

*"Celebrity Fan Narrative as Mythology: an Analysis of How Fanfiction
Centering Around Pop Music Functions and Appears as Myth Within the
Online Culture That Produces it."*

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Redefining Popular Music

To be a fan of 'popular music' is akin to admitting to bad taste. Groups like *NSYNC and the Backstreet Boys, women like Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, have to fight against the stigma attached to the very word 'pop'. And while their musicianship and vocals may show a great deal of talent, the majority of people will put interest in pop music down to immaturity. The simple status of 'fan' is often looked down on, and fans of pop music (like the fans of the groups *NSYNC) are equally stigmatized, the assumption being that those people who enjoy such music are young kids.ⁱ But this is not necessarily the case. In fact, fans of such derogatorily termed 'boybands' are not only members of both genders but are comprised of people of a variety of ages, which is obvious from my attendance at various concerts last year: there was a wide variety of people present. One particularly unusual segment of pop fans are online writers, mostly women who create fictional stories about pop music celebrities, and in doing so, have created their own form of mythology.

Though the suggestion that a media phenomenon normally associated with groups of screaming girls could have spawned mythology seems ridiculous at first, it is possible to see how 'fandom' in general, and the fandom revolving around narratives written about pop celebrities in particular, appears similar in many ways, and fulfills many of the functions, of myth.

A Definition of "Myth"

To come up with a definitive meaning for "myth" or "mythology" is next to impossible, due to the various permutations found. However, Herodotus claims Hesiod and Homer defined the Greek pantheon,ⁱⁱ and as such a connection is often made between oral poetry, especially epic, and myth. As well, one can approach much of the literature of Greece, the ancient Mediterranean, and the Near East as what one could consider traditional myth, and based on these models, may examine the myth of today.

Based on this, one may approach myths through the ideals of sociology, and there are those who have done just that, claiming the importance of myth and its underlying meaning to be that of a social function. Myth defines social values and concerns and creates community. Another major approach by Ritualists link myth to ritual, always, and claim that to have one is to have the other, and that myth is constantly connected to ritual action. One may also claim certain characteristics of myth, such as common motifs and symbols. As well, much is made of the idea that the source material of myth is common, rather than specific: Ovid may write about Apollo, but the source of his narrative is collective, rather than specific to one recognizable author. Myth is often linked to religion, at times religious ceremony, but religious or not, it may be assumed is that myth is important in some way; for many people the difference between folktales and myth is this idea that for the culture that produces it, myth is important, whichever way one wishes to examine it.

All of these characteristics, however, are applied to ancient texts almost exclusively. Another facet of myth for many people, then, tends to be that it is from cultures other than our own modern one. Yet there are texts which exhibit both many of the characteristics of ancient myths, as well as serve the same social function of myth in many ways. Based on the common source material of 'celebrity', these texts can be found online, and they are fan works, narratives called 'fanfiction' which have a similar transmission technique as ancient myths did, a similar form of collective source material, and even some of the same symbolism and a few of the same motifs. Moreover, these narratives may also be linked to rituals within society, and the subculture that produces them. They also function to explore social issues relevant to the subculture which produces them, as well as unify the subculture. These narratives thus function on the level of mythology for the fan culture online, like modern day mythology.

It is important to note that most of the examples and comparisons made within this paper deal with a community, within a subculture, within the confines of the 'celebrity fandom'. The particular narratives that best illustrate many of the points made are of a particular nature: they are about the celebrities involved in pop music, and mostly of a 'slash' nature. Certainly, the narratives being surveyed are from a specific community, that of 'slash' fiction (defined in detail below).ⁱⁱⁱ The main reason that the slash community is the example used within this paper is for the high quality of writing and the intelligence and variety of narrative produced by it.

Media Culture, Celebrity, and Mythology

To step back from fanfiction and online narratives altogether, a brief discussion of pop culture and media culture, and the phenomenon of *celebrity*, is important in understanding how these online stories work as mythology. Approaching media culture and celebrity in general, it is possible to see many of the claims made about mythology can also be made about celebrity. Celebrity in many ways defies definition. Previous definitions hoped to connect the word celebrity with being well-known for nothing but one's personality.^{iv} Gabler, however, calls celebrity "human entertainment" – that is, the reason we are interested in people who are famous, people we call celebrities, is because their lives are entertaining. He goes further, however, and makes the distinction between people who are simply famous, and those who have celebrity: in his words: "So what turns a famous person into a celebrity? Narrative."^v

Here, then, is a definition of celebrity that includes an important element for the creation of mythology: narrative. We are far more likely to read a supermarket tabloid about Britney Spears or Madonna than Tori Amos – indeed, it is much more likely that people would be writing about Britney Spears or Madonna than Tori Amos in the first place – and in this way, it is easy to see that narrative, or the life story of a celebrity, becomes common property of a culture. The tabloids are one way in which to see this; fanfiction, discussed below, is another. However, if one accepts that it is the narrative behind a celebrity that makes them distinct from other people who are simply famous, it means that 'celebrities' have an already built-up corpus of narrative around them and their lives, which is easy to access and available to anyone who wishes to watch interviews

and read magazines. Moreover, this shared narrative has the beginnings of myth, and for those who write about celebrity lives online, this already available collection of celebrity narrative means that they are drawing from and refining these mythological beginnings.

Definitions of Fanfiction and Fandom

The most crucial aspect of celebrities is their fans, or their audience: the people following not only their careers and consuming their products (watching their films, listening to their music), but also closely following their personal lives. This fan culture can include anything from collecting newspaper and magazine clippings, to writing fiction online, hypothesizing about the lives of celebrities.^{vi} In order to examine any of the ties between fandom and myth, this fan culture and some of its terminology must be briefly explained. The word *fandom* is used in a number of ways by people but, when discussing the online community, means something very specific. The term *fanfiction* is a word which means little outside of a very specific subculture of writers, and few people outside that subculture have been exposed to it, therefore its precise meaning must be clarified. Finally, within the online fandom this paper is primarily referring to a specific subset of narratives and online culture, that of the *slash* sub-genre.

First, the general word *fandom* itself must be defined and explained. It has been defined in various different ways by different groups. Online, it is often used to refer to a particular segment of the writing community (for example, the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fandom, the *X-Files* fandom) and typically refers to those people who engage in reading or writing fanfiction about a television show or other source media. It is also used to

describe the whole of the fan community, either online or off – people refer to fandom, and can mean either 'the group of people who read/write/participate in fanfiction' or 'the group of people who consider themselves fans'.^{vii}

As for *fanfiction*, for someone who has no experience with online fan culture it may be difficult to grasp at first the mere idea of such narratives. Henry Jenkins is the author of *Textual Poachers*, one of the definitive studies of fanfiction.^{viii} As he puts it, fanfiction is "any kind of written creativity that is based on an identifiable segment of popular culture, such as a television show, and is not produced as "professional" writing."^{ix} As the word itself suggests, quite simply, fanfiction (or 'fanfic') is fiction written by fans. However, the majority of studies done, including Jenkins, refer to fanfiction but actually mean "media fanfiction", fiction written by fans about original source material which is fictional (in other words, about an existing literary work or, usually, television show). Media fanfiction, then, is based around existing fictional media.

However, Jenkins' own definition, in including "any identifiable segment of popular culture", leaves room for a relatively new kind of fanfiction: that of fiction produced about real people, or celebrities, rather than existing fictional works. The popularity of fanfiction about characters from such shows as Star Trek has been high for decades, in real life conventions and the offline zine culture (fan produced low-budget and non-profit magazines full of fiction).^x However, fiction about celebrities has only become popular (and more importantly, acceptable) for the last two or three years.^{xi} Celebrity fanfiction is a new phenomena. Because of this, celebrity fanfiction, or Real People Fanfiction (RPF for short, though in the community this paper centers around, this

primarily means members of pop music groups such as *NSYNC and the Backstreet Boys), like most newer genres and texts within fanfiction, is based not around zine production and real life encounters with fellow fans, but the internet.

Fanfiction on the internet is wide-spread and easy to find. Much of this fanfiction is written by women,^{xii} and is posted either publicly or privately online: in mailing lists, personal or group websites, and even on personal journal sites, of which LiveJournal is the most popular among fanfiction writers. (Much of the online fanfic community has migrated to this very simple method of communication, especially within the RPF community; one may find scenes, comments, even whole stories posted to LiveJournal. It is a very important website in terms of the fanfiction community, since much of the centralization of the community is apparent on LiveJournal.) In the last few years the internet, has become vital in the distribution of fanfiction, even allowing for artificial subcultures or societies to build up around it, such as the ones on LiveJournal. (For example: on LiveJournal alone there are 1000 people who list "fanfiction" as an interest, which is the top limit of search results. There may be literally thousands.) Each writing community, as well, can be separated into certain subsets, and thus a complex social organization can be found.

The word *slash* was first coined long before the online fanfiction community, within the zine culture days in the early 1970s.^{xiii} Jenkins' definition reflects its origins: "the convention of employing a stroke or 'slash' to signify a same-sex relationship between two characters (Kirk/Spock or K/S) and specifies a genre of fan stories positing homoerotic affairs between serial protagonists."^{xiv} Within the online community, slash flourishes, and in the last few years it has been possible to find slash fiction taking a

much more mainstream position than when Jenkins first published. As well, the term slash has generally come to denote any fanfic that has a homoerotic relationship within it, whether they are protagonists or secondary characters. The slash fandom is an important sub-culture within the online fanfiction community, with many detailed and varied narratives.

Therefore, the RPF fandom online is an online writing community, a fandom that writes fanfiction about real people – in this particular case, pop music celebrities – and produces narratives of primarily a slash nature. Fanfiction in general, however, is more than simply writing, or narrative work: it is re-appropriation of media.

Celebrity Fanfiction and Ownership

Jenkins, referring to the whole of the fanfiction community, calls fandom "a vehicle for marginalized subcultural groups (women, the young, gays, and so on) to pry open space for their cultural concerns within dominant representations". Jenkins goes on to say that "fandom is a way of appropriating media texts and rereading them in a fashion that serves different interests, a way of transforming mass culture into popular culture".^{xv} This idea of 'appropriating' material – in the case of RPF, the celebrities' lives themselves – and making it serve marginalized interests, transforming it into cultural concerns, is a chief example of how this fiction functions as myth. Fanfiction is the ultimate re-appropriation of material: "Far from syncretic, fans actively assert their mastery over the mass-produced texts which provide the raw materials for their own cultural productions."^{xvi} It is this which gives fanfiction its first characteristic of myth: that it is

common property, the re-appropriation of themes and narrative into the community and the creation of text based on this.

The re-appropriation of characters and themes from a television show, for example, works to make an individual's work (the show) a collective possession (that is, anyone who wants may use the intellectual material and create their own variations).^{xvii} All of fanfiction, then, has a necessary characteristic of myth in that the themes and characters themselves are common property of the fanfiction writers as a whole; none of the authors online 'own' the characters or settings that they write about. However, in media fanfiction, the source material is still 'owned' by the original creator, who is identifiable in the credits, or in the by-line of the book. Myths have long been associated with epic poetry and orality, and at their heart, are thought to have no recognizable author, originating from traditional stories (for example: the epics of Homer and Hesiod, as mentioned above; the epic of Gilgamesh and the Enuma Elish; even parts of the Old Testament, as mentioned above). Traditional stories are created by a community, rather than one person (usually through the process of oral tradition, discussed below), though certain literary variants may be identifiable. Media fiction has, at its heart, an original author – for example, should one write fiction about the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (a very popular fandom), the original creator, Joss Whedon, is still recognizable every time the credits roll.

Celebrity fanfiction, however, however, is more fluid and transcends the idea of original ownership in that it uses real people to create fiction: the source material is based in 'celebrity and can already be considered common property, as discussed above. By taking characterization (and to a certain degree, plot points) from celebrity life, rather

than fictional material (such as a television show), RPF becomes fiction created by the community with no original source author – and therefore is closer to myth than media fiction.

Orality and Myth: the Internet as Oral Text

One of the ways in which traditional myth (of the Mediterranean and Near East) was created by the community rather than by one particular author was through its orality – because mythic themes and poems were oral, they were subject to constant revision and change.^{xviii} The overall narrative, then, was constantly in flux and only the relevant pieces of the myth would survive throughout the constant re-tellings. The idea of orality being linked to ancient myth is a common one, since most of what we consider 'myth' in our modern society (as mentioned above) is thought to have been transferred throughout ancient cultures by the method of oral poetry. In our society, there are few, if any, forms of literature or entertainment that one could consider even having any ties to an oral culture whatsoever.^{xix} However, though we no longer live in an oral culture, there is a form of media which can be comparable: that of digital media.

By digital media, one can take the internet, and to a lesser degree, television and radio, as examples. A literate society is one in which literature and entertainment is put down in books, and read, not listened to; thus the information is more tangible. It also means that treatments of myths become static, no longer adapted and adaptable by oral poets. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for example, is one treatment of many different myths, however it is far more long-lasting than the original traditional stories, and thus resistant

to change, simply because it is put on paper. Western society has been a literate society for centuries, and this important facet of myth – the idea that it changes and mutates as necessitated by society – has been lost.

Through the internet, however, this idea of adaptability and change has been brought back; modified for modern society, but very much alive. In regards to digital media, the information imparted by it is much less permanent. It is easy to delete a web-page, or even a whole website, whereas the removal of a paper-based text from societal tradition is much harder. The literature put online, though not oral, is much more than simple textual narration. It has the oral element of transience, but in a way for modern society – quite simply, fanfiction is impermanent and thus always open to change, which is a vital part of a mythic system.

Illustrating this point of impermanence and continual modification is relatively easy with a few examples. One of the most popular writers within the RPF community, Helen,^{xx} recently lost her website and has yet to put any of her fiction back online – however many of the conventions of fiction which she introduced still float around in other writers' work.^{xxi} Obviously, this is very different from a culture in which literature is passed around through paper textual means. Helen is not the only author to have lost her website; other 'well-known' RPF authors have taken their websites down and disappeared without a trace. None of their work survives online, and yet people still discuss it, and them – a method by which their original narrative may survive, though not in the strict literate sense.

Other ways in which the online forum provides a much less permanent basis for publication are the way in which people may even write in chat room windows, through

email, or in online journals. For example, while chatting, people may have an idea, write it quickly for someone else, and then once the window is closed the text will disappear forever. For example, within a private conversation, the author Helen cited an example about a whole story that she and another author had written within chat, which neither of them had saved.^{xxii} In this way, it is very easy to lose narrative online, simply through the act of not saving a conversation or email. Even in the more permanent (compared to online chats or email) forum of LiveJournal, a scene may be deleted, lost, or simply forgotten in amongst other posts. While people may write a scene and share it on LiveJournal, they may not save it to their own computer, choosing to simply leave it in its unfinished, impermanent state, or later even delete it. All of these instances occur frequently and demonstrate the ease by which online text may be lost, and thus its similarity to oral poetry in that it is not static, but subject to constant change.

Finally, as in myth and oral poetry, through this impermanence themes and symbols which are considered relevant to both the author and the audience are kept, even when the material (such as Helen's website) is unavailable. Thus the fanfic which incorporates her motifs and characters acts as myth, and the transmission techniques of oral poetry, in that it filters and preserves parts that the culture deems relevant, and discards the rest. Like in oral poetry, where "the listener contributes to the production of the work in performance"^{xxiii} by requiring the performer to modify their performance, the ability to modify and reuse elements of fanfiction allows readers to contribute and modify the existing bulk of narrative available. The medium of the internet, moreover, is one of the only places in which this is possible, because of the impermanence of the narrative – no other modern media functions as well as oral poetry in this regard.

Common Mythic Motifs in Celebrity Fanfiction

This facet of the internet which mirrors oral poetry is important to the idea that fanfiction functions as mythology, because it shows how themes within fanfic may change and be reused, recycled, even reformed, very easily. To use Helen as an example again, one of her most famous stories, "The Same Inside", introduced two secondary characters, Theresa and Nathan.^{xxiv} Though they were never expressly available to other writers, several other narratives appeared where they had roles, by a number of different authors. Thus two characters, which were originally an invention of one author, became a kind of 'public domain', and were absorbed into the common realm. In many ways, they became part of the collective narrative, available to other writers. It is not only the details of celebrity narrative which is incorporated into the RPF collective, but also details from other writers' works.

Many of Helen's other themes and motifs can be found within other people's works as well. The most prominent of these is the theme of gender-switching. (On one links page alone eighteen stories are listed with this basic plot, including Helen's original.^{xxv}) Another author, Em, wrote a gender-switching story, and though she too has since left the fandom and her stories are no longer available, her influence and ideas remain: people discuss, rewrite, and reuse both of these authors' themes and plots, as well as many others. Gender-switching, of course, can be found in mythology as well: Ovid mentions many, Euripides' *Bacchae*^{xxvi} has a strong gender-switching theme, and that is in the Greek tradition alone.

This motif of gender-switching, however, is far from the only common mythological one to be found within RPF. Though other fanfiction has a certain amount of fantastic elements within it, the variety and number within RPF tends to be higher. For a fandom set firmly within the 'real world' of musicians and celebrities, there are a lot of 'magical' plot points, mystical motifs, and even straight out alternate-universe stories. As well, all of these stories borrow from the common source material, as well as the narratives that have already explored the same motif, and each spin it differently. The motif of wings, for example, is prominent; one character growing wings within a larger plot that can explore anything from a relationship, to themes of belonging/isolation, and more. On another links page there are eighteen stories with this motif, and it is possible that there are others simply not linked.^{xxvii} These narratives could be compared to the story of Icarus, in Ovid^{xxviii} as well as Apollodorus,^{xxix} showing that the motif goes back to other more traditionally recognized myths.

Though sometimes one is able to pinpoint which story possibly first used a certain motif, as in the case of the gender-switch and wings themes (Helen in the case of gender-switch, a story by Lesa Soja in the case of wings^{xxx}), often it is much more difficult. In the realm of alternate-universe stories, or AUs, the common plot of school-age or college-age stories is incredibly common – twenty four listed on one site,^{xxxi} and several others at least. Many of these, of course, have at their heart both a romantic theme and a theme of trying to find one's place in the world and grow up, as well as underlying themes of isolation. Other themes that are continually recycled include "time-shifting" (wherein a character is magically transported forward in time, deposited with current-day characters – or vice versa), body-switching stories (wherein two characters switch bodies

as a plot device), and transformation stories (wherein a character transforms shape – like the already-mentioned gender-switch, as well as animals), and more. Obviously, these motifs borrow heavily from science fiction, but also from mythological motifs. After all, Ovid wrote fifteen books on the power of transformation of bodies alone.^{xxxii}

Common motifs are an important part of a mythic structure because traditional mythic cycles, rather than inventing wholly new stories, instead recycled and reused traditional stories. Therefore the fact that common motifs and even plots can be found within RPF shows yet another way in which it appears like myth, in that authors who choose to write RPF, like many of the traditional tales that come to mind when one thinks of myth – rather than inventing wholly new characters, settings and narratives, instead rewrite and re-appropriate the existing canon to their own ends.

Celebrity Fanfiction as a Social Function

Not only does RPF employ many of the same motifs as traditional mythology, it also works to provide many of the same social functions. It has the ability to create and solidify the subculture which produces it – indeed, the RPF community is strongly based upon the narrative it produces, since people within the community identify as fans of the narrative first and foremost. It links people together within the community, and also puts forth certain aspects and issues which are important to the community.^{xxxiii} The vast majority of fiction within this particular RPF community is slash – and thus the central theme of gay relationships is fairly prominent. The importance of this relationship

varies, from the periphery (many Alternate Universe stories have a relationship develop as a side-note to the more important plot itself) to being the center of the narrative.

The fact that queer issues are present in nearly all of these stories within this particular community could be seen as an argument against the idea that RPF explores important social issues, since queer issues are present in nearly all the narratives, while they are not present in most of modern culture. However, the particular online subculture that produces pop slash is itself 62% queer, as a recent poll showed.^{xxxiv} Taking into account even a ten percent fluctuation either way, over half the community still self-identifies as queer in some regard, and thus the prominence of queer themes within the mythology of the community, RPF, reinforces and sustains this subculture. Thus not only does RPF work to provide social cohesion, or even "create a community"^{xxxv} – indeed, it is the narratives of RPF that the community hinges on – it also puts forth issues and themes that the community puts importance on, and gives the sub-culture which produces its identity.

Finally, the act of writing or reading brings the sensation of fandom – concert-going and being a fan of the music, as well as being a fan of the fanfiction – to a new level: readers and writers become active, rather than passive, participants: "Fan reading, however, is a social process through which individual interpretations are shaped and reinforced through ongoing discussions with other readers."^{xxxvi} This 'active' status brought about by the action of reading or writing (and thus participating) is another way that RPF fulfills a social function within the RPF community – and not only is related to the rituals performed in the community (discussed below) but also serves as myth fulfilling the social function of cohesion.

Celebrity Fanfiction and Ritual

As well, myth has often been linked to ritual.^{xxxvii} RPF, being online, is not directly connected with ritual per se in that it is not spoken, but the very act of writing does become symbolic. As well, by being fans of pop musicians rather than television shows or even other celebrity personalities, people who participate in the RPF fandom can also be involved in a very important aspect of ritual culture: that of concerts.

Concerts themselves may be viewed as ritualistic in that they bear some resemblance to the kinds of initiation rites one hears about from such cults as the Cult of Demeter, or other Hellenistic mystery religions, in that . The current trend of belittling fan culture includes ignoring, or even mocking, concert going and the feelings that come from concert experiences.^{xxxviii} It remains, however, that the feelings brought about in a concert have often been compared to religious or spiritual ones, not unlike the feelings mentioned around pagan cultic practices. Finally, concerts are not the only comparable ritualistic actions fans and writers can participate in. People may get together to view video tapes, discuss celebrity trends – even the simple act of listening to songs on the radio or on a CD can take on new importance. For example, Aden explores the idea of fan participation in simple acts and how said acts become ritualistic; he uses Turner's theories to compare the experience of popular stories as a "symbolic pilgrimage".^{xxxix} His interpretation of popular stories as ritual is comparable to how many people experience RPF. However, for the RPF community, the very act of writing as well as reading can also be seen as a form of ritualistic participation.

The myths that surround these ancient cultic practices (for example, the Homeric Hymn to Demeter) are not comparable to RPF. However, there is a relationship present between the fan, who attends concerts, listens to music, and thus participates in ritual, and the fiction, which is a way in which fans may participate in another layer of the mythology. Writing and reading, by being acts of participation, give meaning to the celebrity narrative as well as one's own life – as well as the culture which produces and re-appropriates the narrative.^{xl} The RPF community, by being participatory, while it creates social ties, it also adds a new dimension to concert-going and pop culture viewing for fans.

Celebrity Fanfiction as Sacred

This dimension may be best defined as that of having importance and imparting meaning. If celebrity fanfiction can be said to have many different social functions, as well as share many of the motifs and transmission techniques of ancient epic poetry and myth, that is still no real distinction between the way that RPF can compare to myth from how it can compare to folktale. The distinction made between myths and folktales is often that of the *sacred* – that is, myths are important, above and beyond folktales, to the extent of having sacred or religious meaning,^{xli} as well as imparting meaning to the lives of those who participate in (create and listen to, or read) the myth. To place RPF within the category of myth rather than folktales, it must also have this sacred meaning to those who read and write it. In the case of RPF, this is demonstrably true.

Much has been said about the spiritual dimension to being a fan in general. As said by Grossberg: "Fans' investment in certain practices and texts provides them with strategies which enable them to gain a certain amount of control over their affective life, which further enables them to invest in new forms of meaning".^{xlii} This can be applied to fanfiction readers and writers as well: the narratives and rituals that they perform and participate in contribute to meaning within their lives, much like myth. The fans who find meaning, or the sacred, through concerts are not restricted to fanfic writers and readers, however having fanfiction as yet another layer of the sacred allows for an even deeper experience. Both the narrative and the rituals RPF fans participate in provide meaning above and beyond simple literature or enjoyment. Even from very personal accounts of concerts from a variety of fanfiction readers and writers, it is possible to see the spiritual nature of their concert experiences, as well as the meaning they gain (Jenkins, as mentioned above) from their participation in the community. One writer equated her first *NSYNC concert to "being boiled", and called the experience a life-changing epiphany.^{xliii} And this is not an uncommon reaction; many readers and writers speak of life altering concerts as well as life-altering fanfiction: the feeling of the sacred and meaning coming from their participation within fan culture and fanfiction. This level of meaning, and the way people view fandom as bringing meaning, is another way in which RPF can function as myth to those who read and participate in it.

The New Mythology

It is obvious that RPF is not a phenomenon which can be applied to everyone's lives. However, for those within the community that do participate and find themselves within the celebrity fanfiction culture, the narratives of this fanfiction function very much the same way myth does in more traditional mythic cultures. Bacon-Smith makes the comment that "membership [in a fandom] is a life-changing option, requiring as high a degree of commitment as any job, town, or religion."^{xliv} Most fans would agree with her. Once one finds oneself within a fandom, or a fan of something, it alters world-view, opinion – it becomes a part of one's world-view, as well as an integral part of one's life. Thus the narratives that go along with being a fan become equally important, in much the same way as myth.

However, possibly the most compelling piece of evidence for the possibility of celebrity fanfiction or RPF to exist as myth is the agreement of the fans with whom I corresponded. Numerous discussions have cropped up about the role of fanfiction within fans' lives, and the importance of fandom to those people who participate in it. Many of the people I spoke with had considered fanfiction comparable to myth already, or had thought about it and discussed it at length,^{xlv} came back with enthusiastic agreement. The subculture of RPF, populated with educated women mostly in their mid-twenties, has found meaning, as well as built a community, around narratives that consist of the re-appropriation of media long considered immature. Thus, these women have created a new mythology, one which is specific to their needs and functions within their lives, and all based on groups like *NSYNC. Pop music is not just for twelve-year-olds.

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Appendix A: Relevant Websites

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nsyncslash/> -- one of the first mailing lists for *NSYNC slash, created in spring of 2000

<http://nifty.firewind.net/nifty/gay/celebrity/boy-bands/> -- the 'celebrity' section at www.nifty.org; lists one of the first pop celebrity slash stories. There are only three stories posted until 1999.

<http://www.waxjism.net/pussycat.html> – "JC and the Pussycats"; lists fanfiction that fits under the theme of gender-switching

<http://sitnah.home.netcom.com/lesasoja/wings.html> -- "Some Blind Hand"; lists fanfiction that fits under the theme of 'wings'

<http://sitnah.home.netcom.com/lesasoja/fiction/lift.html> -- Lesa Soja, *Lift*; the first 'winged' story

<http://www.lostmuse.com/phantasy/archive.html> -- "The Archive for Popsplash AUs"; lists fanfiction that fits in the category of high school and college alternate universe stories

<http://www.trickster.org/symposium/symp114.html> – "Because We Love Our Gods: Mythoi, Logoi, and Real People Slash," by joudama; discussion of myth and RPF

http://www.livejournal.com/users/pop_tarts/155605.html – discussion on LiveJournal about RPF as mythology

Appendix B: Poll Conducted Regarding the Self-Identification of Participants in the RPF Community

Within the RPF community surveyed, the poll conducted for the purposes of this paper reflected out of 314 answers, 195 (62.1% of) people chose to self-identify as queer, and 119 (or 37.9% of) people chose to self-identify as straight.

249 (or 79.0% of) people believed they surrounded themselves with more queer influences in their lives than 'average', whereas 66 (or 21.0% of) people believed they did not.

Out of the 314 answers, 296 (or 94.0%) were female.

http://www.livejournal.com/users/pop_tarts/156748.html – full results.

ⁱ Robbie Woliver "Pop Music; She Does It Again, and No Oops About It". *New York Times*, July 2, 2000. [online] - for an example of such bias.

ⁱⁱ Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 2 sec. 53, trans. A. D. Godley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920). Available at *The Perseus Project* (April 2003) [<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Hdt.+2.53.1>] <online>

ⁱⁱⁱ There are many websites devoted to other fiction regarding pop celebrities, however the quality of writing is far below that produced by this particular online community.

^{iv} Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, quoted in Neal Gabler, "Toward A New Definition of Celebrity" [<http://www.learcenter.org/pdf/Gabler.pdf>] <online>

^v Gabler, "Toward a New Definition of Celebrity" <online>

^{vi} For discussion of fan culture in general and fan activities, see: *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1992).

^{vii} Summarized from: Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 22-23; and my own personal experience with the fanfiction community online.

^{viii} Though *Textual Poachers* is one of the only full books that examines fanfiction, it is over a decade old (published in 1991) and does not deal with RPF or the online fandom. Nonetheless, much of Jenkins' work on fanfiction in general is still relevant.

^{ix} Rebecca Tushnet, "Legal Fictions: Copyright, Fanfiction, and a New Common Law". Reprinted with permission from volume 17 of the Loyola of Los Angeles Entertainment Law Journal, 1997 (17 Loy. L.A. Ent. L.J. 651) [<http://www.tushnet.com/law/fanficarticle.html>] <online>

^x Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women*, 7-22.

^{xi} The first major mailing list for *NSYNC slash was created in spring of 2000; on another early celebrity slash website, there were only three stories posted until 1999. See Appendix A.

^{xii} Bacon-Smith, 5-6; Henry Jenkins III, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 1. For results within the RPF community, see Appendix B.

^{xiii} Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 187.

^{xiv} Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 186.

^{xv} Jenkins, "Star Trek Rerun, Reread and Rewritten," 174.

^{xvi} Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 23.

^{xvii} For an in-depth discussion of this, see Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 24-27 in particular.

^{xviii} Foley, *Oral Formulaic Theory*, 33-41; 189-225.

^{xix} The music forms rap and hip hop, since performers often make up their verses on the spot, or at least modify them each performance, may be comparable, though not relevant for this paper.

^{xx} Helen is her pseudonym; many RPF authors online are not willing to give their real names because of the risks they run from potential ridicule and the stigma attached to writing fanfiction, firstly, and fiction about real people, secondly.

^{xxi} Helen's domain, which went down in September of 2002, is still unavailable, and most of her work has yet to resurface online.

^{xxii} Helen, [private chat] (6 April 2002).

^{xxiii} Paul Zumthor, *Oral Poetry: An Introduction*, trans. Kathryn Murphy-Judy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) 183-187.

^{xxiv} Though Helen's website is still down, she very kindly discussed with me the text, and I obtained a copy from her.

^{xxv} "JC and the Pussycats" - the gender-switch index [<http://www.waxjism.net/pussycat.html>] <online>

^{xxvi} Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 83-85, 220-224; and Euripides *The Bacchae*, trans. William Arrowsmith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); for example.

^{xxvii} "Some Blind Hand" - the 'wings' index [<http://sitnah.home.netcom.com/lesasoja/wings.html>] <online>

^{xxviii} Ovid, 176-178.

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- ^{xxix} Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, trans. Robin Hard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 140-141.
- ^{xxx} Lesa Soja, *Lift* [<http://sitnah.home.netcom.com/lesasoja/fiction/lift.html>] <online>
- ^{xxxi} "The Archive for Popsplash AUs" - in-school alternate universe index [<http://www.lostmuse.com/phantasy/archive.html>] <online>
- ^{xxxii} A discussion of the many different traditional mythic motifs within fanfiction would be impossible in twenty pages.
- ^{xxxiii} Ivan Strenski: "Introduction: Malinowski and Myth", in *Malinowski and the Work of Myth*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992) xvii.
- ^{xxxiv} See Appendix B.
- ^{xxxv} Pierre Hegy, *Myth as Foundation for Society and Values: A Sociological Analysis* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 20.
- ^{xxxvi} Jenkins, *Textual poachers*, 45.
- ^{xxxvii} Most obviously J. Harrison, as well as many others.
- ^{xxxviii} Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 9-15.
- ^{xxxix} Roger C. Aden, *Popular Stories and Promised Lands: Fan Cultures and Symbolic Pilgrimages* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1999) 79-112.
- ^{xl} Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 23-26.
- ^{xli} Betsy Bowden, "Myth", in *Encyclopedia of Folklore and Literature*" ed. Mary Ellen Brown and Bruce A. Rosenberg (California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1998) 431-434.
- ^{xlii} Lewis, *The Adoring Audience*, 65.
- ^{xliii} The writer, going by the pseudonym Alestar, has very personal accounts of her experiences on her website. The remark "I feel boiled" was related in a private conversation.
- ^{xliv} Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women*, 87.
- ^{xlv} Much of this discussion is available on LiveJournal; see Appendix A for a list of a few of the relevant posts and other essays.