

Fanfiction, slash, and I. An attempt at self-meta

by mazaher

May 3rd, 2011

::

The passing of sci-fi and slash writer and feminist literary theorist Joanna Russ was covered in a post by shagungu on April 30, 2011 at

<http://kirkspock.livejournal.com/1503913.html>

One of the links included in the post brought me to the essay *Joanna Russ on Slash Fiction* by K.A. Laity, posted on January 24, 2010 at

<http://teachmetonight.blogspot.com/2010/01/guest-post-k-laity-on-joanna-russ-on.html>

and to the comments on the same.

Both the essay and the comments make for an incredibly interesting and thought-provoking read.

I was moved to once again reconsider my own experience of reading and writing fanfiction (with or without sexual contents) and slash, inside as well as outside of a fanfiction context, in order to try and find fitting words with which to describe it to a hypothetical listener/reader not belonging to the fanfiction and/or slasher communities.

Such reconsideration is admittedly a work in progress, although whatever progress is there, seems to happen in fits and bursts-- I confess I am not very motivated, if at all, to explain myself to outsiders.

One reason may be that my age is such that I missed (by a bare margin) the strong imprint of public-spiritedness which took place on most of a generation between the late '60 and the early '70 of the past century.

As I feel it, my reading and writing are not deliberately political in any sense, but rather a private matter.

Anyway, for what it's worth, I'll stop rambling now and go back to the main issue...

::

I began writing fanfiction by and for myself in the early '80, at a time when I had no idea fanfiction communities even existed, either online or otherwise.

I was moved by identification with male characters in original stories or films: lonely people who were hurt and lacked comfort in the original stories. I mainly wrote in the missing comfort.

At some point, I got access to the web. I discovered then that what I believed was a quirk of mine happened to be instead a wide community endeavor, and at times a team sport. To say I was happy with the discovery is an understatement. I firmly believe that works of literature (and art, for that matter) are not only a blessing and food for the soul, but also by nature as fertile as any living being. Having more good stories to read gave me more ideas for my own writings, which was (and is) absolutely lovely.

Slash, which I met early on in my explorations of online fanfiction and original, independent literature, opened up to me the chance to further expand those same dynamics which already touched me personally, and include the area of sexual relationships. I was thus able to provide the lonely character on which I had been focusing with a mirror, a companion, and a peer.

Now I was not merely saving the character's life (and my own as a consequence): I was dealing with built-in C for the H, so to speak, and I was giving the characters (again, as well as myself, within the boundaries of my identification) a meaningful love life.

::

What perplexed me very much was finding that slash communities are mostly made up by women, and it seems the majority of them are heterosexual.

Frankly, I expected a more or less equal distribution of genders and of sexual orientations.

I think the skewed distribution of both, as statistically reported, reflects the radical imbalance our culture(s) still suffer from with regard to genders and sexual orientations. I do wish that I will see the day when the imbalance will be evened out!

All that given, it should not be surprising that my online persona and behavior are not obviously gendered, aged, or sexually orientated. My reading and writing have nothing to do with escaping from who I am; on the opposite, they have all to do with owning who I am, including those opposites which are present within me at the same time, but aren't normally presentable in society.

Even now, I feel myself a little resistant to explicitly slot myself into a gender and age group in this post. The reason I do this is that I wish to contribute to a discussion (and hopefully to the further development) of cultural openness toward more fluid social identities and roles.

::

The obvious, even trite, key question at this point is:

Why does m/m romance achieve for me the desirable results I mentioned, when f/m and f/f do not?

I have a provisional list of answers, which as I said I review periodically. They are not listed in any strict order of relevance, and therefore are not numbered.

-- Equality. This is the first reason I usually voice to those who ask me, why slash?

While reading and writing slash, I appropriate a male look on, and a male role in, the fictional relationships.

I still identify with a male character (as I said before, women are never allowed to do anything very interesting in stories), and as such I can act out my love for another male character, without the limitations being a woman still imposes nowadays.

As a potentially bisexual, practically heterosexual woman who was for 22 years in a committed, monogamical relationship with a heterosexual man, I know about such limitations. My partner and I found ourselves doing some excellent work on equality, but still neither of us could quite completely overcome the social and family habits impressed on us both since early childhood by our two different, but equally gender-determined environments.

-- In m/m stories, the "no"s the characters have to face, the tribulations so to speak, run across instead of along the boundaries of gender.

While the very presence of a female character guarantees that her fitness to be a hero will be questioned, the problems the characters must solve in m/m slash do not depend on their gender, which is a most welcome respite from everyday life.

All-male slash allows for a fictional space where the removal of the relevance of gender in human interactions can be accomplished, something which I personally feel I need and wish for.

I believe the over-relevance of gender in human societies, as well as the mysticization of sex, are suboptimal social strategies, and counterproductive to truthful, open, satisfactory interaction between and among individuals. m/m slash is the area where I can read and write what I feel is a better state of things in this matter.

-- It is much easier imo to fall into stereotypes while writing women than men.

There is an obvious break between what women actually are and what they do, and what they are seen/acknowledged to be and to do.

During the last 120 years at least (and certainly since WW1, when the sheer size of the disaster compelled women to stand in for absent men in many social roles), women have been learning to be proficient not only in traditionally female matters, but in most traditionally male ones.

The parallel development of the range of activities performed by males seems to be under way, but certainly not as advanced. Men are explicitly or implicitly stigmatized for trespassing into women's territory more often than women for trespassing into men's territory: a phenomenon which imo has been until recent times severely underrated in gender studies. All the same, it still doesn't seem to come natural to think of women as doers (or heroes in fiction), and when they are written as such, there seems to be a compulsion of the author to stress their feminine characteristics in an often stereotypical way, which does not manifest itself with well-written male characters.

-- Slash allows for verbalization of sex in a non-gendered, exhaustive way, impossible in more traditional contexts.

It seems to me that women nowadays (just like men since forever) talk sex among them exhaustively, but in a very gendered way, which is not shared with the other gender(s) at any level.

Within heterosexual couples, discussion of sex is less strongly gendered, but often not exhaustive. I have observed that it is still difficult to talk about sex with one's sex partner, as both parties' insecurities tend to surface and interfere.

I myself find that I can talk about sex in a non-gendered, exhaustive way with one het male old-time friend, who is not a partner of mine.

::

Is any part of this useful to somebody?
(Apart from myself, I mean).