potter*. The concern remains that fanfiction might manipulate character and setting, but it is qualified most often by the

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38 See also Hills (2002:133ff.).
understanding that it is only when the reader pays to experience such manipulation that the larger, transmedial text is affected.

A reader living in the Roman Empire bought books in order to understand, inform or control the works contained within – to possess the text as a physical entity. A contemporary reader, on the other hand, buys books in order to understand the text: they buy works which offer them insight into the characters and settings which (abstractly) make up what they read. In recent years, inspired not least by the publication of E.L. James’ *Fifty Shades of Grey*, arguments around the commerciality of fanfiction have rested on questions of legality or else their implications for the fan community, and it has been a continuing claim of scholarship that ‘gift culture’ is a central component of fan practice. However, it should be clear that the non-commercial distribution of fanfiction is not only a concern for fan culture, but it also informs fanfiction’s position within today’s literary culture as irrelevant and invaluable. Rather than the expression of a marginalised community and nothing more, then, fanfiction must be seen as literature which has been expressly marginalised – not only by its opponents, but also by its writers and proponents – by the vice of being read *gratis*.

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39 On *Fifty Shades of Grey* specifically, see Jamison (2013:224ff; 240ff.).
40 For recent discussion of this, see Jenkins (2013:xxx f.), but also Hellekson (2009). De Kosnik (2009) argues that fanfiction should be commercialised, but on the grounds that (typically women) fans should not allow their work to be undervalued: a similarly political point.
References


