

I Think Therefore I Ship: Language, Gender, and Food as
Rhetorical Practices in BL Fanfiction

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

By Stephie Piñero

University of Central Oklahoma

Edmond, Oklahoma

December 2025

I Think Therefore I Ship: Language, Gender, and Food as Rhetorical Practices in BL Fanfiction

Thesis Title

Stephie Piñero

Author's Name

December 8, 2025

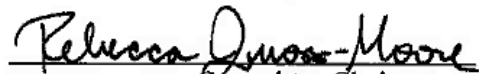
Date

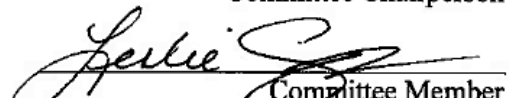
Jackson College of Graduate Studies at the University of Central Oklahoma

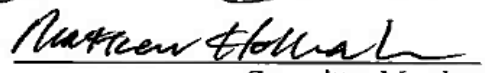
A THESIS APPROVED FOR

the Degree of Master of Arts in Composition and Rhetoric

By


Committee Chairperson


Committee Member


Committee Member

Committee Member

Abstract

Fanfiction serves as a site of linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural engagement. In this project, I use Burke's dramatistic pentad to analyse how fanfic authors work as "double-agents" in their story creation. I consider linguistic, embodied, and cultural/food rhetorics in fanfictions for the Chinese drama *The Untamed*, also known as *Chén Qíng Líng (CQL)*. This drama is a live-action adaptation in a group of canons consisting of many remixes: the original metatext is a webnovel written by 墨香铜臭 Mò Xiāng Tóng Xiù; other adaptations include a *donghua* (animated series), *manhua* (graphic novel series), audio drama, two spin-off live-action movies, and *manga*.

Fanfiction authors must consider the expectations of a diverse global audience who has differing levels of familiarity and sensitivity to the nuances of the canon material. Wolfgang Iser believes that it is the "gaps, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader that give rise to communication in the reading process."¹ Fanfiction can subvert these gaps as the community is able to be interactive with each other. Fandom studies is a continuously evolving space as new material is released and adapted/remixed. Henry Jenkins, Jungmin Kwon, and Suresh Canagarajah provide some key frameworks for my analysis of the *CQL* fandom's development. Henry Jenkins informs us of the participatory culture that influences fandom culture as well as transmedia storytelling.² Kwon works with straight female fans of MLM texts and offers insights into how the BL media movement has developed.³ Suresh Canagarajah highlights how meaning-

¹ Wolfgang Iser, "Interaction Between Text and Reader," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 1454.

² Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia 202: Further Reflection," last modified July 31, 2011. https://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html.

³ Jungmin Kwon, *Straight Korean Female Fans and Their Gay Fantasies* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018).

making develops, in particular with translingual practices; this is most apt due to the multicultural, multilingual practices that the assumed Western writers adopt in the *MDZS/CQL* fandom.⁴ As this project explores, fanfiction writers collaborate in complex rhetorical spaces defined by multiple entry points, multiple cultural contexts, and, in the case of this project, multiple canons. These combine to create specific vocabularies and systems within given fanfiction communities.

Chapter One focuses on how fanfic authors of assumed Western backgrounds adopt translingual practices and evolve the meaning-making of the fandom's shared vocabulary. This chapter integrates Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author" alongside Suresh Canagarajah's concept of "translingualism" to unpack the way that a *danmei* lexicon develops in the fandom. Through my interviews with fanfic authors, I unpack some of the choices authors make, alongside a more quantitative analysis of Orphan_Account fanfics, to consider how choices in language communicate literacies and authorities in fandom spaces.

Chapter Two addresses fanfic authors' use of sexual and gender dynamics and modes of expression. In exploring embodied rhetorics, I focus on how gender is codified within the canon text and how the protagonist, Wei Wuxian, counters the coding given to him as the designated "female" of the relationship, in addition to interpreting what happens when fanfic writers play around with gender by switching canon dynamics. In this way, fanfic serves as a space for play with how bodies are manipulated through narratives. I incorporate some discussion of how widespread fan-cans (fanons) participate in both coding Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji and in generating critical discourses around binary coding and characterisations.

⁴ Suresh Canagarajah, "Weaving the Text: Changing Literacy Practices and Orientations," *College English* 82, no.1 (2019):18, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26823961>.

Chapter Three concerns diasporic narratives and food rhetorics. I consider the use of modern food cultures as an example of subjectivity and self-insertion which allows writers to incorporate various markers of culture and authority. Diasporic fic writers promote themselves as agents of authority in this scene, often completely rewriting the canon through modernised contexts. The multiplicity and meaning of the canon is viewed through the way fanfic authors have decided to address “food as a love language” in their writing, demonstrating various expertise in platform and cultural familiarity.

These three chapters establish a framework for understanding fanfiction as more than derivative work, and instead as a site of linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural engagement. In examining *CQL*’s fandom through the three lenses, the project puts fanfic authors as active participants in meaning-making, to negotiate canon and community norms within the discourse community.

Acknowledgements

This project essentially started as an area of interest during my undergrad in Literary Criticism where I asked Dr. Quoss-Moore if I could write a critical essay about fanfiction, specifically for a fandom that I started to get into the summer before the semester started: *The Untamed*. Since then, I have presented about this show at multiple conferences across campuses and various states *and* introduced the text to two other people—which I think just shows how amazing *The Untamed* is. I am eternally grateful to the support that I have received from my thesis advisor, and mentor, Dr. Quoss-Moore, as I do not know how this project would have developed without their enthusiasm and encouragement. Who else can say that they were able to write about fanfiction on an academic level *and* have it approved? Eleven year old Stephie would be so surprised and proud of how far she's come. I can't believe how many opportunities I've received from this special area of interest. If there's any advice I can give to an incoming MA student in the department, it would be to research about something you love investigating, otherwise you're due for an incredibly dull experience.

A special shout out to Dr. Johnson for convincing me that a Master's is something that I should pursue. I learned a lot in our digital writing and rhetoric, and multimodal rhetorics classes. It set up a solid foundation for this project and gave me the necessary language to develop ideas, particularly the three lenses I could tap into. To Dr. Kiang, who I had at my first semester at UCO: I was so happy to see such an enthusiastic educator who cares for his students. I'm so glad I was able to take Asian-American literature with you; I gained so much in the class discussions and assignments. I'd also like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Similly and Dr. Hollrah for being part of my committee! I appreciate each and every one of you!

I want to thank my family for not questioning my growing bookshelf of *danmei* and instead supporting me in every endeavour I have regarding research into this realm. You have listened to my theories and enthusiasm for a topic that makes no sense to you, but you still listened with a smile and even offered your own thoughts ("fanfic is a chameleon," thanks dad). *Daghang salamat kaninyong tanan sa inyong tabang Ma, Pa, Pia, and Sai*. Love ya!

Lastly, a massive thank you to my cohort—we may be at various stages of our MAs, but I am so grateful to have you be my rocks on and off campus! I seriously have no idea how different my experience would be without you all. May we continue to have lunches out together even after all this is done!

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Meaning-Making in BL Fanfiction.....	22
Chapter Two: Beyond the Codified “Female” in BL Fanfiction.....	48
Chapter Three: Food, Intimacy, and Culture in BL Fanfiction	80
Conclusion	104
Bibliography	109

Introduction

The practice of writing fanfiction is growing increasingly globalised, with fans interacting with canons that feature cultures outside their own. Increasingly, there is an intriguing phenomenon where non-Western fans might favour Western content and vice versa. In interactions like those of USian fans with manga, K-pop, or anime, fans are interacting and learning about a new culture, including the language use, and—in some cases—historical context that is necessary to understand specific fandoms, or “interpretive communities.”¹ The rhetorical situation is rendered complicated when fans, as writers and readers—or Wreaders² as coined by George Landow—must navigate the challenge of representing or engaging with cultural elements they may not fully understand.

In his book *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*, Landow describes “very active readers” as those who I would consider to be fanfic writers; he claims Dante, for example, to have been an active reader of Homer.³ As fanfiction is largely accessible online, it makes sense to include it as an example of a hypertext like those Landow considers. Landow’s arguments then give us frameworks for considering how fanfiction authors navigate specific discourses and spaces. Fanfiction authors must consider the expectations of a diverse global audience who has differing levels of familiarity and sensitivity to the nuances of the canon material. Wolfgang Iser writes how reading typically lacks a face-to-face interaction

¹ Stanley Fish, “Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities,” in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 1902.

² Bronwen Thomas, “The Wreader,” last modified November 4, 2013, <https://www.digitalreadingnetwork.com/the-wreader/>. Landow uses the term to indicate the link between literary theories and computing language and how readers can now participate as writers with the advancement of hypertexts like online forums/blogs.

³ George Landow, “Hypertext: an Introduction,” in *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2006), 6-7.

which results in a “reader [who] can never learn from the text how accurate or inaccurate are his views of it.”⁴ He believes that it is the “gaps, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader that give rise to communication in the reading process.”⁵ Fanfiction can subvert these gaps as the community *is* able to be interactive with each other. Fanfiction offers a participatory culture⁶ through comments—and often—through more immediate social media interactions, for authors who may attach their works to other profiles. As this project explores, fanfiction writers collaborate in complex rhetorical spaces defined by multiple entry points, multiple cultural contexts, and, in the case of this project, multiple canons. These combine to create specific vocabularies and systems within given fanfiction communities.

Canon, Metatext and Adaptations

I want to consider linguistic, embodied, and cultural/food rhetorics through specific examination surrounding the Chinese drama *The Untamed*, also known as *Chén Qíng Lìng* (*CQL*). It is a live-action adaptation in a group of canons consisting of many remixes. The original metatext is a webnovel written by 墨香铜臭 Mò Xiāng Tóng Xiù—referred to as MXTX in the fandom and hereafter in this work. This webnovel has since undergone many edits and unofficial English fan-translations. As a traditionally published novel, its title is *Mò Dao Zu Shi* (*MDZS*), or *The Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* in English; that English title is taken from the authorised English translation, which postdates several fan versions. The work has also been officially and unofficially translated in several other languages, with some translation

⁴ Wolfgang Iser, “Interaction Between Text and Reader,” in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 1454.

⁵ Iser, “Interaction Between Text and Reader,” 1454.

⁶ Henry Jenkins, “Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century (Part One),” last modified October 19, 2006. https://henryjenkins.org/blog/2006/10/confronting_the_challenges_of.html.

publications still ongoing. Other adaptations include a *donghua* (animated series), *manhua* (graphic novel series), an audio drama, two spin-off live-action movies focusing primarily on the side characters, and—most recently—a *manga*. Several of these works also have some combination of official and unofficial translation across multiple languages. Given the range of potential references, I will use the abbreviation of *MDZS* to refer to the official English translation of the canon novel and *CQL* to refer to the live-action adaptation. I have decided to focus on these two canons in relation to the fanfics I have collected for analysis; more works are tagged for these two canons than for the other adaptations, and many authors tag their work with both canons, despite their differences.

As of October 2024, MXTX is also editing her webnovels. The webnovels were previously locked due to their content; in many online spaces, fans are expressing concern regarding the potential censorship her work will undergo in order to be published. This reveals two sides: some fans are saying that international fans should be alright because they have the physical uncensored copies, while others hate that the canon is being rewritten and fear that the queer elements will be filtered, to the extreme of characters being written out. This particular moment, for these canons, offers complex revelations about fanfiction, parasocial relationships, and their potential interactions. Consider how webnovels act in the same way as fanfiction: the author is presently updating the text and aware of readers directly through their comments with the occasional engagement through replies. The major difference, then, is that webnovels are original work. MXTX's situation is intriguing: her work is already established and has developed a fandom, yet her editing the origin piece can be interpreted to be her adapting her work to meet a certain demographic. I offer the definition of fanfiction, for this project, as the act of remixing to meet a certain audience. In this way, the parasocial relationships between fan and author are

complicated further, especially as MXTX, much like the average fanfic author, is essentially anonymous, due to her use of a pseudonym, which may further complicate or displace authority.

While *CQL*'s adaptation came to screens in 2019, the extensive world continues to grow as fans in China continue to celebrate anniversary events of the live-action despite the censoring of it as a queer text.⁷ Moreover, MXTX has two other novels of similar structure which fall under the same genres of *xianxia* (a fantasy-martial arts genre) and *danmei* (MLM fiction; defined further below). Among these works, *MDZS* seems to have a particular appeal manifested in the many incarnations of her properties that have since been released. Because of the many remixes created within the universe that includes *CQL*, we can say that people who have consumed one media over the other will have a different interpretation of the text as each can be viewed as its own canon due to minute changes in the storyline and characterisation. While the novel and *manhua* formats are indeed very popular, I would say that they cater to relatively very niche communities, whereas the live-action has the most global impact as a metatext that fanfic authors have access to. In North America, *CQL* is currently available to watch on both *Netflix* and *Amazon Prime*, thus allowing for it to have a wider reach across two major streaming platforms.⁸

Naming Conventions, Terminology, and Vocabularies of *Danmei*

No small part of my argument, here, is about the specific formations of what I term, in the project, a *danmei* lexicon. However, even fairly novice community participants read fic in the

⁷ Interestingly, since the release of *CQL*, there have been several live-action Chinese dramas that are increasingly more overt in queer representation. The first omegaverse drama aired in China in the summer of 2025 featuring an onscreen male pregnancy test. This posits the question on how much value is given to MLM live-action dramas within the country and if this is more of a marketable asset, since the main actors of *CQL* are yet to be given permission to be seen in public together following fallout from fan fervour resulting from queer interpretations of *CQL*.

⁸ The *donghua* has joined Crunchyroll at the end of 2024, thus furthering the spread of the texts and widening the net for potential fans.

MDZS/CQL fandom(s) with a familiarity of many concepts and conventions that may not be easily understood by new participants.

For example, in this setting, characters are given three names: their birth name, their courtesy name, and—if they are able to obtain one—a title. The main characters of *CQL* are Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian’s birth name is Wei Ying, and he is occasionally given the title Yiling Laozu. Lan Wangji’s birth name is Lan Zhan, and his title is Hanguang-jun. Throughout this project, I will be referring to them by their courtesy names; however, the fanfics that I quote from may make use of their other names. As a pairing, they are given the shipname Wangxian—or, in a move relevant to this project, occasionally “Xianwang” to subcommunities who consider the ordering of shipnames to indicate something about “roles” in a given relationship.

Part of my argument in later chapters is about the need for certain shared understandings in order for fan communities to communicate. In order to properly understand any text featuring *CQL*, it is important to establish the definitions. Within this space, there are three ways to classify MLM (man-loving-man) fiction: Boy’s Love (BL), Slash, and *danmei*. Essentially, they all feature similar elements and origins, but diverge in interesting ways. The genre expectations of BL, Slash and *danmei* shape how fandoms engage and interpret the text. Fans typically match their ideas and identities with certain conventions, which then influence how the fanfic is generated.

Slash

Slash’s origins share similarities with BL as a genre of literature within the queer literary sphere that also started off with fans, specifically the fanfiction community. The fans pulled elements from a canon and reshaped it to match their intentions, rewriting canonically

heterosexual characters as queer.⁹ The name for this genre came from the online fanfiction convention of using a slash to indicate the pairing was romantic or sexual as opposed to platonic. In Judith Fathallah's chapter "From Foucault to Fanfic," she highlights that the pairing between Kirk and Spock—one of the earliest slash fiction pairings—focused on an equal pairing, without the concept of a hierarchy, because gender was not the focus in their relationship.¹⁰ With gender roles not constraining the fanfic writer, they could tackle different ideas regarding the pairing's relationship and intimacy in ways not present in cis-het narratives; this, of course, assumes that the plot renders homophobia absent and that the plot centres itself around a homotopic society. In most instances, slash literature seems to have appealed to female audiences, as it gave them a way to navigate their place in society without their position being put into question.

Of all the genres within MLM literature, fandom slash historically appears to be the one most active in writing literature that is more authentic to the queer narrative, as it has heavily been influenced by the queer community hoping to write more visibility into the heteronormative canons. While she focuses mostly on WLW fandom practices, Anna Llewellyn writes how the online space is a place where young queer writers can express themselves in a way that is absent from traditionally published media. While mainstream media is growing with their methods of representing the queer narrative, it broadly continues to use negative, "harmful tropes" which therefore restricts how queer youth understand themselves.¹¹ Fans then end up mimicking the

⁹ It should be noted that it is not always a homosexual sexuality that fans focus on. They can shift characters sexualities to others under the spectrum including, but not limited to, bisexual, pansexual, and asexual, in order to fit their chosen narrative.

¹⁰ Judith May Fathallah, "From Foucault to Fanfic," in *Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1v2xsp4.5>, 27

¹¹ Anna Llewellyn, "A Space where Queer is Normalized: The Online World and Fanfictions as Heterotopias for WLW," *Journal of Homosexuality* 69, no. 13 (June 2021): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2021.1940012>.

‘okay’ forms of LGBTQ+ by writing “heteronormative narratives of monogamy” into their literature, even though the two love interests share the same gender.¹² It creates a conflicting middle-ground as Llewellyn herself writes that “it is possible that queer heterotopic spaces, such as fanfiction, will always have purpose as they enable resistance to discursive dominance,” despite many limiting factors.¹³

BL

The way that BL as a genre has shifted throughout various regions has impacted its interpretations. BL stands for Boy’s Love and is a direct translation of the Japanese phrase *shōnen-ai*. The market for this genre as a commodity started off in Japan; however, it has since spread to various parts of Asia. Depending on a reader’s entrance into this space, the terms surrounding this conversation get complicated. This is further complicated when a fan from outside the culture and context enters the space.¹⁴ BL, Slash, and *Danmei* essentially revolve around the same background—homosexual literature written by women for women. In order to entice these fans, male characters have been depicted through particular aesthetics. In BL, the Japanese concept of *bishōnen* refers to an appreciation for beautiful boys; it has “been a romantic and sexualized trope for both sexes and commands a high degree of cultural visibility today across a range of genres.”¹⁵ As in slash, many cis-het female authors create content in BL to explore a romantic relationship where gender is not a key component; it helps if the characters are these supposed beautiful men who she can fantasise herself with. This concept of fantasy in

¹² Llewellyn, “A Space where Queer is Normalized,” 4.

¹³ Llewellyn, 15. Llewellyn specifically addresses issues with representation of different ethnicities and races.

¹⁴ McLelland, Mark, and James Welker, “An Introduction to “Boy’s Love” in Japan,” in *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan*, ed. by Mark McLelland, Kazumi Nagaike, Katsuhiko Suganuma, and James Welker. (University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 5.

¹⁵ McLelland and Welker, “An Introduction to “Boy’s Love” in Japan,” 6.

relation to two male characters is developed further in Jungmin Kwon's book as she creates the term "FANtasy" to mean the "fantasy a straight woman fan of gay romance creates and actualizes"¹⁶. The practice is based on where her interests lie as an outsider looking in on homosexual identities and relationships.

BL, specifically, offers some interesting historical connections—and leaps. McLelland and Welker articulate that the thread from which BL developed links back to of how MLM literature was perceived and received in the Edo period.¹⁷ During this time period, MLM literary canon was not removed from reality; it mimicked societal practices with "high-status individuals, including several shoguns, being renowned for their appreciation of youthful male beauty."¹⁸ Further, because of Confucian ideals, women were viewed as lesser—if not evil—marking them unworthy for admiration.¹⁹ With Christian expansion through Western cultural incursions, however, MLM literature began to be viewed in a negative manner.²⁰ In some ironic way, then, BL has allowed for the Japanese culture to return to that admiration of young male youth, only this time the target market has shifted. The very origin of BL is from a fan-produced space where fans controlled the narrative of how they want their male homosexual romances depicted. However, the results of this consumer-oriented production includes and encourages the voyeuristic and appropriative tendencies of the assumed female cis-het author writing queer fantasy.

¹⁶ Jungmin Kwon, "Introduction," in *Straight Korean Female Fans and Their Gay Fantasies* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018), 4.

¹⁷ For example, the popular novel *The Great Mirror of Male Love* written in 1687 consists of love stories between "older and younger samurai and rich townsmen and young kabuki actors" (McLelland and Welker 6).

¹⁸ McLelland and Welker, 6.

¹⁹ McLelland and Welker, 7.

²⁰ McLelland and Welker, 7.

Danmei

While slash and BL frameworks are essential for understanding fan interactions with the texts, *MDZS* does fall specifically under the genre designation of *danmei*—China’s equivalent of the term of *shonen-ai*—which when translated to English means admiration for beauty.²¹ Even the term suggests the ways that *danmei* is linked to and distinct from BL: it takes the concept of *bishōnen* and shifts to become its own genre through its labelling of its own appeal for female readers, or admirers of the male form—the readers of this genre do so because they are admiring beauty, and the beauty of this literature happens to be men, exclusively. Once more, it calls back to that notion of being an object of admiration by the reader, despite how problematic it can be to admire—to some extent, fetishise—a sexuality. However, *danmei* literature, has a unique positionality, offering a combination of elements from BL and slash. Despite developing “independently of each other in the 1970s,” the fact that they “[converge] in *danmei*” speaks to “*danmei*’s extraordinary hybridity and inclusiveness but also sheds light on how media and cultural context flows [...] are mediated by local actors, and how a ‘world system’ of women-oriented male homoerotic narratives seem to be emerging.”²² In combining various narrative traditions, *danmei* develops into a space for different cultural influences and fan-driven innovations to connect. Its popularity highlights the global reach of media and the dynamics of fandom. These features make *danmei* an interesting site to examine as the genre develops with more people gaining an interest in it outside of the Chinese diaspora—offering a kind of insight into growing cultural literacies and illiteracies in real time.

²¹ Hong Li, “Consumer Behaviours of Chinese Female on Boys’ Love Fiction: A Sociological Perspective,” *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 664 (June 2022), 1007, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220504.183>.

²² Yanrui Xu and Ling Yang Xu, Yanrui and Ling Yang, “Between BL and Slash: *Danmei* Fiction, Transcultural Mediation, and Changing Gender Norms in Contemporary China,” in *Queer Tranfigurations*, ed. by James Welker, (Hawai’i UP: 2023), 26–27.

The concept of a flower-boy created for the female gaze catered to Asian perspectives remains and is extended in Jungmin Kwon's discussion. She delves deep into the way that Korean fans have established this admiration. The purpose of her book *Straight Korean Fans and Their Gay Fantasies* is to explore how straight women of a predominantly phallogocentric society shaped a new understanding of gay literature and visibility.²³ It seems that the more the genre spreads out from its birthing ground, the more nuanced the understanding of the literature becomes where fanfic authors recognise their ability to bring awareness of real issues.

Shifting to a focus on queerness specifically in Chinese television, Alvin K. Wong writes about *CQL* and says that "*The Untamed* in the BL mediascape of mainland China captures a form of "unhistorical queerness" whose queer appeal precisely lies in its portrayals of bromance and queer ambiguous desire in a non-historical world."²⁴ The distancing allowed by setting it in the ancient, fantastical past allows for a canon interpretation to be queer even if the present day stance favours censorship. The implicit queerness is emphasized as *CQL*'s roots in *MDZS* fall under the *danmei* category, which is explicitly MLM fiction. Therefore, while *CQL* posits a homosocial lens to the general audiences, fans are aware of the canon interpretation and are able to read what has been lost. Stanley Fish elaborates on these "interpretive communities" where one must be primed to interpret a text with the necessary context to get the true meaning which he terms as "acts of recognition."²⁵ Turning this idea, then, to fanfiction incorporates the notion of interpretive communities via discourse communities who require a familiarity with canon

²³ Kwon, "Introduction," 11.

²⁴ Alvin K. Wong, "Disjunctive Temporalities: Queer Sinophone Visuality across Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan," in *Queer TV China: Televisual and Fannish Imaginaries of Gender, Sexuality, and Chineseness*, ed. by Jamie J. Zhao, (Hong Kong UP: 2023), 126.

²⁵ Fish, "Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities," 1901.

otherwise the context will be lost. The nature of fanfiction assumes that the writer who describes their work as such will utilise a canon text which they will then adapt how they see fit.

The Context of BL Fanfiction

While it shares common features with the other forms of MLM or slash fanfiction, I consider my topic to fall under the term BL fanfiction because of how the source material (canon) has been understood as BL literature. It follows the typical BL elements of where the characters are presented in a manner that is conventional for the genre. The *danmei* genre makes use of very specific expectations and terms; in the case of *CQL*, some fans will be familiar with the more specific terms of *danmei*, but some also will adapt the more broadly known terms of BL which fans are aware of when they enter this space. Indeed, these tropes can be present outside the genre, but they have become essentially standard across all BL literature in East Asia including comics (manga, *manhua*, *manhwa*), animated series (anime, *donghua*, *aeni*), and light novels, of which the broader *MDZS* canon falls under in various English translations. In fanfiction, BL terms may also be complicated or extended through the real vocabularies of USian queer community. For this project, the most important of these definitions are based in the “roles” which represent some part of characterisation in BL works.

The USian top/bottom label exclusively refers to the sexual positions that one takes during the act of sex. It is typically applied to homosexual couples; however, this has been complicated with modern discourse regarding top/bottom “energy”, where it has evolved beyond the sexual positioning and now has the added definition of how one presents themselves with regards to the ‘vibe’ that is given when someone seems like a bottom or top—as a result, heterosexual people now also adopt these terms. Similarly, we have the USian specific dom/sub, sourced from kink culture, whereby one is a more dominant partner and another is a more submissive partner. This does not strictly align with sexual positioning as one can be a dominant

bottom, or a submissive top. Despite this, it is more common to see a dominant top and a submissive bottom—tropes which are heavily present in most slash fanfiction.

These then map onto US fans' understandings of the more specific *seme/uke* – Japanese BL terminology regarding the sexual positioning of two same-sex characters in a relationship. The *seme* refers to the giver, while *uke* refers to the receiver; these designations are often assigned partly through physical depiction, with the *uke* appearing more feminine or androgynous in stature and facial features, while the *seme* appears more masculine. *Danmei* does have its own specific binary—the *gōng/shòu*—and its nuances are explored in later chapters. However, this terminology is usually treated, in English fandom spaces, as the equivalent of *seme* and *uke*. The *gōng/shòu* dynamic is just as rigid in its structuring, with specific characteristics that are maintained and, in some fandom spaces, rigorously defended.

What a person perceives of homosexual literature in the text is thus influenced by their entryway into the text or fandom space, depending on whether their context is gathered from BL terminology that is often very rigid in interpretation, or the Western queer understanding of potentially more fluid gender dynamics and sexual roles. As authors and readers speak and read across these (and other) understandings of sexual dynamics, they end up creating a remix of sorts as they develop overlapping systems of meaning-making.

Fanfiction as a Transgressive Force

Fanfiction can be viewed as a “transgressive force”²⁶ that fights against conventions seen in canon—this can range from various adaptations of text to character interviews. Fans then become “amateur narratologists”²⁷ who act like critics to see what makes good or bad fan-written

²⁶ Bronwen Thomas, “What Is Fanfiction and Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things about It?” *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 3, (October 2011): 7–8, <https://doi.org.10.5250/storyworlds.3.2011.0001>.

²⁷ Thomas, “What is Fanfiction and Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things about It?” 5.

works based on their aesthetic judgment.²⁸ As a result, what one fandom finds valuable will not translate to another. Distinct *and* communal values determine how the fandom for *MDZS/CQL* treats the canon texts. Fans of *MDZS* may write fanfiction citing the novel as metatext, but choose to pull from *CQL* as a point of inspiration if they have a preference for something that the live-action did. It is more common to flip it the other way, though often only implicitly, as fans who use *CQL* as a starting point will take elements from *MDZS*'s less censored writing so that the more apparent MLM queer element can be incorporated. In fact, *most* fans seem to default to assuming that the canon queerness is a starting point for most fanfic plots.

Fandom studies is a continuously evolving space as new material is released and adapted/remixed based on the shared “aesthetic values”²⁹ of the fandom. Henry Jenkins, Jungmin Kwon, Judith Fathallah, and Suresh Canagarajah are some critics who have influenced how I examine the *CQL* fandom's development. Henry Jenkins informs us of the participatory culture that influences fandom culture as well as transmedia storytelling.³⁰ Kwon works with straight female fans of MLM texts and offers insights into how the movement has developed. Suresh Canagarajah highlights how meaning-making develops, in particular with translingual practices;

²⁸ Thomas, 13–14

²⁹ Cornel Sandvoss, “The Death of the Reader: Literary Theory and the Study of Texts in Popular Culture,” in *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, ed. by Karen Hellekson, and Kristina Busse (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 61.

³⁰ As defined by Henry Jenkins who claims that transmedia storytelling “represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes [its] own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story.” With regards to fanfiction, each addition given by the fanfic author develops the fandom's understanding of how it unpacks. However, this consideration can also be taken in when thinking about how fan-translators played a part in influencing how fans perceived and received the texts due to their own understandings of the canon *MDZS* while it was still a webnovel. One fan reading from *x* translation would have been presented something differently from *y* translation; thus, when they turn to writing fanfiction, their source material would have presented a different interpretation. Henry Jenkins, “Transmedia 202: Further Reflection,” last modified July 31, 2011. https://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html.

this is most apt due to the multicultural, multilingual practices that the assumed Western writers adopt in the *MDZS/CQL* fandom. Depending on how a fan enters the space, their interpretation of the text varies. The shifts in the different adaptations influence interpretation; the shifts in fandom literacies work similarly.

Some Notes on Methods and Contexts

The fanfics that I analyse are hosted on Archive Of Our Own (AO3). The website was established in 2007 by the non-profit called the Organization of Transformative Works (OTW).³¹ AO3 is an archive that works to keep a record of fanfiction across the internet as they believe that “fanworks are transformative and that transformative works are legitimate.”³² The use of the term “transformative work” can be seen as a way to legitimise efforts of fanfic writers as (re-)producers. As AO3 chooses to highlight in their Terms of Services, “Commercial entities have frequently permitted fanworks in the early stage of their existence in order to expand their userbase, only to later prohibit certain types of fanworks from being shared on their platform.”³³ Thus, AO3 works to ensure that fanworks are protected.

Theoretical Framework

Analysing *CQL*’s fandom culture through a series of rhetorical lenses to understand the intersections of how *The Untamed* fandom has developed over time is the basis of this project. The three lenses I have selected are a linguistic lens, an embodied lens, and a cultural lens. By combining these lenses with an observation of the rhetorical situation through a Burkian Pentad analysis, I unpack certain effects (and affects) of fanfiction and adaptation choices within each specific lens I have chosen to work with.

³¹ Archive of Our Own, “About,” accessed September 17, 2025, <https://archiveofourown.org/about>.

³² Archive of Our Own, “About.”

³³ Archive of Our Own. “Terms of Service FAQ: Maximum Inclusiveness,” accessed September 17, 2025, https://archiveofourown.org/tos_faq#max_inclusiveness.

Through a linguistic lens, what happens when the language of the canon culture is borrowed by the fanfic author who is not from the canon culture? How do they decide on using one format for language or another? As the canon text of *CQL/MDZS* draws on real ancient Chinese culture, albeit with fictional and fantasy additions, there are certain practices that fanfic authors choose that indicate their understanding of how the language/culture works. The focus here develops from translingual practices that fanfic writers adopt as they evolve the meaning-making of the fandom's lexicon.³⁴ Thus, I can treat the learned language as a *danmei* lexicon that only those who are fans of *danmei* or involved in *danmei* discourse communities are able to grasp. This chapter integrates Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author" alongside Suresh Canagarajah's concept of "translingualism" to unpack the way that the *danmei* lexicon develops in the fandom. It extends death of the author two-fold, as the fanfic writer is now manipulating the canon text and culture, but making those choices depending on their comfort level of using a foreign culture and language in their work, such that they may invite critique or downplay their own authority when speaking to readers. Further, Judith Fathallah links fanfiction with Foucault and writes how "[he] compared governing statements to the roots of a tree", and when this is connected to fanfics, the canon acts as the governing statement.³⁵ The *danmei* lexicon in this sense develops as its own governing statement that fanfic writers have to work with.

³⁴ Cora Sommer, "Gender Non-Conformity in Science Fiction: Interrogating Gender as Language in *The First Sister* Trilogy," Master's thesis, (University of Central Oklahoma, 2025), <https://hdl.handle.net/11244/341513>.

My ideas here are inspired by Cora Sommer's articulation of gender as a language, read and understood depending on specific fluencies. When this concept is transferred to fanfiction, specifically fanfiction citing a foreign culture for canon, the fandom develops its own understanding on particular words that when translated to English miss the mark or are simply nonexistent.

³⁵ Judith May Fathallah, "From Foucault to Fanfic," in *Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Culture Texts*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 19, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1v2xsp4.5>.

Fanfiction, by its nature, is a product of deconstruction as the fanfic writers become bricoleurs³⁶ where they shape and mould the characters to meet the narrative that they either want to push (a head-canon) or is the aesthetic value that the fandom agrees with (as a fan-canon). I see the development taking place with *CQL*-inspired fanfiction as the fanfic authors pull from the original canon, as well as fan-canon interpretations to build their world and adapt it to meet their preferred narrative. Through my interviews with fanfic authors, I unpack some of the choices authors make, alongside a more quantitative analysis of Orphan_Account fanfics, to consider how choices in language communicate literacies and authorities in fandom spaces.

In exploring the embodied rhetorics within fanfiction, I focus on how gender is codified within the canon text and how the protagonist, Wei Wuxian, counters the coding given to him as the designated “female” of the relationship, in addition to interpreting what happens when fanfic writers play around with gender by switching the dynamics. Initially, I hoped to just look at how fanfic authors incorporate their understanding of the canon due to the removal of the overt queer storyline, but, due to the multitude of adaptations, it is difficult to distinguish the particular origins of a given idea or trope. I found instead that the fandom is actively participating in creation, while also citing various adaptations to fit their chosen narrative. Therefore, to find a fanfic that relies solely on the live-action canon is difficult, especially in cases where the fan canons have emerged from other fanfiction, as observed in one of my interviews for Chapter Two. Instead, I incorporated some discussion of how widespread fan-canons (fanons) participate in both coding Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji and in generating critical discourses around binary coding and characterisations.

³⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Science of the Concrete,” in *The Savage Mind (La Pensée sauvage)*, translated by John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 16-18.

Finally, I turn to how food rhetoric and culture works as a lens for analysis. Kavita Finn and Jessica McCall argue that fanfiction is a “unique” place where canon enjoyers turned fanfic creators who are “unsure of their own critical authority” can then “actively undercut the positivism of traditional approaches to interpretation.”³⁷ The aesthetic values in fanfiction prefer those concepts that are “more often derided and refused in traditional academic circles” such as “emotion, self-insertion, and subjectivity.”³⁸ I consider the use of modern food cultures as an example of such subjectivity and self-insertion which allows writers to incorporate various markers of culture. With modernisation as a point of interest, I aim to analyse how and why authors use modern food cultures of Asian diasporas in their fics, utilising tags on Archive of Our Own such as “food as a love language” and specific Fests (fan writing events) that focus on diaspora and its influence. Finn and McCall state that fanfiction can be “a new kind of criticism,”³⁹ pushing writers to “[preserve] the multiplicity and complexity of meaning in the text rather than replacing it.”⁴⁰ With regards to cultural and food rhetorics, the multiplicity and meaning of the canon is viewed through the way fanfic authors have decided to address “food as a love language” in their writing, demonstrating various expertise in platform and cultural familiarity.

These three chapters establish a framework for understanding fanfiction as more than derivative work, and instead as a site of linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural engagement. In examining *CQL*’s fandom through the three lenses, the project puts fanfic authors as active participants in meaning-making, to negotiate canon and community norms within the discourse

³⁷ Kavita Mudan Finn and Jessica McCall, “Exit, Pursued by a Fan: Shakespeare, Fandom, and the Lure of the Alternate Universe,” *Critical Survey*, 28, no. 2 (2016): 28, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26382275>.

³⁸ Finn and McCall, “Exit, Pursued by a Fan: Shakespeare, Fandom, and the Lure of the Alternate Universe,” 28.

³⁹ Finn and McCall, 29.

⁴⁰ Finn and McCall, 29.

community. Fanfic writers demonstrate how meaning is constructed within fandom where the platform AO3 preserves author agency and creativity.

Bibliography

- Archive of Our Own. "About." Accessed September 17, 2025. <https://archiveofourown.org/about>.
- . "Terms of Service." Accessed September 17, 2025. <https://archiveofourown.org/tos>.
- . "Terms of Service FAQ: Maximum Inclusiveness." Accessed September 17, 2025. https://archiveofourown.org/tos_faq#max_inclusiveness.
- Fathallah, Judith May. "From Foucault to Fanfic." In *Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts*, 17–32. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1v2xsp4.5>.
- Finn, Kavita Mudan, and Jessica McCall. "Exit, Pursued by a Fan: Shakespeare, Fandom, and the Lure of the Alternate Universe." *Critical Survey*, 28, no. 2 (2016): 27–38. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26382275>.
- Fish, Stanley. "From Is there a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities." In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch, 1898–1909. NY: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2018.
- Jenkins, Henry. "Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century (Part One)." Last modified October 19, 2006. https://henryjenkins.org/blog/2006/10/confronting_the_challenges_of.html.
- . "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections." Last modified July 31, 2011. https://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html.
- Kwon, Jungmin. "Introduction." In *Straight Korean Female Fans and Their Gay Fantasies*, 1–30. Iowa City: Iowa Press, 2018.

- Landow, George. "Hypertext: An Introduction." In *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*, 1–52. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "The Science of the Concrete." In *The Savage Mind (La Pensée sauvage)*, translated by John Weightman and Doreen Weightman, 1–33. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Li, Hong. "Consumer Behaviours of Chinese Female on Boys' Love Fiction: A Sociological Perspective." *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 664, (June 1 2022): 1006–1013. Atlantic Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220504.183>.
- Llewellyn, Anna. "A Space Where Queer Is Normalized": The Online World and Fanfictions as Heterotopias for WLW." *Journal of Homosexuality* 69, no. 13 (June 2021): 2348–2369. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2021.1940012>.
- McLelland, Mark, and James Welker. "An Introduction to "Boy's Love" in Japan." In *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan*, edited by Mark McLelland, Kazumi Nagaike, Katsuhiko Suganuma, and James Welker. 3–20. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015.
- Sandvoss, Cornel. "The Death of the Reader: Literary Theory and the Study of Texts in Popular Culture." In *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, edited by Karen Hellekson, and Kristina Busse, 61–74. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014.
- Thomas, Bronwen. "What Is Fanfiction and Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things about It??" *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, 3, (October 2011): 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.5250/storyworlds.3.2011.0001>.
- . "The Wreader." Last modified November 4, 2013. <https://www.digitalreadingnetwork.com/the-wreader/>.

- Wong, Alvin K. “Disjunctive Temporalities: Queer Sinophone Visuality across Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.” In *Queer TV China: Televisual and Fannish Imaginaries of Gender, Sexuality, and Chineseness*, edited by Jamie J. Zhao, 124–142. Hong Kong UP: 2023.
- Xu, Yanrui and Ling Yang. “Between BL and Slash: *Danmei* Fiction, Transcultural Mediation, and Changing Gender Norms in Contemporary China.” In *Queer Transfigurations*, edited by James Welker, 19–30. Hawai’i UP: 2023.

Chapter One: Meaning-Making in BL Fanfiction

Introduction

This chapter considers the growth of BL as it relates to the *CQL* (*Chén Qíng Líng*) fandom, as opposed to *MDZS*'s (*Mò Dao Zu Shi*) canon. This is because fans work to re-integrate the canonically queer storyline in their fanfiction as a result of the lighter queer “coding” that occurs in the live-action drama adaptation, *CQL*. This is further complicated as I consider how fanfic authors of assumed Western, (sometimes) North American background weave connections between the narrative established by the *CQL* canon and how they pull inspiration from the fictional Chinese narrative that utilises real, ancient Chinese culture and linguistics. In comparing the repeated values, I aim to bring awareness to the practices of fanfic authors in their adaptation of *CQL* and emphasise how well adopted given practises have become in fandom. Furthermore, this chapter assesses the extent to which these narrative adaptations are embraced in the global context, highlighting the impact of globalisation on fan culture and creative practices.

Literature Review

Application of Translingualism into Fandom Culture

My consideration of the global fandom of *CQL* necessarily integrates questions of translingualism because most of the original canons are written in Chinese, and certain terms from the original are integrated into fandom spaces. When using a language unfamiliar to the author, there is a level of borrowing and understanding required for literacy to develop. With the specifics of how the fandom interacts with the literature, the way that meaning-making works in this imagined world can develop as its own literacy—or the *danmei* lexicon of sorts, in this specific case. Suresh Canagarajah's article “Orientations” focuses primarily on meaning making. He claims that “social constructionism treated texts as the blueprint of knowing and behaviour. Some schools influenced by structuralism treated this blueprint as encoded in language and

internalized in the mind.”¹ This view suggests that texts shape how individuals view and interact with the world around them. Meanings are provided through societal norms that readers/viewers internalise. As a result, texts reflect how societal ideologies shape the values of the reader. Canagarajah’s use of “blueprint” indicates a layer of play because of how meanings can be negotiated. Through fanfiction, the original text (canon) no longer has true authority. Thus, the text is decentralised as fans are active in reinterpreting the blueprints of canon to fit what they want. Through this act of remixing texts, fans complicate what canon is as a singular entity. Further, Canagarajah’s inclusion of the materiality of texts and its different modes thus shifts this perspective as meaning is no longer “encoded or emerging from texts but [is] generated by all material and social resources working together.”² Connecting this with fanfiction, it behaves in a similar manner. Authors take the established canon and use the surrounding discourses that develop around that canon text. In this discourse, head canons are a personal interpretation of the canon text, while fan-canon (fanon) is more community accepted. Borrowing the blueprint metaphor, head-canons are a personal adjustment to the layout, whereas a fanon interpretation is multiple architects agreeing on a change to the layout and seeing the way it fits together.

When considering how literacies develop, the digital space of this fandom merits particular attention, because each community member gains different skills through access to different community formations and discourses. However, “despite these developments ... texts were seen to hold shared meanings within communities ... because social literacies scholars treated communities as homogenous.”³ This perspective provides an assumption that within digital spaces there is unity regarding the understanding of text. Yet, as the digital space

¹ Suresh Canagarajah, “Weaving the Text: Changing Literacy Practices and Orientations,” *College English* 82, no.1 (2019):18, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26823961>.

² Canagarajah, “Weaving the Text,” 18.

³ Canagarajah, 12.

diversifies, the homogeneity turns into something complicated. Fandom culture is rarely one shared ideology; rather, reality suggests that it is fluid with multiple interpretations—fan-canon—competing against each other.

Fanfic’s Connections with Death of the Reader/Author

Fanfiction is the perfect example for Roland Barthes’ idea of “Death of the Author” as the fanfic author acts as a bricoleur⁴ who picks and chooses elements of canon to develop their own narrative. Because the fanfic authors I have chosen to interview are from an assumed Western country,⁵ there is a further level to the death of the author. In this space, the fanfic author is now the one who decides how the linguistics from the canon text should be written in a way that is understood by the fans consuming the text. Through translanguaging and the practice of developing a literacy within the fandom, it can be assumed that the fandom has adopted the aesthetic values shared as the fanon interpretation grows. Yet, there is another angle from which to approach this: to look at how fanfiction acts to complicate Barthes’ “Death of the Author” as the author shifts from the original author, to the one who adapts and remixes the text. Barthes writes that “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.”⁶ It might be inferred that

⁴ This concept derives from Claude Lévi-Strauss who claims that a “‘bricoleur’ is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks” and rather than being limited by what they can do, the bricoleur is able to play with what they can (17). He further states that while the tools the bricoleur uses may be specialised, their utilisation of these tools does not have to be as intended or at an expert level (18). What is most important is how they have used the tool for their purpose. Thus, transposing this onto fanfiction, the fanfic author is utilising elements of the canon text and reconfiguring it to fit their needs. Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Science of the Concrete,” in *The Savage Mind (La Pensée sauvage)*, translated by John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 16-18.

⁵ I made this assumption because I used Archive of Our Own, a site hosted on United States internet structures, because I used English-language fics, and because I was already aware, from my own fandom participation, of the number of authors’ notes identifying the writer as USian.

⁶ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch, (NY: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2018), 1271.

authorial intent limits the work, and so the “Author-God”⁷, as coined by Barthes, is no longer present due to a variety of writings and remixes. Fanfiction complicates this further as the work exists in a collaborative space as the canon is constantly being remixed, and the authority shifts to the fans themselves—and fans of the fanfic authors who take inspiration from the fanfic. Returning to *CQL* and *MDZS*, the author MXTX is secondary, or potentially irrelevant, as fans shift the source material to something they see best fits their motivations. Fanfiction develops as a place of play for the text where the original meaning evolves. The reader—who turns into the fanfic writer—turns into an active participant in the writing process.

In borrowing this idea, Massimo Leone extends this to introduce the concept of The Death of the Reader. Leone addresses how ignorance is necessary to create “aesthetic greatness.”⁸ She claims the lack of true awareness of who the audience is leads to a sense of digital narcissism where the social acts, as opposed to the individual, create meaning making.⁹ Additionally, Leone addresses bloggers and how they introduced a new “voice... praised in the West as forerunners of social and political change.”¹⁰ In my primary text’s case, this voice sprouted from fans who regarded the aesthetic value of the homosexual/homoromantic storyline as a necessity, thus they took it and made it present. Through fanfiction, Death of the Reader thrives as the community, or discourse, develops the language with each fan-canon’s shift. Additionally, Adam Hyde¹¹ argues that the way forward is through collaborative writing which is

⁷ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” 1270.

⁸ Massimo Leone, “The Death of the Reader: Meaning in the Era of Digital Narcissism,” *Language and Semiotic Studies* 4, no. 3 (2018): 73, <https://doi.org/10.1515/lass-2018-040304>.

⁹ Leone, “The Death of the Reader,” 72.

¹⁰ Leone, 81.

¹¹ Adam Hyde. “The Death of the Reader.” *Books In Browsers IV Proceedings* 17, no.1 (Winter 2014), <https://doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0017.108>.

one way to describe the act of fanfic writing, alongside the translingual practices that fanfic authors make when creating their texts.

Further, Stanley Fish also highlights this act regarding how interpretive communities' work.¹² The fandom acts as its own interpretive community with its own training to emphasise what is valued by the fandom. Fish writes how in his example students were able to accomplish a task by triggering their memory where they commit "acts of recognition."¹³ Within fandom communities, fans will develop their own interpretive strategies that would not have lined up with MXTX's canon. These acts draw upon the fandom's shared knowledge: the *danmei* lexicon that they have developed. Fanfic writers and readers are trained through previous encounters with the genre to recognise the patterns and reinforce the aesthetic values of the specific community. As the community is fairly active online, the discourses surrounding the text allow for open non-canonical interpretations, especially when the canon allows for more play—which *CQL* allows for, as shown throughout this project. The romantic relationship between Wangxian is recognised to be that way because that is what the fandom has accepted. Fish also adds a note regarding translations, which is apt for this chapter. He writes that there is an issue of control regarding interpreters. He queries, "will texts be allowed to constrain their own interpretation or will irresponsible interpreters be allowed to obscure and overwhelm texts?"¹⁴ This is important considering how the fandom for *MDZS/CQL* engages with non-Western texts. Translation is not a neutral act, and interpreters may not be wholly faithful to the cultural contexts and nuances present in the canon. Fandoms will integrate their own understandings, with a tendency to frame

¹² Stanley Fish, "Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 1898–1909.

¹³ Fish, "Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities," 1901.

¹⁴ Fish, 1908.

it to what they are most familiar with, be it Western romantic tropes, or Western queer representation. The way a fanfic author interprets the text challenges and reshapes the text. Any irresponsible interpreters, as suggested by Fish, might impose foreign values and take on an Orientalist lens.

In order to look at how these motivations develop, Kenneth Burke's "A Grammar of Motives" provides a framework for analysing the text. Burke's dramatist pentad, in particular, "invites one to consider the motives in a perspective that, being developed from the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action."¹⁵ The pentad consists of the elements act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose, each answering what, where, who, how, and why questions that will allow for a reader to examine how meaning is constructed.¹⁶ Further, how these elements interact with each other elaborates on the meaning-making within the text—where the scene-act ratio reveals how setting influences behaviour,¹⁷ while the scene-agent ratio highlights how an environment shapes a character's traits and decisions.¹⁸ In fanfiction, familiar acts and scenes from the canon text are remixed, allowing the agents—the fictional characters—to act in ways that expand the canon portrayal. This can then be extended further when we consider how the fanfic author is an agent themselves regarding how their movements shift the narrative to suit their intended preferences when rewriting the canon. I consider this to be a double-agent moment where the fanfic author breaks away from the narrative conventions expected in the literary genres where they can expand beyond canon works through various means—typically this means fixing the story based on what the fanfic author believes is to be

¹⁵ Kenneth Burke, "From *A Grammar of Motives*," in *The Rhetorical Tradition*, ed. Patricia Bizzell, Bruce Herzberg, and Robin Reames (New York: Macmillan, 1945), 1276.

¹⁶ Burke, "From *A Grammar of Motives*," 1272.

¹⁷ Burke, "*Motives*," 1276–78.

¹⁸ Burke, 1279–60.

adjusted, whether this is to increase representation (by race, gender, or sexuality), or to provide an alternative perspective to a scene that they believe requires more context, or to simply play with familiar characters by placing them in a different setting.

Methodology

When collecting text to analyse, certain practices within the fandom community need to be considered and respected when crossing into the academic sphere. Part of this process involves gaining consent from the fanfic authors whose fanfics are represented in this project. Brianna Dym and Case Fiesler¹⁹ have written extensively about acquiring permission when academics use fanfic in their research. This is due to how personal some of the fanfiction is; by exposing their works outside of the fandom discourse community, as in an academic article or thesis chapter, they will be entering a different sort of space. Fanfic writers exist behind screennames, often for their own safety. Therefore, in exposing them to the academic space, their identities might be affected. This is most especially important as I have reached out to interview authors for an insight into their writing style and choices considering how they approached and remixed the canon text(s). I ensured that my institution's IRB approved my research before going ahead with the process. In this chapter, I have interviewed three authors, and only one chose to remain anonymous.

My research questions highlight what adaptations fic authors made use of when writing the fanfiction, and why they might have preferred to use Romanised terminology as opposed to English translations (or vice versa, depending on the author's choice). I initially started out looking for fanfiction set in the timeline of *CQL*'s fictional canon, as I was interested to see how

¹⁹ Brianna Dym, and Case Fiesler, "Ethical and Privacy Considerations for Research Using Online Fandom Data," in *Fan Studies Methodologies*, ed. Julia E. Largent, Milena Popova, and Elise Vist, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 33 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2020.1733>.

fanfic authors made use of the language from an assumed distance where the culture is not one that they grew up with. However, as I was interested in interviewing authors to see the hows and whys of their fanfic writing style, my plans evolved as I dealt with the difficulties of directly contacting authors. This is due to how Archive of Our Own (AO3) lacks a direct message feature. Instead, fanfic authors can offer their readers the chance to communicate with them outside of the website through their social media on their profile (and sometimes as an endnote on a fanfic). Typically, the platform would be Tumblr, and that was how I was able to contact the fanfic authors selected for this chapter. As my own account is fairly active and fandom-oriented, it allows for me to show that I am active in fandom culture, too, allowing for them to bestow their trust in me.

The fanfic authors that I selected were Author A, defractum, and Hinu. Author A and Hinu are Western fanfic authors, while defractum is a Chinese author who resides in Europe. I did not know this information prior to gauging their interest in participating in my research project, but I valued the insights that they shared with me regarding the writing styles that they adopted in their fanfiction.

On top of the interviews, I also collected data using AO3's function of Orphan_Accounts. An Orphan_Account is an option for fanfic authors to use on AO3 where they completely remove any association with the fanfic, thus providing me with more of a chance to use the fanfic as it is no longer connected to a fanfic author. This enables me to have the opportunity to use the fanfic without having to request permission, as the fanfic author is no longer associated with the work. While it does mean not being able to interview the fanfic author, I am able to have more of a quantitative analysis with this choice and offer a more critical approach regarding what my findings will be.

When looking at Orphan_Account fanfiction to read for this chapter, I utilised AO3's filter system and ensured that these were the activated filters:

- Fandom: 陈情令 | The Untamed (TV)
- Relationship: Lán Zhàn | Lán Wàngjī/Wèi Yīng | Wèi Wúxiàn
- Status: Complete
- Language: English
- Search within the results: Orphan_Account

I chose to exclude any fanfiction containing Rape/Non-Con.²⁰

With these filters activated, I looked for the top 10 fanfics based on kudos count.²¹ After the filters were applied, there were instances where the author still attached their name to the fanfic e.g. Orphan_Account (author pseudonym) which I decided to neglect in my data collection as it still served as an identifier. My approach was informed through Alison Cummins's methodology; when analysing popular fanfiction in the *Twilight* fandom, she took inspiration from Pardun et al.'s method to codifying her fanfic analysis.²² Cummins simplified the codes that they used in their study regarding how adolescents respond to sexual content.²³ Their study involved the creation of a code that would count the instance of sexual content that adolescents

²⁰ This is a personal preference as I preferred to not engage with any fanfiction containing this element.

²¹ The website utilises this button as a way to praise the fanfic author for their content. AO3 ensures that users "can only give kudos to a work once." To read more about how the Kudos function works, see the AO3 FAQ site: https://archiveofourown.org/faq/comments-and-kudos?language_id=en#whatiskudos.

²² Alison Cummins, "Unconditionally and Irrevocably in Love": The Sociological Implications of Romance and Sex in the *Twilight* Saga and Its Fanfictions," Master's thesis, Muhlenberg College, 2021, <https://jstor.org/stable/community.30532834>, 38.

²³ See C. J. Pardun, K. L. L'Engle., and J. D. Brown, "Linking Exposure to Outcomes: Early Adolescents' Consumption of Sexual Content in Six Media," *Mass Communication & Society* 8, no. 2 (2005): 75–91, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327825mcs0802_1.

consumed in media. I simplified this approach further, which was possible as the wordcount of the fanfics I selected were under 100k and a simplified approach better suited my purpose: to examine the language borrowing of fanfic authors in popular fanfiction. Cummins's focus is on the expression of love in *Twilight* fanfiction, whereas I have shifted it to seek the terms used by fanfic authors to indicate whether they used Romanised language or a direct/rough English translation of the word. In doing so, I hope to reveal which method the assumed Western author presents when writing about a fantasy world that uses world-building inspired by an existing ancient culture. Ultimately, I want to answer the questions: What does it mean for a fanfic author to use Romanised terminology vs. the English translated version? Why did they decide to go that route? Looking at it rhetorically, how does the fanfic author re-shape the canon based on the changes that they have made?

Analysis of the Fandom

Because of the multitude of remixes within *CQL*'s fandom, it is incredibly difficult to separate them as there is no guarantee that the fanfic creator consumed only one format. When I asked the fanfic authors which adaptation they made use of, their response was that they did not limit themselves to *CQL*'s canon. Rather, they looked at the published English novel as well as the unofficial fan-translation which would have presented different meanings depending on how the translator interpreted the text as opposed to the publishing house's interpretation. One author even used other fanfiction to develop their understanding of the literary space of *CQL* fandom—a classic example of how community fan-cans develop.

In this instance, Author A revealed that her Romanisation resulted from, “a couple of reasons... primarily because they seem so integral to how the characters address each other.” She provided the example of Lan Wangji's older brother (Lan Xichen) calling Jin Guangyao “A-Yao” as something that has “such meaning to it” that would otherwise be absent from the

situation. Those who are familiar with the fandom would have already picked up the basic naming system used in *CQL* and thus would accept the diminutive prefix “A-” before a name to indicate an affectionate tone to someone younger (seen as romantic or platonic depending on the context).

Author A continues to say that “The Chinese language is rich in providing context with regards to how a person is related to another person. So much so that when it is translated to English, it comes across as clunky or unnatural.” This is the reason why Author A decided to approach fanfiction by Romanising the Chinese terminology. She then states how the main characters Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian use each other’s given names (Lan Zhan and Wei Ying, respectively) which demonstrates the closeness between them, similar to how we would use nicknames for people, but once more the context is different. When Author A Romanised the terminology, she claims that *xiongzhang* feels natural to Lan Wangji’s character when he speaks to Lan Xichen, his older brother. This is because, to an English-speaking ear, addressing someone as “big brother” would be weird—or appear too formal based on how we currently use the English language—as it is culturally acceptable to refer to an elder sibling by their name in most Western countries. This cultural practice inspired Author A’s writing process when using a canon from Asia regarding whether she should use Romanised Chinese or an English translation of the language. Another example she provided that demonstrates the complex nature of direct translation is Wei Wuxian’s way of naming his martial sister, as “Older sect sister [...] sounds incredibly weird” when compared to “*shijie*.” She writes that through a Romanised version, the relationship between characters would “give different vibes/flow in writing” which implies that this preferred aesthetic appeal allows for more clarity.

Another interesting point is that prior to Author A's foray into the *CQL* fandom, she was part of the anime fandom. She explains that her thought process at the time of writing the fanfic could be because "[she] was already used to using language that way." Because of the Japanese fandom background, Author A saw that "it was customary to use the suffixes when writing fanfiction for anime, partly because the translation isn't one-to-one." In Japanese, the suffix -san after a name to denote the title differed to -kun, which Author A states is "*really* hard to translate into English... So when [she] got to 'Lan-er-gongzi' and 'Xian-gege' it seemed simplest to do the same thing." In having familiarity with the linguistics of a particular culture, fanfic authors are able to plug in Romanised words that are commonly used in the fandom in order to avoid the confusing syntax that would just make the text seem unnatural to a native English speaker.

Contrastingly, defractum is a Chinese author who lives in England. In the fanfics that I gained consent to work with, it appears that her writing preference is to make use of the English translation as opposed to Romanised terminology. Initially, I thought that it would be because of how it feels more natural to use the language in this manner as it is the direct translation of the same word— even if, in doing so, it lacks the connotations that those who do not speak the language associate it with. When asked, her response is:

... I really wanted people to have the familiar sense of feeling of the translation, but one

step to the left. So a number of things I kept were stylistic choices from the translation.

Across my fic in general, I think there is some variation in the amount of Chinese

transliterations I use, and *it largely depends on what I think makes the most sense for that fic* [my emphasis]. I tend to translate when terms are easily transferrable; I tend not to if

there's a meaning in Chinese that can't be conveyed or is lost in the translation that is

important to that particular story (for example, if I'm making a pun off a Chinese pronunciation of a word).

Ultimately, this creates the idea that it is the writer's preference and their overall familiarity with the canon text that allows for them to figure out which element is the one that they want to focus on. With Author A, her familiarity with Romanising Japanese naming systems allowed for her to feel comfort in doing the same thing with Chinese naming systems and familiar hierarchies. Yet, even so, defractum mentions how she does not translate if the meaning is lost. As the agent in this scene, defractum's choice to translate or not is deliberate and situational. She balances familiarity for her English-speaking audience with a desire to maintain cultural and linguistic elements when important. Her purpose is to then create a narrative that resonates across linguistic and cultural lines. It can be inferred, for example, that defractum's usual use of "brother" as opposed to "*xiongzhang*" is because the word exists in English. As a result, readers will not have to worry about reading "brother" in the flirtatious tone implied in Wei Wuxian's use of "*gege*" as it is absent in the fanfics I selected from defractum's works.²⁴ This prevents a misreading or misunderstanding. Rather than risking the confusion or unintended discomfort that might arise from unfamiliar or ambiguous terminology, she maintains clarity. Her rhetorical agency lies in exercising judgement in choosing a language that supports the story's tone, theme, and intent.

My third interview expands outside of the scope where I limited my selection to fanfics sent in the canonical historical past, which had allowed me to look at how fanfic authors

²⁴ There is only one instance in which defractum chooses *xiongzhang* in "the exception proves the rule." In this scene, Lan Wangji says it when he wonders if there is another way for the Lan clan to react as a response to his act of defiance. In using this word, Lan Wangji is drawing upon the hierarchal structures, calling back to the way the Lan clan's society works. This Romanisation makes the conversation more poignant as opposed to using the direct translation of "brother." The Romanised word is one final connection to the place he left.

borrowed terminology of a formal language with practices that they would not have been exposed to. However, Hinu's fanfic presented some very interesting ideas in his author's note which seemed to merit this extension. At the beginning of the fanfic "To Make Him a Perfect Bride" (which is a fusion of *MDZS* and *Crazy Rich Asians*), he writes,

By writing Chinese and Chinese-American characters ... I acknowledge I am writing firmly outside of my own cultural reference points. Nothing in this fic is meant as discriminatory, stereotyping or political, and if anything is found to be culturally insensitive or grossly incorrect, I apologize and ask that the reader kindly let me know so I can do better in the future.

This very much fits into Author A's author notes throughout the fanfic, where she acknowledges the limitations on her interpretation of the canon's language. In fact, Author A's author's notes were the reason why I wanted to reach out to her to see how her writing process developed. Through them, readers are able to view her positionality:

White girl note: my understanding of the Chinese naming conventions is that married women don't change their last names, so even though Jin Guangshan's wife's title would be Jin-furen, her family name would still be Yu (since she is from the Yu sect). So I have named her Yu Huanfa in this AU. If I'm wrong about that and it should be Jin Huanfa, please let me know!"²⁵

I wanted to give Meng Yao's sword a really cool name but then I remembered I don't speak Mandarin and me trying to name things in Mandarin has not historically gone well

²⁵ "Aftermath," Chapter 1. (Throughout, I use the chapter numbering system that a given author uses, i.e. "One" or "1" represents the fic author's choice.)

for me so maybe I'll just admit I can't possibly translate such a complex concept into a language I don't speak lmao.²⁶

Author's notes offer a lot of insight into how a fanfic author develops their writing style.

Initially, they can be seen as a way for the author to communicate their authority with the text.

Alexandra Herzog discusses how the author's note as a paratext serves as a way for fanfic

authors "to convey their understanding of the role of the author in all its fannish interpretations,

focusing on the agency entailed by inhabiting these different models of authorship."²⁷ Yet, what

many authors in this fandom have done with their author notes is indicate their lack of authority

in this space. Rather than having the author become dead, à la Barthes, the fanfic author becomes

more present and, in some instances, welcomes the readers in to become partial creator, as seen

by Author A's request to let her know if she's wrong in any way. Maria Lindgren Leavenworth

expands on this phenomenon in her article "The Paratext of Fan Fiction" where the paratext of

fanfiction can influence the reader's (and to some extent, writer's) experience.²⁸ This is made

even more complicated with how the meaning-making develops as more people start to adopt

specific things based on their entryway into the *CQL* fandom. This time, framing Author A and

Hinu as the agents within the dramatist pentad reveals how rhetorical meaning is co-produced

between writer, reader, and cultural context. As the fanfic writer, Author A and Hinu are

embedded into their text by acknowledging their limitations. Their choices to invite correction

rejects the "Author-God" model as critiqued by Barthes. The action of writing and publishing

fanfiction is one that is dialogic, and, in a sense, the text is unfinished as meaning is gained

²⁶ "Somewhere to Belong," Chapter 13.

²⁷ Alexandra Herzog, "'But this is my story and this is how I wanted to write it': Author's Notes as a Fannish Claim to Power in Fan Fiction Writing," *Transformative Works and Cultures* no.11, (2012). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0406>.

²⁸ Maria Lindgren Leavenworth, "The Paratext of Fan Fiction," *Narrative* 23, no. 1 (2015): 40–60. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24615501>

through reception and response. Both authors utilise paratext as rhetorical tools to shape how the text is interpreted.

In our interview, Hinu states that he “personally prefer[s] [R]omanization of certain words over translation, especially titles and significant cultural concepts.” He likens this to how Tolkien’s languages add to the worldbuilding, saying that this is how he views “language as a writer and reader.” With regards to the usage of “gege” in *CQL* fanfiction, he states that the translation of big brother “reads too formal when translated to English” which then causes it to “lose the flirtations connotation, tied to the cultural usage of the word.” Despite this, he does explain when English translations may be necessary such as the creature called “Xuanwu of Slaughter” where he might “prefer the creature’s name fully in original, with perhaps an explanation of its meaning. Or ... something more interpretive.” In this sense, Hinu sees language as a means for worldbuilding, and, in this way, he is an intentional agent who makes stylistic and rhetorical choices based on how language shapes meaning-making for the readers. He articulates his act of strategically using Romanisation over translation when words carry cultural nuance as distinct from the need for translation when clarity is needed. All three authors’ decisions to Romanise or translate their texts reflect how the globalised nature of fandom informs the readership—some may be familiar with Sinophone language and culture, many not. The fandom context places pressure on writers to mediate between source authenticity and audience accessibility.

Most of Hinu’s insights are reflected in the quantitative data that I gathered from “orphaned” fanfics. Of the five most popular fics (by kudos), 60% chose to use Romanised language. When the Romanised language is used, it focuses on terms particularly tied to the relationship expressed between Wangxian. The words that I paid attention to while analysing the

Orphan_Account fanfics were the most commonly used Romanisations in the fanfics featuring Wangxian as the main couple. Definitions of the terms that I considered can be sourced from the “Character Guide” of the English translation of *The Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation*:

- *Ge* – older brother
- *Gege* – similar to “ge,” but with a potentially more flirtatious connotation
- *Er-ge* – second oldest brother
- *Xiong* – formal honorific for older brother
- *Xiongzhang* – formal version of eldest brother or oldest male friend
- *Shufu* – formal way to call your father’s younger brother (uncle)
- *Laozu* – a rough translation of Patriarch²⁹

When Lan Wangji makes use of *shufu* and *xiongzhang* in the fanfic “Unintended Consequences” he is asking for a formal proposal from his clan to be granted to Wei Wuxian’s. It maintains the essence of his character as someone who is formal and respectful of his elders, with might otherwise have been lost if the fanfic author chose to use English translations of “uncle” and “big brother.” The agent-scene ratio here is influenced by the fanfic author’s use of the terminology. As the creator of the narrative, the fanfic author enforces how Lan Wangji communicates with his brother. The use of the Romanised terms helps to express hierarchy, and it demonstrates Lan Wangji’s upbringing in formal social settings—the fanfic author is maintaining character authenticity through this characterisation.

When authors use Romanised terminology, they attempt to express to other fans something about the various relationships within *CQL* that they feel would have been lost as a

²⁹ Mo Xiang Tong Xiu, *Mo Dao Zu Shi: Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation*. Vol. 1, trans. Suika, ed. Pengie (Los Angeles: Seven Seas Entertainment, 2021), 370-375.

result of English translations. The direct translation of “second brother Lan” reads quite uncomfortably as opposed to Lan *er-gege*. This can perhaps also come from how the cultures apply the language of respect in different ways. In the modern English language, there is not a designated term to call someone, formally, if they are older than you. For example, someone who is your older sister would just be referred to by her first name; however, in a lot of Asian cultures, the older sister would be addressed by a title and then her first name out of respect, or merely the title alone. Hence why it feels more natural to read Lan *er-gege* as opposed to Second Brother Lan to the Western eye. This specific scenario was addressed by all three of the authors in our interviews.

As evidenced from the Orphan_Account samples, there appears to be a general understanding that fanfic authors are handling a culture that they are not wholly embodying. With the exception of one interviewed author, who identifies as someone from the canon author’s culture, all of them prefer to make use of Romanised language. This is a trend that is underscored from the Orphan_Account fics preferring to go the Romanised route. Canagarajah explains how “[m]eanings and texts didn’t originate in the mind, but emerged from activity.”³⁰ In this case, the act of taking the canon language and choosing the elements to build from in the fanfic is the activity of creating meaning. The meanings have been adapted to be more relevant in this situation as the accepted *lingua franca*, of sorts, within the fandom when a fanfic author is assumed to be from a Western background—which I term as *danmei* lexicon for this situation. Thus, Canagarajah’s statement that “[s]uch an orientation gave more importance to practices rather than discourses ... meanings emerged in the collective work of distributed practice” works

³⁰ Canagarajah, “Weaving the Text,” 18.

for this analysis.³¹ Canagarajah also cites Mary Louise Pratt's term of "linguistic utopias" where the space of meaning-making takes a centre stage.³² This concept usefully extends the application to fanfic; the fanfic writer exists in a liminal space, with a liminal identity, where readers will not know who they are unless the author has disclosed information about themselves in their author notes or profile. Through this ability to have mobility, meanings come from the conventions of the space and aren't only "sedimented and regularized [from the community's history]."³³ In this case, meaning-making can be likened to the term head-canon or even fan-canons as certain ideas recur often enough to become accepted amongst larger subsets of the fandom.³⁴

As the concept "fanon" itself shows, translation is not just linguistic, but something cultural and affective where the subtext is made more apparent in the text for the reader. To extend the rhetorical situation within this specific context further, like Burke, Lloyd Bitzer also addresses the rhetorical situation and claims that texts require "an exigence which strongly invites utterance."³⁵ Thus, a fanfic author may view the mode of exigence as a call to respond to the absence of overt queer portrayal in the live-action adaptation. This "utterance" is the fan's translation of the subtextual cues into explicit narrative, and the use of "gege" with its associated meanings solidifies this. The exigence creates a space for fanfic writers to reclaim the queer narrative, drawing from various inspirations. In doing so, fanfic writers not only engage with the text, but critique and reshape it, creating a more inclusive and authentic representation that was

³¹ Canagarajah, 18.

³² Canagarajah, 15.

³³ Canagarajah, 16.

³⁴ Most popular headcanons can be things like a character's favourite food, animal, or hobby. Some other headcanons also indicate the way that a character looks, too, as discussed in the second chapter. Fanons around food are part of my interest in the third chapter of this project.

³⁵ Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1, no. 1 (1968): 5. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40236733>.

once present but now erased. Language turns into a tool for authenticity and inclusivity as fanfic authors can bring in elements of book-canon that were forced to be hidden in the live-action adaptation, making book-canon show-fanon. Through their deliberate writerly choices, fanfic authors reshape the rhetorical situation.

Furthermore, Allan Shearer writes how in the narrative genre of writing, authors of fictional work “present a subjective understanding of each actor which includes the reasons for behaving in one way versus another.”³⁶ In this way, within a fanfic, the actions that agents in a scene perform are how the author crafts the narrative regarding how the characters’ choices “react within their context.”³⁷ The fanfic author can rely on the canon behaviours and the fanon expectations to guide the way that their characters behave. Moreover, Kristina Busse writes how important this context is when looking at fanfiction, claiming that “fanfiction’s *raison d’être* should be understood in its own terms ... we lose an important layer of interpretation and meaning if we divorce fanfiction from its contexts and equate it with other forms of transformative creativity.”³⁸ Generally, fanfiction is viewed as an intertextual text, and the dialogic nature of this intertextuality is present in *CQL* fanfics, as evidenced in my interviews. Without some contextualising background from the canon culture, much of the storyline may become obscure or confusing. Instances where fanfic authors will provide more information to the content typically focus on diasporic writing, which will be explored in Chapter Three. In the examples explored here, though, the preference of Romanising text is informed by the author-

³⁶ Allan Shearer, “Applying Burke’s Dramatic Pentad to Scenarios,” *Futures: The Journal of Policy, Planning and Futures Studies* 36, no. 8, (2004): 826. <https://doi:10.1016/j.futures.2004.01.009>.

³⁷ Shearer, “Applying Burke’s Dramatic Pentad to Scenarios,” 826.

³⁸ Kristina Busse, “Intimate Intertextuality and Performative Fragments in Media Fanfiction,” in *Fandom, Second Edition: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. by Johnathan Gray, et al. (New York UP, 2017), 46.

agent's familiarity with the context and the assumption that the reader will also be active enough in the discourse to comprehend the commonly borrowed Romanised terminology.

Conclusion

MXTX's work *MDZS* grew so popular that it became adapted into a live-action drama and turned into a global sensation reaching many through translations. Of the varying adaptations, there were minor changes to the plot, most notably in the *donghua* and live-action (*CQL*)—supposedly due to its potential to reach a wider audience—whereas the *manhua* would have more leeway in terms of the blatant confession scene, from the original novel, between the protagonists Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji that was removed from the live-action due to censorship. The practice of this shift is known as *dangai*: where the homosexual or homoerotic storyline turns platonic or more bromance.³⁹ This occurs because as a genre, *danmei* is classified as adult erotica and isn't allowed for public sale and consumption under current Chinese law. Because of *dangai*, it makes sense that fans would want to consume media where the homosexual, homoromantic relationship was more obvious, hence why they would turn to fanfiction to reinsert the aesthetic values that they preferred. In this chapter, I have looked at how that desire shapes the ways fans re-integrate the canonically queer storyline as a result of *CQL* being turned into a *dangai*. Because of the foreign contextual background necessary, I analysed how fanfic authors of an assumed Western, (sometimes) North American background weave connections between the narratives established by the *CQL* and *MDZS* canons. In doing so, this chapter explores how the practice works in this discourse community based on how the author-

³⁹ Lucy Yuan Qin and Kong F. Cheong, "Gender, Death, and the Supernatural in *The Untamed* (*Chen Qing Ling*): A *Danmei* Genre Pop-Cultural Phenomenon," in *Global Perspectives on the Liminality of the Supernatural: From Animus to Zombi*, ed. Rebecca Gibson (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022), 23.

agent decides to set the scene—whether they decide to use English translations or Chinese Romanised terms in order to maintain authenticity of varying degrees.

While *MDZS* is a *danmei* from its incarnation, because of its place as a *dangai* in the live-action drama, I have decided to call fanfiction for the fandom BL because of the aesthetic values that the fanfic authors chose to focus on—where they made the ‘straight’ characters, who were queer-coded, more explicitly queer in their fanfic remix. Translingualism connects strongly with how fanfic writers in the fandom make use of the language and culture that they are borrowing from. Canagarajah addresses the literary spheres within the meaning-making process of various literary practices. If we treat each fandom that writes fanfiction as its own literary sphere, the aesthetic values shared within the fandom solidify the language used. *CQL* has a special place because of its various adaptations where fans can make use of the original novel, *MDZS*, or the live-action *CQL* as its source. Even so, it is difficult to separate them from each other, as explained through my interviews. Death of the reader serves as an extension to Barthes’ concept of death of the author, especially due to *CQL*’s multitude of adaptations. When combining this consideration with Burke’s dramatist pentad, with the fanfic author as the agent setting the scene, it would appear that the purpose of fanfic authors who use Romanised terminology aim is to bring the subtext back to the forefront, especially considering the erasure of the queer storyline. Meanwhile, authors who decide to make use of English translations in their work aim to make their text more accessible; this aim reflects a negotiation between staying true to the canon text and to fandom’s *danmei* lexicon. Based on my findings, due to the investment fans have made into the fandom, it appears that most have a basic understanding of and interest within the culture and have learned to appropriately use the Romanised terminology within their texts. Furthermore, in instances that might overstep transcultural boundaries, fanfic authors are self-

aware of this lack of knowledge and welcome correction, furthering the notion of death of author/reader as the barriers have been erased.

Through the lenses of translingualism and the death of the author and reader, this chapter has examined how the literary spheres developed in *CQL* and *MDZS* fandoms and fan fiction spaces. In focusing on the ways that the culture is adapted in fanfiction, I was able to see what values the fanfic authors wanted to carry over into the remix that they created. What fanfic authors made use of prior to their entrance into *CQL* fandom influenced their writing practices, as seen with Author A's experience. Hinu's comments further amplified how the literacy of the fandom develops. Yet, defractum's comments destabilise my assumptions about the space and highlight how the unregulated nature of fanfiction allows multiple meaning-making practices to come into play. Depending on how the fanfic author enters the fandom, whether they watched the live-action drama, the animated series, or the published novel, they will adjust their translingual practice.

Bibliography

- Author, A. "Aftermath." *Archive of Our Own*. 13 Oct. 2020.⁴⁰
- . Personal interview [Tumblr]. 2 Nov. 2023.
- . "Somewhere To Belong." *Archive of Our Own*. 18 Dec. 2020.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch, 1268–1272. NY: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2018.
- Bitzer, Lloyd F. "The Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1, no. 1 (1968): 1–14. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40236733>.
- Burke, Kenneth. "From *A Grammar of Motives*." In *The Rhetorical Tradition*, edited by Patricial Bizzell, Burce Herzberg, and Robin Reames, 1271–86. New York: Macmillan.
- Busse, Kristina. "Intimate Intertextuality and Performative Fragments in Media Fanfiction." In *Fandom, Second Edition: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, edited by Johnathan Gray, et al., 45–59. New York UP, 2017.
- Canagarajah, Suresh. "Weaving the Text: Changing Literacy Practices and Orientations." *College English* 82, no. 1 (2019): 7–28. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26823961>.
- Cummins, Alison. "*Unconditionally and Irrevocably in Love*": *The Sociological Implications of Romance and Sex in the Twilight Saga and Its Fanfictions*. Muhlenberg College, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.30532834>.
- defractum. "dream of a funeral; hear of a marriage." *Archive of Our Own*. 10 Apr. 2020. <https://www.archiveofourown.org/works/23581942/chapters/56581120>.

⁴⁰ Because Author A chose to interview anonymously, I have not provided URLs for their fic content.

---. "the exception proves the rule." *Archive of Our Own*. 26 May 2020.

<https://www.archiveofourown.org/works/24380128>.

---. Personal interview [Email]. 16 Nov. 2023.

Dym, Brianna, and Case Fiesler. "Ethical and Privacy Considerations for Research Using Online Fandom Data." In *Fan Studies Methodologies*, edited by Julia E. Largent, Milena Popova, and Elise Vist. Special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 33 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2020.1733>.

Fish, Stanley. "Is there a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities." In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch, 1898–1909. NY: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2018.

Herzog, Alexandra. "'But this is my story and this is how I wanted to write it': Author's notes as a fannish claim to power in fan fiction." In *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no 11 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0406>.

Hinu. "To Make Him a Perfect Bride." *Archive of Our Own*. 3 Sept. 2022.

<https://www.archiveofourown.org/works/41460267/chapters/103972890>.

---. Personal interview [Tumblr]. 6 Feb. 2024.

Hyde, Adam. "The Death of the Reader." *Books in Browsers IV Proceedings* 17, no. 1 (Winter 2014). <https://doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0017.108>.

Leavenworth, Maria Lindgren. "The Paratext of Fanfiction," *Narrative* 23, no. 1, (2015): 40–60, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24615501>.

Leone, Massimo. "The Death of the Reader: Meaning in the Era of Digital Narcissism." *Language and Semiotic Studies* 4, no. 3 (2018): 72–83. <https://10.1515/lass-2018-040304>.

Mo Xiang Tong Xiu, *Mo Dao Zu Shi: Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation*. Vol. 1. Translated by Suika, edited by Pengie Los Angeles: Seven Seas Entertainment, 2021.

Qin, Lucy Yuan, and Kong F. Cheong. “Gender, Death, and the Supernatural in *The Untamed* (*Chen Qing Ling*): A Danmei Genre Pop-Cultural Phenomenon.” In *Global Perspectives on the Liminality of the Supernatural: From Animus to Zombi*, edited by Rebecca Gibson, 19–33. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022.

Shearer, Allan W. “Applying Burke’s Dramatic Pentad to Scenarios.” *Futures: The Journal of Policy, Planning and Futures Studies* 36, no. 8, (2004): 823–35.

<https://doi:10.1016/j.futures.2004.01.009>.

Chapter Two: Beyond the Codified “Female” in BL Fanfiction

Introduction

The genre of BL explores romantic, explicitly sexual relationships between male protagonists. Many of these storylines rely on tropes, and central to these tropes is the dynamic of the sexual/gender roles within the relationship despite both characters presenting as cis men. This trope dynamic tends to demand that one of the male protagonists will be codified with female traits, and the other with male traits—this designation will be driven by their aesthetic qualities and personality traits from a more stereotypical understanding of “male”/“female” coding.

While people within the BL fandom would claim that the genre subverts traditional gender roles because of the same-sex relationships being normalised (a kind of homotopia), it often hides the reinsertion of “traditional” gendered power dynamics. Characters who are coded as “feminine” are positioned as passive or submissive, reinforcing the gendered performance that the genre supposedly defeats. A paradox then develops wherein the genre’s apparent queerness is saturated in heteronormative gender expectations. This tension is further complicated because BL is predominantly produced and consumed by cis-het women, leading to many criticisms regarding the lack of representation of lived queer male experiences.

Where Chapter One considers the fanfic author’s rhetorical authority in re-inserting queer narratives across canons, this chapter explores BL fandom as a space of contradiction where readers and writers are caught between appreciation and fetishisation of queer narratives. There is a commodification of queer relationships for an audience who may not belong in the queer community; however, the intersection of fanfiction and BL content also highlights the functions of the female gaze. In some ways, narratives around such fiction, both scholarly and in pop culture, reveal that, no matter what choice a female consumer of BL makes, they will always be

termed deviant. How fans treat BL is another layer of complication, as there is a disconnect between fantasy and reality, highlighting the impact of MLM storytelling by assumed cis-het female writers. This chapter will explore how the BL genre enforces gender stereotypes through the codification of genders, how *CQL* challenges this framework, and how fanfiction further subverts the established norms.

Exploring how gender and sexuality play out in the canon text is foundational in understanding how the fandom responds to it. Canon not only shapes how characters are perceived but also sets the limits and possibilities for how fans reimagine or resist those structures in their fanworks. When a canon like *CQL* presents ambiguous or subversive gendered dynamics, it invites a more complicated and varied set of responses from its audience, allowing for new spaces for reinterpretation, identification, and resistance that move beyond the rigid structures found in traditional BL works.

Feminisation of the *Shòu* and Contexts of Heteronormativity in BL

The BL genre works within a framework of familiar tropes, particularly those that reproduce a gendered dynamic within apparent queer relationships. Within the BL narrative, two male protagonists are depicted in a romantic, often explicitly sexual relationship, and it is rare to see a shift in the tropes established by the genre, which have become part of its definition. In *danmei*, the *shòu* is often codified “female” and the *gōng* is codified “male” based on gendered stereotypes, even though the two characters are cisgender men, and their relationships can often mirror heteronormative relationships in structure and dynamic. This division is constructed through aesthetic presentation and personality as opposed to an explicit articulation of gender identity.

The characterisation is usually through the aesthetics of the couple which includes their behaviours. As a result, terminology which plays a key part in shaping audience expectations

about these codified roles has emerged. One well-known example, in fandom spaces, is that of *bishōnen* within Japanese visual fiction like manga. This can be translated to an attractive androgynous male; in fandom spaces, a way of referring to this is pretty boy/flower boy.¹ With these descriptive markers, it is easy to figure out why there is such an appeal for characters who have this aesthetic. *Bishōnen* characters are visually aligned with traditional feminine beauty and are thus frequently placed in the submissive or receptive role within the relationship. In early manga depictions, this is made more obvious with stark differences in the characters' physiques where it is easy to see who the top and who the bottom is in the relationship dynamic. This visual and narrative coding unfortunately reinforces gender binaries rather than dismantling them. As a result of the author's attempt to normalise homosexuality and subvert tropes of gender and power from society's heteronormative reality, writers and fans reinsert gender and power structures back; the paradox reveals that while BL is celebrated for its portrayal, it reasserts traditional gender hierarchies under the guise of queerness.

This contradiction is especially troublesome given the demographics of the genre's primary creators and consumers—assumed cisgender, heterosexual women—are those who cannot truly embody the queer experience. Jungmin Kwon writes how within the genre of *yaoi*, the male lovers do not have the worldly concerns that heterosexual couples go through; “there is no fabled deflowering before marriage, no wedding to plan, and no taking care of a baby.”² Assumed cis-het women would find this refreshing; protagonists are equal as “their relationship

¹ Jungmin Kwon, “Introduction,” in *Straight Korean Female Fans and Their Gay Fantasies* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018), 11. According to Kwon, this attraction was born out of women looking for a difference from the stereotypical male appearance that dominated society. “Flowerboys are basically in-between men and women in body and affect. Physically they are pretty, not handsome, and emotionally they are soft, not macho” (11).

² Kwon, “Introduction,” 7. This is instantly destabilised by the fanfic that I have chosen to analyse in this chapter.

reflects no gendered imbalance of power, which inheres in both reality and heterosexual romance novels.”³ Acknowledging this positive potential, Kwon nonetheless points out the potential fetishisation aspect of the genre, as women can objectify the male protagonists and “control and manipulate those bodies” through the genre—this is further extended in fanfiction making use of two male characters. As for why femslash (female slash) is less discussed, Kwon argues that the distinction harkens back to the homosocial relationships that women have as being more fruitful and present in the everyday regarding expressions of intimacy.⁴ This contrasts with how male homosocial expression is viewed as something unordinary leading to fantasies for observers, such as the cis-het female.

Fandom surrounding this genre has had a lot of back and forth on whether the genre is appreciating or fetishising the male homosexual/homoromantic experience. Because of the separation of fantasy and reality, *yaoi* fans view the BL they consume as separate from reality. They defend themselves by separating the fictional world of the characters from the reality of gay men,⁵ which is problematic. Akiko Hori supposes that this perspective is due to Japanese cultural attitudes towards queer movements.⁶ However, as established in Chapter One, the specific sources of different perspectives can be quite a grey area—hard to define because of the various entryways into the genre. When these works are complicated with fanfiction, the resulting transformative works can be seen as a form of transgression, especially when the canon removes a vital part of the original storyline, as with *CQL*. Kwon’s findings in her research

³ Kwon, “Introduction,” 7.

⁴ Kwon, “Introduction,” 9.

⁵ Jungmin Kwon, “FANTasy Bridged,” in *Straight Korean Female Fans and Their Gay Fantasies* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018), 159.

⁶ Akiko Hori, “On the Response (Or Lack Thereof) of Japanese Fans to Criticism that Yaoi Is Antigay Discrimination.” In “Transnational Boys' Love Fan Studies,” edited by Kazumi Nagaike and Katsuhiko Suganuma, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 12, (2013). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0463>.

present that gay Korean men wish for diverse gay storylines to exist⁷ so that they are depicted beyond the flower-boy concept, while another respondent stated that they wanted gay stories to be depicted as ordinary.⁸ Kwon surmises that having an increase in visibility and diversity in representation would provide solutions to the interviewee's qualms.

The growing popularity of *danmei*, particularly through adaptations like *CQL*, reveals a complicated overlap with the established conventions of BL. Many international fans approach *danmei* based on their familiarity with Japanese BL, bringing with them interpretive frameworks rooted in the *seme/uke*⁹ dynamic and the gendered coding of male relationships. As a result, *danmei* receptions are often filtered through BL lenses, despite the distinct cultural and narrative contexts. Traditionally, the *gōng* of *danmei* is associated with dominance, stoicism, emotional restraint, and physical strength (like the *seme* of BL), while the *shòu* (like the *uke* of BL) is feminised through traits such as emotional expressiveness, passivity, vulnerability, and physical softness. However, despite how Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian “fit stereotypical depictions of gong and shou,”¹⁰ their portrayals diverge from typical BL archetypes.

Lan Wangji may be quiet and reserved; however, he is not a dominant aggressor. Rather, he is known for his emotional suppression. Moreover, his devotion and vulnerability counter the stoic personality expected of the traditional *gōng*. He is guided by moral conviction, tenderness, and a sense of loyalty—not conquest and control. Wei Wuxian defies the *shòu* category, too. His playfulness is matched by his powerful, assertive nature. His flamboyance is not a marker of

⁷ Kwon, “FANTasy Bridged,” 159.

⁸ Kwon, 159.

⁹ *Seme* refers to the aggressor, while *uke* refers to the receiver. As those terms suggest, oversimplified “roles” are characteristic of both BL and *danmei* as genres.

¹⁰ Dania Shaikh, “Reimagining Queer Asias: Performativity, Censorship, and Queer Kinship in the Fandoms of *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* and *The Untamed*,” in *Chinese Fandoms*, ed. Zhen Troy Chen and Celia Lam, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 41 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2023.2343>.

submission, but a strategy for disarming and provoking, often masking his traumas. This deviation from BL tropes complicates the automatic applications of *gōng/shòu* dynamics and challenges the viewer to engage with the characters on their own narrative and emotional terms.

Nonetheless, the connections to BL resonate in both fandom and scholarship around *CQL*. Zhuwen Zhang, a Chinese-American scholar, understands *CQL* to be within the BL genre, rather than only and distinctly *danmei*. In this way, Zhang develops the nuance regarding interpreting *danmei* texts like *CQL* as a BL text, broadly speaking.¹¹ As explored in the introduction, BL, in Japan, was created for female enjoyment, often by cis-het women without any true experience of what a queer male character would experience. In this context, BL was historically crafted as a form of escapism or symbolic rebellion for women in patriarchal societies,¹² not as an authentic space for queer male voices. As such, its legitimacy as a queer literary form is complicated. In examining this phenomenon through *CQL*, though, Wei Wuxian's portrayal challenges the coding found in BL tropes, particularly surrounding his death and reincarnation arcs. The male characterisation in *CQL*, especially that of Wei Wuxian, queers the binary of male/female gender roles within the genre. This queering is extended in fans' play with gendering and queer narratives in fanfiction. As *CQL* develops, Wei Wuxian's transformation provides a nuanced understanding of gender codification, power dynamics, and the fluidity of identity within both the canon and fanfic adaptations of the BL genre. This chapter

¹¹ Zhuwen Zhang, "Crossing Swords and Cutting Sleeves: The Cross-Cultural Impact of Chinese Fandom Fan Fiction on Asian American Youths," in *Chinese Fandoms*, ed. Zhen Troy Chen and Celia Lam, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 41 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2023.2385>.

¹² According to Hong Li, Japan created the market for BL as an after-effect of WWII. Japanese women became a market to work toward and BL was a "release of reality rather than the liberation of reality" (1007). Hong Li, "Consumer Behaviours of Chinese Female on Boys' Love Fiction: A Sociological Perspective," *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 664 (2022): 1006–1013.

considers the ways that gender codification, sometimes stabilised in BL works, can instead be challenged, both in an actual adaptation and in a fan-created adaptation. This consideration is anchored in Wei Wuxian's codification, where the aesthetics established within the BL genre are solidified but also, simultaneously, surpassed through the framing of his experiences in the drama and through fan responses.

Extensions of Feminisation in *CQL*

Female Sacrificial Trope

CQL itself offers a useful starting point for considering the complications of gender in the queer/unqueer canon text. Not least, the creators offer an implicit comparison of Wei Wuxian's death to the main female characters' deaths. These three female characters circle around Wei Wuxian: Madame Yu, his adoptive mother; Jiang Yanli, her daughter and Wei Wuxian's adoptive sister; and Wen Qing, Wei Wuxian's close friend and ally. Each of these characters—Wei Wuxian included—sacrificed their lives for the people they loved. The parallels help emphasise this as a potentially feminising act for Wei Wuxian, who embodies, in this case, a female codification that goes beyond the aesthetic values favoured in BL genres.

With regards to how genres rely on specific troping, the idea of a female character who fulfills the sacrificial role may not be consistent, but it is present across the world. Peina Zhuang and Jiazhao Lin home in specifically on this trope in Chinese literature. They claim that “Chinese history is in fact filled with cases where primitive beliefs and religions, as well as authoritarian politics, have various kinds of negative impact on the bodies of females.”¹³ According to Paola Zamperini, it is a common trope to see heroines “use suicide as a vehicle” as a marker of their

¹³ Peina Zhuang and Jiazhao Lin, “Becoming as Suffering: A Genealogy of Female Suffering in Chinese Myth and Literature,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 21, no. 5 (2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4371-3263>.

passion and “self-reassertion.” This framing of suicide represents their ultimate sacrifice as a “path of independence” to demonstrate how they are “passionate agents of free will.”¹⁴

Zamperini contrasts this with a dominant perspective where suicide is seen as a weakness and the women are viewed as “virtuous martyrs or victims of an unjust patriarchal system.”¹⁵ Thus, in taking her own life, the suicidal woman has final say over her agency. Such depictions may overlap with a more traditional feminising move to highlight a maternal, protective role, when a woman character is sacrificing her life to protect her loved ones—either her children or her lover. This compulsion, of sorts, also applies to the main characters of *CQL*, and specifically to Wei Wuxian, because of the way that his *shòu* characterisation acts, partly, as a kind of female codification within the genre of BL.

In *CQL*’s canon specifically, the way that Wei Wuxian dies can be read to follow the same lines as how the other named female characters died. If we take in Zamperini’s idea of how the female sacrificial trope in Chinese literature plays out, then Wei Wuxian choosing death as a form of agency fits the frame. His choice to die can be read as an act of agency, as opposed to being killed and/or having his special talisman taken by the greedy men in charge (a component that sets up his suicide as an act against patriarchy). Additionally, when he attempts suicide, he is, at first and temporarily, saved by his love interest Lan Wangji, activating the *gōng/shòu* binary. Yet, he ultimately dies because Jiang Cheng, his adopted brother, attempts to dislodge the rock formation which *could* lead to both he and Lan Wangji falling. So, now he has a new, further purpose of choosing to die—in potentially protecting Lan Wangji (and perhaps Jiang

¹⁴ Paola Zamperini, “Untamed Hearts: Eros and Suicide in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction,” *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in China* 3, no. 1 (2001): 77, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852601750123008>.

¹⁵ Zamperini, “Untamed Hearts: Eros and Suicide in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction,” 77.

Cheng)—now falling in line with how the other, previously mentioned women of the drama died out of love to protect someone. Wei Wuxian does the same.

In this moment of sacrifice, there is more being suggested. If people are to interpret this scene as female codification, then the show creates a space where romantic love is subtly signalled while still allowing for plausible deniability. The censored live-action drama would claim it is out of a bromantic relationship, but *we* know what it is. In having his death appear as a self-sacrifice, as opposed to the book canon where he is torn apart by the restless spirits, the protective act for someone he cares about enhances the emotional weight of the moment. Book canon has Wei Wuxian's death rooted in horror, rather than sacrificial actions. The novel gradually develops the queer relationship between Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji, revealing their romantic bond in the later chapters. *CQL*, on the other hand, relies on subtext, and thus has to use framing, gestures, and emotional tone to show intimacy. This gives the fandom more space to interpret, expand, and reframe the relationship in creative ways. The specific reframing of Wei Wuxian's death may do this partly by connecting to the trope of female characters in Chinese literature who choose to sacrifice themselves for the people they love. In placing this trope on a male character—one who is already tied to the submissive, “female” aesthetics—*CQL* allows for a hint toward a romance that is not explicitly proven. Thus, the audience is left with an interpretation that the bond between Wangxian is romantic without *CQL* having to say it, a move which partly counters the censorship laws preventing the more overt, telling signs of their relationship to each other. The queer romantic elements linger in the subtext.

Wei Wuxian's Losses: Personhood/Manhood (Golden Core)

The energy cultivators make use of, in both *CQL* and *MDZS*, is yang energy, mostly associated with masculinity. By extension, those with strong golden cores have a higher male energy; many powerful cultivators also embody typically masculine-coded traits. Through

development of a strong golden core, a cultivator gains a particular ability to protect people—or alternatively, attack them. During the first half of *CQL*, which focuses on an extended flashback, Wei Wuxian is depicted to be hypermasculine in his teenage years. He is characterised through risk-taking behaviour, a disregard for authority, a particular charisma that is set up as opposed to traditional, hierarchical power in the world of the show—and, of course, through his possession of a strong golden core.

Using Burke’s dramatist pentad to examine the rhetorical choices, we can better examine the significance of Wei Wuxian’s loss of his golden core and departure from traditional methods of cultivation in the canon. Each cultivator forms a spiritual connection with their sword, and this connection represents social and spiritual legitimacy in the cultivation world’s eyes. In losing his golden core, then, Wei Wuxian also loses access to his sword, which clearly has phallic ties, extending the reading of his loss of his golden core as a loss of his manhood.¹⁶ As the agent in the scene, Wei Wuxian—an emotionally driven figure defined partly by loss and a need for survival—reinvents himself and embraces the taboo alternative. He shifts to the *dizi*¹⁷ (flute) as opposed to the elite sword that he has lost access to. It can be inferred that the purpose of this moment is for MXTX to challenge orthodox cultivation and moral rigidity through Wei Wuxian’s character. Wei Wuxian’s shift in cultivation is a rebellion against the oppressive system *and* is his way to create a survival system. Thus, as the agent, whatever act Wei Wuxian

¹⁶ Howard Chiang’s work suggests the significance of this phallic loss, since “culturally, the male sex organ is viewed as the seat of life force and vitality” (245). Howard Chiang, “Castration fever: On trans, China, and psychoanalysis” *Special Issue: Histories and Cultures of Mental Health in Modern East Asia, Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences* 57, No. 3 (July 5 2021): 245. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jhbs.22095>.

¹⁷ It should be noted that the Lan clan also utilises musical instruments with their cultivation, yet they are seen as acting with good intentions because of how high in social standing their clan is. Even with Wei Wuxian’s *dizi* being criminalised as it can control corpses, the Lan clan hosts musical techniques that cause unrest, too. This double-standard is rampant throughout the novel and is a implicit cultural critique that is addressed in both *MDZS* and *CQL*.

performs, those who are not fully aware of the context and his circumstances will deem his acts questionable.

If we interpret the golden core to be somewhat equivalent to the male sex organ, then this loss is an emasculating moment through the eyes of the cultivators. Thus, turning to alternative modes of power continues to solidify Wei Wuxian's ostracisation and vilification. Through his choice to act against what the scene (the cultivator society) expects, conflict arises. Because the cultivation world judges actions through the lens of a rigid moral and spiritual hierarchy, Wei Wuxian's acts against the expectations are seen as deviant. His transformation points out the tensions that Burke's pentad allows for us to explore, here showing how an agent's choice of action and means becomes suspicious or even vilified when they conflict with the expectations of the scene. The narrative also suggests a commentary for what happens when the balance of power is redistributed, causing those in charge to be rattled. Through this, Wei Wuxian's character arc is rhetorically significant in the sense that he reveals how power, legitimacy, and identity are negotiated within and against a constraining social order.

This turn challenges the normative constructs of strength and, by association, gender. In showing Wei Wuxian gaining power from the removal of his golden core, MXTX destabilises the dualism pushed by binary gendered systems—and, within the cultural contexts of the novel, certain understandings of Confucian thought. In embracing the yin energy, Wei Wuxian demolishes the current standard where the yang energy is prevalent. Essentially, Wei Wuxian becomes a necromancer—which is considered demonic cultivation—because without a golden core to poison, he becomes a channel for the spirits. In some ways, Wei Wuxian becomes weaker (and so traditionally feminised) because he is more susceptible to pain and his body is physically weaker. Narratively, though, this is all for the good, because a war breaks out in which Wei

Wuxian's distinct forms of extra power become useful, even as they also become a way that those in power vilify him.

This arc brings forward the idea of victimisation as a feminising move because of how it repositions a character within a familiar hierarchy of vulnerability and power. Following heteronormative cultural logic, to be vulnerable, to suffer, or to be acted upon means to be feminised—found often in narratives where a male character experiences trauma, loss, or emotional collapse. In fact, Lucy Yuan Qin and Kong F. Cheong state that Wei Wuxian's characterisation in the live-action adaptation “was modified [from the novel] due to both censorship preference and market tastes, which made the previously powerful and morally grey character into a total victim (albeit still one with considerable power).”¹⁸ Indeed, there are instances in the drama where he is seen stumbling and needing support as a result of the evil interference as he essentially acts like a vessel for the dark spirits. In *CQL*, Wei Wuxian's victimisation arc—his loss of status, his death, and subsequent reincarnation—can be read as a feminising shift. His body is the site of transformation and trauma, and Wei Wuxian's return is marked by the need for protection.

While the drama complicates this through Wei Wuxian's behaviour, fandom interpretations often fall back on feminised readings of his suffering. His new positioning as someone on the same level is still marked by his sexual dynamic within his relationship with Lan Wangji. His “woundedness” becomes a desirable trait, drawing on Lan Wangji's care and emotional attention that, once again, mirrors traditional heteronormative pairings. This feminisation-through-victimisation reveals how even within queer narratives, suffering can be

¹⁸ Lucy Yuan Qin and Kong F. Cheong, “Gender, Death, and the Supernatural in *The Untamed* (*Chen Qing Ling*): A *Danmei* Genre Pop-Cultural Phenomenon,” in *Global Perspectives on the Liminality of the Supernatural: From Animus to Zombi*, ed. Rebecca Gibson (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022), 20.

aestheticised in ways that reinscribe heteronormative roles—making pain not a plot device, but a gender marker. However, queer theory also offers outlets for reading this gendering as potentially reclamatory. Andrea Acosta and Lillian Lu offer the term “bottom epistemology” which they expanded from Ngyuen Tan Hoang’s theory of bottomhood.¹⁹ The bottom position, ergo, the one codified “female” is more than a sexual position; it is also a political one. Through his demonic cultivation—a heretic path that is frowned upon by the patriarchal society—Wei Wuxian’s bottom epistemology is a knowledge that “comes from imagining new kinds of relationality between humans and also between humans and nonhuman entities.”²⁰ Acosta and Lu claim that Wei Wuxian’s connection to resentful energy is one that “democratizes cultivation as an ability.”²¹ Due to its prevalence and accessibility it challenges an otherwise rigid patriarchal structure—even after losing his golden core, readable as a metaphor for masculinity, Wei Wuxian has the chance to use demonic cultivation, destabilising the presumed relationship between gender and power.

Wei Wuxian as a Scapegoat

Another way Wei Wuxian can be perceived to be codified “female” is through his use as a scapegoat. When we consider the power systems in society, the female role is often reduced to their value as a good. With his lost ‘manhood’, aka the Golden Core, Wei Wuxian’s value is reduced to what else he can do to benefit the men in charge. Once he’s no longer useful, he becomes vilified, which leads to his death in episode one of *CQL*.

¹⁹ Andrea Acosta and Lillian Lu, “Queer Structures and Narrative Democratization in *MDZS*,” in *Catching Chén Qíng Líng: The Untamed and Adaptation, Production, and Reception in Transcultural Contexts*, 113.

²⁰ Acosta and Lu, “Queer Structures and Narrative Democratization in *MDZS*,” 114.

²¹ Acosta and Lu, 116.

CQL fits in with the Chinese genres known as *xianxia*, with elements of *wuxia*. *Xianxia* is fantasy-martial arts, whereas *wuxia* is purely martial arts. Haley Wu claims that “[u]nderstanding the history of *wuxia* as a genre is crucial to understanding *MDZS* [*The Untamed*], as it highlights the tactics by state and cultural authorities to suppress genres deemed undesirable.”²² Furthermore, she highlights how “The dominant ideology of *wuxia* narrative is that social and political structures must be undermined in the face of injustice, with the knowledge that new paradigms may someday too be subject to their own reckoning.”²³ Wei Wuxian challenges the traditional norms within the cultivation world. Though he is powerful, he is cast out and punished for refusing to conform. Through his extensive vilification, order is restored. The cultivation world uses Wei Wuxian as an example for what happens when their sense of righteousness—“correct” cultivation—is contested or updated. His being scapegoated allows for the world around him to stay the same while he is destroyed. However, *CQL* complicates this by allowing him to return and rewrite the narrative. Wei Wuxian’s return exposes what the scapegoating was hiding. His survival after this is a resistance to the structure that demands his erasure, allowing the scapegoat character to be seen as more than a passive victim.

Returning to Zamperini’s arguments for suicide as an expression of free will extends our ability to consider Wei Wuxian’s choice of living the non-normative cultivation path and exercising his agency—where he wasn’t harming anyone, but, instead, using his powers to protect those who he felt were dealing with injustice—as related to some kind of rejection of normative gendered structures. Partly, Wei Wuxian is subject to the gendered codification in the BL genre, resurrected into Mo Xuanyu’s more effeminate body with its weaker golden core. In

²² Hayley Wu, “Feminising Culture in The Grandmaster Of Demonic Cultivation,” *Strange Horizons*, July 24, 2023, <https://www.strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/feminising-culture-in-the-grandmaster-of-demonic-cultivation/>.

²³ Wu, “Feminising Culture in The Grandmaster Of Demonic Cultivation.”

this reincarnated body, Wei Wuxian's new weaknesses may also be implicitly tied, under the common tropes of BL, to his new behaviours as someone who can be openly homosexual, compounding the new barriers he faces compared to his previous life. Yet, it is when he is reincarnated into this body that he achieves the happy-ever-after ending. This is also an area where *CQL*'s specific choices again complicate a binary reading; the live-action version uses the same actor to represent both bodies, and they do not have a significant shift in costuming to make this shift more overt. Rather, the actor who plays Wei Wuxian, Xiao Zhan, portrays a more exaggeratedly flamboyant persona to express that he is now Mo Xuanyu around those who are not yet aware of Wei Wuxian's return; acting rather than appearance marks the change.

Mothering/Reproductive Bodies in *CQL*/*MDZS* Fandom Spaces

In *CQL* and *MDZS* fandom spaces, there are many clear indications of fan acceptances of Wei Wuxian's codification as femme to some extent: from overt mpreg and modern AU depictions in "women's" fashions to more subtle anchors like emphasizing his "new" body as smaller than Lan Wangji's. In these fandom discourses, there are people who also add to Wei Wuxian's feminisation by calling him motherly because of how he consistently gives pieces of himself to other people. If we look at the gendered roles of family dynamics, then, it is fair to say that Wei Wuxian also embodies "feminine" traits in this way. Regarding the sacrificial element, there is a common thread coming through regarding what happens when a male character performs a significant bodily sacrifice in order to protect or heal a loved one which results in them gaining a child after some time—in which case, this can be seen as a metaphor for the physical endurance that a pregnant mother must go through in order to have a child. Another *shòu* character, Xiao Xingchen, performs bodily sacrifice by giving his eyes to his *gōng*, Song Lan, and, after a few years, he gains a child. Jiang Cheng, though not in a canon MLM relationship, is another character who gains a child after losing his golden core to protect Wei

Wuxian.²⁴ These sacrificial acts contrast to Meng Yao who sacrifices his child to save his reputation—and who is the main “villain” of most *MDZS*-adjacent canons.

If we think about it in this manner, the very act of Wei Wuxian creating undead life can be its own method of being a ‘mother’ figure to the living undead. He is forced to endure a harmful three months in the Burial Mounds where life just does not seem possible, yet he comes out of it stronger than ever. Later, in this same place of death, when he brings the family group called the Dafan Wen with him, he is able to nurture the land. Aside from the cultivation magic that takes place in *MDZS/CQL*, there is the practice of agricultural cultivation as seen in episode 31. Here, there are attempts of Wei Wuxian growing food in order to survive—there’s even the minor joke of him planting a central toddler character, A-Yuan, in the ground so he can grow up. To return to the ways this canon depiction is reinforced by fandom products, when visiting AO3, the tag “Farmer Wei Ying | Wei Wuxian” contains 28 works indicating that this trope is fairly well-addressed in the fandom.²⁵ When the tag “agriculture”²⁶ is applied, there is no romantic pairing present, but instead 4 fanfics revolving around Wei Wuxian and the Wen siblings who he escapes to the Burial Mounds with—this indicates that the action is associated with found family and community.

Wei Wuxian’s feminisation, then, does not only focus on aesthetic markers. His role as a “mother” figure—both metaphorically through the creation of undead life and literally in his caretaking of A-Yuan—reframes him within a domestic, nurturing framework that has traditionally been coded feminine. The setting of the Burial Mounds as a site of exile and death

²⁴ Jiang Cheng also uses his mother’s spiritual weapon, a ring called Zidian, and is the only adult man regularly not addressed with his formal name—Jiang Wanyin—hinting at signs of infantilisation or minimisation that can also be linked to forms of feminisation.

²⁵ Information gathered on 11 November 2024 using the filter “Fandom— 陈情令 | The Untamed (TV)” on top of the “Farmer Wei Ying | Wei Wuxian” tag.

²⁶ Search performed on 16 December 2024.

turns into an attempted space of rebirth. Within fan spaces, having Wei Wuxian be associated with farming sometimes shifts his narrative from romantic to one that is more on healing and protection. It reinforces the idea of him being a nurturer as opposed to someone who will bring downfall on their world through his unorthodox form of cultivation. The subversion changes his character, and he embodies a redefinition of masculinity in this way that fandom engages and expands upon.

Fanfiction Complications and Challenges

Combatting the Codification

The philosophies present in *MDZS* pull from both Confucianism and Daoism which are contrasting, though long co-existent, schools of thought. While Confucianism can be understood at least partially as more invested in rigid social structuring, Daoism particularly complicates the binary found in Western belief systems, as a central component is the recognition that both pieces of any apparent binary are necessary and shared between the two sites. *MDZS* has a break in the binary as it suggests a reality of harmony as opposed to any consistent clash of ideas and trope-ness. Eun Kim explains that “life is governed by the interaction of two opposite poles, the ultimate of male (yang) and female (yin), positive and negative.”²⁷ However, this model is often misread when filtered through Western thought and misrepresented as dualist; instead, “yin and yang forces coexist in everything. Yin and Yang complete each other to maintain cosmic harmony and can even transform into each other.”²⁸ When this is misunderstood, interpretations of outsiders may distort cultural material, especially when Western fans import critiques that presume binary systems into MXTX’s work, which has its roots in Chinese cultural structures.

²⁷ Eun Y. Kim, “Preface,” in *The Yin & Yang of American Culture* (United Kingdom: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2001), xvi.

²⁸ Kim, “Preface,” xvi.

For example, Lan Wangji's stillness (yang discipline) and Wei Wuxian's chaotic empathy (yin emotionality) can be mischaracterised through the moral binaries of stoic protector vs. reckless rule breaker—or even just through setting up discipline and emotionality as a binary of opposites rather than a binary that represents something in unity. This results in a flattening of the characters that does not account for yin and yang's dynamic as fundamentally harmonious. Further, recognising this allows an extension whereby sexual dynamics appear as a more fluid system as opposed to the set binary when top and bottom is conflated with dominant and submissive, masculine and feminine, etc.

One area where this codification of male characters into the Western view of gender binary roles can be challenged is in fanfiction. A trope that complicates the “female” coding is that of “role reversal”, where fanfic authors play with the canonical relationship dynamic. Fanfic authors reveal the fluid nature of sexuality through the decisions they make regarding how they designate a character's dynamics or preference. To explore some examples of this work in fanfiction, I used AO3's filtering system to identify a popular fanfic whose author had tagged the work with the trope of role reversal. I specifically, then, narrowed my options to, first, select a fic where I could find some method by which to contact the fanfic author for further research—AO3 does not have a direct message feature; instead, some fanfic authors will place their contact information on their profile. By reaching out to the author, I was able to gain consent to use their content, so long as I maintain her anonymity. I then also used a similar method to identify related “orphan account” fics, as explored further below.

Author B's fanfic “love, in fire and blood” makes use of the role reversal trope, where the relationship dynamics are shifted from either the canon relationship (or popular fanon, when characters aren't canonically queer-presenting). Author B writes in her author's note that her fic

has “same-sex relationships [that] are fully normalized/accepted in this world, and nobody is looked down upon for being gay ... In the eyes of the cultivation world, there is nothing disreputable about marrying a man.”²⁹ Removing real-world issues provides fanfic authors avenues to explore relationship dynamics differently from their canon depictions.³⁰

However, removing real-world issues *can* be problematic for those within the queer community due to a loss of true queer identity and representation. This portrayal can lead to stereotypes being reinforced. Hitoshi Ishida concludes that for BL to have a positive light, it must be “repeatedly emphasized that men appearing in *yaoi*/BL have nothing to do with men in reality.”³¹ In this way, they point out how it is important to separate fiction from reality and to not absorb the fiction as fact. Yet this raises tension regarding whether or not the text generated will be meaningful for queer readers. It leads for considerations of whether authenticity should be prioritised or fantasy. Even this binary, though, can be complicated in fan fiction—as it is in this selection. In an interview, Author B states how, because she uses Confucius’s teachings to lead the philosophy of the fanfic, she needed to maintain some form of hierarchy to make the canon of her fic more believable. She attributes this choice to the “deeply hierarchal” “Confucian society.” Therefore, if she “was [to] remove the male-female aspect of hierarchy, [she] wanted to replace it/preserve it with the ‘married out’/‘married in’ hierarchy.” As a result, this leads to a

²⁹ Author B, chapter 1, *Archive of Our Own*.

³⁰ Erica Massey notes that a consensus within fandom is that “slash is a beneficial form of writing for women because of the freedom it allows.” This falls in line with how *danmei* fans interpret metatexts and the fanfics that sprout from them. Erica Lyn Massey, “Borderland Literature, Female Pleasure, and the Slash Fic Phenomenon,” *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 30 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2019.1390>.

³¹ Hitoshi Ishida “Representational Appropriation and the Autonomy of Desire in Yaoi/BL,” in *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan*, ed. by Mark McLelland, Kazumi Nagaïke, Katsuhiko Suganuma, and James Welker, trans. by Katsuhiko Suganuma, Jackson University Press of Mississippi (2015), 229.

story that plays on how the gender codification is represented, partly because it is fantasy, and partly because of efforts towards “authenticity.”

In the fanfic “love, in fire and blood”, Lan Wangji is married out of his sect to the powerful Yiling Patriarch (aka Wei Wuxian) who has demanded a bride warprize for helping the sects defeat the main antagonist. Outside of typical fanfic tropes around miscommunication and falling in love with an arranged partner, the fic does some particularly interesting things with the canon. Rather than Wei Wuxian, Lan Wangji has been codified into the female role, as he is the one who leaves his family and takes on the more ‘homemaker’ roles in the fic. In the interview, Author B states how her purpose of writing was to see how “normalized/legalized queer marriages might intersect with the gender setup in ancient China... In this fic, [she] wanted to reflect on how LWJ [Lan Wangji] would be expected to do the same if he married a man [of a lower status].”

In chapter 5 of the fic, Author B writes “Lan Wangji should demonstrate that he was a faithful and hardworking spouse, a trustworthy teacher. He should show his husband that he could share his burdens, help manage his territories.”³² We can see the progression of Lan Wangji’s thought process as the less powerful spouse in terms of social hierarchy, having “married in.” In chapter 10, Lan Wangji’s internal conflict lies on his need to feel useful as, “[he] seemed to fulfill no purpose in his husband’s life, and he couldn’t make sense of that.”³³ By chapter 15, however, the relationship has shifted; Lan Wangji now thinks that “It would be very pleasant to have authority over his husband. At the very least, he liked the idea of shared authority.”³⁴ In highlighting these thoughts, we can see how his mindset shifts as he becomes

³² Author B, chapter 5.

³³ Author B, chapter 10.

³⁴ Author B, chapter 15.

more secure in the relationship and has more of a partnership with his husband. Even here, the author is highlighting the value of an equal partnership despite the designated roles. The AU (alternate universe) used in this plot offers a homotopia of sorts, mitigating the risks of separate, stratified roles for two partners in a married dynamic. In this homotopia, such roles are less harmful because there is no threat of real-world gendered oppression. Reverting to recognisable marital “roles” feels less harmful as the social risks associated with heteronormative power imbalances are removed.

By pulling from Confucian ideas, where gender roles are fairly binary, Author B explores a different type of codification on how things would shift if “two men *could* get married” and attempts to answer the question of “How would it even work, on a legal/societal level?” In doing this, though, she reintroduces a semblance of a binary that complicates the idealised world presented in her fanfic. Thus, by using Confucianism’s preference for structure as the base point, she explores hierarchal relationships that mimic a gendered balance even if there are attempts to subvert or blur the existing binaries. Fanfics making use of this plot trope allows for a sense of order to exist that then complicates the roles the characters play with each other. Even with Confucianism as the forefront of this narrative, the Confucian teachings will still have that division where the protective role—as the teacher or elder—interacts with the more passive, submissive character. On the other hand, the Daoist influence of *MDZS* and *CQL* highlights balance and fluidity as opposed to rigid hierarchies, which contrasts with Confucianism’s more set structure. Author B’s choice to use Confucianism invertedly shifts the characters into roles that are more clearly defined on gendered or social hierarchies. However, the fact of the characters’ maleness still complicates the rules of both real and fantasy worlds, just as the role reversal complicates the rules of canon compliance.

The fanfic author as the agent can control the scene by reconstructing the narrative framework through perspective, plot choices, and relationship dynamics. Burke claims that depending on who the agent is, the scene and purpose will change. An example he provides is war which can be seen as an agent, act, or scene based on how its purpose is framed.³⁵ In this sense, when transposing the idea of sexual dynamics like *gōng* and *shòu* with regards to how a fanfic author might apply them, as an agent, the fanfic focuses on how the role drives the plot. Something like a dominant *shòu* might rewrite the traditional power dynamics, straying away from passive stereotype to a figure with narrative agency. As an act, the *gōng/shòu* becomes a performance carried out by the characters who fall under those designations. This is interesting when fanfic authors purposely reverse the positioning and the commentary that they are trying to create through that reversal drives the text forward. Thus, the trope of role reversal examines the canon through a new lens. In shifting the protagonist to Lan Wangji, as opposed to Wei Wuxian, Author B puts him under the same circumstances. By doing so, she repositions Wei Wuxian not as a misunderstood or marginalised figure, but as a powerful outlier who must be appeased as opposed to punished. This inversion reframes the cultivator world's reaction to him—not as condemnation, but as strategic appeasement to curry favour with him. Lastly, by examining the concept as the scene, *gōng/shòu* turns into an environment or plot device—if you will—regarding how relationships are framed in that dynamic and whether the fanfic author chooses to challenge or conform to the canon text. Ultimately, fanfic authors act as agents who shift the meaning of these concepts giving a chance for readers to look at power inversions and critical negotiations of the canon text—which then can then expand to the wider world. When you

³⁵ Kenneth Burke, “From *A Grammar of Motives*,” in *The Rhetorical Tradition*, ed. Patricia Bizzell, Bruce Herzberg, and Robin Reames (New York: Macmillan, 1945), 1274.

change what you view the concept to be within the pentad, it disrupts the purpose of the canon by playing with the concepts.

A major plot point for “love, fire and blood” depicts a cautious Wei Wuxian due to his political standing where he assumes that Lan Wangji will act as a black widow and target him from within. He embodies the *gōng* characterisation as a powerful immortal being—thus his power as the *gōng* can be seen as justified due to his experience. Yet, there are scenes where he is willing to be less dominant and more willing to appease his partner. In chapter fourteen, Lan Wangji notes that “The Patriarch offered to let his husband make his own decisions, based on his deepest wishes.”³⁶ In this way, he is giving agency to Lan Wangji’s character, not attempting to be the controlling *gōng* to his *shòu*. This lack of controlling behaviour strays away from the typical *gōng* characterisation.

In our interview, Author B further explains her take on power and gender. She saw the power that Wei Wuxian holds to be something where, rather than being targeted, the cultivator-world was “trying to placate him and win his favor, in the traditional manner of powerful families trying to be on a power man’s good side.” Author B’s writerly choices to influence the plot create a rhetorical situation that indicates this shift. The act has been reshaped, where instead of punishment or exile, the central conflict becomes how to court or contain someone who destabilises established power structures. Author B’s rhetorical choices produce a fanfic world that maintains familiar dynamics of courtship and dominance, but queers them through the role reversal and emotional rebalancing. As opposed to the canonical sexual dynamic, the narrative shifts and the purpose turns into more than retelling canon, instead moving to reimagining how power circulates in relationships once they are unbound from heteronormativity. Through

³⁶ Author B, chapter 14.

Burke's pentad, it is revealed that Author B's manipulation of scene, act, and purpose challenges dominant readings and replaces them with alternative logics of agency.

Role Reversal Allowances

Expanding further into the culture of role reversal, looking at Orphan_Account fanfics with the tag "Bottom Lan Zhan | Lan Wangji" reveals that a popular trope for this dynamic involves extremely sexualised situations, from Omegaverse, to BDSM-centred plotlines. This shift in the pairing's sexual dynamic introduces even more erotic plot lines, with a rare consideration for romantic plot lines from the *CQL* canon portrayal. A major consideration for why the Orphan_Account fanfics that make use of the bottom Lan Wangji tag are structured in this way might be *because* of the freedom that comes from orphaning a fanfic. Authors are granted anonymity; without a visible identity attached, writers are often more willing to explore taboo, controversial, or deeply subversive content without fear of being identified. This protects them from personal critique, reputational risk, or community backlash—this is something even more applicable to *CQL* because of how some fans online prefer the consistency in the *gōng/shòu* dynamic.³⁷ The orphan account detachment allows for more non-canon interpretations, allowing for extreme interpretations of character dynamics. Even so, the considerations indicate a fandom-driven reversal of the *gōng/shòu* coding, where Lan Wangji is viewed as the "bottom" or, often, as the sexually submissive partner.

³⁷ Fans with strong preferences for canon-compliant "roles" draw support for their position from MXTX's own stated preferences, in a widely shared, fan-translated interview: "[...]as long as the main couples stay unbreakable and irreversible, I don't mind any other couples. [...] Ship any couples you like, as long as you don't break or reverse the main couple." "Reversing," here, has been widely understood to mean changing the *gōng/shòu* assignment. The interview was originally shared on MXTX's Weibo account in March 2018.

As an example, the Orphan_Account series “Yin and Yang”³⁸ makes use of the Omegaverse. The first fanfic in the series, “And Be the Moon That Moves Your Tide,” focuses on Wei Wuxian returning to Lan Wangji after the canonical *CQL* ending where he explores the cultivation world. In this fanfic, Wei Wuxian behaves just the same as he does in canon; the tone of the fanfic does not shift from the canon storyline despite the forecasted shift in their dynamic. The shift instead is in Lan Wangji’s personality with regards to how much more expressive he is. In their author’s note at the end of chapter one, the author writes “Instead of developing a golden core, cultivators channel either yin energy (alphas) or yang energy (omegas) from the world around them;”³⁹ the author further explains this cultivation is influenced by phases of the moon. This creative liberty with the harmonious balance is a different take to how yin and yang really behave. Returning to the discussion of yin and yang in the chapter, this author’s note provides us with an example of what happens when these concepts are simplified (and I would suggest that such simplification is, to some extent, misrepresentation). Furthermore, in the author’s note, they write “while in seclusion, Lan Wangji learned how to channel yin energy, becoming the first person to use both.”⁴⁰ Not only is Lan Wangji taking the role that Wei Wuxian takes in canon, but he also experiences the Yin and Yang experimentation—albeit composed differently—that Wei Wuxian undergoes in *CQL*’s canon. The fanfic author as agent is fully motivated in demonstrating other ways to subvert the canon and embody the role-reversal trope to the fullest.

While some elements of a “reversal” appear to yield to binary thinking about gender, this reversal is not just a matter of sexual position. In canon, Lan Wangji’s authority, stoicism, and

³⁸ Orphan_Account, *Yin and Yang*, series, *Archive of Our Own*, <https://www.archiveofourown.org/series/1892092>.

³⁹ Orphan_Account, “Chapter 1,” *And Be the Moon That Moves Your Tide*. *Archive of Our Own*. August 8, 2020. <https://archiveofourown.org/works/25788823/chapters/62637487>.

⁴⁰ Orphan_Account, “Chapter 1,” *And Be the Moon That Moves Your Tide*.

moral compass mark him as the archetypical *gōng*, yet his emotional restraint challenges this archetype. This restraint works as a foundation that indicates a longing for softness, surrender, and intimacy on different terms. With the fanfic authors acting as the agent to reverse the trope to make Lan Wangji the sexually submissive character, they are exploiting the opportunities in his canon representation by giving him imagined vulnerabilities that are absent or repressed in the canon. This re-coding, of sorts, does not dismantle *gōng/shòu* dynamics entirely, but redistributes them: dominance and submission remain central due to the inversion in the plot. This role-reversal trope serves as a site of experimentation, as brought up by Author B, where emotional authority and physical submission are allowed to coexist. This duality speaks to fanfiction’s ability to both subvert and reify tropes—at once challenging canon while still relying on the same structural tensions that define it.

The Orphan_Account fanfic “A handful of stars [on indefinite hiatus]”⁴¹ was found through the use of the tag “War prize Lan Zhan | Lan Wangji” to mimic the plot line from Author B’s work.⁴² The author as the agent has pulled references from Disney’s *Tangled* and from common witch tropes, as Lan Wangji is a witch who is locked in the tower like Rapunzel was. Interestingly, while there is a subversion to Lan Wangji’s character as the victim who has been kidnapped, Wei Wuxian is just as trapped as he is bound to Wen Ruohan (one of the major antagonists in *MDZS/CQL*). In this way, the author builds on familiar narratives that explore a

⁴¹ Orphan_Account, “A handful of stars [on indefinite hiatus],” *Archive of Our Own*, July 2, 2022, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/40029102/chapters/100245840>.

⁴² When first sorting for orphaned fic with the “Bottom Lan Zhan | Lan Wangji” tag, I found that much of the fic was (1) non-con, which I had already determined not to include, as noted in my first chapter or (2) omegaverse. While omegaverse is certainly interesting in terms of gender dynamics, focusing on omegaverse fic would have required much more extensive work to address those complications would have taken an entire chapter of its own. I instead added this term to help focus and unify this chapter’s analysis, balancing the omegaverse fic I did include with another fic with similarities to the fic for which I conducted an author interview.

double-entrapment scenario—not dissimilar to Author B’s fanfic where Wei Wuxian is still limited through the way the cultivation world views him, even if Lan Wangji is the “war prize” of the fic.

The use of the tag “War prize Lan Zhan | Lan Wangji” is a well-known fandom shorthand that explores captivity and power imbalance as well as romance. Such fanfic encourages readers to consider how power, gender, and agency are constantly shifting. Depending on the fic and rating, these works may not explicitly state the sexual dynamic, as the plot does not focus on that, but it does emphasise the equal footing of both men in the pairing. A similar emphasis is explored in Author B’s fanfic where Lan Wangji starts off as the protagonist with no choice, but slowly learns that his standing in the relationship is one of balance. The fanfic subtly critiques the traditional captor/captive tropes by refusing to allow one character to dominate the arc as either victim or captor, instead highlighting acts through which both reclaim their agency. In having both Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian trapped, the narrative of “A handful of stars,”⁴³ like much role reversal fic, unfolds with both men pushing against the constraints of their environments.

Conclusion

In the end, what does this analysis mean for the characterisation and understanding of Wei Wuxian? Is the method of his codification the way forward for other BL genres to stray away from the female stereotyping when codifying the male characters into the more ‘feminine’ role in the relationship? Should fans consider actively pursuing role reversal tropes like Author B has?

⁴³ Orphan_Account, “A handful of stars [on indefinite hiatus].”

While *The Untamed* as a live-action adaptation works outside of the specific expectations with the *bishonen* concept, Wei Wuxian literally gets reincarnated into an even more effeminate boy, and it is *then* that his character seems to finally get his happy ending. While fanfiction's subversive nature makes it a space where gendered codification is often challenged, we can also see that the traditional expectations of BL and *danmei* create specific scripts for readers and writers. Because of how established the genre is, the tropes still exist even with role reversals and complications in place. Undoubtedly, there are fanfics where the codification of the male characters is challenged further. As explored here, Author B's "love, in fire and blood" and the Orphan_Account fanfics "And Be the Moon That Moves Your Tide" and "A handful of stars" show how shifting the dynamic further queers the canon plot. Fanfiction allows for more play as authors decide how to play with gender to combat binary codification, whether that binary is masculine/feminine, *seme/uke*, or *gōng/shòu*.

Despite the work to complicate traditional binaries, though, there is still a holdover to introduce a ruling binary of sorts in order for norms to be established, even with role reversal being a centerpiece for a fic. Without a strict gender binary, fanfic authors will insert their own interpretive frameworks to make the relationship and dynamics appear more realistic. Therefore, while there is an absence of homophobia, my interview with Author B reveals how she still felt some form of role-defining social structure was necessary to present a story with complex narration. This finding is further supported by the way Orphan_Account fanfics have approached the role reversal trope in *CQL*. Within these works, binary-coded dynamics are reoriented. The omegaverse Orphan_Account fanfic focuses on a narrative that creates more obvious gender/sexual dynamics as it makes for obvious role reversal. The alpha/omega dynamics act as a scaffold of sorts that allows authors to have a grammar to work with that allows for them to

return to familiarity—similar to how Author B chose to follow Confucian thought to make the AU they craft appear realistic so as to examine a different quandary outside of typical heteronormative structures. The other Orphan_Account fanfic that makes Lan Wangji more of an obvious victim in the narrative makes it appear as if he and Wei Wuxian are on equal circumstances thus taking away the very idea of who is *gōng* and who is *shòu* within this AU.

Through fanfiction, authors and readers find freer expressions for subjects like gender. While Wei Wuxian's depiction in show canon as feminine-coded may initially seem to offer similarly queered gender roles, *CQL* maintains certain strictures in depicting the ways gender plays out, understanding *gōng* and *shòu* as themselves “gender roles.” Because Wei Wuxian is the *shòu*, he *must* be feminised. In fan fiction, instead, we see how reversals offer shifts in the balance, where feminine coding is applied to the “masculine” *gōng*, when the *gōng* and *shòu* roles are reversed, or when issues of class and power are acknowledged as influencing gendered performance. Comparing the show and the fan fiction reveals the many rhetorical modes through which creators imagine and communicate gender through embodiment, and vice versa.

Bibliography

Author, B. “love, fire and blood.” *Archive of Our Own*.⁴⁴

---. Personal interview [Tumblr]. 21 Sept. 2024.

Burke, Kenneth. “From *A Grammar of Motives*.” In *The Rhetorical Tradition*, edited by Patricia Bizzell, Burce Herzberg, and Robin Reames, 1271–86. New York: Macmillan.

Chiang, Howard. “Castration fever: On trans, China, and psychoanalysis” *Special Issue: Histories and Cultures of Mental Health in Modern East Asia, Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences* 57, No. 3 (July 5, 2021): 245–250.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jhbs.22095>.

Ishida, Hitoshi. “Representational Appropriation and the Autonomy of Desire in Yaoi/BL.” In *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan*, edited by Mark McLelland, Kazumi Nagaike, Katsuhiko Suganuma, and James Welker, translated by Katsuhiko Suganuma, 210–232. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015.

Hori, Akiko. “On the Response (Or Lack Thereof) of Japanese Fans to Criticism that Yaoi is Antigay Discrimination.” In *Transnational Boys’ Love Fan Studies*, edited by Kazumi Nagaike and Katsuhiko Suganuma. Special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 12 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0463>.

Kim Eun Y., “Preface,” In *The Yin & Yang of American Culture*, xi–xx, United Kingdom: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2001.

Kwon, Jungmin. “Introduction.” In *Straight Korean Female Fans and Their Gay Fantasies*, 1–30. Iowa City: Iowa Press, 2018.

⁴⁴ Because Author B chose to interview anonymously, I have not provided URLs for their fic content.

- . "FANTasy Bridged." In *Straight Korean Female Fans and Their Gay Fantasies*, 143–165. Iowa City: Iowa Press, 2018.
- Li, Hong. "Consumer Behaviours of Chinese Female on Boys' Love Fiction: A Sociological Perspective." *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 664, (June 1 2022): 1006–1013. Atlantic Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220504.183>.
- Massey, Erica Lyn. "Borderland Literature, Female Pleasure, and the Slash Fic Phenomenon." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 30 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2019.1390>.
- Orphan_Account. "A handful of stars [on indefinite hiatus]." *Archive of Our Own*, July 2 2022, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/40029102/chapters/100245840>.
- . "And Be the Moon That Moves Your Tide." *Archive of Our Own*, August 8 2020, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/25788823/chapters/62637487>.
- Qin, Lucy Yuan, and Kong F. Cheong. "Gender, Death, and the Supernatural in *The Untamed* (Chen Qing Ling): A Danmei Genre Pop-Cultural Phenomenon." In *Global Perspectives on the Liminality of the Supernatural: From Animus to Zombi*, edited by Rebecca Gibson, 19–33. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022.
- Shaikh, Dania. "Reimagining queer Asias: Performativity, censorship, and queer kinship in the fandoms of *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* and *The Untamed*." In *Chinese Fandoms*, edited by Zhen Troy Chen and Celia Lam, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 41 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2023.2343>.
- Wu, Hayley. "Feminising Culture in The Grandmaster Of Demonic Cultivation." *Strange Horizons*, July 24, 2023, <https://www.strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/feminising-culture-in-the-grandmaster-of-demonic-cultivation/>.

- Zamperini, Paola. "Untamed Hearts: Eros and Suicide in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction." *Nan Nü: Men, Women, and Gender in China* 3, no. 1 (2001): 77–104. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852601750123008>.
- Zhang, Zhuwen. "Crossing Swords and Cutting Sleeves: The Cross-Cultural Impact of Chinese Fandom Fan Fiction on Asian American Youths," In *Chinese Fandoms*, edited by Zhen Troy Chen, and Celia Lam. Special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 41 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2023.2385>.
- Zhuang, Peina, and Jiazhao Lin. "Becoming as Suffering: A Genealogy of Female Suffering in Chinese Myth and Literature." *CLCWEB: Comparative Literature and Culture* 21, no. 5, (2019):1–8, <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374-32631>.

Chapter Three: Food, Intimacy, and Culture in BL Fanfiction

Introduction

Fan-canon, as opposed to traditional interpretations of canon, represents a collaborative reconstruction and expansion of textual gaps by the fans. In the case of *CQL* and its source *MDZS*, fans have continuously filled in changes as a form of fan agency regarding which aesthetic values they consider important. We've established that fans play around with the canonical way Wei Wuxian addresses Lan Wangji through linguistic ties of familiarity and tone. I have also considered how fans remix gender and sexuality in fanfiction pertaining to this pairing. Another aesthetic value that is integral to the plot of *CQL* and *MDZS* is the way that food is addressed. Within canon, there is a lot of association with food as characterisation and as a symbol of relationships. The role of food in the canon has resulted in fans picking up this symbolism and extending it for their own purposes.

In canon, for example, Lan Wangji comes from a more rigid upbringing with specific rules regarding meal times, meal portions, and meal preparation that limit what he can consume. His lack of alcoholic tolerance becomes a common plot device that jumpstarts canon and non-canon compliant relationship beginnings. Contrastingly, Wei Wuxian is associated with spicy food and alcohol. Throughout *MDZS* and *CQL*, Wei Wuxian consumes spicy food and alcohol during their youth; however, after his golden core is lost and he is thrown into the Burial Mounds, he loses his appetite altogether. Some fans have taken the interpretation within fanfics that he ate the corpses in this land in order to survive which has made him stray away from meat foods. Wei Wuxian's adoptive sister Jiang Yanli is often seen in fanfics as the provider of food, and it is through her actions that one can say the metaphor of food as a love language comes into existence. In canon, she cooks a distinctive lotus pork rib soup. This becomes a staple in many fanfics as a comfort food for Wei Wuxian; oftentimes, she makes it extra spicy for him.

In this way, the idea that food acts as a love language becomes a plot element and fanfic authors make use of this in many of their fanfics. “Gaps” in canon—particularly the domesticity of Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji—become creative opportunities for fans. One compelling metaphorical pattern arises in the contrast between spicy and bland food, often connected to Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji respectively. This acts as a narrative device for personality, relational dynamics, and emotional expression. Therefore, food turns into a mode of storytelling on top of being a sensory detail.

Food and Cultural Identity

In plenty of food writing, there is a connection to love, longing, and belonging. When fanfics turn to food as a love language to be central in fanfic narratives, they turn into sites of intimacy, where the act of preparing, sharing, or even resisting food becomes one of emotional value. In a chapter that focuses on how food writing is enjoyable, Lynn Z. Bloom elaborates on how “food writers’ tastes aren’t always the same, but their work reveals that they love and enjoy their subject and want their readers to know, love, and enjoy this genre of hospitality, plenty, and pleasure as they do.”¹ This shared enjoyment resonates within fanfiction, where writers often use food scenes to cultivate warmth and emotional closeness. So, just as food writers invite readers to have experiences through their descriptions of food, the presence of food in fanfics creates similar scenarios where characters—and readers—can find equal amounts of care. With both of these genres, food turns into a rhetorical device.

This potential becomes especially powerful when looking at the fanfic through a diasporic lens. Authors from varied cultural backgrounds adopt characters like Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji into modernised, more urban diasporic settings which allows for the cultural

¹ Lynn Z. Bloom, “Consuming Prose: The Delectable Rhetoric of Food Writing,” *College English* 70, no.4 (2008): 350.

translation to resonate. Upon looking at how the fandom has spread as a result of globalisation, turning to how the fanfic authors of various cultural backgrounds approach the canon text is something of interest. Fanfic authors in the diaspora often use food scenes to construct spaces of emotional refuge or cultural continuity, particularly in stories where characters are distanced from their home communities. Coming from my own diasporic background and using that as an inspiration for much of my research, this positionality not only shapes what I pay attention to but deepens the investment in texts that tackle themes of cultural hybridity, belonging, and negotiation. Hence why this chapter resonates with me on a meaningful level: it reflects how diasporic identity can be explored through affective storytelling.

Fanfic, when it considers diasporic perspectives, turns into a space for exploration. As the rhetorical agents of the scene, fanfic authors utilise familiar settings and manipulate them so that those who are part of the rhetorical situation can recognise familiar storylines. With fanfiction as the scene, fanfic authors as agents make use of familiar narrative elements—settings, genres, character dynamics—as their agency to perform the act of reshaping canonical texts. This is often with the purpose of articulating alternative identities, values, or cultural positions—something fairly important with diasporic-centred fanfics.

Stuart Hall complicates the notion of cultural identity by arguing that it is not a fixed construct, but one that is “constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth.”² Here, Hall is suggesting that identity is not something inherited, but something that people continuously negotiate, especially through diasporic contexts where the past is mediated through a loss of sorts. He insists on a more complex view of identity development: if it is not a fixed thing, how

² Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora [1990],” in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 261, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/82348>.

can we figure out its development?³ This challenge lies in shifting how we understand identity formation to be one of becoming. While his focus is primarily on the Caribbean diasporic experience, his framework is equally applicable to Asian-American and transnational identities. In this way, cultural identity in diasporic contexts does not have a singular origin story, but a narrative built from imagined reconnections. Hall further notes that “diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.”⁴ Identity, then, is less about recovering a pure past and more about navigating the present through acts of cultural reinterpretation and projection. Fanfiction, especially fanfics that are diasporic in some sense, become a site where these elements—memory, fantasy, myth—work together. Characters like Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji, who are displaced from their historical and cultural settings when fanfic authors write modern AUs (alternate universes), become characters through whom fanfic authors can explore fragmented ideas, the hybrid sense of belonging, and emotional ties to memory. In working with Hall’s formulation, fanfic writing is not escapist or derivative, but an affective and cultural practice. The fanfic author as the double-agent in the scene (re-)imagines identity through the AUs.

Hayley Wu and Jiaqi Kang have also considered diasporic writing within the *CQL/MDZS* fandom and turn to Rukmini Pande’s approach regarding “authenticity” of non-Western inspired texts.⁵ Pande compares and contrasts authenticity, which may emphasise the relation to canon pieces, with sincerity. She writes that analysing a text’s sincerity “allows for the examination of how imperfect texts are simultaneously loved and critiqued by members of an engaged audience

³ Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora [1990],” 261.

⁴ Hall, 269.

⁵ Hayley Wu and Jiaqi Kang, “*MDZS* in Diaspora: Negotiating Chinese Americanness Through Modern AU Fanfiction,” in *Catching Chén Qí Lǐng: The Untamed and Adaptation, Production, and Reception in Transcultural Contexts*, ed. Yue (Cathy) Wang and Maria K. Alberto (New York: Peter Lang, 2024), 307.

that are also articulating and rearticulating their own raced, gendered, sexualized selves in response to the various societal scripts around them.”⁶ Using this framework to address fanfics that use food as a cultural marker means shifting the analysis away from whether a dish, dialect, or ritual is accurate in its representation, and instead looking at how food mediates cultural and diasporic meaning. Food functions as a sincere gesture to bridge cultural memory with personal narrative. The fanfic author-agent is using their positionality to enhance the storytelling. In this light, fanfics that incorporate recipes, street food scenes, or the dynamics of cooking and sharing meals can be seen as sincere contributions to an evolving diasporic discourse. The texts are not just reinterpretations of canon, but meaningful conversations about identity, memory, and emotional labour beyond borders.

Methodology

In the same way that I utilised the tagging system in Chapter One, for this chapter, I decided to focus on fanfics that contain the tags: food as a love language, food as a metaphor for love, diaspora, and modern setting. Moreover, rather than limiting myself to the canon historical setting, turning to a modern setting allows for me to broaden my reach regarding the diasporic writing of fanfic authors who made use of the impact of globalisation. Modern AUs (alternate universes) serve a critical function: they transplant traditional Chinese elements into global hybrid spaces. This gives the fanfic authors the chance to address issues of assimilation, nostalgia, and cultural preservation.

The three fanfics I have chosen to look at for this chapter are: an orphaned fanfic titled “in this corner of the world”, auberjing’s “milo godzilla siew dai/一生的爱，唯有家,” and

⁶ Rukmini Pande, “Aang Still Ain’t White: Postcolonial Praxis,” in *Squee from the Margins: Fandom and Race* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018), 88, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book62687>.

“Twin reflections share a splash of red” by tungstenpincenez. These three fanfic authors have various levels of permission granting. The first fanfic is an Orphan_Account fanfic which removes all the original author’s connection to the story, as established in the previous two chapters. auberjing has a notice indicating that their fanfiction can be mentioned, so long as it is cited, whereas tungstenpincenez’s fanfic appears in the “MXTX Food Zine 2024” accessible through tumblr—though its full-length version can be found on AO3 as the zine had a word limit. I will be using the one published in the zine, as the zine publication implies a greater permissivity around transmission (including citation) outside of the immediate fan sphere.

Food Rhetoric as a Cultural Marker

There are three potential entryways into looking at how food functions rhetorically for fanfics in the *MDZS/CQL* fandom. The first is emphasised most clearly in the tag of “food as a love language.” Here, small domestic acts like cooking, sharing meals, or remembering each other’s preferences become primary ways in which affection is expressed nonverbally. The second, which emerges when food-interested fics are also tagged as diaspora fics, shows how food can be seen as cultural connection where recipes or dishes become signifiers of memory, heritage, and belonging. This is a necessary condition to think about regarding contexts of diasporic dislocation in fanfics. The last use of food is as a pedagogical tool of sorts. Some fanfics go beyond the narrative to educate the reader, incorporating recipes or cultural notes. All three of the fics that I have decided to use in this chapter meet at least two of these points. When these themes overlap, they bring attention to the complexities that come through when fanfics make use of food in the text.

Analysing “in this corner of the world”

The fanfic “in this corner of the world” is an orphaned fanfic published with the tag “food as a metaphor for love.” This author has also included other tags to emphasise what dishes they

plan to mention in the story: Sichuan Cuisine, Hanan Cuisine, and Suzhou Cuisine. The fic circles around Wei Wuxian returning to his childhood home and getting reacclimated within the space. It appears that this fanfic is inspired by the author's life as the author note mentions, "this fic is purely based on my own feeling of not belonging."⁷ They elaborate on their diasporic childhood moving from Shanghai to Canada and articulate that, despite this move, they still consider themselves to be Chinese.⁸ Chapter One opens with a Chinese proverb as well as a quotation from the author's grandmother highlighting the importance of home and belonging to a space. This theme of looking for a place to belong is embodied through Wei Wuxian's character. The proverb connects to the opening line "It was always strange, coming back to Yiling."⁹ In doing this, the author as agent in the scene is making the act of writing a fanfic with this concept in mind as a way to reconnect with their roots, as well as finding connection with their readers who may be of similar diasporic backgrounds going through the same things.

The act of cooking is a scene of love for Wei Wuxian as he watches the way his parents interact in the kitchen and becomes involved in the activity. "It was because of their careful instructions that he knew how to cook, and loved it almost as much as he loved them."¹⁰ The scene-act ratio here emphasises how the emotional and familiar context of the kitchen shapes the act of cooking as something more than a chore, as an expression of love. More than learning how to cook, Wei Wuxian learns why he has to cook. The fanfic author highlights how this act of cooking together translates as an action for love for Wei Wuxian. There is also a mention of the

⁷ Orphan_Account, "in this corner of the world," *Archive of Our Own*, October 24 2020, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/27171007/chapters/66360634>.

⁸ Orphan_Account, "in this corner of the world."

⁹ "in this corner of the world."

¹⁰ "in this corner of the world."

spice level and spice tolerance, anchoring the modern AU with this major canonical point of characterisation.

One key difference with this fanfic and the canon text is that, in the fic, Wei Wuxian's parents do not die in his youth, but instead just before he enters college, allowing him time with his parents to witness this action. Looking at this through the purpose-act ratio indicates that the fanfic author aims to have their readers gain a deeper understanding of Wei Wuxian's relationship with food as an expression of love. This fanon shift gives readers an opportunity to have more of an emotional context where Wei Wuxian can witness the way that food functions as part of family life or intimate emotional relationships. Wei Wuxian's parents' prolonged presence in the fanfic, compared to canon, gives readers a chance to provide more backstory and fill in any emotional gaps. This, in conjunction with "food as a metaphor for love" is not just a narrative flourish, but a thematic device in fanon that enriches canon interpretations. In this way, "food as a metaphor for love" is not just a simple narrative addition, but a purposeful thematic device within the author's fanon that adds layers to canon interpretations. Here, we can see how fanon and canon connect, by providing extra context to the canon in a "what-if" moment, of sorts.

The author of this fic also breaks the fourth wall within the story to educate the fanfic reader if there is something they are potentially unfamiliar with. They write how the soup Wei Wuxian made "reminded him a little of *caipaofan*. (soupy rice with vegetables and meat, a common quick dinner from Chinese childhoods. And yes, in China, it's very common to put soup in your rice and eat just that.)"¹¹ This break in the story takes the reader away from the scene set by the author, and disrupts the reading experience, but as the author-agent, they decide

¹¹ "in this corner of the world."

to write the story in this manner to add extra detail for the reader. This frequently occurs when the author brings in a food dish that is not one of the more familiar dishes to an assumed audience who has no experience with the food. The integration of the author-voice is much more smoothly constructed in most fics on AO3—and I will show such an example in this chapter, too. However, with the way that the fanfic author has structured their fic, they are providing readers with the knowledge that they have the authority to write about the dishes with detail and authenticity.

One thing to note, within this fanfic, is that the author mentions how it is a “Modern AU based off the Korean and Japanese films of *Little Forest*.”¹² This remix of cultures is known as the process of cultural amalgamation. An example of this is Disney’s *Raya and the Last Dragon*. The film consisted of a mixture of Southeast Asian cultures and attempts to “show detailed aspects of Southeast Asian cultures through commonalities.”¹³ In showcasing this land inspired by a diasporic culture, Disney aimed to reach a wider audience. This remix of cultural elements is not uncommon in diasporic storytelling where shared experiences—like food—transcend national identities. Yet, Susanto and Ayoela Inggir Wiyanti argue that cultural amalgamation may lead to potential biases that will “[contradict] the movie’s purpose [with] the reality that exists among the public.”¹⁴ Therefore, there are two aftereffects when crafting a diasporic fanfic that consists of a mixture of cultures—either an inaccurate portrayal that appears to flatten the culture into a homogenous one, or a more nuanced portrayal that emphasises the reality post-

¹² “in this corner of the world.”

¹³ Ratri Harida, Phoutsavad Vongphachan, Tomy Kartika Putra, and Adip Arifin. “Linguistic Transculturation in *Raya and The Last Dragon* Movie.” *Jurnal Lingua Idea* 14, no. 2 (2023): 194, <https://doi.org/10.20884/1.jli.2023.14.2.8321>.

¹⁴ Susanto, and Ayoela Inggir Wiyanti, “Semiotic Analysis of Cultural Contents in *Raya and the Last Dragon* Movie,” in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Islam, Law, and Society (INCOILS)* (2021), 208.

globalisation whereby diasporic cultures connect with familiarity. This can be through substituting or assimilating with people who go through the same experience. Thus, the effect of the fanfic “in this corner of the world” can be seen in either manner depending on how the reader perceives it. The intentionality of the fanfic author can be seen through their author note at the start and throughout the fanfic: the author emphasises their attempts at having the reader connect with them by exposing their connection to the characters, having the characters go through experiences similar to their own. The author identifies as Chinese and yet draws on Korean and Japanese texts for cultural inspiration. Rather than claiming authority over the text, they are reflecting a model of diasporic storytelling with the remix taking place in the fanfic. Food, then, becomes a site of negotiation for the author. Through the scenes of cooking, sharing meals, and remembering family members through recipes, the author makes food a metaphor for love, memory, *and* cultural identity. Whether readers view this as a flattening of culture or a nuanced portrayal of a diasporic hybridity depends on their own positionality and familiarity with the cultures in question, but the author seems to make certain moves that show an awareness of and attempt to counter the flattening potential of amalgamation through personalisation.

Analysing “Twin reflections share a splash of red”

In this fanfic, the tags consist of food as a metaphor for love, diaspora, and comfort food. It is also part of two collections: MXTX Food Zine 2024 and Danmei Diaspora Creatives. In this way, fanfic readers have multiple avenues to find this fanfic that reflect specific interests similar to those of this chapter.¹⁵ The purpose of this fanfic is to centre around a diasporic experience to be featured in the Food Zine; writers have to meet certain parameters in order to be included.

¹⁵ Collections are not controlled by the author, but a second person creates them in order to have them housed in the same place. Authors on AO3 will need to consent to their fanfic being placed in a collection before it appears in one.

One of these parameters is to include a recipe in the story. Chapter Two of the fanfic on AO3 hosts the full recipe with the note “This is my family’s version of Macanese Ox-tail Soup”¹⁶. Much like how the author of the previous fanfic interspersed their personal connections throughout their fanfic, tungstenpincenez does the same thing in sharing their family’s recipe with their readers. As the author-agent in this space, they have chosen to share personal information with their readers. It is not usual for a fanfic author to be so revealing of their identity; however, with a text that tackles identity such as this fic, it makes sense for tungstenpincenez to reveal this information. By having Macau be mentioned as a potential setting for the story—it is unclear otherwise where this story is taking place—it gives readers the chance to understand why the act of Lan Wangji providing a specific dish to Wei Wuxian is poignant. Furthermore, it is the perfect backdrop for a diasporic setting, most especially with food as the focus.

The plot consists of Wei Wuxian being injured and Lan Wangji cooking his mother’s soup for him.¹⁷ Much like the previous fanfic, the act of cooking is seen as a way to convey love—only, this time it can be interpreted as romantic as it is taking place between the canonical romantic pairing. Those familiar with the canon text will already assume certain canon transfers: in the fic, as in canon, Lan Wangji’s mother has passed away and he has a very close connection with her. As the author-agent, in having Wei Wuxian eat soup based on Lan Wangji’s Macanese mom’s recipe, the writer indicates an extra layer that readers will appreciate as the canon *MDZS* doesn’t really provide characterisation for her beyond her punishment and seclusion. This shift in narrative is an interesting choice as it points to Lan Wangji’s mother being the one from a

¹⁶ tungstenpincenez, chapter 1, “Twin reflections share a splash of red.”

¹⁷ tungstenpincenez, chapter 1.

diaspora; this choice further points out how different his mother is from the traditional expectations of the Lan clan from canon. This decision, which extends but also modifies canon, can lead to a potential reading that emphasises how the cultural differences take place. In making his mother the Othered in this space, but showing her with agency enough to “make-do” with dishes that are still part of her culture, tungstenpincenez provides readers with more nuance to her character that is missing in canon.

In Chapter 5, Lan Wangji says that “I honour her love by remembering her, by loving my brother, by sharing her recipe for ox-tail soup with the one I love.”¹⁸ This further confirms how tungstenpincenez uses food as a narrative device to symbolise emotional inheritance and cross-generational love. By incorporating Lan Wangji’s mother’s recipe, the author-agent not only deepens the intimacy between Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian, but also builds a bridge between memory and care, thereby showcasing how acts of domesticity are expressions of affection. In an article addressing how family cooking is valuable, Yen-Cheng Chen et al. write that “structured family activities such as [...] participatory meal preparation play a pivotal role in promoting family cohesion, enhancing communication, and strengthening emotional bonds.”¹⁹ Thus, with this food-preparation taking place with Wei Wuxian now being involved, Lan Wangji is starting the process of welcoming Wei Wuxian into his family’s practices by giving him the recipe to his mother’s soup.

As he eats the soup, Wei Wuxian describes the ingredients within and calls it “more of an Asian fusion dish!” as he has not “seen any other Chinese soups include pasta.”²⁰ When looking

¹⁸ tungstenpincenez, chapter 5, “Twin reflections share a splash of red.”

¹⁹ Yen-Cheng Chen, Ching-Sung Lee, Ming-Chen Chiang, Pei-Ling Tsui, Bo-Kai Lan, and Yi-Jie Chen, “Nourishing Holistic Well-Being: The Role of Family Dynamics and Family Cooking,” *Healthcare* 13, no.4 (February 14, 2025): 2.

²⁰ tungstenpincenez, chapter 1, “Twin reflections share a splash of red.”

at the purpose-act ratio, the act taking place here is the description and consumption of soup. Specifically, tungstenpincenez highlights the fusion of ingredients: pasta in a traditionally Chinese soup. The purpose of this is to draw attention to how the evolution and adaptation of diasporic cooking overtime reshapes traditional recipes as a result of multiculturalism. This opens up the conversation regarding the result of a diasporic upbringing, because Lan Wangji explains how his mother's upbringing in Macau influenced the nature of the dish. When considering the ingredients, or lack of access to ingredients in the past, Wei Wuxian points to the obvious reality that they have now which is "to live in an era of multiculturalism!"²¹ The intentionality behind this is poignant as tungstenpincez as the author-agent is bringing to the reader's attention the way that diasporic cooking has adjusted through the years. The writing style is much blunter regarding the topics that tungstenpincez wants to discuss; there is no subtlety around the subject matter. This is a diasporic centred text, and readers are expected to know this through the tags, the fact that it's a part of a collection, and a food zine; it is impossible to miss this information. When before it was necessary to make substitutions and potentially change the flavour of the dish, now there is greater accessibility to food allowing for more traditionally authentic recipes to be made. However, for Lan Wangji and for the fic, the "authentic" recipe is the modified one. The act of eating and describing what components make up the soup demonstrates how diasporic experiences create new authentic recipes due to the mix of cultures. The purpose shapes how the act is performed and understood by the reader, making culinary fusion a metaphor for diasporic experience itself.

At the very end of the fanfic, the author's notes provide extra layers of information that were not included in the main fanfic. tungstenpincez, much like the author of the orphaned

²¹ tungstenpincenez, chapter 1, "Twin reflections share a splash of red."

fanfic, incorporates elements of Japanese media in the story and gives extra explanation here regarding the instances when they mentioned it, once more highlighting the connection shared by many diasporic peoples. The final note mentions where the title of the fanfic came from: “the poem 詠同心芙蓉~杜公瞻 “Ode to the Joined Hearts of Lotus Flowers” by Du Gongzhan.”²² This is a way for the author to provide authority and authenticity to the text. For the author-agent, this decision to include this information has a dual rhetorical purpose. It invites readers to recognise the layers of meaning within the title—providing readers with a cultural translation that bridges literary history with contemporary fandom. Also, it points out the author’s control over interpretation; these author’s notes guide readers through historical and cultural contexts. By ending the fic with this reference to classical Chinese poetry, tungstenpincenez is providing a remix where, even in a diasporic focus, there are still opportunities to connect with the homeland.

Analysing “milo godzilla siew dai/一生的爱, 唯有家”

The fanfic “milo godzilla siew dai/一生的爱, 唯有家” by auberjing features a Wei Wuxian who brings the diasporic reality to the forefront for readers in an even more insistent manner than the previous two fics discussed. In the fic, Wei Wuxian speaks various languages, appropriate to the Singapore setting and his Singaporean identity, which serves as a foil to Lan Wangji’s more rigid “mainlander” perspective. This is made apparent with the tag “Wèi Yīng | Wèi Wúxiàn is an Ah Beng” which roughly translates to a person classified to be an “antisocial lower class youth” in Singapore.²³ This establishes a rich baseline for the fanfic’s use of canonical elements

²² tungstenpincenez, chapter 6, “Twin reflections share a splash of red.”

²³ Aesthetics Wiki, “Ah Beng,” https://www.aesthetics.fandom.com/wiki/Ah_Beng. Because this is a term similar to those that one might find in the US on a site like “Urban Dictionary,” an unconventional citation is necessary, here.

to transmix them into a modern AU; in canon, Wei Wuxian is often discriminated against as the son of a servant and treated as an “outsider” in the cultivation world. With the setting of the fic being Singapore, auberjing makes a clever move due to the country’s culture blending within a small space—this contrasts to fanfics that may use countries like Canada or the United States where Asian communities are present, but the diasporic experience is vastly different and also differs greatly between different cities and spaces. It also contrasts with Macau as a setting, due to the sheer number of diasporic entryways present in Singapore.

In the first scene of Wangxian sharing a meal together in the fic, Lan Wangji reveals that despite being in Singapore for two weeks, he “has not yet eaten anything vaguely local” prior to being taken to a restaurant by Wei Wuxian.²⁴ Contrastingly, the food Lan Wangji is more familiar with is cooked by his uncle who carries the ties of their familiar mainland home or takes them to restaurants to cater to their particular palates. This familiarity usually “bring[s] a tightness to Lan Zhan’s throat and tears to his eyes.”²⁵ Here, we can see two opposing ways in which food can be used to connect to someone—introducing something new to someone versus using food to solidify connection.

The method that Wei Wuxian partakes in here where he brings newness to Lan Wangji is not dissimilar to the way their canon characterisations behave. Through this new cuisine, Wei Wuxian is inviting Lan Wangji to explore a new culture and to adjust to the new world that he has found himself in. To Lan Wangji, the opportunity to try these new foods is inherently tied in with his attraction to Wei Wuxian. This is the basis of the fic with Wei Wuxian giving Lan Wangji the chance to explore things he is unfamiliar with, even things that he does not like. At

²⁴ auberjing, “sunny island, set in the sea,” “milo godzilla siew dai/一生的爱, 唯有家.”

²⁵ auberjing, “sunny island, set in the sea.”

one point, Lan Wangji's monologue states that "*All [Wei Wuxian] has to do is look at me, and I'd drink a truckful of it for him.*"²⁶ This refers to the milo godzilla drink which the fic is titled after and which Wei Wuxian orders for Lan Wangji despite the fact that he is lactose intolerant. Lan Wangji's food sensitivity is itself used for further characterisation: he decided not to share this information out of fear of appearing too straight-laced, which he assumes will not appeal to Wei Wuxian's more carefree personality. That decision, then, also sets up opportunities to extend Lan Wangji's canon stubbornness and devotion to Wei Wuxian. After their meal, Lan Wangji reflects that "It had been his own decision to finish the entire milo godzilla and roti john extra cheese in one sitting. Hardly Wei Ying's fault at all. *And I'd do it all over again for him, consequences be damned.*"²⁷

While Lan Wangji is committed to his decisions when he views them as serving his relationship to Wei Wuxian, this instance nonetheless shows Lan Wangji experiencing a conflict with his different identities—which we can read to be an internal conflict with the differing identities he has within causing tension. W. E. B. Du Bois originally constructed his foundational work in "double consciousness" in the context of Black Americans' experiences;²⁸ rather than discussing two opposing cultural worlds, Kent A. Ono and Alison Yeh Cheung build on his framework and introduce triple consciousness, as a way to adapt Du Bois's work to account for the layered experiences of Asian and Asian diasporic individuals.²⁹ Ono and Cheung see how

²⁶ auberjing, "sama-sama, maju ke hadapan," "milo godzilla siew dai/一生的爱, 唯有家."

²⁷ auberjing, "bunga sayang, gentle flower of the heart" "milo godzilla siew dai/一生的爱, 唯有家."

²⁸ John P. Pittman, "Double Consciousness," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, February 16, 2023), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/double-consciousness>.

²⁹ Kent A. Ono and Alison Yeh Cheung, "Asian American 'Hipster' Rhetoric: The Digital Media Rhetoric of the Fung Brothers," *Enculturation*, December 18, 2018, <https://www.enculturaion.net/asian-american-hipster-rhetoric>.

this develops with three intersections where the Asian individual has to navigate three identities: the cultural heritage, the social norms and expectations of their host/national context, and the racialised identity projected onto them by Western discourse.³⁰ When this is applied to Lan Wangji, in this fic, this framework gives us the chance to read his internal struggle as one shaped not just by duty or emotion, but by cultural negotiation, too. He is pulled between his inherited values, the multicultural environment, and the external expectations of how he might be perceived—characterised through Wei Wuxian. As the author-agent, auberjng sets the scene in Singapore to emphasise how people with diasporic backgrounds and understandings can encounter this sort of conflict between honouring the more traditional familial ties and assimilating to a culture that is more mixed. These differing consciousnesses highlight the complexities that come with diasporic identities. Such a context frames Lan Wangji's conflict as navigation in this space where he has to learn to reconcile tradition with environment within a hybrid world.

Connecting with another of Burke's Pentad ratios, analysing the purpose-act ratio shows how auberjng makes use of footnotes to indicate that any unfamiliarity a reader may have with the content that has been shared will have further explanation. Much like how the author of "in this corner of the world" works to incorporate A/Ns to bring in more context, the footnotes have the same function in auberjng's fic. Without any of the footnotes providing readers unfamiliar with the culture/language/location with more context, there could be a lot of confusion and misinformation in the comments. As the authority in this space, the author-agent prevents this situation from the get go. Further, the very presence of such extensive footnotes indicates that

³⁰ Ono and Cheung, "Asian American 'Hipster' Rhetoric: The Digital Media Rhetoric of the Fung Brothers."

auberjing is making the assumption that they will have readers who are unaware of the foods being described in the fic. Another element that is unique to their fic is the paratext provided with the embedded images depicting the scene through fanart and photographs, images of the food/drink that is consumed by the characters, and a map of the route Wangxian take in the chapters “sama-sama, maju ke hadapan.” With this method, an immersive experience is created as readers are given more detail.³¹ The inclusion of maps furthers as an example of Alexandra Herzog’s point regarding the power dynamics that are present when the fanfic author directs their readers to a certain direction that influences their reading of the text.³² Readers who need the necessary information, or are missing the cultural awareness of the setting, will be able to click the footnote, read the information, and return to their place in the text. Readers also have the choice to read the text as is and read the footnotes at the end; therefore, the instructions or reading experience are not as enforced and guided as that suggested by embedded author’s notes. This falls in line with the community element that circulates around sharing food—it is made as an offering, not a forced participation.

There is one author note in the chapter “bunga sayang, gentle flower of the heart” where auberjing’s use of footnotes has impacted the structure of the fic. They state that “the footnotes are busting the 5000 character limit [...] so I’m uploading them in batches of 25 at a time.”³³

With this note, it shows that the fic author is still limited by the setting—to borrow Burke’s

³¹ These kinds of immersive additions are an understudied element in fanfiction, with such insertions occurring at least as early as Wattpad’s peak as a fanfiction site in the 2000s, when fanfic authors would incorporate images like outfit inspiration for characters. Unfortunately, a full study of this trend would be well outside of the scope of this specific project. Nonetheless, the visual element emphasises the multiple rhetorical functions of fic authors’ work.

³² Alexandra Herzog, “‘But This Is My Story and This is How I Wanted to Write It’: Author’s Notes as Fannish Claim to Power in Fan Fiction Writing,” *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 11 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0406>.

³³ auberjing, “bunga sayang, gentle flower of the heart” “milo godzilla siew dai/一生的爱, 唯有家.”

pentad once more—of the fic. So, while it could appear that the author has complete mastery over the reading experience, the platform that they are using prevents them from total control which could impact the pacing of the text if their writing is impacted by how many footnotes they have present in the fic. The platform itself is a participant in the rhetorical situation; in this case, that makes the platform also a part of the fan community and, here, the diasporic community, as well. auberjing is collaborating with the tools they use, just as their author's notes show them collaborating with their reader and in specifically diasporic contexts.

Cultural Experience and Shared Fan Values

There is a fascinating thing taking place when comparing tungstenpincenez's "Twin reflections share a splash of red" with auberjing's "milo godzilla siew dai/一生的爱, 唯有家." While both do present readers with cultural markers of Asian origin, tungstenpincenez particularly draws attention to the diasporic experience outside of Asia. In Chapter 1, Lan Wangji tells Wei Wuxian to eat some "digestive cookies"³⁴ which are of British origin; this is followed by Chapter 3's mention of a recipe that is a "fusion of Texas and Shandong barbeques."³⁵ This diasporic experience speaks to an affective connection for Asian cultures living abroad and getting used to Western food and diet, and making attempts at combining the two or substituting ingredients that are unavailable to them. This differs from auberjing's fic which focuses primarily on how a country like Singapore acts as a melting pot of Asian cultures—and how that space develops, through historical contingencies. In the context of Lan Wangji's characterisation as someone who is used to a more singular cultural experience, Wei Wuxian provides readers with an insight in how society is really like for the everyday person in that town. It indicates that each author is

³⁴ tungstenpincenez, "Twin reflections share a splash of red," chapter 1.

³⁵ tungstenpincenez, "Twin reflections share a splash of red," chapter 3.

making use of knowledge that they are familiar with and experiences they have lived or seen as ways to connect with the characters.

The Lan Wangji in tungstenpincez's work introduces Wei Wuxian to his mother's family recipe in order to help heal him, and, in doing so, he is bringing Wei Wuxian into his world. It allows for tungstenpincez to introduce the reality of a diasporic culture where one must make do with their surroundings and adapt recipes. Lan Wangji's close connections with his family are also addressed in auberjing's fic, as it is because of them that his diet has remained a certain way before Wei Wuxian's presence in his life. However, the opposite direction of influence takes place in auberjing's fic, as Lan Wangji is the one taken out of his comfort zone and introduced to a new environment—which I would argue falls more in line with the canon narrative where Wei Wuxian is bringing newness into Lan Wangji's life.

The Orphan_Account fic is a more introspective take on Wei Wuxian's relationship with food as it is mostly him cooking for himself as he settles into his new environment. The relationship with Lan Wangji is not the main interest of the fic or the fic's use of food; instead, it talks about his relationship with his family and the food associations he has with memories of them. In canon, it can be inferred that Wei Wuxian's relationship with food is such a way because of his upbringing—growing up in the streets, being brought into a family where there are class struggles, and marrying into a family where discipline and order is the expectation. Here, instead, we have a Wei Wuxian whose relationship with food is positively defined. Broadly, in all three fics, the characters experience food in positive ways that may be related to canon, but bridge off into very new directions. This shows shared fan values particularly in diasporic writing where food is a site to share cultures with others as a form of intimacy and close relation.

Conclusion

Each of these fanfics make use of author note's and paratext in order to inform readers about context necessary to understand the plot. This extensive information—whether offered through foot notes, or author notes embedded directly into the main body of the text—is akin to the act of feeding the reader. The authors work to provide readers access to some of their own diasporic experience and to give readers a sense of immersion through the intimacy provided through food writing. Through their personal, diasporic perspectives, the authors create immersive worlds that encourage a shared, intimate experience with the reader. Each explanation of a dish, drink, or spice turns into a moment of connection, a moment of shared meaning-making between reader and writer.

The choice to write these stories in modern AUs further expands this intimacy by allowing fanfic authors to explore contemporary diasporic realities. Without the historical setting in *MDZS* canon holding the authors back with concerns about authenticity, modern AUs allow for fanfic authors to explore their lived experiences and express sincerity. As the author-agent, they are utilising the digital setting of AO3 as a platform to remix their culture into a canon to which they can relate. Despite the fact that Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji are not members of a diaspora in canon, fanfic authors are still able to use the combination of canon and fan fiction community to communicate intimacy to their readers and to other writers.

In many of these fics, fanfic authors use Wei Wuxian as the diasporic figure, and they use his adaptability as a foil to Lan Wangji's more traditional upbringing. In tungstenpincenez's fic, the pattern is inverted as it appears that Lan Wangji is the one who has the overt diasporic upbringing and *he* is the one to introduce new things.³⁶ Across all three fics, however, as well as

³⁶ This calls back to how fanfic authors address role reversal, as discussed in Chapter Two.

within this type of fic more generally, what remains constant is the way that fanfiction is transformative. Through paratext, food writing, and reimagined modern settings, these authors make use of the tools in fandom to articulate meaning and cultural belonging.

Bibliography

- Aesthetics Wiki, "Ah Beng," https://aesthetics.fandom.com/wiki/Ah_Beng.
- auberjing, "milo godzilla siew dai/一生的爱, 唯有家." *Archive of Our Own*, July 16 2022, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/40333773/chapters/101032128>.
- Bloom, Lynn Z. "Consuming Prose: The Delectable Rhetoric of Food Writing." *College English* 70, no. 4 (2008): 346–62. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25472275>.
- Chen, Yen-Cheng, Ching-Sung Lee, Ming-Chen Chiang, Pei-Ling Tsui, Bo-Kai Lan, and Yi-Jie Chen. "Nourishing Holistic Well-Being: The Role of Family Dynamics and Family Cooking." *Healthcare* 13, no. 414 (February 14, 2025): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare13040414>.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora [1990]." In *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, edited by Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 257–71. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/82348>.
- Harida, Ratri, Phoutsavad Vongphachan, Tomy Kartika Putra, and Adip Arifin. "Linguistic Transculturation in *Raya and The Last Dragon Movie*." *Jurnal Lingua Idea* 14, no. 2 (2023): 190–202. <https://doi.org/10.20884/1.jli.2023.14.2.8321>.
- Herzog, Alexandra. "'But This Is My Story and This is How I Wanted to Write It': Author's Notes as Fannish Claim to Power in Fan Fiction Writing." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 11 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0406>.
- Ono, Kent A., and Alison Yeh Cheung. "Asian American 'Hipster' Rhetoric: The Digital Media Rhetoric of the Fung Brothers." *Enculturation*, December 18, 2018. <https://www.enculturation.net/asian-american-hipster-rhetoric>.

Orphan_Account, “in this corner of the world.” *Archive of Our Own*, October 24 2020,
<https://archiveofourown.org/works/27171007/chapters/66360634>.

Pande, Rukmini. “Aang Still Ain’t White: Postcolonial Praxis.” In *Squee from the Margins : Fandom and Race*, 75–110. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book62687>.

Pittman, John P. “Double Consciousness.” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, February 16, 2023. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/double-consciousness>.

Susanto and Ayoela Inggir Wiyanti, “Semiotic Analysis of Cultural Contents in *Raya and the Last Dragon Movie*.” In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Islam, Law, and Society (INCOILS)*, 201–210. 2021.

tungstenpincenez “Twin reflections share a splash of red.” *Archive of Our Own*, November 17 2024, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/59172907/chapters/150884995>.

Wu, Hayley and Jiaqi Kang. “MDZS in Diaspora: Negotiating Chinese Americanness Through Modern AU Fanfiction.” In *Catching Chén Qí Líng: The Untamed and Adaptation, Production, and Reception in Transcultural Contexts*, edited by Yue (Cathy) Wang and Maria K. Alberto, 305–319. NY: Peter Lang, 2024.

Conclusion

Fanfiction serves as a site of linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural engagement as demonstrated by the chapters prior. Observing the way that fandom responds to a canon text reveals a fruitful insight into the discourse surrounding transmedia storytelling and how adaptations can shift meanings. With a fandom like *MDZS/CQL*'s, applying Burke's pentad to analyse the motivations behind why fanfic authors work as a "double-agent" in their story creation gives us an insight to understand the results from a globalised world where anyone can have access to a different culture's media.

With each application of the lenses that I chose to analyse the *MDZS/CQL* fandom, I made use of a different methodology and updated it depending on how it would benefit the topic of interest. Having this flexibility gave me affordances to adjust with the trends reflected within the discourse regarding the subject area I was focusing on. With such an interdisciplinary field, fandom studies provide plenty of ways to consider how to research a specific discourse.

Chapter One focused on how fanfic authors of assumed Western backgrounds adopt the *danmei* lexicon in order to develop meaning-making within fandom spaces. This gives us an example of how fandom can lead to cross-cultural exchange in a deeper way and what aesthetic values they consider important enough to maintain across the fics that I selected. Since the start of this project in 2023, where I mostly worked on Chapter One's research, there may have been a change in trends, most especially with the Orphan_Account fanfics that I collected since I based my sample on the "most popular fics by kudos." I can almost guarantee that this data set has shifted since my last search.

Further, my choice to look at fanfics specific to the *CQL* canon yet struggling to find fanfic authors who consumed *just* the TV adaptation reveals that with a series that has been

adapted so many ways, it is difficult to separate the origin points and have a specific canon. This is common in most fandoms where there are multiple adaptations that exist, such as superhero comics or even the Tolkien fandom, to name some further examples. What one considers canon might in fact be the interpretation of an adaptation of the metatext. Indeed, there may be the case where a fanfic author has strong feelings about a plot line, canon in one form of media, that is absent in the canon of the other, related form. As a result, the gateway into the fandom impacts how meaning-making develops and it can also affect the interpretations going forward.

Chapter Two addressed the way that fanfic authors utilise sexual and gender dynamics and modes of expression as a way to reshape the way that the world works. In canon, Wei Wuxian's characterisation as the *shòu* is pretty sturdy. However, I was able to unpack ways that people can read him as more than the shallow aesthetic value and instead see what other markers are available to indicate his dynamic in the relationship beyond appearance and personality. The links between female sacrifice and agency gave me the opportunity to really explore how a character can be codified "female" beyond the scripts pushed upon them. Fans who wander away from the aesthetic values that match canon interpretations of the Wangxian pairing challenge the standardisation of gender and sexuality by further breaking the binary. In this way, fanfic serves as a space for play with how bodies are manipulated through narratives. My choice to ignore fanfiction that contained rape/non-consensual plots may have skewed my findings for this chapter; however, I think it would be safe to assume that the topics that are discussed there regarding sacrifice and the "female" codification of it, remain within those contexts.

As for my third chapter, which concerns diasporic narratives, there are two groups who partake in the fandom I have selected to focus on: those who are part of a culture that is close to the canon culture, and those who are not part of such a culture. With those outside of the culture,

they are able to make use of translingualism and meaning-making to develop the *danmei* lexicon, as seen in chapter one. However, those who are close to the canon, or close to a diaspora like the canon culture, instead assume and display particular authorities with the text and share their knowledges with readers who they assume will be unfamiliar with the cultural contexts they have chosen. In this way, they are promoting themselves as agents of authority in this scene and completely rewriting the canon through modernised contexts. The diasporic experiences seem also to require modern AU retellings, in order to more straightforwardly express the lived realities of the fanfic authors. This chapter highlights how food works as a rhetorical tool to indicate the crossroads of belonging and displacement; identities are shaped and reshaped by what recipes are handed down by relatives and by adaptations and substitutions—hence the instances of fusion dishes being common in most diasporic experiences. Fanfic authors who use their diasporic experiences may tie in their lived experiences to connect with their readers. Alternatively, their purpose of alienating them with their expert knowledge draws attention to a discomfort in reading where voices that were originally not heard have the chance to shine.

A key area that I decided not to focus on with this project was the considerations on how non-Asian, cishet female writers would turn to a fandom like *CQL* and craft narratives based on experiences that they are not able to wholly tap into—either culturally/racially or through gender/sexual expression. The interplay of appreciation and fetishisation of queer lived experiences has been addressed previously by Erica Lynn Massey. She writes how slash offers assistance in “exploring issues of gender, sexuality, performativity, and self-identity.”¹ Her comments emphasise the nature of queer fanfiction as an avenue for community building. However, Alexis Lothian and Mel Stanfill discuss how the fandom space is predominantly

¹ Massey, “Borderland Literature, Female Pleasure, and the Slash Fic Phenomenon.”

occupied by white individuals—a space where whiteness is seen as the default.² The assumption complicates how my selected fandom is interpreted, as I note earlier my assumption that a large majority of the fanfic writers are non-Asian. This issue expands further as I am relying on a Western fanfic host site to gather my selected fanfics for analysis. As such, I intentionally consider what practices develop with the knowledge gained by writing in a culture that some writers are not part of and contrast that level of ownership with those who are able to claim authority over the culture. To build upon this further in future, I would like to look at other cultural rhetorics beyond food writing and consider interviewing fanfic authors (and readers) who are drawn to diasporic writings.

Studying fan culture gives us an insight in how people respond to texts. Fanfic culture, most especially, has incredible insights as the creation of fanfic is an act of labour that has no monetary outcome. The discourse surrounding fandom studies is one that is continuous and ongoing as more products are being made, which results in more fans being active. With a fandom like *CQL*'s being born in 2019 and still being active, it means that there is a continuous flow of worldbuilding and opportunities ripe for discussion. These are works of passion, and I am incredibly happy to have been part of the conversation.

² Alexis Lothian and Mel Stanfill, “An Archive of Whose Own? White Feminism and Racial Justice in Fan Fiction's Digital Infrastructure.” *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 36, (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2021.2119>.

Bibliography

- Lothian, Alexis and Mel Stanfill. "An Archive of Whose Own? White Feminism and Racial Justice in Fan Fiction's Digital Infrastructure." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 36, (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2021.2119>.
- Massey, Erica Lyn. "Borderland Literature, Female Pleasure, and the Slash Fic Phenomenon." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 30 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2019.1390>.

Bibliography

- Aesthetics Wiki, “Ah Beng,” https://www.aesthetics.fandom.com/wiki/Ah_Beng.
- Archive of Our Own. “About.” Accessed September 17, 2025. <https://www.archiveofourown.org/about>
- . “Terms of Service.” Accessed September 17, 2025. <https://www.archiveofourown.org/tos>
- . “Terms of Service FAQ: Maximum Inclusiveness.” Accessed September 17, 2025. https://archiveofourown.org/tos_faq#max_inclusiveness
- auberjing, “milo godzilla siew dai/一生的爱, 唯有家.” *Archive of Our Own*, July 16 2022, <https://www.archiveofourown.org/works/40333773/chapters/101032128>.
- Author, A. “Aftermath.” *Archive of Our Own*. 13 Oct. 2020³.
- . Personal interview [Tumblr]. 2 Nov. 2023.
- . “Somewhere To Belong.” *Archive of Our Own*. 18 Dec. 2020.
- Author, B. “love, fire and blood.” *Archive of Our Own*.⁴
- . Personal interview [Tumblr]. 21 Sept. 2024.
- Barthes, Roland. “The Death of the Author.” In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch, 1268–1272. NY: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2018.
- Bitzer, Lloyd F. “The Rhetorical Situation.” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1, no. 1 (1968): 1–14. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40236733>.
- Bloom, Lynn Z. “Consuming Prose: The Delectable Rhetoric of Food Writing.” *College English* 70, no. 4 (2008): 346–62. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25472275>.

³ Because Author A chose to interview anonymously, I have not provided URLs for their fic content.

⁴ Likewise, Author B chose to interview anonymously; hence why there is no URL provided for their fic content.

- Burke, Kenneth. "From *A Grammar of Motives*." In *The Rhetorical Tradition*, edited by Patricia Bizzell, Burce Herzberg, and Robin Reames, 1271–86. New York: Macmillan.
- Busse, Kristina. "Intimate Intertextuality and Performative Fragments in Media Fanfiction." In *Fandom, Second Edition: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, edited by Johnathan Gray, et al., 45–59. New York UP, 2017.
- Canagarajah, Suresh. "Weaving the Text: Changing Literacy Practices and Orientations." *College English* 82, no. 1 (2019): 7–28.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26823961>.
- Chen, Yen-Cheng, Ching-Sung Lee, Ming-Chen Chiang, Pei-Ling Tsui, Bo-Kai Lan, and Yi-Jie Chen. "Nourishing Holistic Well-Being: The Role of Family Dynamics and Family Cooking." *Healthcare* 13, no. 414 (February 14, 2025): 1–18.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare13040414>.
- Chiang, Howard. "Castration fever: On trans, China, and psychoanalysis" *Special Issue: Histories and Cultures of Mental Health in Modern East Asia, Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences* 57, No. 3 (July 5, 2021): 245–250.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jhbs.22095>.
- Cummins, Alison. "*Unconditionally and Irrevocably in Love*": *The Sociological Implications of Romance and Sex in the Twilight Saga and Its Fanfictions*. Muhlenberg College, 2021.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.30532834>.
- defractum. "dream of a funeral; hear of a marriage." *Archive of Our Own*. 10 Apr. 2020.
<https://www.archiveofourown.org/works/23581942/chapters/56581120>.
- . "the exception proves the rule." *Archive of Our Own*. 26 May 2020.
<https://www.archiveofourown.org/works/24380128>.

---. Personal interview [Email]. 16 Nov. 2023.

Dym, Brianna, and Case Fiesler. "Ethical and Privacy Considerations for Research Using Online Fandom Data." In *Fan Studies Methodologies*, edited by Julia E. Largent, Milena Popova, and Elise Vist. Special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 33 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2020.1733>.

Fathallah, Judith May. "From Foucault to Fanfic." In *Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts*, 17–32. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1v2xsp4.5>.

Finn, Kavita Mudan, and Jessica McCall. "Exit, Pursued by a Fan: Shakespeare, Fandom, and the Lure of the Alternate Universe." *Critical Survey*, 28, no. 2 (2016): 27–38. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26382275>.

Fish, Stanley. "From Is there a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities." In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch, 1898–1909. NY: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2018.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora [1990]." In *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, edited by Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 257–71. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/82348>.

Harida, Ratri, Phoutsavad Vongphachan, Tomy Kartika Putra, and Adip Arifin. "Linguistic Transculturation in *Raya and The Last Dragon Movie*." *Jurnal Lingua Idea* 14, no. 2 (2023): 190–202. <https://doi.org/10.20884/1.jli.2023.14.2.8321>.

Herzog, Alexandra. "'But This Is My Story and This is How I Wanted to Write It': Author's Notes as Fannish Claim to Power in Fan Fiction Writing." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 11 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0406>.

Hinu. "To Make Him a Perfect Bride." *Archive of Our Own*. 3 Sept. 2022.

<https://www.archiveofourown.org/works/41460267/chapters/103972890>.

---. Personal interview [Tumblr]. 6 Feb. 2024.

Hori, Akiko. "On the Response (Or Lack Thereof) of Japanese Fans to Criticism that Yaoi is

Antigay Discrimination." In *Transnational Boys' Love Fan Studies*, edited by Kazumi

Nagaike and Katuhiko Sukanuma. Special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*,

no. 12 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0463>.

Hyde, Adam. "The Death of the Reader." *Books in Browsers IV Proceedings* 17, no. 1 (Winter

2014). <https://doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0017.108>.

Ishida, Hitoshi. "Representational Appropriation and the Autonomy of Desire in Yaoi/BL." In

Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan, edited by

Mark McLelland, Kazumi Nagaike, Katsuhiko Sukanuma, and James Welker, translated

by Katsuhiko Sukanuma, 210–232. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015.

Jenkins, Henry. "Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the

21st Century (Part One)." Last modified October 19, 2006.

https://www.henryjenkins.org/blog/2006/10/confronting_the_challenges_of.html.

---. "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections." Last modified July 31, 2011.

https://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html.

Kim Eun Y., "Preface," In *The Yin & Yang of American Culture*, xi–xx, United Kingdom:

Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2001.

Kwon, Jungmin. "Introduction." In *Straight Korean Female Fans and Their Gay Fantasies*, 1–

30. Iowa City: Iowa Press, 2018.

- . "FANTasy Bridged." In *Straight Korean Female Fans and Their Gay Fantasies*, 143–165. Iowa City: Iowa Press, 2018.
- Lai, Yang. "Mo Xiang Tong Xiu and Chaotic Authorship in the Internet Era." In *Catching Chén Qí Lìng: The Untamed and Adaptation, Production, and Reception in Transcultural Contexts*, edited by Yue (Cathy) Wang and Maria K. Alberto, 41–66. NY: Peter Lang, 2024.
- Landow, George. "Hypertext: An Introduction." In *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*, 1–52. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006.
- Leavenworth, Maria Lindgren. "The Paratext of Fanfiction," *Narrative* 23, no. 1, (2015): 40–60, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24615501>.
- Leone, Massimo. "The Death of the Reader: Meaning in the Era of Digital Narcissism." *Language and Semiotic Studies* 4, no. 3 (2018): 72–83. <https://10.1515/lass-2018-040304>.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "The Science of the Concrete." In *The Savage Mind (La Pensée sauvage)*, translated by John Weightman and Doreen Weightman, 1–33. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Li, Hong. "Consumer Behaviours of Chinese Female on Boys' Love Fiction: A Sociological Perspective." *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 664, (June 1 2022): 1006–1013. Atlantic Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220504.183>.
- Llewellyn, Anna. "A Space Where Queer Is Normalized": The Online World and Fanfictions as Heterotopias for WLW." *Journal of Homosexuality* 69, no. 13 (June 2021): 2348–2369. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2021.1940012>.

Massey, Erica Lyn. "Borderland Literature, Female Pleasure, and the Slash Fic Phenomenon."

Transformative Works and Cultures, no. 30 (2019).

McLelland, Mark, and James Welker. "An Introduction to "Boy's Love" in Japan." In *Boys Love*

Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan, edited by Mark

McLelland, Kazumi Nagaïke, Katsuhiko Suganuma, and James Welker. 3–20. Jackson:

University Press of Mississippi, 2015.

Mo Xiang Tong Xiu, *Mo Dao Zu Shi: Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation*. Vol. 1. Translated

by Suika, edited by Pengie Los Angeles: Seven Seas Entertainment, 2021.

Ono, Kent A., and Alison Yeh Cheung. "Asian American 'Hipster' Rhetoric: The Digital Media

Rhetoric of the Fung Brothers." *Enculturation*, December 18, 2018.

<https://www.enculturation.net/asian-american-hipster-rhetoric>.

Orphan_Account. "A handful of stars [on indefinite hiatus]." *Archive of Our Own*, July 2 2022,

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/40029102/chapters/100245840>.

---. "And Be the Moon That Moves Your Tide." *Archive of Our Own*, August 8 2020,

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/25788823/chapters/62637487>.

---. "in this corner of the world." *Archive of Our Own*, October 24 2020,

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/27171007/chapters/66360634>.

Pande, Rukmini. "Aang Still Ain't White: Postcolonial Praxis." In *Squee from the Margins :*

Fandom and Race, 75–110. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book62687>.

Pittman, John P. "Double Consciousness." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed.

Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University,

February 16, 2023. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/double-consciousness>.

- Qin, Lucy Yuan, and Kong F. Cheong. "Gender, Death, and the Supernatural in *The Untamed* (Chen Qing Ling): A Danmei Genre Pop-Cultural Phenomenon." In *Global Perspectives on the Liminality of the Supernatural: From Animus to Zombi*, edited by Rebecca Gibson, 19–33. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022.
- Sandvoss, Cornel. "The Death of the Reader: Literary Theory and the Study of Texts in Popular Culture." In *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, edited by Karen Hellekson, and Kristina Busse, 61–74. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014.
- Shaikh, Dania. "Reimagining queer Asias: Performativity, censorship, and queer kinship in the fandoms of *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* and *The Untamed*." In *Chinese Fandoms*, edited by Zhen Troy Chen and Celia Lam, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 41 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2023.2343>.
- Shearer, Allan W. "Applying Burke's Dramatic Pentad to Scenarios." *Futures: The Journal of Policy, Planning and Futures Studies* 36, no. 8, (2004): 823–35.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2004.01.009>.
- Susanto and Ayoela Inggir Wiyanti, "Semiotic Analysis of Cultural Contents in *Raya and the Last Dragon Movie*." In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Islam, Law, and Society (INCOILS)*, 201–210. 2021.
- Thomas, Bronwen. "What Is Fanfiction and Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things about It??" *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, 3, (October 2011): 1–24.
<https://doi.org/10.5250/storyworlds.3.2011.0001>.
- . "The Wreader." Last modified November 4, 2013.
<https://www.digitalreadingnetwork.com/the-wreader/>.

- tungstenpinenez “Twin reflections share a splash of red.” *Archive of Our Own*, November 17 2024, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/59172907/chapters/150884995>.
- Wu, Hayley and Jiaqi Kang. “MDZS in Diaspora: Negotiating Chinese Americanness Through Modern AU Fanfiction.” In *Catching Chén Qí Líng: The Untamed and Adaptation, Production, and Reception in Transcultural Contexts*, edited by Yue (Cathy) Wang and Maria K. Alberto, 305–319. NY: Peter Lang, 2024.
- Wong, Alvin K. “Disjunctive Temporalities: Queer Sinophone Visuality across Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.” In *Queer TV China: Televisual and Fannish Imaginaries of Gender, Sexuality, and Chineseness*, edited by Jamie J. Zhao, 124–142. Hong Kong UP: 2023.
- Wu, Hayley. “Feminising Culture in *The Grandmaster Of Demonic Cultivation*.” *Strange Horizons*, July 24, 2023, <https://www.strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/feminising-culture-in-the-grandmaster-of-demonic-cultivation/>.
- Xu, Yanrui and Ling Yang. “Between BL and Slash: *Danmei* Fiction, Transcultural Mediation, and Changing Gender Norms in Contemporary China.” In *Queer Transfigurations*, edited by James Welker, 19–30. Hawai’i UP: 2023.
- Zamperini, Paola. “Untamed Hearts: Eros and Suicide in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction.” *Nan Nü: Men, Women, and Gender in China* 3, no. 1 (2001): 77–104. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852601750123008>.
- Zhang, Zhuwen. “Crossing Swords and Cutting Sleeves: The Cross-Cultural Impact of Chinese Fandom Fan Fiction on Asian American Youths,” In *Chinese Fandoms*, edited by Zhen Troy Chen, and Celia Lam. Special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 41 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2023.2385>.

Zhuang, Peina, and Jiazhao Lin. "Becoming as Suffering: A Genealogy of Female Suffering in Chinese Myth and Literature." *CLCWEB: Comparative Literature and Culture* 21, no. 5, (2019):1–8, <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374-32631>.