

5. 'I'm a God': The Author and the Writing Fan in *Supernatural*

Introduction

As we have observed, cult television makes frequent use of symbolic author figures. Though TV shows are, in reality, a product of many people's labour and dependent on a multi-level network of financial and industrial support, individuals in the horror/drama/sci-fi genre are often constructed as the primary creative force behind a program (Mittell 2012). Inherited from twentieth-century film theory, and the singular model of Romantic authorship before that, these figures help imbue the text with an aura of value (Gray 2010, pp. 99–102) and a symbolic 'guarantee of value' (Newman and Levine 2012, p. 1020). This is itself a rather paradoxical strategy of legitimation, depending on an appeal to already-legitimate cultural texts, rather than arguing for the legitimation of television as a distinct form (cf. Newman and Levine, p. 198). Whilst the previous texts discussed are adaptations, with the author-function split more obviously between writers and showrunners (c.f. Newman and Levine, p. 187), the CW's *Supernatural* (2005–) has a singular author figure in the form of Eric Kripke, who conceived of the text, plotted the initial five-season myth arc, and served as chief writer and showrunner until the end of that fifth season.

Supernatural is a fantasy/horror/drama with comic elements. The early seasons were built on a fairly simple formula, in which the brothers Sam and Dean Winchester followed more-or-less reluctantly in their father's footsteps, hunting ghosts, monsters, demons and other supernatural beings. From the fourth season onwards the show became increasingly complex and meta-textual, involving angels, demons, heaven, hell and questioning the existence of God or an ordered universe. It was here that Kripke's textual proxy was introduced, in the form of the Prophet Chuck, alias Carver Edlund, a hack writer who receives divine visions of the other characters and writes them into a series of pulp novels also called *Supernatural*. Chuck's books develop a cult following, including slash-writing fangirl Becky Rosen (Emily Perkins). Her first appearance in 5x01, 'Sympathy for the Devil', is a remarkable instance of a televisual writer writing fanfiction about his show into the show itself. Fans responded with a range of approval and approbation to this destruction of the fourth wall (Felschow 2010, 6.3; Schmidt 2010, 2.8–9), and Chuck, Becky and other canonical fan-representations have

been re-appropriated into fanfic. Further, *Supernatural* fandom now exists in a post-Author-God era: at the end of his projected five Seasons, Kripke stepped down. In a gendered distinction, his successor Sera Gamble was never imbued with an author-function, received by fans as chief fangirl at best and a talentless fumbler at worst (cf. Zubernis and Larsen 2012, p. 216). Newman and Levine argue that ‘in order to be considered a televisual auteur, it is usually necessary for the showrunner to also be the show’s original creator’ (2012, p. 983). This is certainly the case with *Supernatural*, and when we consider the relatively prominent influence of George Martin over *GoT* fandom, it is clear that the construction of authorship at stake depends on the concept of an originator or founder, even when that personality may no longer exert significant influence over the text.

Kripke consistently presents and is presented as a fanboy-auteur. As Scott argues,

We could frame the fanboy auteur as an ‘undead author,’ or an author who understands that metaphorically ‘killing himself’ is an ideal way to engender fannish solidarity, and [to] ‘fashion himself as “just one of the fans”, when he is decidedly privileged in the relationship’ (Scott 2011, p. 168, quoting Gray 2010, pp. 113; 112).

These sorts of statements are typical from Kripke and other SPN writers, and I want to clarify here that this chapter addresses *discursively constructed presentations of authorship*, rather than falling into Said’s trap of shifting to address real-world practices or claiming insight into the actual attitudes of the showrunners. So, paratextually, Kripke discursively presents his love for and loyalty to fandom (Ausiello 2007), and claims to ‘love’ and ‘welcome’ fan production (Zubernis and Larsen 2012, p. 214). He was written in as a character to a meta-textual Season 6 episode, wherein his sole plot function was to die, a comic slow-motion sequence set to a mock-Western soundtrack. Kripke declared himself delighted with the scene, thanking director Charles Beeson ‘for letting [him] die in such a manly way! With none of the urinating or begging or crying’ (Bekakos 2011). The definite article self-effacingly delineates the verbs ‘urinating’, ‘begging’ and ‘crying’ as actions that Kripke would expect to take place at his own death. For the construction of ‘Eric Kripke’ is split and maintained between his paratextual self-presentation and his proxies in the text. The death is performed by an actor, not by himself, thus simultaneously maintaining an extra-textual presence as the *real* author *and* performing abnegation for his fans. The practice of fanboy-auteurism is thus refined to an art.

Zubernis and Larsen (2012) have made an extended study of boundary-crossing in relation to *Supernatural* and its fandom. But their interview-dependent work has a different orientation to mine: they are concerned with the attitudes and responses of fans and producers, not the establishment of discursive formations and their alteration by writing. Their project is more a socio-psychological study of fan cultures, and thus, where they do attend to fanfic (pp. 83–115), it is from the perspective of trauma and healing that Bacon-Smith inaugurated (1992). Nonetheless, they present much useful data on Kripke's paratextual presentation of himself as showrunner, some of which will be utilized in this chapter.

Here, I seek the statements constructing the discursive formation 'The Author and the Writing Fan'. Originally, I had intended to study 'The Author' alone, but it quickly became clear that the canonical dyad was inextricable, the two constructed in terms of each other. 'Real' authorship is largely defined by its negative. Chuck and Becky are introduced in parallel circumstances, their writing compared and contrasted (Cherry 2011, p. 212), and though the canonical author remains in control and privileged, the characters become romantically involved for some time. As Zubernis and Larsen read it, 'that Kripke/Chuck is literally in bed with his fans can be seen as indicative of the fact that we—the creator, the actors and the fans—are all in this together' (p. 170). This rather overlooks the inequality of the power relationship: both between the characters, and between Kripke and fandom. Moreover, the dyad is problematically broken during Season 7, where Becky has been dumped by Chuck and crosses new lines of pathological behaviour. However, fanfic also intercedes with statements that separate the discourse formation 'fan' from 'author', reconstructing them in ways that shift the balance of power.

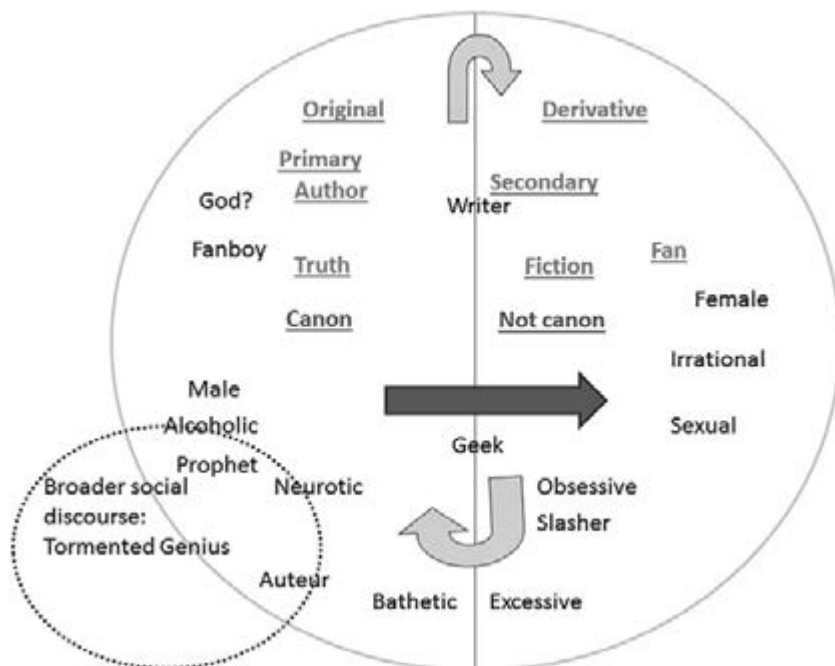
At the conclusion of Season 5, the series suggests that Chuck may indeed be God, a literal manifestation of the originating deity Barthes recognized as standing behind the authority of the Author (cf. Busse 2010; Scott 2011, pp. 296–97). If Chuck is not God, then God is definitively absent or non-existent in *Supernatural's* apocalyptic storyline. Garcia argued that the Author-God/fan relationship was further complicated by Chuck's direct address to the audience and discussion of writing the series before he vanishes (5x22, 'Swan Song'), leaving the series and the fans to carry on without, if not his presence, at least his leadership (2011, pp. 158–159). However, Kripke remains an executive producer (Ausiello 2010), and notably, wrote the critical Season 6 finale himself, rather than leaving it to Sera Gamble. Gamble's proxy in the text is fannish publisher Sera Siege, who in a problematically gendered distinction is ultimately a gatekeeper rather than

a 'real' author—the characters must prove their fan credentials to her before she directs them to him (Scott 2011, p. 304). Then, as we will explore, Chuck makes one final appearance at the coda of 10x05, 'Fan Fiction', which enacts the legitimation of fan activity by the Author-God in almost literal terms.

The Construction of Authorship and Fandom in *Supernatural*

In the text of *Supernatural*, I found that statements constructed the author as a fanboy-auteur quite specifically: as a geek and a fanboy on one hand, and a visionary or God on the other. The fan who writes, meanwhile, was constructed variously as excessive, excitable and feminine: characteristics that date back to some of Jenson's (1992) descriptors of fan pathologization. On the other hand, fan activity is permitted, even valorized to an extent by the Author-God, and in a sense they are shown as parallels. Chuck and Becky both speak their first lines sitting at their computers, writing about Sam and Dean and reading their work aloud. But the governing statements of the dyad define a consistent power relation:

Fig. 11: The construction of authorship (by its negative) in *Supernatural*.



- 1) That the Author-God's text is canonical truth, and
- 2) The fan's text, though permissible, is secondary, derivative, false.

This canonical discursive formation 'Author and Fan' is more coherently and solidly iterated in the text than either masculinity or authority, so it is not particularly helpful to divide it into branches for discussion. It can be delineated thus:

Governing statements are underlined. The straight arrow (one-way) represents legitimation, which flows only from the author to the fan. The curved arrows represent love and need, which are constructed as reciprocal, though the flow from the fan to the author is greater.

Our introduction to Chuck Shurley comes in the midst of a vision. At the opening of episode 4x18, 'The Monster at the End of this Book', he sleeps restlessly in his bathrobe and boxer shorts, despite clear sounds of daytime outside. His house is in disarray. Zubernis and Larsen write that 'the tongue in cheek portrayal of Chuck here is one of the things that saves the episode from slipping into a mean-spirited parody of fans' (p. 160). I agree, though it must be acknowledged that statements which construct the author as nervous, distracted, disorganized and at least semi-alcoholic hook into a broader discourse of the author as tormented genius. Though Chuck's publisher describing him as 'very private...like Salinger' (4x18, 'The Monster at the End of this Book') is obviously played for laughs, humour does not negate this hook. Where Chuck is constructed as bathetic, fans were initially constructed as excessive. Becky is primarily constructed through excess: excess love, excess commitment, and excess deviant sexuality. These statements hook into of the oldest and most conservative constructions of pathological fandom (Jenson 1992; Jenkins 1992). Johnson names this practices 'fan-tagonism': a form of discipline by discursive containment, in which the text displays the fan to herself in controlling forms (2007). Fan-tagonism supposedly de-legitimizes certain kinds of fandom—notably the excessive and feminine—by exposing, exaggerating and shaming (pp. 295–299), but the construction of Becky particularly is complex, somewhere between celebration and censure, and moreover, probably renders the production of *Supernatural* fic absolutely legal until further notice (McCardle 2003, pp. 449–250). Episode 10x05, 'Fan Fiction', consolidated this statement. Here, in *Supernatural's* 200th episode, a girls' school is putting on a musical based on the canon. Whilst writer/director Marie shares some properties with Becky: she is also a slightly obsessive fan, much invested in the homoerotic 'subtext', as she puts it, she is also a capable creator and showrunner who turns out to be a valuable hunting ally. Though we will go on to discuss

this episode, at the time of this research, fandom had not yet had time to re-appropriate Marie into its discourse. What it does with her will make a fascinating topic for future research into the legitimization paradox, but each discursive study must address a time period, after all, and fandom has made highly transformative use of Becky that deserves focus here. Indeed, it might be argued that the reconstruction of Becky, in addition to other fan responses to her, influenced the more progressive portrayal of fandom in the 200th episode. This would be an example of discursive transformation at the level of statement altering the broader media archive.

Re-appropriations of Becky in fic alter the construction with new statements. Discourse incites as well as represses, and thus, as noted, I prefer the term textual provocation. The construction of Becky in *Supernatural* is quite clearly double edged, provocative in the sense of baiting, and provocative of the production of more text, which then alters the formation. The danger of fans is first established in the text when Sam and Dean confront Chuck: taking them for role-players, he claims to appreciate their enthusiasm, but advises, 'for your own good, I strongly suggest you get a life' (4x18). 'Get a life' is of course the original insult to fandom, provocation in the first sense, made famous by William Shatner's *Saturday Night Live* sketch (Jenkins 1995, p. 1). When his protagonists forcefully enter his house, Chuck wails, 'Is this some kind of *Misery* thing? Ah, it is, isn't it? It's a *Misery* thing!', referencing the novel many King fans took as an insult (Palko 2009, pp. 119, 4n).

In 5x01, 'Sympathy for the Devil', Chuck Shurley contacts Becky Rosen via Skype, requesting that she 'get a message to Sam and Dean.' The author is thus constructed as needing the fan (cf. Zubernis and Larsen p. 164). Becky responds with initial scepticism giving way to hyperventilating excitement, before finding Sam and Dean and sexually harassing Sam. She later organizes the *Supernatural* convention (5x09, 'The Real Ghostbusters'), where she and Chuck fall in love with each other, visually sealing the dyad as they stand together at the end. However, this positive if unbalanced fan/author binary was separated by new statements in 7x08, 'Season Seven, Time for a Wedding!', still provocative in the first sense. Here, Becky admits that Chuck dumped her, probably because he was 'intimidated by [her] vibrant sexuality.' Fan excess can overstep boundaries and harm relationships. Indeed, that is rather the theme of the episode, wherein Becky briefly kidnaps Sam with the aid of a love potion before realizing the error of her ways and assisting the Winchesters in a hunt. Most serious objections to the construction of Becky concern the kidnapping, with fans finding her funny and charming up to a point but considering that episode to cross a line of pathologization. 'Becky was awesome and now she's just ruined,'

objects *rossettaslair* (2011), whilst blogger *Lady Geek Girl* also states that it 'ruined' the character for her (2012). *Hells_half_acre* argues that 'Becky worked as an inside-joke about the fans before, because she was confident, crazy, but, most importantly, completely unashamed,' but this episode 'undermine[d] the character' (2012). Separated from Chuck, and in the meta-textual absence of Eric Kripke, Becky devolves. Booth would call her a 'hyperfan': a construction of fandom that, drawing on Baudrillard's conception of hyperreality, makes no real reference to objectively-existing fans but serves to discipline contemporary fandom into [economically] usable fan audiences (2015, p. 82JH).

Fig. 12: Becky (Emily Perkins) and Chuck (Rob Benedict). Copyright and source: CW.



Once convinced that the narrative of his books is real, Chuck concludes, 'Well, there's only one explanation. Obviously I'm a god' (4x18). Again this is played for humour: Chuck is still in his bathrobe, and has just been thoroughly petrified by his imposing protagonists. Sam returns, 'You're not a god,' but Chuck insists: 'How else do you explain it? I write things and then they come to life. Yeah, no, I'm definitely a god. A cruel, cruel, capricious god.'

Later, it is established that Chuck is a prophet, tasked with writing 'The Winchester Gospels'. Even granted Chuck's less-than-impressive character, this could be perceived as an audacious meta-textual positioning on Kripke's part, as a 'conduit of the inspired word' (Castiel, 4x18). Yet, criticism of this is pre-empted. Chuck admits that though he had a vision revealing this role,

he did not write this into the books because ‘it was too preposterous. Not to mention arrogant. I mean, writing yourself into the story is one thing, but as a prophet? That’s like M. Night-level douchiness.’ The Chuck/Kripke division is thin here, the implication being that though Kripke is loath to be as arrogant as director M. Night Shyalaman, with his penchant for ‘auteurist cameo’ (Hills 2010b, p. 110), the trope must in this case be excused, for he is, despite himself, a visionary. He is not constructed here as an originating author, but ‘a passive subject who brings to the role whatever the Creator dictates’ (Garcia 2011, p. 156). These statements do not necessarily reduce the cultural capital associated with the role: canonical authors from Homer to Milton depicted themselves as the conduit of a muse (hence ‘prophet’ overlaps with the broader discourse in figure 11). It does, however, inflect the meaning of a diner logo displayed earlier in the episode, which reads, ‘Kripke’s Hollow’. Cleverly upholding his textual proxy in his place, the author performatively kills himself, empties himself out, whilst gesturing to his text as truth.

Gestures such as this, culminating in his staged ‘death’ in Season 6, construct Kripke as creatively open-handed. Paratextually, he performs a great deal of fannish allegiance and affection. He claims to ‘love our fans to death’, ‘love how passionate they are’ (Ausiello 2007); ‘like *Supernatural*. tv’ and ‘pop around the various LiveJournal stuff’ (Zubernis and Larsen, p. 178). He ‘love(s)’ and ‘welcome(s)’ fanfiction, including slash (p. 214). He stresses his receptivity to fan opinion, and willingness to moderate the text in anything ‘apart from the main storyline’ (p. 180). There is then, a limit—he retains ultimate control over the story, but claims subplots are ‘completely negotiable’ (p. 180). Perhaps Kripke’s performance of all-embracing permissiveness is enabled through the use of his other, textual half to delegitimize—though not ban—unruly practice. Not only does Chuck fear that his fans are insane, but in a deleted scene to 5x09, available as a DVD extra, Chuck answers implied questions from his fandom. Shaking his head, he states, ‘Uhhh no...I can’t read your LiveJournal short story. No, I get it. Sam and Dean really *love* each other. I just don’t need to see that.’ Hills calls this kind of paratext ‘fanagement’. Directed not at the casual viewer but the active fan, ‘expectations and dissatisfactions are problematically engaged with, and disciplined and contained, at the level of niche paratexts rather than in the TV show’ (2012b, p. 409). Again, I prefer the term textual provocation. The paratext is provocative in the sense of deliberately aggravating, because it suggests there is something wrong with a popular fan practice. On the other hand, by acknowledgement and tacit affirmation that Chuck/Kripke has no intention of attempting to ban incest fic, it provokes further fan production.

This leads us to the first governing statement: that the (real) author's text is canonical truth. Chuck is not a good writer. His first extended scene shows him reading aloud as he types at his computer, and the text is over-written and melodramatic. Tautology is used for comic effect. But as he types, 'with determination, Dean pushed the doorbell with forceful...determination' (4x18), before throwing his manuscript down in disgust, the camera cuts to the character Dean doing just that. According to Garcia, this creates 'a disturbing impression of a work in progress as it reveals its structures and mechanisms' (p. 156). I disagree. The objective camera angle is utilized for the Chuck/Winchesters/Chuck sequence, which as Dancyger notes, 'provide(s) information about what is going on without choosing a distinct point of view' (2006, p. 90). Chuck may be a bad writer, but what he writes, during his time in the diegesis, is constructed as objectively true.

More statements consolidate the construction in 5x22, 'Swan Song'. As conceived by Kripke, this would have been the final episode of the show, and framed *Supernatural* as a classical five-act tragedy ending in the death and/or devastation of its protagonists. This kind of conclusion hooks into the cultural capital of tragic drama rather as Lopes recognized comic books 'emulat[ing] the conventions of literary works' in a bid for cultural capital (2007, p. 132; see also McCabe and Akass 2009, pp. 89–90). Some fans consider this the real, author-ized end of the series, with everything that happens afterwards a kind of 'visual fanfic' (kongjinying 2012). 'Swan Song' is narrated by Chuck. At the opening, he provides the following voice-over:

On April 21, 1967, the 100 millionth GM vehicle rolled off the line at the plant in Janesville—a blue two-door Caprice.

There was a big ceremony, speeches. The lieutenant governor even showed up. Three days later, another car rolled off that same line. No one gave two craps about her. But they should have, because this 1967 Chevrolet Impala would turn out to be the most important car—no, the most important object—in pretty much the whole universe.

He goes on to describe the first owner of the car, which has been iconic throughout the series, until it comes to the Winchester family, adding 'I guess that's where this story begins. And here's where it ends' (5x22).

The camera cuts between Chuck, typing at his computer, and images of 1960s-quality film affirming the veracity of his statements. They are again objective shots, and the flashbacks are muted, Chuck's voice and the clicking of his keyboard carrying over them in a split-edit that constructs his writing as an accurate record of history. Chuck displays emotional

knowledge and insight into the characters that was lacking in his earlier comic characterization, describing details of Sam and Dean's daily existence that the viewer is privy to for the first time. His narration also concludes the episode, as he ruminates over a series of emotionally-charged flashbacks that whilst it's 'hard to say' what 'it all adds up to,' he believes his protagonists 'did alright':

Up against good, evil, angels, devils, destiny, and God himself, they made their own choice. They chose family. And, well... isn't that kinda the whole point? (5x22).

The characters are intermittently muted, and the extra-diegetic music accords with the tone of Chuck's statements, constructing the Winchesters and friends for the first time as characters in his narrative rather than independent individuals whose lives we witness through suspension of disbelief. An authorized interpretation is thus placed, within the text, on the narrative, and the boundary between Chuck and Kripke is thin, especially as he laments the difficulty of endings and impossibility of pleasing all the fans. It would be just as logical to conclude that the moral is, in the Greek tradition, that we should struggle to do the right thing simply because it is right, though we will suffer and be punished anyway. Chuck types 'the end' under his manuscript, and admits, 'No doubt - endings are hard. But then again... nothing ever really ends, does it?' and, with a wink to the camera, disappears. On one level, this could be read as the Author-God writing himself *out* of the text, to continue without him; but it also imbues what Chuck/Kripke *has* written with the aura of magic and omnipotence, a statement which is never contradicted in *Supernatural* itself. Chuck's actor Rob Benedict has stated para-textually that cast and crew referred to his character as 'God', but the tone was joking and ambiguous (Benedict 2011). It seems that Chuck's exact status is deliberately and provocatively left open, though deification is a strong possibility.

Meanwhile, the fan's text, though permissible, is constructed as secondary and derivative. As Cherry notes, our introduction to Becky parallels our earlier introduction to Chuck (2011, p. 212): she is alone at her computer, writing about Sam and Dean, reading aloud and correcting herself as she goes. She, however, is writing bad slash: 'And then Sam touched—no—caressed Dean's clavicle. 'This is wrong,' said Dean. 'Then I don't want to be right,' replied Sam, in a husky voice' (5x01). Becky's fic employs the conventions of small-r romance, which SPN and its fans

often denigrate and Other with implicit or explicit reference to *Twilight* (cf. Bode 2010; Pinkowitz 2011). Though this is Authorized in the sense that Kripke literally wrote it, there is no visual parallel to confirm the truth of her words. Indeed, Sam and Dean have already discovered their slash fans (4x18), and declared their texts 'sick' (on grounds of incest, not homosexuality).

Further fan production is constructed in 10x05. When Sam and Dean investigate a disappearance at a girls' school, Dean is duly horrified to find rehearsals for the musical *Supernatural* well underway. 'There's no *singing* in *Supernatural*,' he informs the director, to which her stage manager friend replies, 'Well, this is Marie's interpretation...' of which Dean is scornful. By the end of the episode, however, he has changed his tune. When he informs Marie of the canonical events that have taken place since the departure of Eric Kripke and disappearance of Chuck:

Dean: Alright, Shakespeare! You know that I can actually tell you what really happened with the-the Sam and Dean? A friend of mine hooked me up with the, uh, unpublished unpublished books. So, Sam came back from Hell. But without a soul. Then, Cas' brought in a bunch of leviathans from Purgatory. They lost Bobby. And then, Cas' and Dean got stuck in Purgatory, Sam hit a dog. They met a prophet named Kevin, they lost him too. Then Sam endured a series of trials, in an attempt to close the gates of Hell. Which nearly cost him his life. Then Dean? Dean became a demon. Knight of Hell, actually (10x05).

She bursts out laughing, and responds:

Marie : That is some of the worst fan fiction that I've ever heard! I mean, seriously, I don't know where your friend found this garbage! I am not saying that ours is masterpiece, or anything, but geez! (10x05).

Marie's 'version' apparently includes robots, tentacles, and Dean/Castiel slash, tropes that commonly appear in fic and evidence of the showrunners' continued attention to the nuances of fandom. Contrary to Booth's argument (2015, pp. 75–76), then, it cannot be said that Marie represents a good, rational model of fandom that serves to emphasize the opposing bad fandom of Becky, but rather that they exist on a continuum, and the construction of the writing fangirl has moderated since the fifth season. Bear in mind, though, that the events of 10x05 took place on screen unsanctioned by the authority of the ultimate author. The last text Marie has access to is

'Swan Song'. These statements go some way towards levelling the different 'versions' of what happens *after Kripke*, as Dean ultimately concedes: 'I have my version, and you have yours,' and tells her to keep writing, with as much homosexual/incestuous subtext as she pleases. Indeed, it is her belief in her interpretation, regardless of what Dean thinks, that summons the monster of the week so it can be killed. Marie's interpretation is ratified for now, in the post-author era, but does not impact the authority and status of the initial five season arc. Then finally, in a surprise twist and literal fulfilment of the legitimization paradox, Chuck is revealed in the episode coda. As Marie and her friend observe the emptying theatre after closing night, they notice a mysterious figure sat alone at the back.

Maeve: The ticket you left for the publisher? Someone claimed it! [...]
Go, fangirl!

(Marie runs up the steps)

Marie: [breathless with excitement, to a figure off camera] Hum... Hi! Thank you... so much for coming! Uh... I know the second act is a little bit wanky, and the first act has some issues, but.... What did you think?

(The camera reveals Chuck.)

Chuck: [smiling kindly] Not bad.

(Fade out)

Marie is 'fangirl', once more: overwhelmed, eager and needing the approval of the Author God. The camera lingers on Chuck's face as the episode closes, his beneficent smile granting affection and permission to the creative productions of the his fangirls.

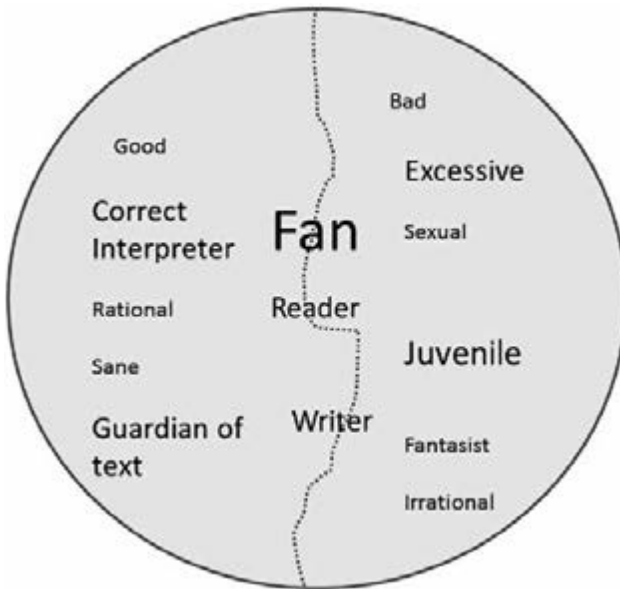
I will argue that fandom reconstructs the discursive formations of fandom and authorship separately, as follows:

Notice that the canonical dyad of author and fan is gone, and with it, the primary/secondary binary. The author's relationship with truth is brought into question, for he is constructed as a participant and collaborator rather than originating God. On the other hand, many of the statements constructing the fan pathologically in canon have not been removed, but simply been placed onto the other side of a binary: that of the good fan/bad fan (cf. Stanfill 2013; Booth 2015, pp. 79–100). Arguably, rather than redeeming the figure of the fangirl, this divide has now simply been canonized in the division between Becky and Marie. This divide, however, which in itself is fragmented and uneven, each half mixing into the other rather than statements that specifically compromise other statements.

Fig. 13: Fandom's reconstruction of authorship.



Fig. 14: Fandom's reconstruction of the writing fan.



Fandom's Reconstruction of Authorship and Fandom

Pursuing the flow chart given in the methodology (p. 41), I found 704 works and 32,025 reviews to code. At the time of writing, fandom has not made any significant re-uptake and transformation of Marie, so our focus with regard to the ongoing interchange between fandom and canon is the transformation of Becky and Chuck. Once again, I moved outwards from particular statements to find patterns and regularities, then finally the conditions of their possibility (Foucault 1981, p. 67). As 87 of these fics were on Dreamwidth (DW), it receives its own column in the table. LiveJournal was the most popular hosting site here, probably due to the fact that *SPN* is the oldest fandom studied and the height of its popularity coincided with that of LJ.

Table 3: Table of fic distribution for *SPN*.

Site:	Ff.net	LJ	DW	A03	Other	Overall
Number of fics:	217	337	87	492	33	704
Highest number of comments on a fic	458	2741	822	130	163	2791
Lowest number of comments on a fic	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average number of comments on a fic (mean)	22.4	63.9	32.8	5.1	12.2	45.4
Average number of comments on a fic (median)	5	19	6	2	2.5	8

Again, many fics appeared in more than one place, hence the sum of the top row is 1166. A miniscule percentage of the reviews were entirely negative (nine in total, or 0.03%). This suggests a strongly supportive websphere where harsh criticism is unwelcome.

Following the methodological flowchart meant that I had to code my own fic. In doing so, I discovered that I have largely contributed to consolidating the discourse established by the text itself. Thus, one outcome of constructing a rigorous methodology was forcing me to engage in what Bourdieu and Wacquant called 'reflexive' practice: removing myself from the 'know-how', or learned practice (1992, p. 228) of writing fanfic, in order that this research is able to investigate a social world that my writing is the product of and contributes to. It is not some special insight or capacity that enables me to map these discursive formations, but the construction of a systematic method enabled by my academic position. If social behaviour is, as Giddens has it, an

essentially reflexive practice (1984, especially pp. 1–9), this explains how the same 'me', whilst caught up in and reflexive of the culture of writing *within* this discourse, produced statements that, through the tool of my methodological framework, I later fitted into the specific discursive categories established. The step of 'locat[ing] [one] self in the picture' (Fook 1999, p. 11) that research produces is missing from Zubernis and Larsen's investigation. The lack of a methodology that would reflect on their own actions and positions as well as demonstrate how the evidence for their chapters is selected means that their account sometimes slips into the anecdotal. It is not enough to state that one is both a fan and an academic: the implications for what is then presented must be explored. As a fan, I contributed statements that shored up a discursive formation through learned practice; later, my position as an academic and the method I constructed from academic sources then allowed me to recognize it. Placing my own text in the discursive formation is an act of 'assembl[ment] using hindsight' (Ellis *et al.* 2011, p. 2), enabled by my position in an academic network, a 'culture of research production' (May and Perry 2011, p. 176) as opposed to a fannish culture of fic production.

In an illustration of the fact that discursive formations can solidify by internal mechanisms unconnected to the specific construct under discussion, most of the fics of high impact were so for reasons unrelated to Chuck and Becky. Typically, they were: long; of high literary capital; written by big name fans; set in the Endverse³ and featured the pairing Dean/Castiel. Thus, statements constructing the author and the fan set in this context gain the most weight. The discursive formation 'The Author and the Fan' was quite definitively transformed by fic statements, though the primacy of the 'real' text was still respected in the majority of cases (cf. Stanfill forthcoming). This suggests that though fans may alter the construction within the spaces and boundaries of fandom, they may retain a sense of fandom's limited ability to alter hegemonic discourse in the wider media archive. Former PR worker David Gardner writes that media producers often 'let fans (and some popular academics) believe they have more of a voice than they do' (2012, p. 51), and yet, the airing of 10x05 suggests in retrospect that fannish impact may actually have been underestimated here, demonstrating the explicit transformative capacity of fanfic on the broader cultural sphere.

3 A dystopian future world revealed canonically to Dean by the angel Zachariah, in an attempt to manipulate him into following the angels' plan. The name derives from the episode title, 'The End' (5x04, 'The End'). In this world, Sam is unavailable as a partner for Dean, having given himself to Lucifer as a vessel, and Castiel is no longer an angel, but a drug-addled faux-spiritual guru outcast from heaven.

Due to fandom's tendency to treat Chuck and Becky more separately than canon does, the remainder of this chapter is divided into two halves. The first concerns the author and his text; the second, the fan and hers. There is more fic constructing the author without the fan than vice versa. This is partly due to the fact that Chuck was introduced before Becky in canon, so fanfic about Chuck was produced for a time before the dyad was obvious, but it nonetheless helps consolidate the primary/secondary binary.

The Author and His Text

In some fanfic, the author Chuck is literally God. *Supernatural* does not explicitly state this, so these statements definitely consolidate the construction of the Author-God. They are most popular on Ff.net, rendering this part of the websphere less critical and more reverential towards the text. The writer will often assume God's point of view with an apology like, 'this fangirl owns nothing and would like to humbly apologize to the Big Man upstairs for this blasphemy' (PwnedByPineapple, 2012). Paradoxically, the fic-writer *is* assuming the right to speak from God's perspective. As PwnedByPineapple continues, 'what's the point of believing if you can't have some fun with religion, eh?' Chuck—the male Author-God—is the *tool needed* for the fic writer to assume this voice. Sometimes this is played 'straight', and God directs the narrative in traditional manner:

[The angel Castiel] looked up in surprise as he felt another hand on his head and was even more startled to find Chuck smiling down at him. "Chuck?" Cas asked in wonder. "Cas you are on your way to redeeming yourself... Now go save your family" (iamtryN 2011).

This fic received 12 reviews on Fanfiction.net. Though below average where average is taken as mean, the mean here was raised by a few fics with hundreds of reviews. The median number of Ff.net reviews is five, so these statements constructing the author as literal God are not insignificant. On the other hand, another fic depicts God-Chuck as rewriting the story to remove all misery with the following revelation:

Dean, I am God. I am not Chuck the prophet as you know me. I can change the course of time. Alter realities and change history. I have made it so that your mother never dies in a fire. You never become a hunter. Your daddy dies in his bed, an old man next to your mommy. Mommy dies an old lady surrounded by her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Sammy marries Jess and has babies. [...]As for all the evil in the world...I can make it so that it doesn't exist. I am God. I created all the beings on this Earth, be they good or bad (harakalı, 2011).

This fic is blanked, receiving no reviews on Fanfic.net or anywhere else. The statements fail to impact the formation, but this possibly has more to do with the un/acceptable construction of God, and/or the removal of the premises on which *Supernatural* is based, than the attribution of divinity to the author.

Other times, Chuck is constructed as God in a comic mode, and the fan uses him to correct the unpopular ending of Season 6. Here, the angel character Castiel suffers a psychotic break, releases the many-headed monster Leviathan from purgatory to take into himself, and declares himself the new God. Many fans were unimpressed, considering the twist unjustified, out of character, and a cheap trick on behalf of the un-Authorized post-Kripke writers. As msormanti66g6 put it,

This is the moment that completely ruined Supernatural for me. And then just when I thought Cas going dark side was the worst mistake the writers ever made, they kill off Bobby, Dean has become a cynical, hopeless drunk, and Sam is mental. Sera Gamble what are you doing to our show, do you care for these characters at all? (2012).

Chuck, as Kripke's proxy, is utilized by fan writers to correct matters. In Krissy7490's fittingly titled, *How Season 6 Should Have Ended, or How Season 7 Better Start*, Chuck descends in a 'bright flash of light' at the critical moment to command:

"Alright. This is how it's gonna work. We're going back a year. Castiel, when you were thinking about talking to Dean while he was raking the leaves, you're gonna talk to him. I'll bring back Sam, soul way more intact than anyone else could. And, Bobby. Well, you just keep being kick ass, alright?" And that's what happened. Because this writer made it so (2011).

The tone is flippant and comic, and as with the *GoT* fandom, reviewers acknowledge that this fic is not the 'real' text, much as they might wish it:

WHY DIDN'T THIS HAPPEN! (Sheridan Holmes 2011).

Oh...if only (Frannie-pants 2011).

I AM BOICOTING THE LAST EPISODE AND MAKING THIS STORY
CANNON IN MY OWN BRAIN.:D (LastBishop 2011).

Canon in one's 'own brain', accompanied by a manic smiley face, is not quite legitimate canon. Such statements consolidate the paradox established with Becky's canonical licence to borrow Chuck's characters: that the fan, a 'writer', has power, but that power is legitimated and sourced from the Author-God, and rejects his female successor. The coda of 10x05 would consolidate this, and in fanfic, the fan's authorial position is necessarily ironized by the context in which she writes in.

Herzog has demonstrated how authors' notes on fanfic register a tension between the individual fan's authority over the text and the communal authorship model demonstrated in fan practice. She shows that 'varying fannish interpretations provide a more nuanced perspective' than simple fruition of Barthes predictions (2012, ch. 2.5). She goes on to argue that 'attempt[ing] to actively direct the story's audience into a certain, premeditated reader position[, some fans may] curtail the very sort of interpretive and agentive practice they themselves are engaged in while writing fanfiction' (ch. 2.7). I found that conversely, where paratextual author's notes existed in this formation, they tended to be brief thanks to other fans whose input helped shaped the fics. This would indicate a communal concept of authorship; but strong authorial positioning could be found in the fics themselves. This strong positioning, I argue, is enabled through the legitimation paradox which allows fanfic to present itself as authentic text. The legitimation paradox is simultaneously deconstructive of the Author-God's role and consolidating of it. This accords with Stein and Busse's observation that though fanfic is a recombination art, in practice it often displays adherence to older models of cultural author/ity (2009, p. 205). The comedic Chuck-as-God fics, where he descends to repair Season 6 and 'the random stuff we've been getting from Gamble' (angel_gospel 2011), gesture toward the hypothetical 'true text', informed by the author-function, which this fic is approaching: the true text would be faithful to the ordered, coherent vision of the originator, not the haphazard attempts of his stand-in. Romirola's review articulates, 'love this, and I totally agree. Castiel would never, ever do that. It was stupid. I feel used, as if the show only exists to keep up ratings. RIP original supernatural' (2011).

Chuck-as-God is less common off Ff.net. A03 contains a vast number of AUs, most of which depict him as a geek and struggling writer, consolidating the other side of the geek/God formation. On LiveJournal, canon tends to be

more popular than AU, and Chuck is typically depicted as a man, prophet and mouthpiece 'in all his lovable, neurotic glory' (thevinegarworks 2009). The fanboy-auteur strategy succeeds here, as the textual guidance to love and pity Chuck, to take him as our friend, is wholeheartedly followed. The phrase 'poor Chuck' occurred 93 times in reviews, rendering the construction very solid. I have written it myself, because those were the feelings the fic called up in me, and because I had unconsciously learned that the response was appropriate. Later, I understood these statements as part of the pattern consolidating the fanboy construction of the author. It is this depiction of Chuck that tends to turn up in the most popular fics, and thus these statements make the most impact. In tracy_loo_who's legendary Endverse epic, *And I Will Walk on Water* (2009), which has 2741 LJ comments and 2791 total, Chuck turns up at the end to greet the conquering heroes with 'a huge banner hanging from the low ceiling that read, in large, colorful lettering, *Happy End of the End of the World!*' to which he has 'added some sparkles.' He still drinks, has visions, and is guarded/trapped by the angels, though permitted a 'pet hedgehog' named Frodo. But other LiveJournal texts construct him, if rarely as a serious God, certainly with more weight and cultural capital.

'Death of the Author' (Barthes 1977) may have been an earnest attempt to deconstruct the cultural capital attached to the figure, but if the author is constructed in the process of dying, as writing enacts 'the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin' (p. 142), this capital is rather restored. Proxydialogue's *The Winchester Revision* (2011a) is quite significant, with a total of 105 comments between LiveJournal and Ao3, a circulating recommendation on Tumblr, four recommendations on LiveJournal; one on Dreamwidth and one on an external site. This fic is the story of a desperate re-write, in which 'a recently de-deified Chuck, dying in Italy, decides to revise the story of Sam and Dean and Cas to give it the fairytale ending it deserves.' The fan utilizes the voice of the author to legitimate her desires, composing a story in which the characters

fuck the system and live happily ever fucking after and die of natural causes like weak immune systems and old age and too much happiness. In Chuck's version of the story, Dean and Cas and Sam live the lives a fangirl would have written for them.

Fuckin-A right they do.

He centers the cursor and types:

The Winchester Revision

It's a God-damned fairytale (proxydialogue 2011a).

Chuck opens his story with the ironic and bitter declaration, 'here 'bigyneth' the total and utter fucking tragedy of an older brother.' In a further example of the legitimation paradox, proxydialogue uses Chuck to rewrite the authorized interpretation placed on 'Swan Song' by Chuck in canon. Canon is restructured not as a trial by fire that makes heroes of the protagonists, but the cosmically unfair and undeserved ruination of a small set of characters defined by their family bonds. On the other hand, though utilizing the author-character and the discourse of authorship goes a long way to legitimate the plot as authentic, Chuck here is no longer a prophet. This is only a 'version' of the story. For God had been using him as a vessel, and has now departed. Chuck finds that 'the side effects of divine possession are a bitch' what with 'his body falling apart from the inside,' and the 'sudden onset of acute existential uncertainty.' In between sparsely-written episodes of physical deterioration, Chuck continues to write the story 'how it would have been done if God wasn't such a mean motherfucker,' and the reader has access to his text. He finds himself unable to create the fairytale he intended, learning as he goes that 'The moral is not: *They lived happily ever after*; but just: *They lived*,' which is more justice than the conclusion of 'Swan Song' at least.

Defiant in the face of impending death, determined to write in spite of God, there is definite cultural capital attached to this construction of the author, held in tension with the story's ambiguity about if, when and where Chuck's rewrite has any effect on 'reality'/canon. The value of fiction as a form of writing is in question. Chuck's voice legitimates the fanfic, but constructing his writing as 'a fangirl would have written it' may delegitimize the text-inside-the-text, which he produces. Absent from Ff.net, polished and elegantly phrased, these statements give the impression of a writer speaking to writers, playing upon our self-perception and vacillation between faith in fiction's power and despair of its futility. Though half of the story is devoted to the text Chuck writes, the alternate universe for his protagonists/friends, the dying author is very much the hero of the story. Proxydialogue comments, 'I guess of all the characters in the canon I find Chuck the easiest to write and the easiest to extrapolate with. And I always felt that, if he were himself, human, and used as a tool, he would be rebellious against his role' (2011b). Here then is another way in which the author Chuck legitimates the fan as writer: by providing a model of self-conception. It also adds potential statements like 'hero' or 'protagonist' to the discursive formation 'author', existing independently of the fan.

However, these are not governing statements, as a limit case demonstrates. *I'll Take My Chances Here and Now* by HappyFunBallXD explicitly

undercuts the elevation of the author. It is a fairytale AU, wherein the *Supernatural* protagonists find themselves in a mysterious land. Chuck, in a role approximating the Wizard of Oz, is a psychic who lives in a castle, and is rumoured to be able to help Sam and Dean get home. Chuck first appears as a dragon, accompanied by smoke and light. But when Dean loses his temper with the dragon and hits it, his fist goes

straight through, until he was shoulder- deep in Chuck's side [...] Instead of blood and guts that should be pouring out of a wound that size, there was nothing. [...] The younger hunter stepped in closer, pushing back a scale to see the hole more clearly. It was hollow. Mostly. There were a few gears inside, turning the head and joints, but for the most part, it was just scales over a frame. It wasn't real (HappyFunBallXD, 2012).

These statements inflect the meaning of the 'Kripke's Hollow' pun in the source text. The construction of the author is 'lights and smoke and all that [...] more chemistry than magic.' In other words, it is showmanship, fakery, a para/textual spectacle without substance. What is needed to break the illusion is an act of violence—here physical, but a para/textual parallel might be the Tumblr blog titled, 'Fuck the canon, old man' (<http://crowleyshouseparty.tumblr.com/>), which collects subversive fic recs and commentary.

That said, Chuck—whose true form is as usual, a small scruffy man in a bathrobe—does have prophetic insight, and utilizes the dragon illusion in the hope of making people listen to him. He is enabled by Becky, who lives at the castle with him: an interesting reversal of the source text's dyad. He needs *her* legitimation, whilst she just 'thought he was cute, trying to be all authoritative.' Before meeting Chuck, Sam dreams about him, and since he has no mental reference point, Chuck is 'represented by a floppy rag doll, which Becky held up on a silver platter.' This fic reverses the construction of the fan as dependent on the author for authority—here, the illusion 'author' is dependent on the fan for construction, just as Foucault describes an author-function as dependent on the institutions that maintain the fiction of the author, and Mittell considers reception the vital constituent of a televisual author-function (2012, p. 36).

Despite its 90,000-word length and high literary capital, this story is less well received, with 36 total comments. The statements that maintain the author as legitimately special, then, whether as author (primarily LiveJournal/A03) or God (primarily Ff.net) can be contradicted, but still have more impact in the discursive formation. Chuck's authority legitimates the voice of the fan, just as Kripke's para/textual statements legitimize

fanfic. However, the possibility of writer as constructed by audience, with a critical slant, is opened by fanfic in a way excluded by the source text. Moreover, when the writer is explicitly constructed as writing like a 'fangirl', the relationship of his writing to truth is ambivalent. In these ways, though the legitimation paradox dominates, it can be subverted to an extent, constructing the author-function as dependent on audience critiques the primacy and originality of authorship.

It is fair to say that the governing statement that the author's text is canonical and true is largely consolidated in fanfic, though this is complicated by the fact that the fan writer assumes control of the in-text author, and thus *her* version of what Chuck writes becomes 'truth'. Some comedic fics explore this as a meta-textual realization, with the writer realising that the pen is mightier than the sword. In DarkLady's *Making a Prophet* (2009), Chuck happens upon the Bible verse Matt. 26:56, 'But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.' He takes this to mean that prophets are not merely witnesses and recorders, but that their writing influences events. As *lex_rhetoricae* comments on an Endverse fic, this is actually closer to the Biblical meaning of prophecy than the passive visionary construction:

So, Martin Buber has this essay in *On the Bible* about the difference between the 'prophetic' and the 'apocalyptic' modes of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic literature. And in the prophetic, the prophet has an actual chance of saving people through his message, while in the apocalyptic, it's a 'put your head between your knees and kiss your ass goodbye' kinda prophecy (*lex_rhetoricae* 2010).

In the comedic pieces, this tends to be taken literally. In *Making a Prophet*, Chuck saves the day by grabbing a computer and hastily typing:

Chuck 32:6 - **So verily it came to pass that Lucifer slipped on a banana peel [sic] and slid arse-first down to the depth of the fiery pit, and took Zachariah and all his snot-nosed angels with him. And there was peace upon the land, and rejoicing, and also fresh apple pie. And the Righteous Man and his brother and the good folk who hung with them ate of the pie and also mostly got laid (DarkLady 2009).

At other times, the appropriation of Chuck as prophet allows the fan to affirm her and other fans' desires. Quite often, the fan writes Chuck writing fanfiction, which comes true whether he intends it to or not. Again, Chuck

is the device by which the fan's writing is legitimated, but she controls what he writes. Maskedfangirl's very popular *Chuck Verse*—which sparked the creation of *Making a Prophet*—contains three main stories: *The Apocrypha of Chuck* (2009); *The Code of Chuck* (2010a); and *The Tribulations of Chuck* (2010b). The overarching plot is that Chuck travels, lives, and eventually undertakes the adventure to stop Lucifer with the heroes, despite knowing that were this the Council of Elrond, he would be 'background Elf #3. Or maybe the pack mule' (2009). He is a thorough and unrepentant geek, thinking in terms of Joss Whedon programmes and admitting he would 'rather write slash fiction than deal with real life.' When life gets hard, he retreats into his 'Happy Verse', an extended fanfic he is writing about his friends, wherein Sam and Dean hug, Dean and Cas get together and the apocalypse is averted. Again, he is constructed as writing like a stereotypical fangirl. However, over time, reality and the Happy Verse begin to overlap, until the main points of Chuck's fantasy become reality.

Maskedfangirl uses a Chuck avatar as her icon, and in the many celebratory comments (670 total for the trilogy), a now-deleted comment asked, 'Like, holy shit, Ben Edlund, is that you!?!?!?' Ben Edlund is the *Supernatural* writer most known for comedy and meta-textual cleverness. Maskedfangirl is delighted with the attribution, claiming that made her week. Although Chuck's writing, in the hands of the fan, becomes the tool by which the fan can alter the 'truth' of the text, the highest legitimation still comes by association with the male professional writers (cf. again 10x05). On the other hand, falcytan_dream compliments, 'I like to think that you had the true prophetic gift for the show, and the telly series we all know is just an elaborate fanfic off of this' (2011). This statement structures the fanfic as truth. Yet, notice the caveat, 'I like to think,' which recalls the kind of approving review claiming fics are 'personal canon' (oximore 2011); 'my official post season 5 canon' (ataratah 2010) or 'cannon in my own brain' (LastBishop 2011). 'Personal canon' is something of a contradiction in terms, suggesting that the transformative power of fic on discourse is real, but limited to individual psychological pleasure rather than influence on the text itself.

Two popular fics construct the author's word as truth and the entertainment industry as a threat to that. This accords with the author-function popularly attributed to cult TV showrunners in contrast to the mechanisms of industry. In *Thursday's Child* (strangenessandcharm 2009) and *Amen to That!* (Mardy Lass 2010), Chuck's novels are to be adapted by Hollywood and a television network respectively. *Amen to That!* is primarily a comedy, concerned with the exploits of Sam, Dean, Chuck, Cas and Becky as they

run around a television set attempting to prevent or dictate the production. Whilst Dean is worried about the further exploitation of his life, Castiel is concerned for the damage a TV show will do to the authenticity of the prophet's word. This fic makes above-average impact, with a total of 64 reviews. Conversely, Chuck's work is not a major plot point of *Thursday's Child*, but this is one of the most famous fics in the formation, one of those Dean/Castiel Endverse epics with several hundreds of reviews. It would easily have broken the thousand-mark, perhaps even overtaken *And I Will Walk On Water*, but it has been deleted from its original home on LiveJournal and resides only on Dreamwidth, with an exceptional 822 reviews there. There is even a fan-created trailer *for* the fic, available on YouTube (Saphiamur 2013), which itself has over 52,000 views. Set post-apocalypse, the Winchester Gospels have been recognized as religious texts, and the government invests in their conversion into blockbusters as a public morale booster. The distortion of truth by Hollywood provides a great deal of the comic subplot, including the casting of Lindsay Lohan as Castiel before she is fired for unreliability.

In the end, it is up to Chuck to insist on the truth of his text against industry economics, which here entails legitimating the pairing Dean/Castiel when Castiel is played by a male actor. Dean reports that 'Chuck went to the studio and told them about our big gay love and demanded they put it in the next movie. They told him no, but apparently he threw a fit. Dean explains that 'a gay relationship [...] won't play well for some audiences' of what are essentially religious texts in the fic, and Castiel insists, 'it's not anything to do with it 'playing well'. It's just how it is.' This is why Chuck 'played hardball' and 'told them they could find another prophet unless they made the films true to life.' The true text then, the author's text, would legitimate Dean/Cas: it is only the present climate of homophobia that censors it. Where Chuck is mentioned in the entirely positive comments, it is to affection for his character or approval for his guardianship of the true and authorial text which endorses the popular pairing: 'I adore Chuck for putting his foot down about the Big Gay Love™ between Dean & Cas' (sycophantastic 2009). The fact that these statements become some of the most influential and impactful in the discourse via context rather than content is illustrated by a contrast. Amorremanet's snippet fic, *It's Not That Kind of Show* (2012), is focused entirely on this theme. In this fic, Dean is really a girl named Deanna, and Becky is her girlfriend. They go to the cinema to see the adaptation of Chuck's word, and Deanna endures a 'painfully inaccurate' account of her life portrayed by 'some weird white dude.' They resolve to 'post subversive fanfiction on Tumblr' and go home. Becky

explains that Chuck had to sell all the rights to his manuscript because he had no money for rent. The fic receives no comments. Seven people have pressed the 'kudos' button, so it is not completely unacknowledged, but the impact is hardly comparable to statements of Chuck's true word triumphing over industrial imperatives made in the popular fics. If it were better received, it might post a significant challenge to the legitimation paradox, eschewing the figure of the straight White male, and substituting a lesbian couple as the figures of revaluation.

On the other hand, there is a significant set of fics that deliberately undermine the construction of the author's text as the only legitimate truth, as compared with the comparatively small impact of *I'll Take My Chances Here and Now*, which debunked him as a figure. As noted above, *The Winchester Revision* constructs the truth-status of Chuck's writing ambivalently. *The Chuck Writes Story: An Unauthorized Fandom Biography* (lettered 2011) deals specifically with this theme. *Chuck Writes* is a series divided into six fics on LiveJournal/Dreamwidth/Ao3, which receives a total of 140 comments. Most fics dealing with the matter of text and truth are on these platforms, reflecting a longstanding division within many fandoms that view Ff.net as more juvenile and of lower quality than others archives mostly 'written by children and teenagers' (Lawrence 2007, 8.1; cf. Hadas 2009). The few that do appear on Ff.net tend to be in the light-hearted mode, including *Making a Prophet* and *Amen to That*. *The Chuck Writes Story* is both light-hearted and serious, its subject matter being the location of the 'real' *Supernatural*. Chuck writes a fanfic under a fake identity, posts it on LiveJournal, and receives just a single review. Thrown into an existentialist crisis, he begins to explore the world of fic, making increasingly desperate attempts to be noticed within his own fandom, including posting an unpublished *Supernatural* manuscript. Failing to realize the indispensability of the *name* to the author-function, as the descriptor that allows certain texts to be set apart and differentiated from others (Foucault 1991, pp. 105–107), he is driven to increasing distraction by this evidence fans could love the text and not the author:

if they liked Carver Edlund so much, why wouldn't they like his sock [pseudonym]? Because if they didn't . . . was it really the writing they loved, or was it the marketing, (the covers with their shirts ripped off, the models, the *hair*)—or was there actually some other *Supernatural*? Was there some amorphous, non-text, non-content driven *Supernatural*, a *zeitgeist!**Supernatural*, some *über Supernatural*, a *Supernatural* that was his *Supernatural* and yet his no longer—now part of the collective mind, now part of the cultural maelström, or other words with umlauts, some

Supernatural that belonged to the world and to the fans and no longer to the mind of the creator? A meta!SPN? Was it that *Supernatural* that they really loved—or was it Carver Edlund? (lettered 2011).

The series subtitle, ‘an unauthorized fandom biography’, implies that this is the work of fandom in action, the communal creation of a text without an Author-God, rather than one with an Author-God as a source of legitimation.

When it becomes known that the LJ user ‘chuck_writes’ is in fact Carver Edlund, the fictional fans engage in just such a debate. There is really no way to describe these statements other than to quote at length:

demian_dean, 2011-06-03 8:06 pm, UTC ([link](#)): We are all Chuck.

[...]

parks_the_car, 2011-06-03 8:12 pm, UTC ([link](#)): Do you remember the uber *Supernatural*? The one with umlauts.

spnfangirl, 2011-06-03 8:15 pm, UTC ([link](#)): I remember the über!*Supernatural*. The meta!SPN. It was another *Supernatural*.

bobby_sing_it, 2011-06-03 8:15 pm, UTC ([link](#)): But does she mean ... we were all writing the same thing.

glass_family, 2011-06-03 8:28 pm, UTC ([link](#)): How do we know what’s canon now?

long_seige, 2011-06-03 8:28 pm, UTC ([link](#)): How do we know what’s real?

demian_dean, 2011-06-03 8:29 pm, UTC ([link](#)): Same way you always know.

twop_barnes, 2011-06-03 8:29 pm, UTC ([link](#)): Create.

watsonian, 2011-06-03 8:30 pm, UTC ([link](#)): Do you think we’re all a part of something? (lettered 2011).

Notice the coding, which imitates how actual conversations appear on LJ, blurring the distinction between Chuck’s *Supernatural*, which these fictional fans discuss, and Kripke’s *Supernatural*, which is discussed in the same format on LiveJournal. Some of the fictional fans remain convinced that ‘books are canon. Fanfic isn’t. *Supernatural* is concrete, finite. The SPN in our heads isn’t,’ which raises the question of whether ‘chuck_writes’ or only Carver Edlund can produce canonical text. The debate recalls Foucault’s argument that the unity of the author-function could not merely be replaced with the unity of a ‘work’, for the concept ‘work’ has no pre-extant unity (1991, pp. 103–104). Writing on *Skins* fan production, Hunn asks,

What is the original and what is the copy? Is there really an authentic and authoritative *Skins* text, a *Skins* essence? Or, is it all really just skin

deep—a series of competing textual performances made more ontologically unstable by the overlap between official and fan productions that an embrace of participatory and collaborative practices inevitably engenders? (2012, p. 94).

These are exactly the questions enacted by the *Chuck Writes* saga, yet in the format of fanfic, and conducted through the social and technological codes of fandom rather than academia.

Thus *Chuck Writes*, with its sophisticated intertextually and irreverent humour, enacts a mode of 'good', rational fandom on behalf of its own author, inclusive of the enlightened reader and exclusive of 'bad' crazy fans, like Becky.

Becky appears in *Chuck Writes* to support the authority of the author with her canonical pseudonym, 'samlicker81':

Sorry all you haters...but CW is canon...the writer is canon...C.E. is canon... in the time of our writer...the Creator is God. I know it might be hard for some of you to recognize...some of you wish you were him...but you're not ...we're all in his hands (lettered 2011).

Once again the author is legitimated by the fangirl—but the definition of 'fan' is here reconstructed to include the whole range of responses. Not all fans are Becky, and not all fans accept the authority of the author. The most famous fic in the fictional fandom is a rewrite of Chuck's series, intensifying the emotion between the brothers and hinting at the possibility of a sexual relationship between them. This writer of this epic is known as 'lord_kripke', an epithet of Kripke's in real-world fandom. Possibly then, though it contributes statements which greatly destabilize the primary/secondary, author/fan binary and indeed the legitimation paradox, *Chuck Writes* re-instates the Author-God in the end through manipulation of the Chuck/Kripke divide. The *real* author may well be 'Lord Kripke', hiding in plain sight, he who has written the series as we know it. For Chuck's work in the fic is not our *Supernatural*, but a series of badly-written pulp novels. Our *Supernatural*—the real *Supernatural*?— is (Lord) Kripke's.

This statement is complicated by an iconographic coincidence. The abbreviation of 'chuck_writes' is CW. CW is the name of the network that *Supernatural* airs on, including now, in the post-Kripke era. This means that statements like 'CW is canon' or 'CW isn't canon. Just another fanfic' cut two ways: they could *either* refer to the text written by the author *or* to the productions of an industry in the post-author era, whose concerns are

economic. The text is held in negotiation between CW—with the referents of Chuck's fanfic, and the network; and the revered 'lord_kripke'—with the referents of a slash-inclined fan and Eric Kripke. Lettered claims not to have noticed this until she began typing up the fic, which illustrates again the profound impact happenstance has on discursive formations.

So statements upholding Chuck and/or Kripke as author, and his text as original and true, retain a strong influence in fandom's construct. But the appropriation of Chuck empowers fans to utilize some of that authority, even reversing the terms of the legitimation paradox by demonstrating that fans enable the author-function as much as the other way around. Moreover, fanfic contributes statements that question connections between the author and the 'real' text, notably *Chuck Writes*, whose graphical-lexical density and instability of referents complicates the attribution of truth to an author. Though not the strongest statements, constructions of Chuck as fanficcer and contributor to the 'meta-SPN' destabilize his relationship with truth, as well as his construction as God. His 'truth' also modifies the statements 'fanficcer' and 'collaborator', raising those attributions by legitimation. The author-function remains strong.

The Writing Fan

The (re)appropriation of Becky into fanfic is theoretically significant, recalling Fuery's recognition of a 'post-panopticism of new media in which we are so aware of being watched that part of our strategy of transgression is to incorporate the very acts of surveillance' (2009, p. 141): responding, in other words, to textual provocation. But the figure of the fan is still problematic, even reclaimed and re-constructed by the fans themselves, placing a question mark over Fuery's 'transgression'. I prefer to substitute 'negotiation'; for some fics make statements that construct the fan even more pathologically than 7x08, 'Time for a Wedding'. Hills (2002, pp. 61–64) theorized a good fan/bad fan imagined dichotomy in the self-construction of most fan cultures, and Stanfill found a similar discursive structure at work in her interviews with Xena fans (2013). Though her interviewees 'accepted negative portrayals of fans as valid,' they 'refused to take on that meaning for themselves, instead bracketing themselves out of it and shifting it off onto others' (2013, p. 117). As Stanfill comments,

This simultaneous acceptance and refusal of stereotypes suggests that being a fan is a subject position fraught with baggage from historical

and contemporary media representations, which troubles triumphalist renderings of a new media order centered on the fan (2013, p. 117).

Stanfill points out that research into other non-normative groups, including lesbians and Black women, has shown that members

will subdivide their group into (a) themselves and others like them, whom they classify as normal, and (b) a deviant subgroup they declare actually deserves the stigma or pathologization to which the entire group is subjected (Ault 1996; Collins 2000; Fanon 1994; Ferguson 2003), a process that Ault (1996, p. 314) terms 'split subjectivity' (2013, p. 121).

In other words, we fans are normal, because we are not like 'those' fans, the crazy ones that give us all a bad name; that behave, in the worst case scenario, like the Twihards. Zubernis and Larsen also document the tendency for fans to construct dualisms between good and bad fan practice (2012, pp. 30–31, 37–38, 145; cf. Hills 2002, esp. pp. 61–64, 101–103).

The discursive formation of fandom, as re-conceived by fans, clearly includes attributes deserving of stigmatization, to an even greater degree than the source text would posit. Adrenalineshots' *Bean Stalker* is well received, with 245 reviews, and constructs the non-canonical fan Alexa as entirely insane. Based on *Misery*, this is a story of a girl who, dissatisfied with Chuck's ending to the series, means to kidnap him and discovers by happenstance that his characters are real. Thus, she instead kidnaps Dean, her love object, and tortures him for her psychosexual gratification, drawing clear parallels with torture and the hurt/comfort genre of fanfic. Indeed, *Supernatural* itself offers plenty of opportunity for voyeuristic pleasure in the tortured male body. Adrenalineshots has Dean observe of the fan:

Her eyes were glittering like beetles in the back drop light, lustful of pain and misery. Was his torture that much of an entertainment for her? Was this why people liked Chuck's books, because they enjoyed reading about all the suffering that he and Sam had endured their whole lives? (adrenalineshots 2009a)

Reviewers are privy to the game. They use Alexa as a model of bad fanship to construct their personas *against*:

... She is our crazy mirror! (chiiyo86 2009).

The difference between some crazy thoughts and some sane ones is the way we act upon them *g*(adrenalineshots 2009b).

Marlowe78 rationalizes the investment in seeing our heroes hurt in terms of restoration:

for me, reading the fanfiction that bloodies our heroes is about fighting the odds, surviving even though that seems impossible, staying alive even though the world wants you to die—and stick together for better or worst [...] I don't get off reading about bloodied noses (or shoulders) but it is a fine line, I admit (2009).

'Crazy' is retained as a property of fannishness, but not *our* kind. Statements like this displace it onto a hypothetical bad other, an other who will not be legitimated but, on the contrary, further pathologized through the capital of the White male.

In related statements, Becky is redeemed in fic by being 'educated out' of some Bad (excessive) aspects of fandom and displaying some Good (rational) ones (cf. Hills 2002, p. 61). For instance, in sothereyougo's *We Are All Made as an Afterthought* (2009a), she apologizes to Sam for groping him and explains that she needs time to process that Chuck's books are real, rather than an extended use of Campbell's journey-metaphor for the development of the individual, and justifies her slash habit with the rationale that 'commercial porn is almost all crap.' Sothereyougo describes the fic as an attempt to 'show a little more of Becky that gave her back a bit of her dignity' (2009b), and the commenters appreciate it as such. Similarly, in M.D. Jensen's *Little Wet Tears on Your Baby's Shoulder* (2011), Becky learns from experience that having Sam cry in front of her is not pleasurable as she finds it in fic, and she wants him to feel better, not 'prolong it'. In Gatergirl79's *At His Side* (2012), she attempts to get over Sam and 'close[s] down her website, her forum groups, clear[s] her Twitter account and Facebook.' For learning to curb her excess, she is rewarded, and actually ends up in an adult relationship with him. So Becky is constructed as inhabiting a juvenile stage we must outgrow.

Sometimes Becky's lesson is harsh: in kasey8473's *Killing the Fandom* (2012), Becky meets Sam's pregnant wife and is at first horrified, but comes to understand that she is behaving badly and ought to apologize:

He'd looked happy before she'd interrupted them. Becky recalled that touch to the woman's—*Gwen's*—back. It had been gentle, caressing, and

loving. He seriously cared for the woman, like in a 'love for Jess' way, and Becky had pretty much spit on that.

Embarrassment for her own behavior welled up. Here she'd been trying to be mature and adult and she'd acted like an idiot teenager. Apparently, she hadn't managed to leave those days behind.

Later, she is briefly turned into a vampire, unable to control herself, and faces the prospect of execution by her heroes before she realises their lives are not so glamorous after all. The title refers to an exclamation by Becky—that Sam and Dean getting married and having children is 'killing the fandom'—but the statement also constructs Becky's experience as killing some of the fandom in her, the Bad part we must resist. Still, her gleeful excess is not quashed: she transfers her joy to the imminent arrival of the baby. Exuberance is not extinguished, but it does have to be contained, and the characters will not permit her to host her planned 'baby shower'.

Becky is also celebrated in fic, often in flippant style that flouts the good fan/bad fan construction. In *girl_wonder's How Becky Totally Saved the World Without Becoming a Mary Sue or: PLEASE R&R OR I'LL NEVER WRITE ANOTHER CHAPTER* (2009), the title is a playful employment of bad practice. 'Mary Sue' is a disparaging fan term for original characters that are or read like idealized self-insertion. The 'Mary Sue' character is an annoyingly perfect female inserted into the fictional universe. Through some contrived series of events, she typically manages to save the day and have the heroes fall in love with her. 'R&R' means 'read and review'. Threatening to withhold a continuation unless people review is a classic example of bad fandom, and an open invitation to mockery if done in earnest. Here it is compounded by Capslock, considered a breach of netiquette. Context inflects the statement parodically: the demand to 'R&R' is associated with Ff.net; but this piece appears on LiveJournal/Ao3, where 'we' older fans know how to read it (cf. Hadas 2009 on inter-fandom divisions between age/experience and youth/naivety). In between writing fanfiction and editing Chuck's new draft, Becky and her fan friend stop Lucifer by trapping him in a ring of holy fire. Becky considers that he 'is actually taller than Chuck had written him, and looks like all he wants is a hug.' She 'couldn't resist giving him some of the chocolate she was saving for the after-party' (2009). Hugs, chocolate, flippancy and humour are the properties structuring the fan here, and all are slanted positively. Chuck loves her, as he does in many fics, but that is not presented as a condition of her legitimation. *How Becky Totally Saved the World* is also high impact, with 227 comments. There are shorter examples with less impact on Ff.net, such as *Lucifer Meets Crazy*

Becky (DeanFan 2010). In this series, Becky encounters characters she did not meet in canon, including Castiel and Lucifer. She so annoys Lucifer that he returns to hell willingly to get away from her, resulting in reviews like, 'YAY! Becky saves the day!' (DjinnAtwood 2012). The construction is not likewise self-reflexive, but Becky is certainly more sympathetic here, so these statements open the possibility that 'we' have a little of the bad fan in us too, and are not ashamed of it.

Usually, though, Becky's redemption in fic is legitimated by Chuck. She is constructed as an apostle of the Winchester Gospels, whose task is to spread the message. In both trinityofone's *Writing (And Other Things that Are Hard)* (2009) and twoskeletons's *Restore From Saved Draft* (2010a), Castiel informs Becky of her role as an apostle. Twoskeletons admits that Becky-as-apostle is one of her favourite fan innovations, and the comments express much love for the character. Both these fics are high status, particularly considering they are short, not cross-posted, and mostly concern minor characters, gathering 97 and 231 comments respectively. In twoskeletons *Peanuts*, the metaphor is extended as Chuck reflects on Becky's evangelical role:

I think our side can really use someone like Becky [...] We can use someone who believes so hard and is so joyous in her faith, even if her equivalent of singing hymns is writing gay incest porn [...] There have been hundreds of religions that have died out for want of believers, but Becky? She mods nine Livejournal communities and five exchanges, and has a novel-length Wincest pirate AU WIP that she's writing the eleventh chapter of.

[...]

It's like that guy Matt said one time in some testament somewhere: "You are Becky, and on Livejournal I will build my Church, and flame wars will not prevail against it" (twoskeletons 2010b).

This fic is also high status with 82 comments, and the description of Becky has been copied and pasted in comments, solidifying the construction their repeatable materiality. Moreover, Chuck does not set himself up here as the origin and source of legitimation, but admires Becky because 'she has a sense of purpose and a lot of drive, and these things are hardwired into her instead of copy-pasted in by God's divine ineffability.' There is a God, but it isn't Chuck. It might, however, be Kripke, another example of how the Chuck-avatar allows Kripke to retain control over the text whilst avoiding 'M. Night-level douchiness' (4x18).

The fan is sometimes constructed as guardian and/or interpreter of the Author-God's truth, as opposed to the rampant fantasist of *Bean Stalker* or

Killing the Fandom. For instance, in scaramouche's *A Judicious Application of Free Will* (2011), Chuck has vanished, and Becky owns his last manuscript. Though multiple gods vie for the text, this manuscript is divinely protected, and only its rightful owner can read it. Becky is kidnapped and the gods demand she read it in their presence, censuring her for inserting 'personal comments'. In a variation of the legitimation paradox, this maintains the primary/secondary statement hierarchy, though it empowers the fan by her access to and definition of the 'right reading'. As the deity Baldur grudgingly admits, Chuck's text is meant for her, not them. Similarly, in earis's *Draw Back the Curtain*, Chuck disappears post-apocalypse, leaving a note:

Bex - Sorry about us. Take care of these, make sure they find a home. I'm going away for a while, it's your turn now. L, Chuck P.S. Take my house. I don't need it anymore (earis 2010).

But though Becky moves into Chuck's space, she does not become the new prophet. Her turn is not to write gospel but become the 'guardian' of Chuck's stories, as Sera Siege was in the canon. Unable to find a publisher, 'she launches www.winchestergospel.com', where 'every single book is available as a downloadable pdf' and 'there is an apocrypha link to fanfiction communities and archives'. Apocrypha are by definition non-canonical. Moreover:

She looks at all the stories that she has become the guardian of, that she has protected. They're pretty grim. She can't make anything better for real, but she can still come up with a potentially better scenario. They boys gave everything to the world, so that it might live. The least she can do is write them one crappy, fake, fan-fiction happy ending. After all, didn't Chuck tell her, 'It's your turn'? (earis 2010).

Her turn is not to write the new Book but protect and preserve it, empowering her through that secondary status.

This brings us to the second part of the governing statement recognized in the canon formation: that the fan's writing, though permissible, is secondary and derivative. Though there are statements that uphold this, there are also significant statements that challenge and deconstruct the binary, as already broached in *The Chuck Writes Story*. If a discursive formation is defined by what is thinkable and sayable, rather than united by agreement, it must be concluded that statements from fic have altered the formation of The Author and the Writing Fan significantly.

Becky's writing is utilized in fic in a number of ways. Sometimes, her voice is appropriated for comic purposes, as in LolaAnn's *In the Arms of an Angel*—by SamLicker81. The fic is a mashup of clichéd self-insertion on the 'Mary Sue' model and is prefaced by parodic author's notes referring to an implied flame war:⁴

Pre-emptive Warning to DeanSam4Evr69: If I get any flames from you for this fic, I will be banning you from the site (permanently this time) [...] I am NOT 'selling out to the hetero-normative majority' by writing Sam as having a soulmate that happens to be a woman. It does NOT cheapen what he has with Dean. So, save it and stop being such a narrow minded hater. If you don't like het, then don't read my story. Personally, I think you're suffering from some severe internalized misogyny and I pity you (LolaAnn 2012).

It is difficult to explain how funny this is to fan outsiders, but essentially it condenses several long-worn fannish arguments over self-insertion, misogyny and homophobia into one high-minded paragraph. The 'author's notes' continue: if Samlicker81 does not receive at least ten reviews, she

will NOT be continuing [her] *Brothers: Forbidden Love and Burning Desires* series. Which means you'll never get to find out if Sam is able to save Dean from his most recent bout with pneumonia/hypothermia by the power of his love and body heat alone.

The rest of the fic skewers fanfic clichés with equal wit and precision. The main character is Becky, who after a hard day's work counselling suicidal orphans, learns that her true identity is that of a 'half-angel'. For some reason, she is 'the only one' who can save Sam from another 'dark haired Jezebel' placed in his path by Lucifer, defeating her with the power of her goodness and purity before assuring Sam and Dean that even though she and Sam are in love, she is perfectly happy for the brothers to continue to have sex with each other. After all it is 'completely normal' for them to be 'only gay for each other,' due to their mutual attractiveness and the great adversity they have endured together. Again, this refers to a debate around slash regarding the improbability and latent homophobia of the only-gay-for-x trope that appears in some slash fanfic.

4 Combative exchange of online messages.

This fic sets up a parallel to the good fan/bad fan dichotomy: good fic (which 'we' write) and bad fic, (which 'they' write in earnest and 'we' parody: cf. Carruthers 2004). LolaAnn appropriates the form of author's notes to disguise her own authorial position, passing off bad writing to that other kind of fan. The portmanteau 'badfic' already has currency, and can refer either to fic that is actually bad, or fic like this that parodies it. The reviews continue this: Defincupark found this hilarious but 'can't wait to read [LolaAnn's] *real* post' for the challenge this fic is submitted to (2012, my emphasis). My own review, submitted after I had finished hyperventilating with laughter, salutes the author, 'well played' (*reading_is_in* 2013a). We understand LolaAnn as a good writer appropriating a bad mode. JohannaMK states appreciation for the fic but warns her not to stray too far into the bad fan side, reviewing 'thank you. (Please don't do it again! ☺)' (2012). Thus, the parodic author's notes on one hand mock the concept of an originary genius, and the privilege of a writer to direct the reading of the text. On the other hand, they subtly reserve it to the *real* writer, who constructs a model of good versus bad fanfic and fanfic writers.

In other fic, Becky takes over from Chuck to write in a secondary mode, paralleling the departure of Kripke and installation of Gamble as showrunner. This is another manifestation of the legitimization paradox, in which the newer female showrunner is authorized by the fanboy- auteur. As gabehorn puts it, 'Kripke could have made any one of the bigger male names on the show the runner, but he chose Sera' (2012). His choice authorizes her. Arguments circulate in fandom over Gamble's authority, hinging on the consensus that her tenure as showrunner *did* see a decrease in writing quality, combined with an awareness of the gender issues inherent in the legitimization paradox. Crowleyshouseplant argues that without excusing some of Gamble's writing decisions, we should bear in mind that focusing criticism purely on her as showrunner perpetuates the misogynist context of the entertainment industry (2012a); whilst quarterclever 'can't help but think that if Sera Gamble were a man the fandom wouldn't have half the complaints about her they do [...] Because we can complain about the show being misogynistic all we want but so often that's a matter of pots and kettles' (2012a).

My own fic fits into the formation by contributing statements of this sort, in which the secondary female writer is authorized by the author. It is an AU, set in a world where the characters are pitted between a totalitarian state and a terrorist resistance movement, rather than Heaven and Hell. The Resistance's chief weapon is bioengineering, of which Chuck is a failed product, leaving him with erratic visions and alcohol problems. Whilst Chuck is alive, Becky persistently believes that her heroes will overthrow the State

and save the world, considering it her job to ‘spread hope’ to the people. After he is killed, Becky takes over his role, salvaging his journal from the wreckage:

“I’m going to carry it on,” Becky said. “I mean, I may not have visions, but I can still write down what’s happening. I could be like a chronicler of the revolution.”

Sam put his hand on hers. “I’m sure Chuck would be proud.”

“No he wouldn’t.” She smiled, a little wobbly. “He’d tell me I was wasting my time, that there wasn’t going to be a revolution, and try not to make it obvious he was looking at my boobs.” She sighed. “I miss him,” (reading_is_in 2013b).

These statements demonstrate my internalization of learned practice. I did not plan to contribute statements that constructed Becky in this way and solidified the legitimization paradox, but according to my ‘know how’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 228) it seemed appropriate at that point in the story. Moreover, this fic is a sequel I produced by request, gratified that people liked the first novella in the series and eager to continue my performance and validation as a good fan and good writer. I perform to my strengths and respond to what my audience approves, hence I could not resist using a passage of ‘Becky’s’ chronicle to open the epilogue in comic mode:

And that is the story of how Dean killed Lilith. (Although really, in the opinion of the writer, it was mostly thanks to Sam. I mean Dean fired the actual bullet, and he did turn out to be pretty awesome when he wasn’t being a dick. But it was totally Sam who heroically used himself to entice and trap her despite knowing it was him she wanted to kill). And so, like the great teachers of old—

Becky frowned, crossed out *old*, and wrote *antiquity*. Then she crossed out *antiquity* and wrote, *historic times*. She huffed, and dropped the journal (reading_is_in 2013b).

Thus, I contributed to the formation of Becky’s writing as secondary, derivative, and improper, being unable to omit her bias for Sam from a supposedly objective history.

That story was modestly successful and received complimentary reviews, but a major contribution to this aspect of the discourse, which makes explicit the Gamble/Becky parallel, is tenoko1’s *The Path We Choose* (2012).

After the disappearance of Chuck, Becky is enraged by the 'new books', which represent Season 6:

Have you read the new books? You know: the ones after Sam saved the world- no thanks to you, I might add? [...] They're terrible! The stupid stuff the two of you pull? The obvious plot holes? The bad writing? It's defamation of character is what it is. There's no way Chuck wrote these, even at your worst, he still tried to protect your images in the eyes of the fans, and he certainly never would have made you look silly! It's all bad filler written by someone who doesn't care! (tenoko1 2012).

Statements such as these, common in fandom, have been readopted by canon as expressed by Marie in 10x05 (see p. 167), a clear example of fandom's discursive transformations making industrial impact, and impacting the broader cultural sphere. The author-function operates to de-legitimize Season 6 and the 'new books' by spanning the Chuck/Kripke binary: the author would never have produced it or them. The 'new books' are 'false prophecies', produced by ghost writers under contract to the publisher. Horrified at the travesty the series has become, the characters help Becky get a job as the new writer, and though she admits that she cannot 'compete with the end of the world' they judge that she has done a good job with the new books, keeping everyone 'in character'. She is not the prophet of the Apocalypse, but she does know how Sam, Dean and Castiel ought to be portrayed: the fan writer is secondary and faithful to the author, thus ranked above industrial production. The reviews shift this construction onto Tenoko1, judging her fic 'much better than [sic] current canon' (kojonoyuri 2012). The objections are to Season 6 directions that fans believe ring false: the 'truth' of matters was established by Chuck/Kripke, and fan writing is legitimated by portraying it as more authentic than post-authorial a production that 'only exists to keep up ratings' (romirola 2011).

Occasionally, however, statements that construct the writings and persons of the Author and the Fan are juxtaposed to undermine the primary/secondary, original/derivative binary, and the paradox it creates. Consider crowleyshouseplant's *B. Rosen and C. Shurley Are Dead* (2012b). This fic is based of course on Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, which is, in turn, based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, itself based on Saxo Grammaticus' version of the Amleth legend, which is based on an earlier chronicle, whose sources are lost to history. These statements open an 'anti-theological' (Barthes 1977, p. 147) perspective: there is no primary text, only an endless series of repetition with difference (Kristeva 1980). In

this story, Chuck and Becky are summoned by the angels to investigate the mysterious changes in Castiel. Becky is placed in the role of Rosencrantz, and in Stoppard's text, Guildenstern becomes angry that Rosencrantz is always copying him. Rosencrantz, by his own admission, 'can't think of anything original' and is 'only good in support' (Stoppard 1968, p. 78). But in *B. Rosen*, when Chuck asks,

"Don't you ever wish, Becky [...] that you had written anything original. Instead of just silly fan-fiction?"

She coughs, huffs, seethes. "I have written original things. Besides, just because it's fanfiction doesn't mean it's not original" (crowleyshouseplant 2012b).

Everything may be fanfiction, but every citation is also an original statement. Compare her admonishment to Chuck in *Writing (And Other Things That are Hard)*:

Everything anybody writes has a chance of making you see the characters, the people, in a whole new way. It can transform them and their relationships and the world and you into something new and amazing (trinityofone2009).

The original/derivative binary is challenged, and the case for fandom's transformative impact on the cultural sphere is articulated. Fans, after all, live and work in the world, and fanfic's transformations changes perceptions. Becky's writing does not need to be legitimated by Chuck, nor ours by Kripke. In *B. Rosen*, Chuck attempts to tell her that the things she has written, notably resurrecting dead female characters, 'never happened' and are 'not canon', but 'fanfiction.' Becky replies, 'I reject your canon and substitute my own' (crowleyshouseplant 2012b). Her work is not constructed as better than Chuck's, or truer, but equal because 'all the words are important.' She suggests that the angels, who think Chuck can rewrite Castiel's floundering story, do it themselves: 'Write your own stories. Instead of doing what someone says. Instead of having someone else do it for you. If you don't like what's going on, just write your own.' Though the angels and Chuck continue to insult her fic as not real, it is ultimately she who frees herself and Chuck from the nooses of their execution, and begins to narrate to him as they walk off and end the story: "It's a wonderful universe [...] Full of adventure and bravery." Her voice is lost as they continue to travel east, towards the ribbon of blue sky and a rising sun.'

Again, it seems that statements like this have been canon-ized, to some extent, by 10x05, as 'Marie's version' of *Supernatural* is celebrated onscreen, and the transformative work of fandom is explicitly celebrated. Yet, the paradox is at its most acute here: legitimation through the canonization and broadcast of fanfiction, finally approved, in 10x05, by Chuck's blessing. Meanwhile, *B. Rosen* receives no comments, and just seven kudos on A03, so has not had a great deal of impact in fandom. *The Path We Choose* gets 212 comments total. So the stronger statements with most impact tend to uphold the secondary position of Becky's writing.

On the other hand, xenoamorist's *Tons of Feels* (2012) receives a respectable 48 comments, and this fic is a clear illustration of how mixing statements from two or more discourses results in a new kind of text. 'Feels' is fan slang for feelings: to have tons of feels is to be overwhelmed with emotions. It is tagged as a crossover with Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), and mimics the novel's mixed-media layout, excessive footnotes, notes from unknown editor(s), and pastiche of texts from supposedly different sources. *House of Leaves* is a difficult book to make sense of: the first words, on an otherwise blank page, are 'this is not for you.' In it, several narrators contribute versions of events, mostly linked by the first narrator's obsession with a dead man's account of a documentary film. Chanen suggests its subject is 'the creation of and search for meaning in a remediated narrative' (2007, p. 163). It is a text about a text about a text; about obsession with text; and as Woodcock (2009) suggests, a satire on academia. Each 'contributor' has a different font. *Tons of Feels* is also a text about a text that deals with the location and creation of meaning; it is also about obsession with text, and a satire on academia. It takes the form of an essay written by Becky for a university English class and sent to Chuck, which has been prefaced and appendixed by him, and variously annotated by unknown 'eds'. Again, the contributors each have their own font, and the opening statement, 'this is not for you', appears to be written by Chuck to himself, an attempt to separate the writings of the fan from his own. The discourses that clash here are academic, fannish, authorial and literary-academic.

The fannish and authorial discourses are in conflict with each other – Becky and the editors appear to be Wincest and Dean/Cas fans respectively, and xenoamorist's authorial statements are rather different to Chuck's, positioning her outside the text as an orchestrator. Her author's notes advise us that 'neither Becky's feels nor Chuck's feels reflect my own' and meta-textual jokes of which none of the characters can be aware construct the fan—author's overarching presence. For instance, the word 'minotaur', wherever it appears in *House of Leaves*, is crossed out: one of the editors

remarks that a previous contributor has ‘attempted to systematically eradicate the “Minotaur” theme’ (Danielewski 2000, p. 336). In *Tons of Feels*, every instance of ‘Cas’ or ‘Castiel’ is similarly struck through, referencing a long-standing fan division between those who wished for the series to remain with the relatively simple formula of the early seasons, before Castiel was introduced, and those who appreciated the introduction of angels, heaven and the apocalypses. Xenoamorist, the fan author, is thus subtly constructed as master of ceremonies, and the good fan-reader as the enlightened audience. In that sense, the good fan/bad fan divide is maintained between us and Becky: she is a character in the text, helping to produce the mingled discourse, whilst we overlook it from a privileged position.

In *Tons of Feels*, Chuck’s statements form a discourse of Romantic authorship, heightening and satirizing the ‘prophet’ and ‘God’ constructions of the original. He reads Becky’s essay, and is horrified at the violation of his ‘creation’, the ‘artistry’ of his ‘vision’. Desperate to believe he is a ‘God-chosen genius’, fanfic is forcing him to confront this as an ‘illusion’. Chuck wanted to keep his vision pure and unsullied, textual analysis being ‘almost the same as this fanfic abomination’. He resorts to quoting Barthes in academic style, but then footnotes that footnote: ‘Look ma, I know how to cite bullshit that people spew and publish for more people to regurgitate. Only article that ever stuck with me after three semesters of English classes.’ The imagined purity of academia is brought into conflict and conjunction with both fannish discourse and outdated discourses of authorship, so that each shows up the cracks in the other. The author is alive enough to reject his own death, but in doing so, shows himself out of touch with the workings of text. He can *claim* the right and desire to control meaning, but cannot carry out his will. Meanwhile, Becky’s essay, which begins conventionally enough, breaks down with an apology:

i’m sorry prof daniels but i just cannot with my feels
(xenoamorist 2012).

‘Feels’ is in blue font. The absences and limitations of academic discourse are revealed in its clash with statements from fandom: with its prescribed style and format, it fails to account for the emotional, passionate, anti-rational aspects of our relations with text, the ‘emotional rush’ explored by Zubernis and Larsen (2012, p. 1). Indeed, Louisa Stein has argued that, whilst fan communities often posit standards for correct English and a traditional model of high quality writing, they can also be understood as ‘cultures of feels’, where ‘emotions remain intimate but are no longer necessarily

private, with the emotional impulse to collective authorship operating as a binding force of community (2015, pp. 156–159). The good fan/bad fan divide is also flouted, as the rational mode, which as *Chuck Writes* demonstrates can come very close to academic writing, may not account sufficiently for our 'feels' either (cf. Hills 2002, pp. 16–21). The next page is a series of twitter hashtags, strings of letters approximating the random smashing of keys, and a text-boxed excerpt from Becky's canonical fic. Even the fanfic eventually breaks down into the bare letters, spaced out across several pages on individual lines, which spell out 'goddamit wincest'. Ultimately, this fic enacts the collision and mutual undermining of statements from varied discourses, in a style only possible in this space, culminating in the final statement, *gar nichts muss sein* (nothing must be), answering the opening, and the opening of *House of Leaves*, '*muss es sein?*' (must it be?).

This undermining of the author's writing/fan writing binary, and the fan writer/academic writer binary in addition, is of moderate impact. The comments also enact the collision of fannish and academic, or good fan/bad fan registers: I commented myself that 'I was srsly having lit-crit squees' (reading_is_in 2012). The fan/author dyad has been replaced, and many of the statements constructing the fan in canon have simply been placed onto the bad fan side of the dyad. However, self-identification sometimes straddles the divide, which in itself is broken and uneven, each half blending into the other rather than statements specifically destabilizing other statements (fig. 20). Fics like *Tons of Feels* suggest that good fan discourse does not properly account for the sexual/emotional aspects of fandom, in short, the feels.

Thus, in this sense, fanfic *has* transformed the governing statements of the source, the author/fan primary/secondary binary; but the most popular and influential statements in the formation are still those which uphold it. Chuck's writing is usually upheld in fic as canonical and true, even whilst the figure of the fanboy-auteur is mocked. Paradoxically, the fan writer can utilize the figure of Chuck to author-ize her own writing, though when he is constructed explicitly as writing 'like a fan,' then the non-canonical construction of fan writing consolidated from the source text may actually work *backwards* to de-legitimate writing attributed to Chuck. Moreover, though Becky and her writing are redeemed and revalued in fic, it is frequently in relation to Chuck and legitimated by him, in the same way the fan and her fic is canonically legitimated, within boundaries, by Eric Kripke. Further, though specific fannish interventions in the discourse open a space for the positive constructions of *some* kinds of fandom, we seem unable to eschew the shadow of the other, bad fan, constructed largely

as broader culture would have it (cf. Hills 2002; Stanfill 2013; Zubernis and Larsen 2012). Sometimes we acknowledge the artificiality of the good fan/bad fan divide, or construct our own personas as overlapping it, but the divide itself, and the 'split subjectivity' of fandom created by it, is apparently indispensable. Nonetheless, in fics which negate the divide, the legitimation paradox begins to be tentatively deconstructed. We are beginning to see fics that specifically address the questions of originality, authorship, and the value of fanfic as transformative work that opens categories of interpretation in broader society. Finally, in a striking example of how fanfic changes popular cultural texts in a concrete industrial sense, we then saw the legitimation paradox taken up and played out on screen, canonized by *Supernatural* and validated by the blessing of Chuck in 10x05. The case of *Supernatural* thus goes furthest in demonstrating the transformative impacts of fandom in a concrete sense, and whilst the same potentials exist in *Sherlock* and *GoT* fic, it may well be the case that the showrunners' explicitly permissive stances with regard to fan production have enabled these discursive transformations. This case has also demonstrated the most radical discursive transformation, and unlike the others, begins to undermine the very concepts on which the governing statements depend. Nonetheless, whilst *Supernatural* is an extreme case, the increasing industrial trend of acknowledging and incorporating fandom, even for economic reasons, means that fanfic's is becoming an increasingly visible means of transforming discursive social categories. Now, in conclusion, we will assess the results and potentials this study has made visible, and discuss future work that could use different methodologies to further and build on these insights.