Truth in Fanfic

I. Lewis' "Truth in Fiction"

II. A fanfic primer

III. Some examples of fanfic

IV. The problems that fanfic poses for Lewis' theory

V. The solution

Lewis' Analysis 0

- A sentence of the form "in fiction f, ϕ" is true iff ϕ is true at every world where f is told as known fact rather than fiction.

- Problem: We extrapolate facts about the fiction from real world facts.

Lewis' Analysis 1

- A sentence of the form "in fiction f, ϕ" is non-vacuously true iff some world where f is told as a known fact and ϕ is true differs less from our actual world, on balance, than does any world where f is told as a known fact and ϕ is not true. It is vacuously true if there are no possible worlds where f is told as a known fact.

- Say what?

What Analysis 1 comes to

- Some proposition ϕ is true in a fiction iff

- ϕ is explicitly stated in the fiction and/or...

- ϕ is the sort of thing you would expect to hold in worlds that are as close to the actual world as they can be given everything that is told in the fiction.

A Problem for Analysis 1?

- In "The Adventure of the Specked Band" Sherlock Holmes solves a murder mystery by showing that the victim had been killed by a Russell's viper that had climbed up a rope. What Holmes did not realize is that the snake is not a constrictor...and could not have climbed the rope. Either the snake reached its victim some other way or the case remains open. --Carl Gans, "How Snakes Move"

Lewis' misstep: Analysis 2

- A sentence of the form "in fiction f, ϕ" is non-vacuously true iff, whenever w is one of the collective belief worlds of the community of origin of f, then some world where f is told as a known fact and ϕ is true differs less from the world w, on balance, than does any world where f is told as a known fact and ϕ is not true. It is vacuously true if there are no possible worlds where f is told as a known fact.

- Say what?

What Analysis 2 comes to

- Some proposition ϕ is true in a fiction iff

- ϕ is explicitly stated in the fiction and/or...

- ϕ is the sort of thing you would expect to hold in worlds that are as close to <u>the way the original audience of *f* took the world to be</u> (or as close as they can be given everything that is told in the fiction).

- We won't follow this strategy

A Real Problem for Analysis 1

- Serial fictions (and fanfic)

- General background about fiction genres (Unless told otherwise, can't we assume dragons can breathe fire, vampires have no reflections, etc?)

Lewis' Gestured at Analysis 1.5

- Let F be the set of fictions that overlap with f in some relevant way. Then a sentence of the form "in fiction f, ϕ" is non-vacuously true iff some world where f is told as a known fact and ϕ is true differs less from our actual world, on balance, than does any world where f and the salient fictions of F are told as a known fact and ϕ is not true. It is vacuously true if there are no possible worlds where f is told as a known fact.

- Say what?

What Analysis 1.5 comes to

- Some proposition ϕ is true in a fiction iff

- ϕ is explicitly stated in the fiction and/or...

- ϕ is the sort of thing you would expect to hold in worlds that are as close to the actual world as they can be given everything that is told in the fiction <u>and the salient things told in appropriately related fictions</u>.

II. A Fanfic Primer

Some fanfic concepts

- **Canon** (fic from the "official" media source)
- **Fanon** (fanfic incorporated into the canon)

- Three major categories
  - **Gen** (no romantic relationships)
  - **Het** (stories involve heterosexual relationships)
  - **Slash** (stories involve same sex relationships, often based on perceived homoerotic subtext, e.g. Kirk/Spock)

Sub-genres of fanfic

- hurt/comfort, h/c
- Mpreg (male becomes pregnant)
- Deatfic (major character dies)
- Curtainfic (uberdomestic – as in characters shopping for curtains together)
- Episode fix
- Episode tag, Missing scene
- AU, Alternate universe
- Crossover (e.g. Bufffy and X-files)
- Fluff (doesn't advance plot)

Some more fanfic concepts

- PWP (porn without plot)
- Kink
- Badfic
- Mary Sue/Stu (typically writing oneself into the fiction as an original character, e.g. As Harry Potter's boy/girlfriend)

Editorial control of fanfic

- Header (specifies genre, pairings, spoilers, etc., allows archiving)
- Betas (read stories and make suggestions)
- Listmoms, list owners (set rules and guidelines for what can be posted)
- Readers provide reviews and comments
- BNF (fan with large following, can set tone for board)

The vastness of fanfic: harrypotterfanfiction.com

- Stories: 43,931
- Chapters: 163,223
- Reviews: 1,328,600
- Authors: 21,074
- Members: 48,786
- (as of 10-19-2007)

Controversy over fanfic

- Writer Robin Hobb: "Fan fiction is a good way to avoid learning how to be a writer. Fan fiction allows the writer to pretend to be creating a story, while using someone else's world, characters, and plot. Coloring Barbie's hair green in a coloring book is not a great act of creativity. Neither is putting lipstick on Ken. Fan fiction does exactly those kinds of things."

Controversy over fanfic (2)

- Writer Robin Hobb: "Anyone who read fan fiction about Harry Potter, for instance, would have an entirely different idea of what those stories are about than if he had simply read J.K. Rowling's books."

Hobb again:

- "I should be flattered that readers like my stories enough to want to continue them." That's not flattering. That's insulting. Every fan fiction I've read to date, based on my world or any other writer's world, had focused on changing the writer's careful work to suit the foible of the fan writer. Romances are invented, gender identities changed, fetishes indulged and endings are altered. It's not flattery.

Hobb again (2):

- To me, it is the fan fiction writer saying, "Look, the original author really screwed up the story, so I'm going to fix it. Here is how it should have gone." At the extreme low end of the spectrum, fan fiction becomes personal masturbation fantasy in which the fan reader is interacting with the writer's character. That isn't healthy for anyone.

III. Some examples of fanfic

Star Trek New Voyages

Come What May (pilot)

- began in 1997 with James Cawley and Next Generation costume designer William Ware Theiss. There has been a pilot, Come What May, and five episodes produced so far. More are in production

Star Wars Revelations

Revelations Battlefield Shoot
Filmed at Brandy Station Battlefields , VA

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- Between episodes 3 and 4
- Intended to give a reason for why the Jedi Order was almost extinct in the original trilogy.
- Directed by Shane Felux and written by Dawn Cowings and Sarah Yaworsky.

Firefly spinoff "Into the Black)

- Made by Shindigital Pictures
- Set in Joss Whedon's Firefly 'verse

Into the Black Trailer

Star Wars "The Phantom Edit"

- removing or re-editing some scenes featuring Jar Jar Binks
- removing or re-editing most Battle Droid dialogue
- limiting redundant exposition throughout film
- trimming reiteration of the politics
- re-arranged shots and scenes to match original trilogy presentation style
- removing "Yippee" and "Oops" from young Anakin's dialog in order to make him a stronger character

Early fanfic (Archonic fiction)

- 1428 John Lydgate "The Siege of Thebes" continues Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales".
- Robert Henryson's variation on Chaucer's "Troiles and Chrisyde (itself a variant of a Greek myth).
- All of Shakespeare?

More early "fanfic"

- 1613 Elizabeth Cary "The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry" (based on Josephus' story of King Herod's wife.)
- 1621 Lady Mary Wroth "The Countess of Montgomery's Urania" (based on Sidney's "The Contess of Pembroke's Arcadia")
- 1654 Anna Weamy's "Continuation" of "Arcadia"
- Also 1590 Lucy Hastings Copy of "Arcadia" with handwriting notes and continuations.

Some "post-colonial" Fanfic

- 1988 David Henry Huang: "M. Butterfly"
- 2000 Seana Naslund: "Ahab's Wife"
- 2001 Alice Randal: "The Wind Done Gone" (narrated by Scarlet's slave and half sister)
- 2005 Nancy Rawles "My Jim" (based on *Huck Finn* told from perspective of Jim and wife)

Henry Jenkins:
Textual Poachers (1999)

- "Fanfiction is a way of the culture repairing the damage done in a system where contemporary myths are owned by corporations instead of owned by folk."

IV. The limitations of Lewis' theory

Needed: a framework in which it is possible to make sense of...

- Critiquing canonical fiction for flouting norms and getting rl facts wrong
- Improving on canonical fiction by extensions and repair
- Developing "true" alternative narratives that explore alternative POV and latent subtexts.
- Critiquing fanfic for flouting norms of fanfic communities.
- Canon-based critiques of fanfic
- Doing all of the above without contradiction.

V. An Alternative Formulation

Prelude to Analysis 3: Normative Grounding for *f*

- Def: For any (fan)fiction *f*, worlds that provide *normative grounding for f* are those worlds consistent with the norms established by the relevant community of fanfic readers of *f,* given expectations established for *f* (e.g. header information).

- Possible norms to include: physical laws, logical laws, biological laws, social norms, ethical norms, norms of character, etc.

Analysis 3

Let W be the set of worlds that provide normative grounding for f. Then some proposition ϕ is true in a (fan)fiction f iff either

1) ϕ is the sort of thing you would *expect to hold* given an sincere telling of f in any of the worlds in W, or

2) ϕ is the sort of thing you would expect to hold given an sincere telling of f in the set of worlds W' related to W by *permissible extension*.

What is a "permissible extension"?

Suppose ϕ is NOT the sort of thing you would expect to hold in the set of worlds W that are canonical for f.

then ϕ should be the sort of thing you would expect to hold in the set of worlds W' that differ from W at most with respect to some manageable number of identifiable norms.

That is...

- You can push the envelope of the normative grounding of your fanfic community if you are clear (or at least not deceptive) about the norms being played with.

Common Ground: Norms Shared Between Communies
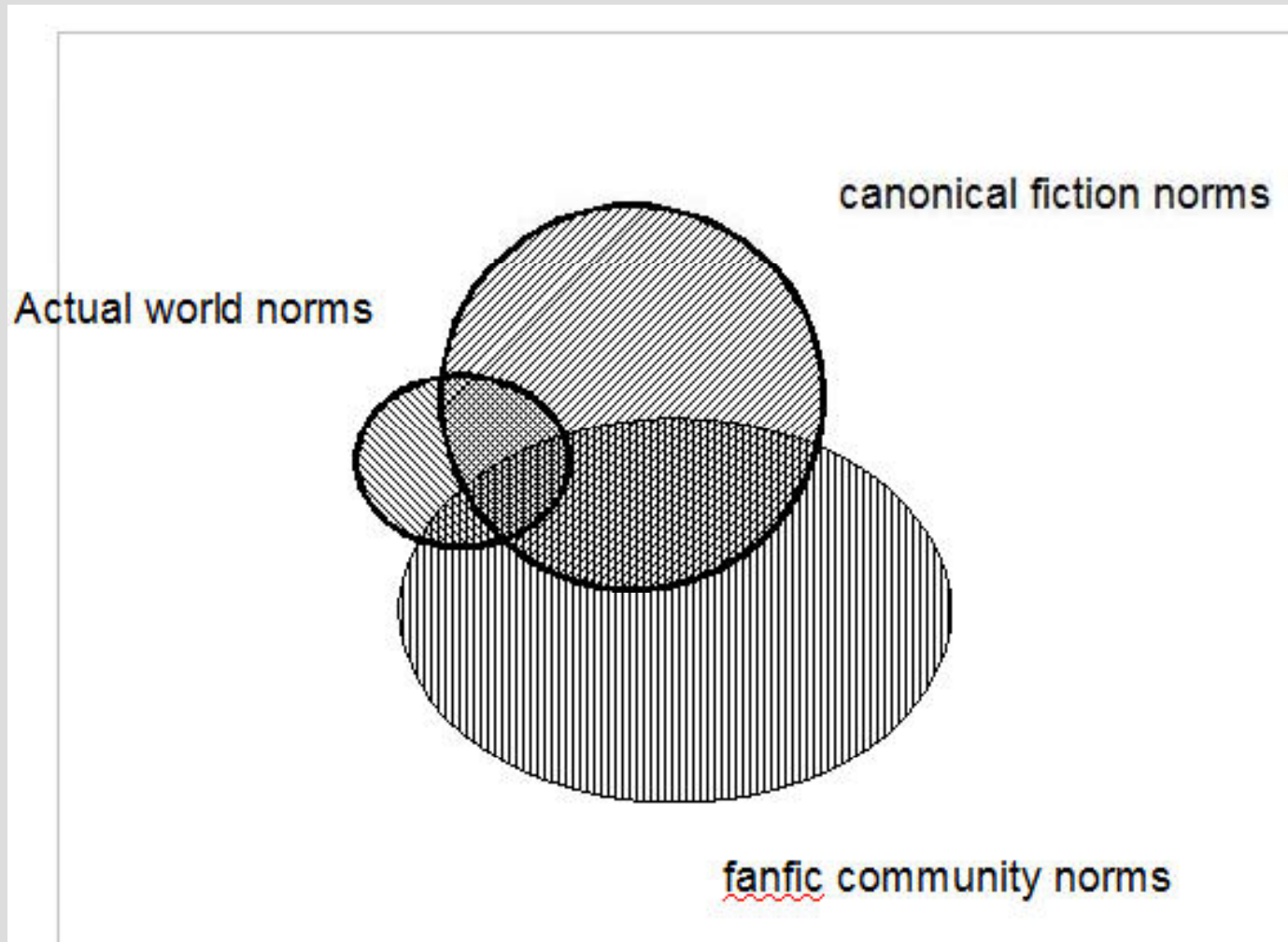
Making Sense of It All

- Holmes/snake case: Flouting norms in the Holmes canon (respect real world physical laws).
- Jar Jar Binks case: Flouting norms in the Star Wars canon (respect real world social norms)
- MPreg fic: (respect norms related to sociological aspects of pregnancy)
- Cross-community critiques are made possible by points of overlap (worlds where norms are shared).

A Complication: Automated fanfic?

Example: Jack Sparow Mpreg on the Sims2

Jack Sparrow MPreg

Example: Harry and Snape slash MPreg stories on the Sims 2

Harry and Snape. Pals forever.

Another Complication: Fanfic Roleplay

In Second Life...

- Several Firefly "browncoat" settlements
- Gorean Islands
- Potterverse "Wizzard's Alley"
- Gotham City
- Justice League Unlimited
- etc

Question:
Can we extend Analysis 3 to...

1) handle narratives outside authorial intention (Sims have "minds of their own").

2) incorporate a notion of "truth in roleplay".

Possible Answer: Extend f beyond "tellings/narrations" to include automated fiction and roleplay. (note: sincerity constraint may need tweaking).

What About Parody Fanfic?

- Example: Scary Mary Poppins

Scary
Mary

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