



Fandom | Cultures | Research
ONLINE JOURNAL FOR FAN AND AUDIENCE STUDIES

Elsa-Margareta Venzmer

Book Review

Anne Eßer (ed.): In Texten wildern: Slash oder die Erotisierung fiktiver Stoffe durch Fangemeinden

KEYWORDS

fandom, fan fiction, slash, shipping, genre

AUTHOR

Elsa-Margareta Venzmer, M.A., holds a Bachelor's degree in Media Studies and Musicology and a Master's degree in General and Comparative Media Studies from the Universität Regensburg. She is currently a doctoral researcher at the DFG research training group "The Sentimental in Literature, Culture, and Politics" at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. Her latest publication, the article "Women Representing Women in the Nuclear Family: Exemplified by the Female Characters of the Animated Sitcom Bob's Burgers," examines gender identities in animated television series. Her other research interests include audio-visual media, queer theory, and affect studies.
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4964-2218>

Elsa-Margareta Venzmer

Book Review

Anne Eßer (ed.): *In Texten wildern: Slash oder die Erotisierung fiktiver Stoffe durch Fangemeinden*

Berlin: Salzgeber 2025, 272 pp., ISBN 9783863003906, EUR 20,-

In the German-language edited volume *In Texten wildern: Slash oder die Erotisierung fiktiver Stoffe durch Fangemeinden* (trans. *Poaching Texts: Slash and the Eroticization of Fictional Narratives by Fan Communities*), the contributors seek to integrate theoretical perspectives on slash fan fiction with nuanced textual analysis through close readings of selected slash narratives. Slash refers to a genre of fan fiction in which two or more characters from a media text are reimagined in romantic or sexual relationships. Following a brief editorial introduction, the volume opens with a historical overview of the genre.

Kristina Busse's paper "Definition und Geschichte des Slash" (trans. "Definition and History of Slash") explores the origins and the development of fan fiction—particularly the slash genre—as a creative, non-commercial engagement by fans with fictional worlds. Drawing on personal experience, Busse situates fan fiction within historical, cultural, and economic contexts. She traces its emergence within the female-dominated *Star Trek* (1966-1969) fandom, examines legal and societal tensions, and demonstrates how queer identities and intertextual references are reflected within the genre. Slash fiction, in particular, is understood as an affective practice and a queer reinterpretation of intense male relationships—negotiating between subversion and stereotype. Further, Busse analyzes the evolution of slash fan fiction from a subversive, female- and queer-feminist-influenced genre to an increasingly inclusive and commercialized fan culture. While early theories focused primarily on heterosexual women writing slash, the fanbase today is notably more diverse. As queer content becomes normalized within mainstream media, the term 'slash' is losing its relevance. Instead, 'shipper' cultures now dominate—embracing more fluid understandings and representations of gender and sexual identity. Slash is thus increasingly regarded as a historical phenomenon. Busse's paper is not only highly relevant for examining the history of slash, but also engages with contemporary discourses, emphasizing that slash is no longer written and read exclusively by white, heterosexual women; instead, many fans now identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

The next chapter in the anthology ties in with this. The chapter "Film, Fernsehen, Fanfiction" (trans. "Film, Television, Fan Fiction"), written by Jacqueline Meintzinger and Thessa Jensen, analyzes the development of slash fan fiction since the 1960s as a counter-narrative to stereotypical, often negative portrayals of homosexuality in film and television. The authors argue that slash provides space for queer life stories, emotional depth, and sexual exploration that transcends heteronormative media. The authors demonstrate how fans discover their own identities through close readings and creative reinterpretations. With the rise of the internet and growing social acceptance, more diverse representations and new themes such as 'soulmate marks' emerged, alongside the commercialization of gay romance. According to Meintzinger and Jensen, the German crime television series *Tatort* (1970-) in Münster—featuring investigators Boerne and Thiel—serves as a popular source for slash fan fictions within the German

fandom. These narratives depict a secret, intimate relationship that is only subtly implied in the series itself. The (orphaned) fan fiction *Du bist es wert* combines the murder case from the episode “Tempelräuber” with erotic scenes, highlighting the emotional closeness of the characters. It creates a tender and humorous sense of intimacy by combining explicit sexuality with the familiar dialogues from the series, rendering the characters authentic and offering both sexual and intellectual gratification for fans. By challenging the conservative norms of the original and centering an emotional love story, it expands the *Tatort* universe to include queer perspectives and greater personal depth. This paper is particularly compelling because it not only traces the history of slash fan fiction and its specific subgenres but also outlines the evolving representation of homosexual individuals in film and television from the 1960s until today.

The next chapter, “Slash als erogene Zone: Der gemeinsame Drarry-Traum in *Mental* von sara_holmes1” (trans. “Slash as an Erogenous Zone: The Shared Drarry Dream in *Mental* by sara_holmes1”), by Melanie Babenhauserheide and Kalle Krämer, examines the Drarry slash fan fiction *Mental*, in which magical accidents create a mental connection between Harry and Draco from *Harry Potter*, enabling intimate closeness and sexual advances. Themes such as consent, voluntariness, and boundary transgressions are critically reflected upon. This is situated within the context of a societal paradigm shift towards a negotiated morality of sexuality, while also emphasizing the ambivalences, ambiguities, and conflicts that arise when negotiating boundaries and expressing desire in erotic fan fiction. The analysis focuses on the dream sequence in *Mental*, where touch and language simultaneously produce both proximity and distance. The eyes symbolize boundaries of identity and death, linked to the relationship between Snape and Harry. The green snake represents sexual anxieties, power, and the past, while the Room of Hidden Things serves as an unconscious space reflecting psychic conflict. This nuanced analysis offers a compelling interpretation of sara_holmes1’s slash text, skillfully situating the Drarry dream sequence within broader cultural discourses on consent, desire, and identity. It thoughtfully explores the complexities of erotic fan fiction, highlighting the emotional and symbolic depth of the text.

In “Pon Farr, sexuelle Gewalt und die politischen Dimensionen der Fantasie” (trans. „Pon Farr, Sexual Violence, and the Political Dimensions of Fantasy”), Alexis Lothian and Kristina Busse analyze the political dimensions of erotic fantasies in slash fan fiction, focusing particularly on the example of Kirk/Spock and the concept of Pon Farr. They demonstrate how fantasies involving sexual violence and unequal power dynamics are used by women to process patriarchal norms, while also highlighting problematic structures within fandoms themselves. Slash is understood as an ambivalent space—situated between the potential for liberation and the reproduction of social inequalities. The fan fiction used as example, *You Don’t Have to Say (Yes)* by luminousbeings, critically engages with sexual violence, consent, and power imbalances. In contrast to earlier works in the fandom, it explicitly portrays healthy models of sexual consent and interrogates colonial, racialized, and patriarchal structures. It addresses Kirk’s trauma of rape, his solidarity with marginalized figures such as Gaila, and the troubling fantasies surrounding white masculinity—without fully deconstructing them. However, despite some pedagogical intentions, Lothian and Busse conclude that fan fiction in general remains embedded within hegemonic power structures and the authors convincingly discuss the ambivalences that still characterize fandoms today.

Nina Heise’s essay “Found Family vs. Family of Choice: Zur Idee von Familie in Slash-Fanfiction” (trans. “Found Family vs. Family of Choice: On the Concept of Family in Slash Fan Fiction”) examines how



family is represented in slash fan fiction—particularly beyond heteronormative frameworks. Drawing on theoretical approaches such as Sara Ahmed’s work and Critical Kinship Studies, as well as empirical research, Heise demonstrates how queer characters reimagine family as chosen kinship rather than biological ties. In doing so, traditional norms are both critically questioned and, at times, partially reproduced. Fan fiction thus functions as a space in which values such as care, responsibility, and emotional connection are renegotiated. The *Harry Potter* fan fiction *A Store of Happiness* by coyotesuspect explores an alternate scenario in which Sirius Black is exonerated and becomes Harry’s legal guardian. At its core is the affectionate domestic life shared by Harry, Sirius, and Remus Lupin—portrayed as a queer ‘found family’ in contrast to Harry’s neglectful biological relatives, the Dursleys. The story highlights care and kinship beyond biological or legal definitions and challenges conventional gender roles. Remus and Sirius serve as nurturing figures, with their relationship subtly framed as romantic. The narrative affirms that family is constituted through emotional intimacy, shared everyday life, and mutual care—thus fulfilling an ideal of familial happiness in non-normative ways. Nevertheless, Heise argues in a compelling way that fan fiction should not overlook the discrimination faced by queer couples, nor should it merely serve as a nostalgic, escapist utopia. Rather, it should prompt critical reflection on contemporary understandings of family.

In the following chapter, “Subversion, Normativität und queeres Empowerment: Inzest und alternative Formen von Verwandtschaft” (trans. “Subversion, Normativity, and Queer Empowerment: Incest and Alternative Forms of Kinship”), Denise Labahn examines the *Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017) fan fiction *Große Worte, Wetten und andere Schwierigkeiten* by Dunkle Flamme as a site for queer, norm-critical narratives centering on incest, masculinity, and desire. The figure of the vampire serves as a symbol of societal transgression. The story explores homoerotic tensions between brothers, interrogates hegemonic masculinity, and engages with themes of queer empowerment and alternative family structures. In doing so, the incest taboo is problematized as a cultural construct and creatively subverted (it is one of those cases where you have to say: ‘You have to read it’). Fan fiction emerges here as a space for queer utopias and sociocultural renegotiations. The second part of Labahn’s analysis focuses on the analogy between blood and sexuality. The vampire bite is staged as a form of sexual penetration, wherein blood and semen symbolically merge. Penetration is not only physical but also emotional and symbolic, thereby opening up queer potentials. Over the course of the narrative of *Große Worte, Wetten und andere Schwierigkeiten*, the brothers confront and overcome internalized homophobia and discover homoerotic desire. In the end, they consciously reject heteronormativity and embrace their vampiric, queer selves. Labahn emphasizes that masculinity in this fan fiction nonetheless continues to be characterized by competition, power, and control. This is why the analysis, like some of the previous studies in the edited volume, shows an interesting oscillation between subversion and affirmation.

The next chapter, “Omegaverse: Heteronormative Reifizierung oder queere Subversion?” (trans. “Omegaverse: Heteronormative Reification or Queer Subversion?”) by Kelsey Entrikin, examines the Omegaverse fan fiction genre that portrays an alternative social order based on biologically determined gender roles—Alpha, Beta, and Omega. These roles are embedded within social hierarchies and sexual scripts that closely mirror heteronormative structures. Alphas occupy dominant positions, while Omegas are marginalized and sexualized. Male Omegas in particular are central to many narratives, reflecting feminized roles and experiences. The author investigates the fan fiction *Nu ABO: A Memoir by Park Jimin* by decompositionbooks—a real person fan fiction that explores how these dynamics manifest within

the world of K-pop, focusing specifically on BTS member Jimin, who, as an Omega, faces social descent and the pressures of normative sexual expectations. The narrative illustrates the internalized devaluation associated with Omega status, critiques societal power relations, and interrogates gendered roles. Despite reproducing aspects of heteronormativity, Entrikin states that the genre offers space for the reflection on and subversion of conventional concepts of gender and sexuality. This paper is not only relevant due to its thematization of a fan fiction that innovatively develops the Omegaverse genre, but also examines a popular music fandom that, in contrast to book, movie and TV series fandoms, has received far less attention.

Vera Cuntz-Leng examines in her chapter “Fundamentally People: Interpretation, Intertextualität und Innovation in *Good-Omens-Fanfiction*” (trans. “Interpretation, Intertextuality and Innovation in *Good Omens Fan Fiction*”) the slash fiction *Fundamentally People* within the context of intertextuality and interpretation. She demonstrates how fan fictions creatively reinterpret existing texts while simultaneously being constrained by the fan object, community, genre conventions, and technology. *Good Omens* (2009-) offers narrative gaps that allow for diverse readings, particularly queer interpretations. The fan responses to season 2 illustrate the creative dynamics and collective construction of meaning within the fandom, where fan fiction functions as a productive site of tension between the original text and fan interpretation. Following the dramatic conclusion of the second season of *Good Omens*, a wave of so-called fix-it fan fictions emerged, including *Fundamentally People* by CorvidCordelia, which seek to rectify the series’ emotional imbalances. This fan fiction continues the narrative from multiple perspectives, foregrounding internal conflicts and intertextuality, supplementing missing narrative content, and emancipating characters from canonical constraints. Despite moderate reception, it exemplifies a creative, communal fan response aimed at collective processing, exerting control over the source material, and pursuing a ‘happy ending.’ Cuntz-Leng impressively shows that small details and fandom-specific scenes, objects or quotes can express an emotional reaction in the reader and that it is the dichotomies that make a text so appealing.

David M. Halperin, in his analysis “Die heilige Gemeinschaft der Männer: Geschlechtermythen und ihre Folgen” (trans. “The Myth of Gender: Genesis and Gilgamesh”), engages with Gayle Rubin’s feminist theory, which posits that the oppression of women arises from social structures such as the incest taboo and the ‘traffic in women.’ According to Rubin, women function as exchange objects among men, thereby reinforcing male dominance. Literary works such as the Epic of Gilgamesh reflect and perpetuate these structures. Halperin interprets the male friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu as a mythical ideal that marginalizes female characters and glorifies male homosociality—thus establishing an ideologically charged, literarily encoded gender order. Further, Halperin examines the parallels between the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Book of Genesis: both narratives depict the transition from a natural state to culture through sexuality. While Genesis is often interpreted within a hierarchical framework, early rabbinic exegeses also exist that present man and woman as being created equally. Halperin criticizes that contemporary homophobic interpretations of Genesis are politically motivated. In contrast, he states that the Epic of Gilgamesh presents an intense male bond that can be read as an alternative origin myth for Western cultural self-understanding. Halperin delivers a sharp and thought-provoking critique of masculinist ideologies by deconstructing the myth of male homosocial solidarity. His essay outlines a powerful theoretical intervention that positions canonical texts as sites of queer potential rather than immutable pillars of heteronormative tradition.



In Anne Eßer's contribution, "Solidarischer Machtkampf oder Common Purpose" (trans. "A Power Struggle in Solidarity or Common Purpose"), Kirby_Crow's *Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) slash story *Common Purpose* is analyzed, which portrays a sexual power struggle between Aragorn and Boromir. Despite apparent non-consensual elements, the narrative emphasizes that both characters are equally strong and willingly engage in the power play. The text illustrates how slash fiction eroticizes power relations and explores the ambiguities of consent. The fan fiction challenges conventional ethics and highlights the complexity of power, desire, and role distribution in fan fiction. The analysis further demonstrates how explicit sex scenes in slash fiction—*Common Purpose* serving as a case in point—can transcend mere pornography. Despite its direct language and detailed physical depictions, the text conveys emotional depth, psychological tension, and romantic undertones. The scene is embedded within the canonical context of *The Lord of the Rings*, allowing for multiple layers of interpretation. The author's open engagement with the fan community reflects a culture of respectful dialogue. Thus, the slash text emerges as an example of emotionally complex erotic storytelling and a creative exploration of power, intimacy, and affection. Eßer's study compellingly exposes the complexities of collective political action, highlighting both its transformative potential and its structural limitations.

So where does all this eroticism leave us? The edited volume demonstrates that fan fiction, particularly slash, is a complex and multifaceted genre, capable of simultaneously serving as a medium for social critique as well as reinforcing the status quo. As it is the first German-language collection of essays about slash, it also provides insights into German fandoms. Overall, this book with contributions by renowned scholars of fan studies is relevant for students of media studies or literary studies who want to explore how fan fiction analysis can be conducted. Moreover, it is also of great interest to scholars studying slash and current discourses of individual fandoms. Or, to put it in Klingon: Qapla!