My OTP[1]: Harry Potter Fanfiction and the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

Meredith Warren

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the Bible[2] and its readers is not clear, despite the best scholarly efforts. Ancient readers may have held as authoritative some portion of what is commonly accepted as such today, but different portions and books were viewed differently by different communities. In short, *canon* is different from *scripture*. While scripture can mean any text that has a measure of authoritative status, canon is a "fixed standard or collection of writings that defines the faith and identity of a particular…community."[3] The set canon for rabbinic Judaism dates only to the 5th century, and the Christian canon *still* differs among branches; although the *concept* of a closed Christian canon can be dated to the second or third century, there is disagreement among leaders as to what the *content* of such a canon might be.[4] The writings that now form the canonical and non-canonical literature were not so distinct then, and many "non-canonical" documents were (or even *are*), considered to be canon and/or scripture by some communities. Thus, the relationship between canon

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[1] "OTP" stands for the recent popular term "One True Pairing," which is used by fans to express the belief that a pair of characters should be (or are secretly) a couple, and in fact the only legitimate romantic pairing in that fictional world. However, it is also the acronym for Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, which, because it comes in two volumes in J. H. Charlesworth's edition, makes it a "couple".

[2] Bible throughout means the Hebrew Bible, including Torah, Writings, and Prophets. Unless otherwise noted, references are from the RSV.

[3] L. M. MCDONALD, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon,* Peabody, Hendrickson, 2002, p. 13. The word omitted and replaced with the ellipses is "religious"; for the purpose of our study it is not particularly useful to impose the idea that the Harry Potter fandom is one of religious character, although that has been argued (See M. HILLS, "Fandom between Cult and Culture," in M. HILLS, ed. *Fan Cultures*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 117-130.)

[4] MCDONALD, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, p. 15.

and community is complicated. As a way of understanding this relationship, I propose a modern analogy. Just as groups in antiquity converged around writings they considered authoritative, communities have also arisen around contemporary texts. The communities which arise around TV shows, films, books, and other media are called fandoms. One such fandom is concerned with the *Harry Potter* series of children's novels.[5] This community, primarily organized on the Internet,[6] comprises thousands of fans of all ages and nationalities.

FANDOMS, FANS, AND FAN LITERATURE

The two readership communities are remarkably similar in two main ways. First, both biblical and HP communities accept certain books as authoritative and distinct from other similar works. That is, despite similarities of genre and content, a distinction is made by the community between texts with authority and those without; this is true for texts which fall *within* a religion (e.g. the *Gospel of Thomas* for Anglicans) and those which are *external* to it (e.g. the *Bhagavad Gita* for Anglicans). Similarly, for the HP fandom, neither HP-related fiction written by fans nor external works which are "canon" for other fandoms (such as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy) are considered canonical. Of course, for HP fans the idea of "canon" is far less problematic than for biblical readers, but it is growing more so recently. For example, some fans have rejected parts of the newest HP book, *The Half-Blood Prince*, as contradictory to

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[5] Henceforth, "Harry Potter" will be abbreviated as "HP" unless referring to the character. Titles in the series will be mentioned in full at first, then abbreviated using the standard acronyms, e.g. "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" as HBP.

[6] Most current fandoms are coordinated using the Internet, although historically other mediums have been used, such as zines, mailing lists, and conventions.

canon (due to the unpopular romantic pairings in HBP). It is not uncommon for fans to feel that the characters they cherish somehow exist apart from their creator; thus the fans may feel that they have more right to determine the course of the characters' activities than the author, should certain plot developments challenge fans' expectations.[7]

Second, both communities produced copious amounts of literature drawing on genres, themes, characters, and topics addressed in their respective authoritative texts. For the Bible, this literature includes the pseudepigrapha, the apocrypha, and the New Testament, among other writings. For HP communities this means fan-produced fiction, non-fiction, and visual art. Both communities' products make commentary on the canonical literature and develop certain topics and characters to a fuller extent than does the canon. In both cases, the categories given to the literature of the two communities, Bible vs. pseudepigrapha on the one hand and canon vs. fanfiction on the other, are at some level artificial: "In a purely literary sense, fanfic doesn't exist. There is only fiction. Fanfic is a legal category created by the modern system of trademarks and copyrights. Putting that label on a work of fiction says nothing about its quality, its creativity, or the intent of the writer who created it".[8]

Clearly, at some level the analogy falls short. We cannot make assumptions about the intent of the authors of the pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament with regards to

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[7] H. JENKINS, *Textual Poachers: Television Fan & Participatory Culture*, N.Y., Routledge, 1992, p. 34.
[8] T. N. HAYDEN, Comment in "Making Light" blog: www. nielsenhayden.com/makinglight/archives/007459.html#121781. (Page visited April 26th 2006).

canonical authority. We can, however, think along new paths about the relationship between these two categories of literature, canonical and non-canonical, and examine the symbiotic ways in which they interact. In doing so, this paper will draw connections between *fanfiction* and *pseudepigrapha* in terms of their relations to their respective "canons." I will look specifically at the HP fandom and its associated literature because that literature is hierarchically divided into several *levels* of canonicity, not unlike the Bible. In looking at a contemporary example of "pseudepigraphic" fiction writing, I hope to promote a new understanding of the relationship between the canon and the biblical pseudepigrapha.

THE PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha are defined by J. H. Charlesworth in his introduction to *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*:

> Those writings 1) that, with the exception of Ahiqar, are Jewish or Christian; 2) that are often attributed to ideal figures in Israel's past; 3) that customarily claim to contain God's word or message; 4) that frequently build upon ideas and narratives present in the Old Testament; 5) and that almost always were composed either during the period 200 B.C. to A.D. 200 or, though late, apparently preserve, albeit in an edited form, Jewish traditions that date from that period.[9]

This category is distinct from apocryphal writings, which are those works which were preserved in the Greek Old Testament but not included in what became the Hebrew Bible and are considered deutero-canonical by Catholics.[10] However, the distinction between apocrypha and pseudepigrapha is not clearly defined; for instance, *4 Ezra*

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[9] J. H. CHARLESWORTH, "Introduction for the General Reader," in J. H. CHARLESWORTH, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Garden City, Doubleday, 1983, p. xxv.
[10] CHARLESWORTH, "Introduction for the General Reader," p. xxvii.

and the *Prayer of Manasseh* are occasionally considered apocryphal, not pseudepigraphal.[11] Both sets of writings reflect the interactions between Jews and Christians and the Torah; the pseudepigrapha, being further removed from what is now considered canon, also speaks to the relationship between a community and its canon. Of course, just as there are many different types of literature included in the Bible, there are also many different genres of pseudepigrapha. Among those in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha are epics, philosophical treatises, histories and historical fiction, apocalypses and vision literature, and wisdom literature.[12]

Whenever the pseudepigrapha are discussed, the question of canonicity is always present in the discourse. Of course, because the closing of any canon was a long process, the status of the pseudepigrapha (both OT and NT in this case) was ambiguous. To this day, the Orthodox Church accepts some of the pseudepigrapha in its canon while protestant churches do not; Catholics are somewhere in the middle, accepting some apocryphal writings but not the pseudepigrapha. For centuries there was also debate in Judaism concerning which books in the Bible were canonical and/or authoritative. The Song of Songs in particular was controversial in terms of its scriptural authority.[13] In these traditions ordinary religious practitioners for a long time continued to use texts labelled non-canonical by their religious leaders. Thus, there was no firm time at which the canon was closed in practice. Rather, the power and authority attributed to texts continually competed with the power and authority

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[11] CHARLESWORTH, "Introduction for the General Reader," p. xxvii.
[12] CHARLESWORTH, "Introduction for the General Reader," p. xxviii.
[13] MCDONALD, *The Formation of the Christian Canon*, p. 282.

wielded by Church Fathers and rabbis. This debate is an example of what is at stake in our exploration of canon/noncanon. We do not have space here to properly problematize the notion of canon, but we can ask certain questions that will help us clarify the meaning of this term in this context. If canon contains different things for different groups and has never really been a static entity, can we continue to assume that there is such a thing as canon? McDonald outlines four criteria demarcating canon for early Christians during the Hellenistic period: it is a written collection which is considered to be of divine origin which communicates God's will to God's people and functions as law within the community.[14]

It is possible, and perhaps probable, that at least some of the extant pseudepigraphic literature is in conscious imitation of biblical style, and further may have used this similarity to exert some "borrowed" authority. Some pseudepigrapha may have been written with the intent that they would become included in the canon of the community in which it was written, while others may simply be written in a similar style. Goldstein writes that the author of 1 Maccabees "probably intended to add his work to the sacred Scriptures of the Jews."[15] This highlights the problem of canonicity and the difficulties of distinguishing (non)canon. If it is generally the case that writings are accepted as canonical only because a community has embraced the text and considered it authoritative. Then the pseudepigrapha may certainly have been considered canonical by some communities at some times. It is not until Irenaeus

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[14] MCDONALD, *The Formation of the Christian Canon*, p. 11.
[15] J. GOLDSTEIN, *1 Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (what is this AB for? The collection?, Garden City, Doubleday, 1976, p. 26.

railed against "false" gospels such as the *Gospel of Judas* (*Against Heresies* XXXI.1), or Eusebius wrote lists of books to be excluded from the contents of scriptural literature that the idea of a "fixed" canon begins to form in Christianity; it is an even later development for Judaism.[16] Thus, the concept of biblical canon in the ancient world was much more fluid than it is today.

THE HARRY POTTER CANON

The HP canon at first glance seems much simpler to sort out than the biblical canon. However, the literary activity of the HP "fandom" has made this distinction less clear, as we will see. The fandom around a given cultural, literary or cinematic artefact are differentiated from "ordinary" fans in that they are interested in minute details about the book, movie, or cultural phenomenon of which they are a fan.[17] These communities usually converge around television shows, movies, or books.[18] The HP fandom began shortly after the 1997 publication of the first book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, and has since grown rapidly. Members produce art and literature based on the books and characters and may also engage in online or real-life role-playing games (RPGs). The HP fandom, as with most fanfic-producing fandoms, is organized around the concept of "canon." The term is used by fans both as an adjective referring to something perceived as accurate about the characters or plot and as a noun referring to the group of authoritative texts being engaged.

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[16] MCDONALD, *The Formation of the Christian Canon*, p. 282.
[17] See www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fandom; www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_fiction_fandom.
[18] The oldest fandoms began in the thirties and focus on science fiction and fantasy works, such as the Star Trek and Tolkien series. Some fandoms hold conventions at which members mingle socially and discuss the focus of the fandom.

While we appear to have a much clearer idea of what the canonical texts of the HP fandom are than we do for the ancient world, we nevertheless have a notion of the gradations of authority for various Harry Potter literatures. In HP fandom, the British editions of the series written by J. K. Rowling are generally accepted to hold the highest authority. Next, the fandom acknowledges the canonicity of the American versions of the books, and a deutero-canon including the movies produced by Warner Bros, Rowling's website, and the Warner Bros website. This differentiation in canonical status between the British and American books is in crisis at the moment, as the two versions of *HBP* contained two very different sentences at a key situation in the plot. This led many fans to accept the American version as canonical in this instance and created confusion among fans as to which version could be cited as canon.[19] The *Harry Potter Lexicon*[20] makes the important distinction between what is *official* and what is *canon* for Harry Potter fans. The movies can be said to be official, but cannot be said to be canon because J. K. Rowling was not herself behind every interpretive detail.[21] The *Harry Potter Lexicon* therefore gives a list, in order of authority, of the corpus of the Harry Potter canon:

• the novels and the "school books" (*Fantastic Beasts* and *Quidditch Through the Ages*)
• the illustrations in the "school books" (which were drawn by Rowling herself) but not the pictures in the novels

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[19] See www.hp-lexicon.org/about/books/hbp/differences-hbp.html for more information on this important canonical difference.
[20] www.hp-lexicon.org
[21] In some sense then, the movies themselves are a type of fanfiction, in that they are re-workings of the canon which expand on certain details or add new ones. The discourse of power, of course, determines which fanfics are official and which are subversive.

- interviews with Rowling where her actual words are given
- sections of the film/games/etc. which are known to be written by or okayed by Rowling.[22]

We can see from this list that for this source, authorship is the key criterion for determining textual authority in the HP fandom, but that the author herself as a separate entity from her works is valued less than her product – interviews with Rowling are lower on the list than her books.

There is recognition in the fandom at least superficially that fan-fiction (see below) is not authoritative.[23] The fans who write "fics" largely do not write with the intent that they become canon. However, because canon is not an absolute category, many fics, their characterization, and their plots become part of the *fanon*.[24] For example, although it is never mentioned or alluded to in the canon, it is "well-known" that Draco Malfoy suffered abuse at the hands of his father. As such, there are levels of meaning that are assumed by the fan when reading a canonical text which are not generated solely by the canon. Rather, a fan reading the canon will also have in mind many of the accepted *fanon* facts and read those assumptions into the literature seamlessly. Fanfic is the main venue for fanon generation. Fanfics are paragraphs (called drabbles), short stories, or even longer novellas which expand and expound on the characters and plot of the novels and films. They can cover any topic, including romance, sexuality, and other worlds/characters foreign to the canon. They can

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[22] www.hp-lexicon.org/help/hp-faq.html#canon
[23] "Dr. Merlin's Guide to Fanfiction", X. www.missy.reimer.com/library/guide.html.
[24] Fanon is "Information or characterization that has never been confirmed in *canon* but is accepted as such by fans" (www.subreality.com/glossary/terms.htm#F); see also www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fanon_%28fiction%29.

develop the characters according to their canon personalities or completely alter them. One example of this in the HP fandom are the many homo-erotic fics written about Harry Potter and his arch-nemesis at school, Draco Malfoy. This is a drastic deviation from the canon for more than one reason. Not only are Draco and Harry enemies in canon, but until the latest book, there had been no indication that Draco had the capability to feel emotion or love whatsoever. In the HP fandom, fics are largely published only online due to copyright issues.[25] Because of this democratization of the publication process, fanfic is prolific on the net. All fics develop canon or other characters according to either the personal views of the author or the established fanon characteristics of the character in question (or some combination of the two).

FANON AND CANON: A RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP

Beyond creating a fanon accepted by fans, the HP fandom and its fanon has had an influence on the actual canon texts written by Rowling. There are three clear incidences of this.

First, and most obviously, is the abbreviation of the class name, Defence Against the Dark Arts, to DADA.[26] Fans developed the abbreviation for the class as early as the late nineties, but it was not used in the books, despite the somewhat unwieldy

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[25] Recently a Star Wars fan offered a book-length fanfic for sale on Ebay, but shortly thereafter it was removed due to copyright infringements. The Star Wars franchise is among the least comfortable with the fandom which is devoted to it and its characters; other copyright holders, such as Rowling, are supportive of the fannish activity and encourage the production of fanfiction for non-commercial use.
[26] J. K. ROWLING, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Vancouver, Raincoast, 2005, p. 242.

alternative, until the latest book, *HBP*. It appears that the fandom has influenced Rowling's own conception of her created world.[27]

Second, members of the fandom have noticed an allusion in *HBP* to the homoerotic relationship developed in the fanon between Draco and Harry; chapter nineteen includes the sentences, "Harry, however, had never been less interested in Quiddich; he was rapidly becoming obsessed with Draco Malfoy."[28] While such a theme is not developed in the canon, and only very subtly alluded to here, it seems as though Rowling gives a "shout-out" to her fanfic-writing followers with this sentence, allowing further speculation on the topic.

Third, the term "Marauders" is used to denote Harry's father and his three friends,[29] which had previously only been done by fans. While earlier books did mention the Marauders' Map, the group of students were known by their individual names before *HBP*. While it is possible that this is simply a natural progression related to Rowling's comfort with her subject matter, it seems more likely that in paying attention to her fandom's activity, she has picked up the vocabulary developed by the readers and in doing so has integrated the fanon more fully into the canon she creates.

CONCLUSIONS

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[27] Interestingly, Rowling has admitted to using the fandom-created encyclopaedia the *Harry Potter Lexicon*, which she honoured in the "Fan Sites" section of her website, saying "This is such a great site that I have been known to sneak into an internet café while out writing and check a fact rather than go into a bookshop and buy a copy of Harry Potter (which is embarrassing)." (www.jkrowling.com/textonly/en/fansite_view.cfm?id=14).

[28] ROWLING, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, p. 383.

[29] ROWLING, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, p. 424.

From the above discussion two main conclusions can be drawn. First, because canonical literature becomes so based on reader-response and the support of a community, the difference between canon and "uncanon" is a difference in power. This is true both because a text with canonical authority exerts a certain amount of power over those who hold it to be so, and also because it takes power to establish a canon as closed, as is exhibited by the writings of Church Fathers such as Eusebius.[30] It took many centuries of forceful writing and even more forceful treatment of "heretics" to stamp out heterodox canons in Christianity. The same can be said of the HP series, although on a smaller scale. The canonical hierarchy is arranged based on authorship; Rowling has also been consistent in quashing the publication of fanfic outside the Internet. This exertion of authorial authority continually enforces the distance between canon/uncanon, even though, as we have seen, the lines are continually blurred between these categories.

Second, the relationship between canon and its subsidiaries is not that of mother-daughter. Rather than a direct, one-way connection, canon and fanfic or canon and pseudepigrapha are related symbiotically: the influence is reciprocal. We can see instances above where HP fanon has made its way into the canonical books just as we also know of instances where the Torah has been interpolated with later traditions from the outside sources.[31] This can particularly be seen with the story of the Watchers in Genesis 6:1-4. Van Seters suggests that the passage contains later

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[30] MCDONALD, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon,* p. 281.
[31] Van Seters, for instance, assigns a post-exilic date to the Torah, making it later than the earliest prophets (e.g. Hosea), and G. W. Nickelsburg argues repeatedly that the Enochic pentateuch rivalled the Mosaic one well into the Hellenistic period.

additions, but relies on external mythology from the surrounding cultures.[32] Further, there has been some suggestion that the apocryphal *1 Enoch* and specifically its *Book of the Watchers*" is quite early, and thus could be responsible for the teasing mention of the story in Gn 6:1-4, rather than the other way around.[33]

A similar phenomenon might be observed in some rabbinic biblical interpretation, where midrash influences the "Oral Torah" expounded by the rabbis. This bears more resemblance to the process in the fandom of reading into a primary text the accepted "truth" underlying the story; the example used above was interpreting Draco Malfoy's actions on the assumption that he is abused at home. That is, while the fanon does not make it into the primary text, it nevertheless exists there according to the readership. As Jenkins writes, "Fan reading…is a social process through which individual interpretations are shaped and reinforced through ongoing discussions with other readers. Such discussions expand the experience of the text beyond its initial consumption."[34] That is, by carefully reading, interpreting, and loving a text, the fan creates new meanings which belong to the text just as much as the authorial meaning of the text.[35] Examples of this eisegetical activity can be seen in the writings of the Church Fathers and in rabbinic writing as readily as it can be seen today.

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[32] J. VAN SETERS, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis,* Louisville (KY), Westminster John Knox, 1992, p. 149-159.
[33] That is, it is not that *Enoch*'s Book of the Watchers is a later pseudepigraphic extension of the fragmentary myth alluded to in Gen. 6:1-4, but that the "Book of the Watchers" represents an external, non-canonical account that became included in the biblical text.
[34] H. JENKINS, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, N.Y., Routledge, 1992, p. 45.
[35] JENKINS, *Textual Poachers*, p. 51.

It is clear then that the distinction between canonical works and non-canonical works is at best muddy. The terms cannot be seen to be mutually exclusive. Many times there is no historical distinction between canon and "uncanon," and when there is, it is often the result of power and authority being exerted either onto the text by the community or onto the community by an outside force. Fannish interpretation is looked down upon because it is not the "official" meaning of the text; it is subversive and rejects ownership of textual meaning.[36] That is, canon does not exist apart from interpretation, whether in the form of fanon influencing the reading of a primary text, or as actual fanfiction invading the text itself. Likewise, the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha pervade our reading of the canon and/or the writing of the canonical books, even if subconsciously.

These conclusions can serve scholars in biblical studies by allowing us to look at the biblical canon as more closely related to its non-canonical literature. We should therefore attempt to reverse that view which labels canon more important for understanding a religion's history and texts, and so endeavour to include pseudepigrapha in any analysis. Such behaviour not only respects the validity of fannish interpretation but also works against the ownership of meaning by one group over and against others.

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[36] JENKINS, *Textual Poachers*, p. 25.