

***MACBETH AS AVATAR: FANDOM IN BRITISH
ROMANTIC THEATRE AUDIENCES***

by

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Abstract

This study aims to place two previously disconnected areas of academic inquiry, Romantic theatre studies and fandom studies, in dialogue with one another, to the mutual benefit of both fields. Towards this end, I focus on a particular manifestation of fan behavior, the deployment of popular iconography and mythology as a protest strategy – a mode of fandom recently codified as “*Avatar* activism” by Henry Jenkins, a leading fan scholar – and look for its existence in a specific moment in time in Romantic London: the 1809 Old Price Riots. Fandom studies, as a discipline, looks at active media audiences, and the ways in which they build upon source media texts. In the first chapter, I give an overview as to the history of this relatively young branch of scholarship, which brings us to the current moment, in which *Avatar* activism can be considered a mode of fan behavior. Following that, I focus on the Romantic period for the remainder of the thesis. In the second chapter, I choose three various case studies of engaged audiences – Sarah Siddons as celebrity icon; hippodrama and genre fandom; and intertextuality, transmedia, and what David A. Brewer has called “imaginative expansion” - which set the stage for the idea that fan behavior was alive and well in the early nineteenth century. In the final chapter, I focus on the Old Price Riots, and the rioters’ use of Shakespeare-as-icon and Shakespearean mythology as a Romantic manifestation of *Avatar* activism. With this study, I aim to provide a larger historical context for modern conceptions of fandom, as well as to offer greater insight into audience/text dynamics that existed in Romantic London.

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Introduction

You are a fan. You just might not know it yet. At least, that seems to be the general consensus forming from the growing body of scholarly work that exists under the mantle of “fandom studies.” Somewhere in your media consumption patterns, you have something in common with the man who paints his body blue and sits in the snow rooting for his hometown sports team, the woman who drives for days to visit Graceland, and the teenager who spends sleepless nights posting on a web site devoted to his favorite movie franchise. You may consider yourself a “connoisseur” of a certain artist’s work, or an “aficionado” of a specific film genre, but your consumptive dispositions, and expression of those tastes, fit along a spectrum of what can be considered fan behavior. Much like the shift from studying “theatre” to studying “the theatrical,” studying fan behavior, instead of fans, allows us to look at the ways in which this type of audience relationship to media is not relegated to a small subset of pathological individuals, but rather permeates the dynamic by which all audiences and texts interact. This is a relatively new concept; as Henry Jenkins writes in the opening lines of *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*:

Exploring Participatory Culture,

[t]he concept of the active audience, so controversial two decades ago, is now taken for granted by everyone involved in and around the media industry. New technologies are enabling average consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content. (Jenkins 2006, 1)

This latter statement by Jenkins is emblematic of a tone common to the work of many fandom scholars – one that privileges twenty-first century media technologies as enabling expressions of fan behavior in new and profound ways. While the Internet has no doubt become a venue for new modes of engaged reception, audiences have certainly

been archiving, annotating, appropriating, and recirculating media content for hundreds, if not thousands of years. The term “fan” itself, originally used as shorthand for “fanatic,” can be traced in English usage for at least three hundred years (Cavicchi 38), though it became more widely used by late nineteenth century journalists, who applied the term to sports enthusiasts (Jenkins 1992b, 12). While Jenkins and others, throughout their work on fandom, make sure to place their studies within such a historical context, there have been relatively few large-scale studies into pre-twentieth century fan behavior. If Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington are correct in stating that “to study fans is to study many of the key structuring mechanisms by which contemporary culture and society work” (Gray et al, 16), then must not there be great value in studying historical expressions of fandom, in order to provide a greater context for those same societal mechanisms?

In the pages that follow, I explore a moment of theatre history - the Old Price Riots of 1809, in London – in the hopes of finding a connection between engaged Romantic audiences and the media audiences of today. In what ways can contemporary notions of fan behavior be applied to historical theatrical audiences? What can those transhistorical applications tell us about contemporary fans? More specifically, I attempt to apply Jenkins’s recent notion of “*Avatar* activism,” which he describes as “mobilizing icons and myths from popular culture as resources for political speech” (“*Avatar* Activism: Pick Your Protest”), to the rioters’ use of Shakespeare’s image and of his works as a rhetorical strategy for conveying a clearly political message. Jenkins sees this as a fan-powered form of activism, one that draws “emotional power from its engagement with stories that already matter to a mass public” (“*Avatar* Activism: Pick Your Protest”).

If the Old Price rioters can be seen as nineteenth century *Avatar* activists, we can broaden our understanding of Romantic audience dynamics, as well as provide a larger context to contemporary efforts made by fans to connect popular myth with political reality.

Since, with this study, I am hoping to find common ground between two traditionally quite distinct areas of scholarly interest – Romantic studies and fandom studies – a good deal of background information will be necessary in order to put readers from both ends of the spectrum on the same page as we proceed through the argument. With that in mind, Chapter One is an attempt to locate the current state of fandom studies. I adopt the framework presented by Gray et al, in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, in which fandom studies is seen to have gone through three distinct “waves” (1) of scholarship through its relatively short existence as a field of academic inquiry. Such a historically-focused view of the field can help to position the emergence of fandom studies, in the mid-nineteen eighties, from previous scholarship on culture, media, and reception. According to Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington, fan scholarship initially began largely with an attempt to liberate fans from previous psychological/sociological paradigms that had fans pegged as pathological outliers, towards a sense of fans as simply extremely active consumers. Following that, the field shifted away from a focus on individuals, and towards fan communities, and the ways in which fan communities can become microcosms of the larger cultures they exist within. Finally, in our current moment, we find fandom studies scholars looking once more at the individual, but rather than focusing just on those people whom our culture has already identified as fans, through their notably vocal engagement with a text, studying more the ways in which fan behavior permeates our culture as a whole, and the way we all engage

with popular media texts. It is in this current context that Jenkins proposes *Avatar* activism as a mode of fan/political engagement.

In Chapter Two, I switch gears and present three case studies of engaged audiences in Romantic London, in an effort to recreate the context in which the Old Price Riots occurred. I contend that fandom was alive and well in Romantic theatre audiences. Celebrity icons ruled the stage, in the form of David Garrick and even more so, the actress Sarah Siddons. Janet Staiger, in *Media Reception Studies*, suggests “talk” as the “cement” for fan communities (108); Romantic society during the reign of Siddons on stage was saturated with “talk” about her, in the form of praise-filled essays, portraits of her in an array of characters and poses, and devotional poetry. The second study is of the meteoric rise of hippodrama (plays featuring live horses) on London stages in the summer of 1811. In a recent essay, Jenkins suggests that we have entered a new era for fandom, “where what we are calling ‘fan culture’ has a real economic and cultural impact; where fan tastes are ruling at the box office (witness all of the superhero and fantasy blockbusters of recent years)” (2007, 359). The domination of hippodrama on London stages, due to sheer audience interest, suggests that this dynamic is not so new. Finally, the third case is actually several cases in one, all pointing to the ways in which texts and characters interacted with one another, on the Romantic stage and in the streets of London. What we now know as fan fiction existed in Romantic society, under a model that David A. Brewer, in *The Afterlife of Character, 1726-1825*, has termed “imaginative expansion” (2). The ways in which pieces of text or entire characters migrated offered a variety of entry points for fan interest, and added to each work’s cult value. Jenkins’s most recent book, *Convergence Culture*, describes the way in which our culture has

moved more and more towards transmedia storytelling, or narratives told across media platforms; by looking at the various iterations of a speech written by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, we can see that transmedia practices were definitely present in early nineteenth century London.

Chapter Three brings us to the crux of the argument: the Old Price Riots themselves. First, I offer a bit of background on the riots themselves and the cultural dynamics that made them possible. Then, I present my case for Shakespeare's status as a cult icon for theatregoers in 1809, carrying with his name an infamy at least comparable, if not more so, to that of the 2010 film, *Avatar*, which inspired the protests that gave birth to Jenkins's concept of *Avatar* activism. Finally, I offer three examples of the rioters' usage of Shakespeare-as-icon, as well as quotes from Shakespearean characters, to lend credibility, rhetorical weight, and access points to their political argument. As Lawrence Grossberg has written, "[t]he fan's relation to cultural texts operates in the domain of affect or mood" (56); by tapping in to the affective bond that Romantic theatregoers had with Shakespeare and his works, rioters were able to engage the public in the righteousness of their argument in ways that they never could have, had they simply appealed to the public's logic, or generalized sense of justice. As such, it exists as a centuries-old precedent for Jenkins's *Avatar* activism.

As Jenkins wrote recently in *Convergence Culture*, "[j]ust as we would not traditionally assume that someone is literate if they can read but not write, we should not assume that someone possesses media literacy if they can consume but not express themselves" (2008, 176). In the following study, I hope to show that audiences in Romantic London were media-literate in the same way that he presents contemporary

consumers as being. Early nineteenth century theatregoers were very adept at expressing themselves, and at actively utilizing their power as audiences, as consumers, and indeed, as fans.

Chapter One: *The Current State of Fandom Studies*

For the past twenty-five years, the field of fandom studies has established itself as a steadily growing area of academic interest. Scholars across a large variety of fields of study - including performance studies, reception studies, cinema studies, media and cultural studies, sociology, psychoanalysis, comparative literature, literary theory, and aesthetics, among others - have joined the conversation as to just what it means to be a “fan.” While the methods and specific objects of inquiry have varied widely, the overall approach is generally quite consistent: to consider fandom as simply a subset of active viewing/audience-ship, rather than as a pathological behavior. As Henry Jenkins noted in a seminal essay, “the fan’s activity is treated as different only in degree from those types of interpretive strategies adopted by all consumers of mass culture” (Jenkins 1992a, 209).

Although fandom is a relatively recent object of scholarly research, the tenor of the work produced under that heading has changed a great deal throughout its existence as a point of academic interest. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington suggest, in their recent anthology, *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, that there have been three distinct generations, or “waves,” within fandom studies that have brought us to the current state of affairs (Gray et al 1-9). The first of those waves, “Fandom is Beautiful” (Gray et al 1), began in the mid- to late- 1980s, building off of the reception theories and media writings of cultural critics like Eco, de Certeau, Barthes, Benjamin and Bourdieu. The aim of this first wave was simple: to start to break down the popular (mis)conception of fans as being either sociopathic loners or uncontrollable concert mobs - or as Joli Jenson puts it, “the obsessed individual and the

hysterical crowd” (9). In these early writings, these two fan “types” are seen as being present in the broader cultural imaginary as the only images that come up when the word “fan” is mentioned; the aim, then, of these initial studies was to emancipate fandom from this pathological image. From televised crowds of teenage girls screaming uncontrollably at every Beatles appearance to the highly publicized case of John Hinckley, who claimed his adoration for Jodie Foster drove him to attempt to assassinate Ronald Reagan, media fans had developed an image of emotional instability at best, and sinister obsession at worst; the first fandom scholars hoped to explore fan behavior, and by doing so, to normalize it.

As Lisa A. Lewis puts it in the Introduction to *The Adoring Audience: Fan culture and popular media*, her early anthology of essays on fandom,

[w]e all know who fans are. They’re the ones who wear the colors of their favorite team, the ones who record their soap operas on VCRs to watch after the work day is over, the ones who tell you every detail about a movie star’s life and work, the ones who sit in line for hours for front row tickets to rock concerts. Fans are, in fact, the most visible and identifiable of audiences. (1)

She goes on, however, to claim that, “[w]e are all fans of something...By endeavoring to understand the fan impulse, we ultimately move towards a greater understanding of ourselves” (1). In these two statements, Lewis clearly lays out the popular conception of fandom, and then promptly undercuts that notion, implicating anyone who might be reading her anthology as sharing some kind of fan impulse. In doing so, she also exemplifies a new field in the process of justifying its existence, liberating fan behavior from the pages of the psychologist’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* and into the minds of cultural and media theorists.

In order to do so, the writers most often started at the point of reception, to at once tie in fandom with - and at the same time differentiate it from - extant reception theories. They explored a variety of media output, from Elvis (Hinerman) to Bruce Springsteen (Cavicchi); from *Star Trek* (Jenkins) to soap operas (Abercrombie and Longhurst). Lawrence Grossberg, in an early article on fandom's sensibilities, writes, "[w]e have to acknowledge that, for the most part, the relationship between the audience and popular texts is an active and productive one" (52). Starting from such an approach made the connection to previous scholarship simple. Reception theorists had been moving more and more towards the concept of meaning-making originating not in the producer of popular texts, but rather in those texts' consumers. So what to do with fans, who clearly deviate from the typical consumer (even though all audiences are understood to also be actively engaged in the making of meaning)? Grossberg makes the case for fandom studies as a branch of reception studies by writing that, "[w]hile we may all agree that there is a difference between the fan and the consumer, we are unlikely to understand the difference if we simply celebrate the former category and dismiss the latter one" (52). Rather than simply being viewed as a different species of audience member altogether, fans, then, could be placed along the spectrum of these audiences that had just recently been understood to be *active* – fans were just such active audience members that they verged on production of new material. Jenson uses this approach to legitimize fandom, comparing it to an academic's cool remove and self-identification as an "aficionado" of an artist, author, etc. As she proposes, the only difference between a fan and an aficionado is in the source material, and whether or not it is deemed culturally worthy of intense appreciation. She writes that,

one aspect of the distinction between ‘them’ and ‘us’ involves a cultural hierarchy. At least one key difference, then, is that it is normal and therefore safe to be attached to elite, prestige-conferring objects (aficionado-hood), but it can be abnormal, and therefore dangerous to be attached to popular, mass-mediated objects (fandom). (20)

Implicating herself as part of this practice, she claims that, “my aficionado-hood is really disguised, and thereby legitimated, fandom” (23). In his seminal book, *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins also seeks to merge academia (at least his approach to it) and fandom, by confessing to his own personal engagement in fan culture, and framing it as an asset in his scholarship. “When I write about fan culture, then,” he acknowledges, “I write *both* as an academic (who has access to certain theories of popular culture, certain bodies of critical and ethnographic literature) and as a fan (who has access to the particular knowledge and traditions of that community)” (1992b, 5). His resultant self-labeling as a hybrid “aca-fan” is one that he continues to use throughout his publications and on his blog, “Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins.” Matt Hills, in *Fan Cultures*, acknowledges the positive view of that approach, noting that, “Jenkins’s hybrid identity allows a more adequate ‘recognition’ of a basic similarity between ‘fans’ and ‘academics’” (2002, 11).¹

Jenson’s comparison between fandom and aficionado-hood goes beyond a mere shared tendency towards an expressed predilection for a certain genre, artist, or text, however; an academic art aficionado can be considered a fan in part because of what they

¹ It should be noted, however, that Hills goes on to posit a less positive way of viewing Jenkins as “aca-fan”. He continues, “...it could equally well be argued that this is a constructed pseudo-similarity aimed at legitimating academic practice by projecting this onto a *rationalization* of the fan” (11). By equating fandom with academia, and then trumpeting fandom, he contends, the “aca-fan” approach is a backdoor way of legitimizing academic work. The Introduction to *Fan Cultures* presents a thorough analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the academic-as-fan-as-academic issue.

would go on to do with their “tastes and preferences” (Jenson 19), talking about it with friends, sharing their preferences with colleagues, writing articles on their experience of the cultural artifact, and so on. As put by Jenkins, “[f]an reception goes beyond transient comprehension of a viewed episode towards some more permanent and material form of meaning-production” (1992a, 210). While Grossberg’s fan/consumer difference centers on the sensibility through which, as audience members, each group receives a text, and the concomitant personal investment made to the source material, Jenkins and Jenson’s framing centers on the difference in meaning-making between the two groups. More specifically, the Jenkins/Jenson fan/consumer distinction seems to be one of the durability of such meaning-making; a fan’s reception is one that moves beyond a straight semiotic translation/interpretation of produced signs during a particular event or viewing, towards more lasting contributions to a conversation with the artist or artists of the source material.

This distinction proved to be a crucial one, as it provided fandom scholars with a metric by which to measure a person’s fandom: the concrete production of new text, as inspired by some sort of source media; in other words, their *talk*. Talk can be anything, really, as long as it builds on the source text in some way – fan letters, Internet postings, changes in style/dress, attendance at conventions, fan fiction, and so forth (it should be noted that “text” has a plethora of meanings as well, not simply a written text; for example, Roland Barthes uses Greta Garbo’s movie screen-sized face as a “text” in his essay, “The Face of Garbo”). Denis Bielby and C. Lee Harrington arrange fan talk into four categories: *commentary*, the basic statement of opinions as to what a fan finds pleasurable or irritating about a given text; *speculation*, musings on the fate and future of

a body of work or star; *request*, i.e. asking other fans for information on the object of fandom; and *diffusion*, the doling out of such information (Staiger 85). Janet Staiger proposes a fifth category: *recognition*, or “the use of catchphrases or insider information that would identify the depth of knowledge that a ‘true’ fan would know” (108).

According to these authors, it is a very rare for a fan to engage in every one of these forms of talk on a regular basis. Rather, these are categories of talk that can be considered to be fan behavior instead of typical consumer/audience behavior. A person need only act in a manner consistent with one of the categories to be engaging in fan behavior, and thus, on some level, to be counted a fan. John Fiske, one of the early pioneers of the field, makes a somewhat simpler distinction between fan and casual viewer, by noting the difference between *semiotic* and *textual* productivity:

All popular audiences engage in varying degrees of semiotic productivity, producing meanings and pleasures that pertain to their social situation out of the products of the culture industries. But fans often turn this semiotic productivity into some form of textual production that can circulate among – and thus help to define – the fan community. (30)

While all theories of fandom that stress the importance of fan talk work in tandem with Jenkins’s “permanent and material” production of meaning concept, Fiske’s duality here seems the neatest comparison. As Jenkins claims, “[m]edia fans are consumers who also produce, readers who also write, spectators who also participate” (1992a, 208). Fans engage in semiotic productivity like all consumers, and unlike all consumers, in addition engage in some form of textual productivity resulting from their reception; therein lies the difference. Jenkins adopts de Certeau’s term “poaching” (1992a, 215) to describe the fan’s process of appropriating, adapting, and reworking source material into a newly produced text (i.e. fan talk). In the above excerpt, however, Fiske hints towards a future

area of fandom study, the fan community, which eventually became the second wave of fan studies as identified by Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington.

During this second generation, “Fan Cultures and Social Hierarchy,” (Gray et al 6), in the 1990s, fan studies scholars turned away from the fan’s place in their culture at large, and instead focused on the social structures created within fan communities. While this in many ways seemed like a natural progression within the discourse, it also marked a profound shift for the field. As Gray et al explain, “fans are seen not as counterforce to existing social hierarchies and structures but, in sharp contrast, as agents of maintaining social and cultural systems of classification and thus existing hierarchies” (6). In one fell swoop, fans went from being poachers, unauthorized adapters and re-appropriators, taking major media products and subversively manipulating them to meet their needs/interests (such as the gay rights movement co-opting *Wizard of Oz* imagery) to mere replicators of larger social structures, creating equally rigid hegemonies within their own fan communities. In an early (i.e. first wave) article on poaching, Jenkins alludes to the power structures he saw fans as subverting through their fandom:

Fandom is particularly attractive to groups marginalized or subordinated in the dominant culture – women, blacks, gays, lower-middle-class office workers, the handicapped – precisely because its social organization provides types of unconditional acceptance and alternative sources of status lacking in the larger society. (1992a, 213)

This construction of fandom falls right in line with the first wave’s roots in de Certeau’s notion of poaching, and his distinction between “strategies,” what the dominant culture does to maintain its hegemony, and “tactics,” maneuvers available to the subordinate in order to subvert and appropriate dominant discourse (Staiger 112). Fandom emerged as a

tactical system employed by marginalized social groups to assert some form of dominance.

If de Certeau provided the framework for the first wave, the second found its theoretical home in Pierre Bourdieu. Indeed, Fiske initiated the connection between fandom studies and Bourdieu's work, using the latter's concept of cultural capital to explain part of the impetus behind a fan's desire to accumulate knowledge on their object of fandom. As Fiske explains, "[f]andom offers ways of filling cultural lack and provides the social prestige and self-esteem that go with cultural capital" (33). Here, he sees fandom as being a perfect refuge for the socially marginalized – much in line with Jenkins's use of de Certeau's poaching-as-tactic – ultimately offering the fan a "shadow cultural economy" in which other strengths and knowledge sets are given greater weight than those prioritized in the dominant culture (Fiske 30). Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and his treatment of dominant vs. subordinate habitus (Fiske 40) do not stop at a simple dichotomy, however, and ultimately the shadow cultural "economies" created within each fandom were not always socialist utopias. Bourdieu saw social structures as being recreated on various levels of society, and fandom scholars began looking at the ways in which Jenkins's notion of "unconditional acceptance" amongst members of fan communities was not always the case. All poachers were not created equally, it turned out, and the first wave revolt against the popular concept that "[f]ans are simply incapable of recognizing that the culture they enjoy is actually being used to dupe and exploit them" (Grossberg 51) gave way to a second wave introspection into the ways in which the mechanisms of duping and exploiting were being replicated within fan communities themselves.

Set against this framework, Bielby, Harrington, and Staiger's categories of fan talk as listed above begin to take on an entirely different aspect. *Commentary* remains relatively innocuous, as does *speculation*, to a point. The other three, however, become tools for fans to delineate a power structure within the fandom. *Request* can be seen as a plea for entrance into a higher level of knowledge, and therefore status in the community. In the same light, *diffusion* of information can be delayed, withheld, or doled out only to those deemed worthy by those who have it. And Staiger's *recognition* talk becomes a clear way of isolating different strata of fans, with the vocabulary and/or shorthand becoming more and more obtuse as one rises among the ranks. What had originally been seen as empowering forms of self-expression and ownership over mass media products, cast in this light, become the mechanisms for dominance within a fandom's subculture. In de Certeauian terms, what was once a "tactic" becomes a "strategy." In his most recent book, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Jenkins uses the fan base of the CBS show *Survivor* as a case study to exemplify ways in which even *speculation* can be codified into a very specific set of practices within a given fandom, and the *diffusion* of information is carefully managed and timed as to who gains access to insider knowledge, and when they get it (2008, 25-58). Eventually, the result is a constellation of "gated [knowledge] communities" (2008, 38), with access to the upper echelons only granted to the elite few.

The studies of this generation moved away from empowering stories of fandom as a healthy assertion of self in an overly dominant mass-media atmosphere, and instead looked to the ways in which the social structures created within specific fandoms recreated the very structures that the studies of the first generation showed fans

subverting. “These studies are still concerned, for instance, with questions of gender, but they no longer portray fandom as an extraordinary space of emancipation and reformulation of gender relations” (Gray et al 6). New fan types were described that policed their own communities, or rebelled against them. In his chapter on *Survivor*, Jenkins describes the existence within such fan communities of the “expert paradigm” (2008, 29), through which only certain people are granted the status of “expert,” becoming the only ones considered to be reliable sources for certain coveted insider knowledge. Professional fans and fan celebrities are described; people who become objects of a certain level of fan interest in their own right, due to their proximity to the source material, or mastery over it. Derek Johnson coined the term “fan-tagonism” to describe the “ongoing, competitive struggles between both internal factions and external institutions to discursively codify the fan-text-producer relationship according to their respective interests” (287); previous to this generation, the fact that internal struggles existed among different factions of a fandom was not explored. Staiger identifies some of the key factors of status-building within a particular fan community: “knowledge of information about the text or its production, knowledge of group norms or their history, articulation of or adherence to group taste preferences, leadership in group activities,” (108) among others. Ultimately, however, Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington see this second generation of scholarship as limited in scope, and to some extent, guilty of invalidating the cause of researching fandom to begin with. “While the second wave of fan studies,” they write,

proved effective in demonstrating what fandom is not – an a priori space of cultural autonomy and resistance – it had little to say about the individual motivations, enjoyment, and pleasures of fans...As much as popular media representations of fans have failed to ask why audiences

become fans...the academic analysis of fandom was now in danger of committing [sic] the same omissions. (6-7)

In the early twenty-first century, fandom studies took its third and final (up to the present moment) paradigmatic shift. The third generation, “Fandom and Modernity” (Gray et al 7), coincided with a substantial increase in technological innovation that created new opportunities for the expression of fan behaviors and sympathies. “When Jenkins wrote *Textual Poachers* (1992),” explain Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington, “fan communities were often relegated to conventions and fanzines” (7). By contrast, a mere ten years later, the status of the fan had seen a marked shift in society at large, and fans were no longer relegated to spaces specially designated for their kind. Rather than being seen by their broader societies as obsessed or hysterical, fans started to be considered proactive, engaged consumers. Stories in major media began popping up - such as recent pieces on NPR on how fans of the television show *Chuck* successfully prolonged the life of the series (Holmes), or in *The New Yorker* on James Bond fans doing their own spy work to out plagiarists (Widdicombe) – in which fans were lauded as enabling the creation of new texts, and as being a sort of cultural police force, an “ad-hoc intelligence bureau,” (Widdicombe 54) maintaining a genre’s integrity. These types of intervention weren’t necessarily new (see, for example, Sue Brower’s 1992 article, “Fans as Tastemakers: Viewers for Quality Television”), but their mainstream publication and celebration were. No longer were fans simply isolated and parasitic, fans were everywhere, and they were driving media production forward. As Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington point out, fans flocked to new Internet sites such as *Television without Pity* and *Ain’t It Cool News* which, rather than focusing on one text, were hubs for a variety of information and news on audience and fan interests (7).

Scholars followed suit, and began moving away from intense scrutiny of what Stanley Fish, in 1980, called “interpretive communities” (14) – exemplified by Janice Radway’s exploration into book clubs (in *A Feeling for Books: the Book-of-the-Month Club, literary taste, and middle-class desire*, 1997) and in the aforementioned studies of fans of Elvis, *Star Trek*, etc., among many others – towards a broader look at fan behavior as a byproduct of the modern media landscape and the evolving relationship between media and consumer. These communities, fan clubs, convention attendees, etc. stopped being viewed as the only source of fan behavior, and were instead understood as those members at the far end of a wide spectrum of textual reception that could be considered fan-like in nature. Just as the first generation placed fandom along the spectrum of all audiences, this generation, conversely, began to place all audiences along the spectrum of fan behavior. By focusing almost exclusively on the extreme end of fan behavior, the first two generations of fan studies ignored the much more common fan inclinations of the more casual viewer, and those who did not engage in fan talk in an organized, systematic way; as Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington put it, “fandom in one of its most common forms was excluded from systematic academic study” (4). In the process of defending/legitimizing fan behavior, those early accounts inadvertently reinscribed fans as an Other by looking at them as existing within communities in isolation (even if, as second generation studies posited, those Othered communities replicated mainstream hegemonies). The result, then, was that “early fan studies did not so much deconstruct the binary structure in which the fan had been placed as they tried to differently value the fan’s place in said binary” (Gray et al 3).

This most recent wave of study still, in practice, often tends to focus on case studies of isolated interpretive communities, but the rhetorical approach is different in scope. Rather than engage in the case study in order to unearth a previously maligned/unknown segment of the population and grant their behavior legitimacy, the goal is instead to view their behavior as exemplary of new understandings of how audiences interact with a text and the peripheral information that surrounds it.² With that in mind, many researchers have gone back to a cultural/rhetorical studies approach to fandom, creating or re-examining systems of categorizing both what gives a text cult value and the ways in which audiences express fan inclinations. At the same time, they have begun to lean heavily on media studies, as a way to explore emerging media technologies' ability to enable new forms of fan expression and audience engagement.

In his article, "'Strangers No More, We Sing': Filking and the Social Construction of the Science Fiction Fan Community," as in *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins proposed a model of fandom broken down into five distinct categories of fan behavior, with the underlying understanding that "part of what distinguishes fans as a particular class of textual consumers is the social nature of their interpretive and cultural activity" (1992a, 209). The categories are: the adoption of a "distinctive mode of reception" (1992a, 209), which views fans as a specific category of media audiences alongside children, housewives, and husbands, who each have particular ways of approaching their media

² These generations are of course not as distinct as I am here summarizing them to be. From the outset, all three lines of inquiry have been represented in major works on fandom; Jenkins's *Textual Poachers*, for example, certainly uses many of the approaches that have only been ascribed to later generations of the field, especially his "different only in degree" (1992a, 209) framing of fandom. I am simply following Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington's generational model because it provides a useful framework through which to view the broad trajectory of the field.

viewing habits; the constitution of a “particular interpretive community” (1992a, 210), which helps the fan negotiate “reading protocols and structures of meaning” (1992a, 211) for a certain text - building, as mentioned above, off of Fish’s previous work, and as Jenkins notes, off of David Bordwell’s *Making Meanings*; the creation of a “base for consumer activism,” (1992b, 278) usually, but not always, an organized group of audience members intent on promoting or prolonging the publication/production of a specific media object; the constitution of a “particular Art World,” (1992a, 211) which goes beyond the interpretive community to also include creators, producers, distributors, investors, etc, who give a text both aesthetic and economic value; and finally, the creation of an “alternative social community” (1992a, 213) – a social space in which fans, beyond negotiating their shared interpretation/evaluation of a given text, can find social acceptance and a peer group with explicitly shared interests.

Janet Staiger has proposed a sixth category of fan behavior: “the extension of fan partialities into everyday living” (105). These kinds of activities include collecting (both of memorabilia and of the texts themselves), the decorating of one’s home with fan-related material, the naming of children/pets after fictional characters, and the making of pilgrimages to places where notable scenes were filmed, events occurred, or celebrities live(d) - an activity explored thoroughly by Roger C. Aden in *Popular Stories and Promised Lands: Fan Cultures and Symbolic Pilgrimages*. It would seem natural to also include repeated viewing or attendance under this category, as an example of an “everyday” behavior (like owning a DVD) that, when multiplied (like owning several copies of the same DVD), can provide new insight into a person’s tastes/fan inclinations. Cornel Sandvoss, in “The Death of the Reader?: Literary Theory and the Study of Texts

in Popular Culture,” lends credence to this notion, with his pared-down definition of fandom as “the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text” (22). Staiger’s reiteration of Jenkins’s initial list, and her addition of a sixth category, is a way of ensuring that an important piece of first generation fandom theory stays relevant in this new, third generation context. With Staiger’s addition, a much broader spectrum of behavior is now open to scrutiny under the umbrella of fandom studies; as simple an act as taping a poster up on one’s wall becomes an instance of fan action. Jenkins’s stipulation that fan behavior is distinguished by its “social nature” (1992, 209) becomes less relevant in this context; certainly there is a social aspect to home decoration, but it is much more social in the performative sense than in the community-building sense that Jenkins was originally referring to.

Indeed, fandom-as-performance is yet another recent addition to the frameworks by which scholars have been investigating fan behavior. Hills, for example, uses the term “performative consumption” (2002, 158) to describe an act of dressing up or otherwise impersonating an object of fandom – a sort of fictive mimesis, an imitation of something that never actually existed. Hills has also presented new ways of viewing other objects of fandom inquiry through this performative lens; in “Attending Horror Film Festivals and Conventions: Liveness, Subcultural Capital and ‘Flesh-and-Blood Genre Communities,’” he views fans’ attendance and performance-as-fans at horror film conventions through the lens of Philip Auslander’s theory of “‘liveness’ as a source of authenticity” (Hills 2010, 87), to present fans’ embodied performance at such events as an attempt to accrue “subcultural capital” (Thornton qtd in Hills 2010, 87). Instead of viewing fan conventions and Internet message boards as locations through which interpretive and

social communities are fostered and solidified, Hills presents them as sites for the performance of fandom. As he notes in regard to an online fansite for the television show *The X-Files*,

the online *X-Files* audience cannot merely offer a ‘window’ on the programme’s offline, socially atomized fandom; it must, instead, *perform* its fan audiencehood, knowing that other fans will act as a readership for speculations, observations and commentaries. (2002, 177)

This perspective, like Staiger’s addition to Jenkins’s list, does not negate Jenkins’s notion of the need for an underlying social aspect to fandom, but instead complicates it.

Concurrent with this complication of previous research has been a renewed interest in looking at the source texts that inspire all this fuss in the first place, in a continued effort, as Sandvoss suggests, to understand “why fan texts mean so much to so many people and [to trace] the meaning of this affective bond between text and reader” (32). What is it about certain texts that makes them a source of fan-like attention? The most commonly referred-to text towards this end is Umberto Eco’s “‘Casablanca’: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage,” in which Eco explains why he believes *Casablanca* to be an ideal cult artifact, and why in the postmodern era, “cult has become the normal way of enjoying movies” (12). Among others, Hills attempts to update the framework posed by Eco; he suggests that, while they can obviously differ greatly, there exists a “family resemblance” (2002, 131) between all cult texts. This resemblance has three aspects: *auteurism*, or the existence of a singular Creator who “acts as a point of coherence and continuity in relation to the world of the media cult” (2002, 132); *endlessly deferred narrative*, or the text’s posing of a question or set of questions that never actually get answered – an itch that can never be scratched (Hills suggests that the title of the television show *Doctor Who* can be seen both as a title and also as a question, constantly

leaving the viewer to seek its answer (2002, 135)); and *hyperdiegesis*, or “the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension” (2002, 137) – what Eco called a “completely furnished world” (3). An interesting aspect of this framework is that not all of these fan-inciting factors need reside within the text itself, but can rather exist as extratextual information. For example, an untimely or mysterious death can yield cult value to a celebrity icon³, offering a sort of endlessly deferred narrative. Similarly, the knowledge that J.R.R. Tolkien created an entirely new language in the process of writing his novels can lend hyperdiegetic depth and hence cult value to his work, without having to read a single word of *The Lord of the Rings* (nor having to see the film adaptations).

In a similar vein, Eco, Jenkins, and others have stressed that a text’s ability to communicate with other texts, as well as across media, affects its ability to become inscribed as an object of value for fans. Eco writes of the cult text’s inclusion of “intertextual frames,” or “stereotyped situations coming from the previous textual tradition and recorded by our encyclopedia” (5). He foresees a moment in the near future in which films will be nothing but self-conscious, intertextual referencing, in hopes of garnering cult value, with the reverse effect being achieved; if everything is a cult movie, nothing is a cult movie. Hills dismisses this as “generational taste weakly disguised as a theoretical distinction,” (2002, 132) and writes in favor of self-conscious intertextuality – he cites Will Brooker’s work on *Star Wars* as evidence that George Lucas’s self-aware usage of Joseph Campbell’s archetypal models certainly did no harm to that franchise’s

³ Hills suggests that icons, as objects of cult interest, are similar not to texts but to genres. For more on that topic, see Hills 2002, 138-143.

cult value. On the media side of things, Jenkins writes in *Convergence Culture* of the growing field of transmedia storytelling, or the spreading of a text across multiple media platforms. He sees this as a “new mode of storytelling” (2008, 99) in which the access points for potential fandom interest in a given text increase exponentially as it is presented through a variety of media, and uniquely tailored to meet the needs of each platform. As he suggests, through transmedia storytelling, “[a]ny given product is a point of entry into the franchise as a whole” (2008, 98). If *Casablanca* was Eco’s quintessential cult film, then *The Matrix* is Jenkins’s, as it offered abundant use of inter- and extratextual referencing within the trilogy of films, and also had countless spin-offs and add-ons to the film narrative via DVD extras, television programs, video games, and more (2008, 100).

As we have seen, through its short existence the field of fandom studies has undergone multiple massive paradigmatic shifts. Through the course of that development, a slew of new (usually portmanteau-style) vocabulary has been created, and previous vocabulary and scholarship has been appropriated/adopted to meet the field’s needs. The present moment finds top scholars in a state of examining “the inherent symbiosis between fandom and modernity” (Gray et al 15), lending much weight to the Internet as an enabler of fan behavior. In the next chapter, I will focus on a decidedly non-contemporary moment in time, the opening years of the nineteenth century, in an attempt to place fan behavior in a broader historical context than many of these studies offer. Hopefully, an examination into the fan culture of historical theatrical audiences will provide further insight into Romantic reception, as well as today’s audience dynamics.

Chapter Two: *Romantic British Theatre and the Active Audience*

Let us now shift our focus from present thought to historical feeling. As we have seen, the past three decades have been witness to a flourishing of discussion on the study of fandom, and the vast majority of that conversation has been based in contemporary case studies. These theories can work to explain the behavior and organization of modern television and film audiences; can the same theories be applied to centuries-old theatregoers? I believe the answer to that question to be a resounding “yes” – though there is no shortage of work to be done in order to flesh out this union. Hopefully, an application of fandom theory to the behavior of historical theatre audiences will allow for greater insight into both previously unconnected fields, allowing for greater insight into the deeper dynamics within theatrical audience-ship, and for a larger contextualization as to what it means to be a fan today.

In an effort to provide a deeper context for Chapter Three, in which I will focus specifically on the Old Price Riots of 1809, with an eye towards the rioters as fans of Shakespeare, I will first attempt to establish a sense of the larger audience dynamics in which the riots occurred. Three brief cases aim to establish the existence of various modes of what we now know of as “fandom” in the theatrical audiences of Romantic London. These three examples - Sarah Siddons and the celebrity icon; the brief but bright craze for hippodrama; and Dick Cypher, transmedia, and rampant intertextuality – are all deserving of in-depth studies, as there is much to be learned from an elaborate look into each case. By presenting just the tip of the iceberg for each, I hope to impart a

sense of the existence of fandom in Romantic theatre audiences, and potentially whet the reader's appetite for future research – or at the very least, for Chapter Three.

Sarah Siddons and Celebrity

I should no more think of saying Mistress Siddons, than I should say Mr. Shakspeare, or Mr. Milton. She belongs to God's nobility, and is above even the title of duchess. Words suggest ideas; and what a lovely crowd are conjured up by the magic combination of the seven letters which compose her name! (Robson 17)

This excerpt, from William Robson's *The Old Play-Goer*, the author's mid-nineteenth century collection of his impressions at the theatre in the earlier years of the century, is not at all unique in its hyperbolic expression of admiration for Sarah Siddons (1755-1831), arguably the most famous actress of the Romantic era. Claiming to "put forth nothing but the genuine sentiments of a play-goer" (vi), Robson extols Siddons's virtues to an extent that would seem almost embarrassing to contemporary sensibilities, if he were not so eloquent in doing so.

Born Sarah Kemble, Siddons was part of an illustrious theatre family in London, made exponentially more illustrious by herself and her two brothers, Charles Kemble and John Philip Kemble. Long regarded as "the Muse of Tragedy herself" (Hazlitt 1957, 122), Siddons was most remembered for her enactment of Lady Macbeth, a role that she reprised often over the course of decades. Twenty years after she first took on the role, William Hazlitt, one of the most prominent theatre critics in London, declared in *The Examiner* that "Mrs. Siddon's Lady Macbeth is little less appalling in its effects than the apparition of a preternatural being" (Hazlitt 1957, 122). She is most often compared to something unnatural, an otherworldly being come down from the heavens to grace the

audience with her direct translations of what tragedy ought to be, and because she is doing it, what tragedy *is*. Other people involved in making theatre also sang (well, wrote) her praises; in 1794, Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote this sonnet in her honor, published in *The Morning Chronicle*:

As when a child on some long winter's night
Affrighted clinging to its Grandam's knees
With eager wond'ring and perturb'd delight
Listens strange tales of fearful dark decrees
Mutter'd to wretch by necromatic spell;
Or of those hags, who at the witching time
Of murky midnight ride the air sublime,
And mingle foul embrace with fiends of Hell:
Cold Horror drinks its blood! Anon the tear
More gentle starts, to hear the Beldame tell
Of pretty babes, that lov'd each other dear,
Murder'd by cruel Uncle's mandate fell:
Ev'n such the shiv'ring joys thy tones impart,
Ev'n so thou, SIDDONS! meltest my sad heart!
(Coleridge 140)

As Richard Dyer notes in “Heavenly Bodies,” “[i]mages have to be made” (85). He is referring to the Hollywood star-making system, both via the work of studios and their media counterparts, but I would argue that the same rule applies here. Siddons’s performances were no doubt sublime, but the extent to which the reactions to her were so consistently superlative must have been incremental. Her identity as a star beyond compare was constantly reified by writings such as those by Hazlitt, Robson, and Coleridge, which in turn generated (and perpetuated) audience, i.e. fan, interest, in the same way that contemporary fan interest in a star can be perpetuated by consistent updates about them on *Ain’t It Cool News*. Just as David Garrick before her, Siddons’s

celebrity status benefited from the production and wide distribution of paintings of her as certain characters⁴, and treatises on her near-supernatural ability.

Indeed, the seemingly consistent referencing to Siddons as otherworldly also conforms to contemporary understandings of the larger-than-life star. In “Stars,” Dyer utilizes Max Weber’s definition of “charisma,” being “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he (sic) is defined as set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least superficially exceptional qualities” (qtd in Dyer 82). Dyer suggests that Marilyn Monroe, James Dean, Marlon Brando, and Elvis Presley all carry with their image this sort of charismatic weight.⁵ The evidence certainly points to Siddons, melter of hearts, member of God’s nobility, as being among their ranks as well. In an essay on Siddons, Hazlitt notes that,

[t]he homage she has received is greater than that which is paid to queens. The enthusiasm she excited had something idolatrous about it; she was regarded less with admiration than with wonder, as if a being of a superior order had dropped from another sphere, to awe the world with the majesty of her appearance. She raised tragedy to the skies, or brought it down from thence. It was something above nature....She was not less than a goddess, or than a prophetess inspired by the gods...She was the stateliest ornament of the public mind...To have seen Mrs. Siddons was an event in everyone’s life... (1957, 94)

⁴ For an excellent collection of portraits of Siddons in various poses, see Judith Pascoe’s *The Sarah Siddons Audio Files: Romanticism and the Lost Voice*.

⁵ Dyer adapts Weber’s notion of charisma in tandem with the claim of S.N. Eisenstadt, that “charismatic appeal is effective especially when the social order is uncertain, unstable and ambiguous and when the charismatic figure or group offers a value, order or stability to counterpoise this” (Dyer 83). As such, Monroe et al are stars because their charismatic images existed in tandem with aspects of society that were in crisis. Romantic England was certainly a society undergoing fundamental political and social change, though for the purposes of brevity I can delve no deeper in this direction in regard to Siddons’s popularity. There is certainly more work to be done here.

John Lennon's infamous remark in 1966 that the Beatles were "more popular than Jesus" can be seen as having a tangential precedent in Hazlitt's hyperbole regarding Siddons being no less than a goddess. Robson quotes a contemporary of his as having declared that, "the heart that she cannot subdue must be made of other materials than flesh and blood" (Beattie qtd in Robson 20-21). The list goes on – in fact, writings in this vein abound⁶, with Siddons repeatedly cast as "set apart" from other, ordinary people. If "talk" is our agreed-upon unit of measurement of fandom, then Siddons is guilty of stimulating unprecedented amounts of fan-like reactions, from critics, to peers, to amateur theatregoers.

The fact that the everyday playgoer was able to put her opinions in writing and distribute them in any kind of quantity is crucial to the growth of fan behavior in this period. Just as in the current moment, in which Jenkins feels inspired to note that "[n]ew technologies are enabling average consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content" (2006, 1), the broadening availability of printing technologies and rising literacy rates enabled audiences to interact with, and comment on, the objects of their fandom like never before. People like Robson, who took the time to compile book-length manuscripts on their experience in the theatre, could communicate with a broader public, but so too could those interested in replicating stars' likenesses through portraiture (as in the case of David Garrick mentioned above, and also with Siddons), or in writing shorter odes of their affection. For example, "The Siddoniad," a twelve-page tract written "as the first production of a youthful pen" (1), features a "poetical essay" extolling the young author's praise for Siddons. It begins,

⁶ Again, see Judith Pascoe's *The Sarah Siddons Audio Files: Romanticism and the Lost Voice*, or William Hazlitt's *View of the English Stage*, among others.

SIDDONS! to thee, the bless'd AMBASSADRESS
OF VIRTUE, from those mansions where she reigns,
In full perfection, would a Muse, untry'd
In numbers of poetic harmony,
Ascribe her unaffected song; to thee!
By Nature fitted out with ev'ry charm
To make e'en vice a seeming ornament.
(2)

The ode continues for ten pages. This is not William Hazlitt, professional theatre critic⁷, nor Samuel Coleridge, famous author – this is an anonymously printed tract by an audience member wishing to communicate, in a creative way, his appreciation for the Siddons's work. As such, I would argue, it is a clear expression of celebrity fandom.

An Abundance of Horseplay(s)

For a few short months, and almost with the same fervor with which many of them approached the performances of actors like Siddons, Garrick, Edmund Kean, and the Kembles, Romantic audiences could not get enough of hippodrama – in other words, plays involving live horses. As the Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres, the two venues that held a monopoly on “legitimate” theatre production in London – in addition to the Haymarket, which operated during the summer months while the others were closed - burnt down and were rebuilt over the years, their auditoriums swelled with each new iteration, as did their corresponding seating capacities⁸. Eventually, their sizes became prohibitive to close viewing – poor acoustics and lack of visibility made it so that

⁷ There is, of course, ample reason to recognize critics as fans, and to study them as such. While we have accepted the existence of the aca-fan, should we not also acknowledge the crit-fan?

⁸ For the purposes of this brief study, we will focus on these major centers of theatrical activity in London. There were, of course, dozens of other sites where a large variety of popular entertainments were held. It would no doubt be interesting to examine fads and attendance trends at those sites, though it would also be, no doubt, a lot more difficult.

only the highest-paying audience members, seated closest to the stage, could follow plays with subtle movement and complex language. Audiences, naturally, were therefore more responsive and appreciative towards moments of visual/auditory extravagance; theatre managers began seeking out pieces of theatre that prioritized spectacle over poetry.

Playwrights whose tendencies leaned towards more subtle drama lost favor.

Theatregoers, already accustomed to elaborate sets and stage machinery, such as in Matthew “Monk” (so nicknamed due to the popularity of his Gothic novel, *The Monk*) Lewis’s 1797 *The Castle Spectre*, as well as to performing animals, such as Carlo, the Wonder Dog (Gamer 307), were looking for something new – and audience members in the rear of the auditorium were hoping for something big. Horses seemed like the next logical step.

Michael Gamer, in “A Matter of Turf: Romanticism, Hippodrama, and Legitimate Satire,” is quick to point out a few very particular aspects of early nineteenth-century London life that did indeed make horses on stage seem like a no-brainer. As he states, “[o]nly recently have cultural historians begun connecting [hippodrama] to broader trends in early-nineteenth-century British culture or to other equestrian fads of the early Regency” (308). Arguably chief among these facets of London life was the current vogue for coach driving, made most explicit by the members of what was called the Four-in-Hand club. Travel by horse-drawn coach was ubiquitous already, yet it became incredibly fashionable to “perform” the role of coach driver. Men belonging to a variety of subcultures would find common ground in adopting a driver character, dressing the part, borrowing coaches or decorating their own, and driving around London. The resulting character of “Whip” became an iconic social type, centered on his relationship

with a horse and coach (Gamer 308-9). This fad, in turn, was the result of a deeply ingrained club culture, born from a long local tradition of horse racing and breeding. Finally, for the purposes of this study, we should note that Gamer observes horses as representatives of “a changing cultural landscape” (317). In *The Dramatic Censor*, reviewer John Williams, using the pseudonym “Oliver Old Times”, writes about this change, saying,

*we are becoming a warlike people...*Thanks to Bonaparte’s threats of invasion, *every man* now is *a soldier*, and therefore naturally becomes enamoured of “the pomp, pride, and circumstances of glorious war,” and amongst them “*the neighing steed*” of course holds a conspicuous place in his affections... (qtd in Cox and Gamer 347)

Under the constant threat of invasion by Napoleon and his army, or of a French Revolution-style popular uprising from within, the close possibility of war was very much present in the collective consciousness of Londoners in the early nineteenth century. Hand in hand with imagery of war at the time went “the neighing steed,” and thus, horses were on everyone’s mind all the more. These factors and more combined to make the perfect storm for hippomania on London stages.

It started with afterpieces, and other pieces of theatrical marginalia that supplemented the night’s major offering. These pieces would be coupled with more traditional comedies/tragedies that had come to be known as standard “legitimate” fare at the patent theatres, in an effort to keep the bourgeois/critical audience (i.e. those who could afford seats close to the stage) satisfied while at the same time trying to appeal to new audiences hungry for spectacle. As Jane Moody notes in *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840*, the decision of Henry Harris and John Philip Kemble, the managers of Covent Garden in 1811, to present the revival of George Colman the Younger’s *Blue-*

Beard alongside a production of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, "suggests a calculated attempt to deflect damaging accusations about the burgeoning illegitimacy of Covent Garden's repertoire" (69-70). The managers could avoid the uproar about the death of legitimate theatre they knew to expect by presenting hippodrama as merely supplemental to the main event, a more traditional offering. The thought process behind this decision was soon abandoned, however, as Harris and Kemble, encouraged by the overwhelming popularity of the revival - the first to include actual horses on a patent theatre stage (the original 1798 production used "the great machinist Johnston's mechanical animals" (Cox and Gamer 76)) - commissioned Lewis to write *Timour the Tartar*, which would succeed *Blue-Beard* as an afterpiece just two months later. While *Timour* was presented nightly as an afterpiece to a variety of "legitimate" plays, it was clearly the night's main attraction, for advocates and opponents alike. *The Morning Chronicle*'s opening night reviewer contended that "[h]ad the audience been polled upon the subject, we think we may venture to say that three-fourths of them came to see the horses - the horses - and nothing but the horses" (qtd in Cox and Gamer 344).

While the critical response was largely dismissive (despite public enthusiasm) as to the content of these plays - one reviewer labeled *Blue-Beard*'s revival "unmeaning noise and gaudy *spectacle*" (*The Morning Chronicle*, qtd in Cox and Gamer 334) - even the most discerning of dramatic critics could not help but admit to the sheer audience effect of seeing the animals perform. "The production indeed is unworthy of criticism, and would not have been noticed in this paper but for a singular novelty that has lately been added to the representation," admitted Leigh Hunt, one of the foremost critics, in *The Examiner*, "...it is no doubt interesting," however, "to see of what so noble an animal

as the horse is capable” (qtd in Cox and Gamer 338-340). Hunt goes on at length in praise of the horses, himself caught up in the experience of seeing such a spectacle. His tacit, though reluctant, approval helped to firmly plant the cloven hoof in the stage door.

After *Timour*, satires, buffooneries, burlesques, pantomimes, satires of satires, and more, all featuring live horses, flooded the London theatre scene; Covent Garden even went to the lengths of bringing in an elephant for *Harlequin and Padmanaba* (Moody 72). As the one-two punch that started it all, “*Timour* and *Blue-Beard*,” writes Moody, “came to symbolise the decadent triumph of theatrical illegitimacy” (72). By July of 1811, six months after the revival of *Blue-Beard* was mounted, Colman the Younger was justified in putting in the opening lines of his metatheatrical burlesque *The Quadrupeds of Quedlinburgh*, “modern Taste and Genius have, at last, naturalized neighing foreignness; - the Circenses have trotted into Town, over the Bridges; and the hoof and the postern have distanced the Sock and the Buskin” (I,i, 73-75, qtd in Cox and Gamer 120).

I merely hope for this example to call attention to the fact that fads for certain genres or staging techniques certainly existed in the Romantic theatrical scene, and that these fads were audience-driven. Using Sandvoss’s notion of fandom as “regular, emotionally involved consumption” (22), this phenomenon certainly falls within that rubric. These plays, as afterpieces, outlived the runs of every mainstage “legitimate” show they had originally been paired with, and were enormously commercially successful, both as individual shows and under the aggregate of hippodrama. As far as emotional involvement, if a reviewer as typically reserved as Leigh Hunt could gush at length about his experience viewing the horses, one begins to get a sense of the overall

effect these plays had on their audiences. In the end, Hunt comes to the conclusion that these horse plays were “too powerful a stimulus to the senses” (qtd in Cox and Gamer 340) for the average spectator. Unfortunately, Hunt laments, “[i]n time these spectators learn to like nothing else; and then the managers must administer to their depraved appetite, or they cannot get rich” (qtd in Cox and Gamer 340). One can imagine contemporary television critics complaining in the same way about the producers of *Chuck*, whose fans famously pleaded for just one more season.

Imaginative Expansion, Intertextuality, and The Case of the Transmedia Text

Another aspect of Colman the Younger’s *Quadrupeds of Quedlinburgh* that is of use to this study is the vast amount of intertextuality embedded in the play. In this section, I would like to briefly point out a few of the ways in which Romantic theatremakers, and audiences, added cult value to works of theatre through intertextuality, pastiche, and transmedia storytelling.

First, as we turn to *Quadrupeds*, as Jeffrey Cox points out in “Spots of Time: The Structure of the Dramatic Evening in the Theatre of Romanticism,” it is important to consider the plays’ “immediate intertextuality” (403); in other words, the other plays and theatrical events that surround a play’s production on a given night. Just as a song may stand alone, but also exists in clear relation to the other songs on the album on which it is presented, so too is it important to note the entirety of the evening of theatre during which a play is performed. The hippodramas’ statuses as afterpieces allowed them to share the stage with works by playwrights who had been firmly established in England’s “legitimate” theatrical canon. This no doubt gave a different qualitative heft to the plays

than if they had simply been staged in “illegitimate” theatre spaces, with circuses, burlesques, and so on. Audiences would have also been aware of the fact, mentioned above, that as the mainstage productions came and went, these afterpieces, including *Quadrupeds*, enjoyed much longer runs. Thus, the “immediate intertextuality” that surrounded *Quadrupeds* embedded the production with both a sense of legitimacy and at the same time, popularity.

The play itself, as a metatheatrical satire, exists as almost nothing but intertext. Its structure employs the “well-worn frame narrative of distressed manager and dress rehearsal made popular in *The Rehearsal* (1671), *The Critic* (1779), and *Old Hay at the New Market* (1795)” (Gamer 322). Meanwhile, its framework, as well as its full title - *A Grand Dress’d Rehearsal of a Tragico-Comico-Anglo-Germanic-Hippodramatico Romance, call’d The Quadrupeds of Quedlinburgh; or The Rovers of Weimar* - are indebted to a 1798 piece in the *Anti-Jacobin*, by the pseudonymous “Mr. Higgins,” titled *The Rovers; or, the Double Arrangement*. Colman’s play pokes fun at Germanophilia (another fad of extreme audience interest), hippomania, and Gothic drama, engaging with the work of Lewis, Kotzebue, Goethe, James Arnold, and Colman’s own previous work (especially, of course, *Blue-Beard*), among countless others. As a reviewer in *The Examiner* remarked, “[i]ts burlesque...demands a continual reference in the minds of the audience to the nonsense of the German dramas” (qtd in Cox and Gamer 354). The play’s framing as a satire allowed it to engage with these various works and genres, while simultaneously commenting on them. More importantly, it offered a plenitude of entry points for audiences to engage with the piece and find cult value within it – and he was

rewarded for doing so by the play's continued popularity (and hence, profitability). As Colman himself wrote,

[t]he proprietors may possibly plead, that there is a dearth of legitimate dramatists, and it may be so; it has been averred to by [*sic*] the case in all ages; but few regular shoemakers are inclined to take the trouble of making shoes, when they find so much encouragement given to them for cobbling. Between managers and the town, who leads or who drives is a problem of difficult solution; do they not by turns lead and drive each other? (qtd in Cox and Gamer 344)

Colman's "cobbling" is not entirely dissimilar from Jenkins's "poaching"; it certainly serves the purposes of a de Certeauian tactic, being a previously subordinated form of theatre appropriating and subverting more dominant forms. In that sense, *Quadrupeds* exists as both an object with cult value, and a fan text itself, the product of extensive "cobbling" of past texts.

The practice of lifting themes, narrative strategies, titles, even entire characters from one fiction and placing them into another was certainly not unique to this precise moment. As David A. Brewer explains in *The Afterlife of Character, 1726-1825*, British readers throughout the eighteenth century (and no doubt before) were often engaged in what he terms "imaginative expansion," which he describes as "an array of reading practices...by which the characters in broadly successful texts were treated as if they were both fundamentally incomplete and the common property of all" (2).⁹ His notion of

⁹ For his book, Brewer focuses by and large on eighteenth century British novels and their readers, though he proposes that his observations apply to British theatre audiences of the era as well. He cites Lisa A. Freeman's *Character's Theater: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century English Stage*, noting, "Freeman is completely right to insist that there are important ontological differences between the disembodied nobodies of the novel and the all-too-embodied roles of the theater. What my own research suggests, however, is that many eighteenth-century playgoers were more than willing to overlook that difference" (208). Recent work on fan fiction certainly shows that modern

readers' seeing of characters as "fundamentally incomplete" seems uncannily parallel to Hills's concept of the endlessly deferred narrative; just as Hills sees the potential for fan interest in the open-endedness of *Doctor Who*, Brewer sees many readers as asking themselves the question, "Falstaff *who*?" As he continues, "the originary representation of these characters was, for readers engaged in these practices, merely a starting point."

(2). Brewer uses George Saville Carey's 1769 play, *Shakespeare's Jubilee* - which portrays a new tale involving many of Shakespeare's most well known characters, including Falstaff, Puck, the witches from *Macbeth*, and so on - as an example of this imaginative expansion. It is interesting that he positions Carey, a published playwright, as a reader, rather than simply a producer of texts. Brewer claims that readers who, like Carey, engage in imaginative expansion, "are knowingly appropriating the creations of another in the hope that they could further increase the felt value of those creations for all who delighted in them" (24). Colman the Younger, as an intertextual cobbler, certainly can be seen to fit within this framework of expansion as well.

Another way in which characters and texts crossed boundaries during this period was through what I consider to be transmedia techniques. Charles Mathews the Elder, a prominent comic actor in the early years of the nineteenth century, created a character named Dick Cypher, to be part of a farce called "Hit or Miss," by Isaac Pocock. The character was a lampoon of the "Whip" type, and was beloved by the members of the aforementioned Four-in-Hand club - so beloved, in fact, that members asked Mathews to ride along with them, in costume and in character as Cypher. "[T]hey sometimes invited Mr. Mathews to accompany them in their drives, when in their full costume and

audiences, at least, are more than willing to imagine continued narratives for those characters that they have seen embodied on television or in film.

cavalcade, and he generally was preferred to a seat on the box, for which the nominal coachman was displaced” (Mathews 152). This blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction, between audiences and the characters that lampoon them, creates an uneasy tension – the modern equivalent would be akin to watching a politician put their arm around a comedian known for impersonating her, *while the comedian is in costume as the politician* - and also creates an interesting liminal territory that is fertile for future study. Brewer calls this happening “character migration” (78), and describes certain Romantic fictional characters as “detachable” (79), or able to be taken out of their original context and placed in new scenarios, whether on stage, on the page, or in the real world. I also see Mathews’s offstage performances as Cypher as an instance of transmedia storytelling, with Mathews spreading the character across multiple arenas, thereby extending Cypher’s overall narrative, and offering audiences new and various entry points to that narrative.

Characters were not the only things that can be seen as migrating during the period – texts were also on the move. Poet and playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan was, for a long while at least, most famous for a piece of writing that he also performed: a speech he made to the House of Commons on February 7, 1787, and then repeated over the course of four days in 1788, to the House of Lords, in his capacity as a member of Parliament. The text of this speech - known as the Begums Speech because it was part of a charge that Edmund Burke brought against the first Governor General of recently-colonized Bengal, Warren Hastings, accusing him of exploiting a ruling Indian family (the Begums), and demanding his impeachment – then made its way, verbatim, into *Pizarro*, Sheridan’s 1799 play on the colonization of Peru. *Pizarro*’s audience would most certainly have been familiar with Sheridan’s infamous speech from over a decade

before, and by including the speech in the play as a speech given by the character Rolla, a Peruvian general, Sheridan was clearly hoping to draw a parallel between the English colonization of India and the Spanish invasion of Peru. In “Trying Sheridan’s *Pizarro*,” Julie Carlson points to the eighteenth century “elocutionary movement” (363) in politics to explain the context in which Sheridan brought a new level of performance into political speechmaking with his original address to the Houses of Parliament – it certainly took some feats of acting to make the speech extend across four days (at the end of which he quite theatrically collapsed from exhaustion). In *Pizarro*, he did the opposite, bringing literal political rhetoric into theatrical space. Finally, in 1803, when the threat of a French invasion of England loomed large in many British minds, Sheridan reprinted the speech and distributed it as leaflets, this time giving it the title “Sheridan’s Address to the People.” By distributing this text across time and across presentation, Sheridan seems to have been capitalizing on the transmedia potentials that existed at the time in order to garner wider audience attention. The speech was accessible through public record as a speech given to Parliament, through news reports of the same, through attendance at or reading of *Pizarro*, and through the leaflets distributed throughout London in 1803. Each iteration of the speech added to the overall story it told, and each “product [was] a point of entry into the franchise as a whole” (Jenkins 2008, 98). As Carlson points out, *Pizarro* was an outrageous success, becoming “[t]he most popular play of the 1790s in London and the second most popular play of the entire eighteenth century” (360) – not bad for a play that premiered well into the last year of that century. One other reason the production might have achieved such a high level of popularity? It had an unusually strong lead female character, and she was played by Sarah Siddons.

Throughout this chapter, I have explored the active-audience dynamic that existed in London at the start of the nineteenth century. As I noted earlier, all of these examples are deserving of much greater study, but they have hopefully served to establish the various strategies Romantic audiences took to engage with source texts and to extend their experience of them, as well as those employed by the producers of texts to add cult value to their creations. Arguably the unbeatable source of cult interest at the time, however, was Shakespeare, and the most notoriously “active” audience were the rioters who took over Covent Garden theatre in 1809, demanding a reduction in ticket prices. In the next chapter, we will look into this event in more depth, in an attempt to answer this question: can the rioters’ invocation of Shakespeare be considered fan behavior? If so, what do we gain from describing it as such?

Chapter Three: *Rioters as Fans*

On September 18, 1809, after having been closed since the previous year due to a fire, Covent Garden theatre reopened to much enthusiasm, under the auspices of its new manager, beloved actor (and brother to Sarah Siddons) John Philip Kemble. Drury Lane had also been closed due to fire-related renovations since that February, making Covent Garden the only place in town for “legitimate” theatre productions. There was only one problem: the prices had gone up. “Beginning that night,” Elizabeth Hadley writes, “spectators seated in the pit, sporadically joined by those in the dress boxes and gallery, exercised what they considered their ancient right to express approbation and disapprobation in the theatre” (524). It started when Kemble came out to deliver his prologue for the night’s performance of *Macbeth*, with Kemble in the title role; before he could get his first word out, the audience began jeering, catcalling, and shaking noisemakers, doing whatever they could to disrupt the presentation. This went on for sixty-seven straight nights. This display of audience aggression became known as the Old Price (O.P.) Riots (or the Old Price Wars), and ended only after Kemble capitulated to the rioters’ demands and brought the prices back down. This event can and should be explored from a multitude of angles, as indeed it has already; for the purposes of this paper, however, our main object of scrutiny will be Shakespeare, and the rioters’ use of his works and his name as a Romantic example of what Henry Jenkins has recently called “*Avatar* activism,” or the “mobilizing [of] icons and myths from popular culture as resources for political speech” (Jenkins, “*Avatar* Activism: Pick Your Protest”). In order to do so, we will need to first take a brief look at the deeper dynamics that fueled the O.P.

Riots, as well as examine briefly what Shakespeare actually meant to the average London theatregoer in 1809 (if there can be said to be such a thing).

Starting with the passage of the Licensing Act of 1737, a production's right to be classified as "legitimate" in London was granted (or revoked) by one person – the Lord Chamberlain. A status of legitimacy granted a production the right to be performed at Covent Garden or Drury Lane, the two theatres that were considered "patent" houses (during the regular playing season; the dynamic changed slightly during the summer). Moreover, a play's being considered illegitimate left everyone who worked on it open to very real legal sanctions. As Jane Moody explains in *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840*, "[a]ny individual performing an 'Interlude, Tragedy, comedy, Opera, Play, farce or other entertainment of the Stage' not previously sanctioned by letters patent or licensed by the Lord Chamberlain 'for hire, gain or reward' would now be liable to punishment as a rogue and a vagabond" (*Licensing Act* qtd in Moody 16). A twentieth century analog with similar effects to the Licensing Act would be the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930, which established guidelines for censorship of American films, and held sway for decades. To be sure, as I alluded to in the previous chapter, popular performances of all stripes were scattered around London throughout the more than a century during which the Licensing Act held sway (the Act's power was steadily diluted throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, but it was not fully transformed until 1843). These productions, however, were entirely susceptible to censure; as Moody notes, the actors who took part in them, and their audiences, were open to prosecution for their creation/promotion of "illegitimate" theatre. The end result of this legislation was a two-theatre city, in which the patent theatres were more like public institutions than they

were private enterprises. While it was obviously not a sustainable theatrical system, it became an understood and accepted paradigm, in which the political nobility supported the two theatres financially; granted rights of access to them to certain playwrights and acting companies; and welcomed the public, from the wealthy to the impoverished, to attend, all for a reasonable price.

The riots were never, however, just about the rise in ticket prices – they were also about the change in the way theatre managers were offering access to the only technically legal form of theatre in town. In “The Old Price Wars: Melodramatizing the Public Sphere in Early-Nineteenth-Century England,” Hadley notes that “the Old Price Wars were never simply a protest against prices, even on that first night, since the increase was hardly significant for those who generally populated the pit and the boxes. Other controversial changes accompanied the new prices” (525). These changes were largely architectural, with an expanded number of private boxes (the most expensive seats), separate entrances for box-ticket holders, and a pit (the cheapest section) that had not only shrunk, but that also had a view that was largely obstructed. Moody, who suggests that the riots could be seen as a “rational response” to Covent Garden’s “capitulation to decadent luxury and social exclusivity” (62), goes on to note,

[a]s in earlier theatre protests, the Old Price rioters claimed that the new theatre deliberately promoted class division and exclusivity, as the private boxes, with their separate entrances and stairs, permitted the aristocracy to ‘purchase their exemption from mingling with the body of the people.’ (*The Dramatic Censor* qtd in Moody 64)

The general consensus seems to be that a citizen’s basic right of access to theatre had been removed by the theatre’s new structure and pricing policy. To that end, Moody cites a pamphlet from the time, *Considerations on the Past and Present State of the*

Stage, whose author makes the claim that, “[t]he legitimate British theatre...resembles our invaluable constitution. It has, from time immemorial, been fairly open to all classes of the public, in their several ranks and degrees” (qtd in Moody 67). The fear was of a paradigmatic shift, from a system that, while dominated by monarchical and political patronage, offered open access to at least the forms of theatre deemed “legitimate” by the Lord Chamberlain, to a system much more subject to the whims of the newly rising class of aristocrats. Hadley frames the previous paradigm as one in which theatre managers had an obligation to provide entertainment to the public (525); the new model found them shirking that responsibility in favor of higher profits and the predilections of the wealthy. Since aristocrats were not elected (nor royal by birth), they had none of this obligation toward the lower classes. To make another contemporary analogy, the rioters’ fear resembles that of those who fight for “net neutrality” today, for fear that corporations, unaccountable to the broader public, could restrict access to media (in our case, the Internet) from all but the wealthy (i.e., those willing/able to pay a premium). Much like the rhetoric that surrounds the current net neutrality debate, the comparison, as exemplified in the pamphlet cited by Moody, of the theatre to the constitution shows what broad consequences people were considering this conflict to have – in “The OP War, Libertarian Communication and Graphic Reportage in Georgian London,” James Baker writes that “[a]t stake became not merely customarily legitimated access to public space, but the universality of English law and English liberty under threat, OPs (as the supporters of Old Prices became known) argued, from arbitrary (aristocratic) power” (82). It was precisely this arbitrariness of aristocratic power, as opposed to political/monarchical power, that caused the most concern to the rioters.

As Baker insinuates above, the way of life that was under threat was a distinctly British one. Much of the response that came from the O.P.s was centered on nationalistic terms, framing the patent theatres as England's "national" theatre. Many in Britain were still reeling from the French Revolution, and the persistent fear that French-style uprisings would cross into England. David A. Brewer connects the destabilization that arose from that fear to the rioters' concerns:

[Kemble's] opponents interpreted the raising of prices as suggesting that admission was a matter of capacity to pay rather than a recognition of a right to entertainment at a price one could afford. Implicitly this right was also a political right to a place within the national theatre of Britain, expressed by the slogan-like status of the phrase 'box, pit, and gallery'. The riots only served to confirm that the culture's confidence in this formulation was in crisis: the experience of the 1790s and the French wars had caused 'box, pit, and gallery' to split apart. (231)

Kemble seems to have added fuel to this fire, not only by aiding in the split between those in the box and those in the pit and gallery, but also by hiring non-English talent, and experimenting with genres and forms not endemic to the British patent system. As Moody explains it, this sentiment grew from "suspicions about foreign performers (notably Angelica Catalani, an Italian opera singer recently employed by Kemble at an extortionate salary), foreign theatrical forms (opera, melodrama), and questionably foreign, immoral practices (the provision of private boxes in a public theatre)" (64). These three foreign threats, combined, led to many of the rioters' posturing themselves as the defenders of a "national theatre." In doing so, they were able to sum up many of their concerns, cultural and constitutional, in a concise argument. "In their sturdy demands for 'the national drama'," Moody notes, "the Old Price rioters coined a phrase which succinctly conflated the nostalgic claims of cultural patriotism and also the topical rhetoric of popular constitutionalism" (65). Kemble's decision to hire Jewish and

immigrant guards to keep crowds in check once the riots had started only served to increase nationalistic sentiment amongst the rioters. As Moody points out, “[t]he emergence of ‘national drama’ as a popular rallying-cry during the riots (‘National Theatre: Fair Prices: English Drama: *No Catalani*’) was accompanied by the chauvinistic repudiation of new and especially ‘foreign theatrical forms’” (65). Out from this nationalistic posturing came a predictable hero, in whose name there already existed a strong tradition of English actors, using English theatrical forms, performing to English audiences: Shakespeare.

In *The Romantic Cult of Shakespeare*, Péter Dávidházi traces the roots of what was to become an intensely loyal English following for Shakespeare’s works by the turn of the nineteenth century. As he explains it, the Romantic interest in Shakespeare was sparked by two people I have already mentioned: George Saville Carey and David Garrick (Dávidházi 34-107). Michael D. Bristol, in *Big-Time Shakespeare*, agrees, painting Garrick as the first person in England to capitalize on Shakespeare’s full market potential (68-71). Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, Garrick began organizing productions of major Shakespearean works. It became a pairing that worked symbiotically – as Garrick garnered attention and acclaim for his remarkably charismatic acting, creating iconic poses and performances, he immortalized the Shakespearean characters he was embodying, and the plays they were in. Just as Garrick became a larger-than-life celebrity, so too did Shakespeare’s characters. This iconic status, then, helped Shakespeare’s plays snowball into works that were repeatedly remounted, expanded upon, and reformulated. This falls in line with Brewer’s notion of “imaginative expansion” (2), as was discussed in the previous chapter. “[T]he originary representation

of these characters,” he writes, “was, for readers engaged in these practices, merely a starting point” (2).

This notion of Brewer’s, of course, brings us back to George Saville Carey’s *Shakespeare’s Jubilee*, first performed in 1769. Carey’s play was actually written for performance as part of a larger event, the Stratford Jubilee, which was organized and orchestrated by Garrick. According to Dávidházi, the Jubilee “brought about a whole new paradigm in dealing with Shakespeare and his works” (34). Previously, Shakespeare had been generally acknowledged as a superlative playwright, but the rhetoric, spurred by Garrick’s demonstrations at the Jubilee (as well as the concept of the Jubilee to begin with), shifted after this event more distinctly towards idol worship. Dávidházi claims that “[a]s if to prove the later thesis that tradition can be invented, Garrick seems to have invented one of the ritual archetypes of literary cults” (34). He did so in a variety of ways, the most novel of which was his framing of Shakespeare in religious terms. “The most striking of [Garrick’s] innovations is...that he adopted and adapted some of the venerable symbolism known from ancient religious ritual” (Dávidházi 35). A ballad written by Garrick for the event, and performed by Joseph Vernon, a Drury Lane house actor, exemplifies the way in which the entire Jubilee framed Shakespeare-as-icon: upon the presentation of a goblet made of wood from a mulberry tree that had been supposedly planted by Shakespeare himself, Vernon sang,

Behold this fair goblet, ‘twas carv’d from the tree,
Which, O my sweet Shakespeare, was planted by thee;
As a relick I kiss it, and bow at the shrine,
What comes from thy hand must be ever divine!

...

All shall yield to the Mulberry-tree,
Bend to thee,
Blest Mulberry,

Matchless was he
Who planted thee,
And thou like him immortal be!
(qtd in Dávidházi 40)

The rituals, odes, and events that filled the Jubilee all contributed to the “quickly developing mythology of Shakespeare” (Dávidházi 42), positioning him simultaneously as a great English countryman and a peerless (i.e. “matchless”), immortal icon. This type of hyperbolic, quasi-religious rhetoric helped to codify Shakespeare as a charismatic figure, fitting in line with Weber’s conception of a person “set apart from ordinary men” and possessing of “supernatural” or “superhuman” qualities (qtd in Dyer 82). According to Dávidházi, for some, Shakespeare’s work even became tangible evidence of the existence of God:

There is an interesting similarity between the theological argument from design, the attempt to prove the existence of God by postulating that the coherent order of the universe must have required a supreme designer, and the amazement of late eighteenth-century critics who seriously wondered whether the inexplicable perfection of Shakespeare’s design could have been invented and executed by a mortal author at all. (46)

Such a positioning of Shakespeare as more than mortal did not come about by accident; it was steadily promoted by Garrick’s framing of Shakespeare as gift from God. Since Garrick was considered to also possess otherworldly talent, his opinions served double duty. To those who would doubt the propriety of the performances at the Jubilee, Garrick responded that “we shall Entertain and content ourselves with that Heav’n has sent us in SHAKESPEARE” (qtd in Dávidházi 44). It also certainly found support in the imaginative expansion of Carey, in his *Shakespeare’s Jubilee*, which signaled to its audiences the expansive possibilities of Shakespeare’s characters, and the possibilities inherent in taking them from the confines of the page into the endless bounds of the

imagination. By the early nineteenth century, according to Moody, Shakespeare had reached the status of “national playwright,” whose “symbolic position” as such made performances of his plays able to be seen as fulfilling the “desires and cultural ambitions” of Romantic audiences (137). He became a potent national symbol, adored with the kind of religiosity normally ascribed to cult icons.

Shakespeare’s status not just as national symbol, but also as cult icon, bears a brief investigation, given the context we’ve given to the definition of cult status in previous chapters. Does the Romantic conception of Shakespeare stand up to the contemporary understanding of cult objects? As Hills sees it, cult texts share a “family resemblance,” or three common overarching traits: auteurism, endlessly deferred narrative, and hyperdiegesis (2002, 131). I believe that the early nineteenth-century conception of Shakespeare’s work fits his work in the category of cult text, and points to his status as a cult icon. As far as the auteuristic elements of Shakespearean drama stand, it seems quite clear – Shakespearean texts stood alone as a genre unto themselves; thanks to Garrick, they were viewed as not mere tragedies nor comedies, but rather “‘what Heav’n has sent us’” (qtd in Dávidházi 44); in other words, Shakespearean texts existed largely in conversation with each other, rather than with other dramas – the product of a singular auteur. While plays by other playwrights were compared and contrasted with each other in terms of coherence with genre norms and quality of character-building, Shakespeare’s vast body of work existed as a dramatic world unto itself, with comparisons most often made amongst his plays, but not outside of them. Shakespeare himself thus served as the “point of coherence” (Hills 2002, 132) – the texts’ intricacies were more understandable once one placed them in the context of Shakespeare’s

supposedly otherworldly penmanship. Hazlitt, in his book entirely focused on Shakespeare's characters, cites Alexander Pope as having claimed that "[i]f ever any author deserved the name of an *original*, it was Shakespeare" (qtd in Hazlitt 1818, vii). This magnificence of artistry, combined with his tendency to create plays that had their own internal logic as well as a consistency of quality and style shared with his other works, granted Shakespeare the status of auteur in the Romantic mind.

The bard's status as immortal also lent to the endlessly deferred narrative ascribed to him at the time. Rather than his texts' posing of a question that never gets answered, Shakespeare himself, as an auteur, also exists as endlessly deferred. The question of his true identity existed then, and does to this day – indeed, while today, a variety of conspiracy theories exist as to who actually penned Shakespeare's works, Romantic audiences took the conjecture one step further, positing divine intervention as a possible source of inspiration for Shakespearean texts. This pair of unanswerable, nagging questions – who was he? how did he do it? – added to what Sandvoss calls the "field of gravity" of his plays. As he explains,

the fan of a given actress will watch her in different films but also follow further coverage in newspapers or read the abovementioned celebrity biographies. Fan objects thus form a *field of gravity*, which may or may not have an *urtext* in its epicenter, but which in any case corresponds with the fundamental meaning structure through which all these texts are read. (2007, 23)

Sandvoss also points to the allure of "paratextual" information, or contextualizing knowledge that adds value to the fan object for the individual reader/viewer. He writes,

[i]t is then a form of preexisting interest or what we might call an object of fandom (the work of Thomas Mann) that allows us to create meaning through contextualization that will have remained hidden to other readers – just as if the sentence in question had been 'My name is Slim Shady,'

different paratexts would have come into play for different fan groups.
(2007, 24)

Moments within Shakespeare's plays contain such information, such as when, during

Prospero's final speech in *The Tempest*, he proclaims,

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. (*Tempest*, IV, i, lines 148-156)

The mention of "the great globe itself" would have been to many audience members a nod towards Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, at once rewarding the viewer for their paratextual knowledge, while at the same time drawing more attention to the play as a cult object, by reminding the viewer of Shakespeare's biography, and the endlessly deferred narrative inherent within it.

In terms of hyperdiegesis, the space does not exist within this study to delve into the larger question of whether or not a historical playwright's body of work can serve to provide a "completely furnished" (Eco 3) world - though it certainly seems that Romantic audiences treated it as such. Carey's *Shakespeare's Jubilee* and Brewer's notion of imaginative expansion serve to show that audiences were actively engaged in building on the characters and environments Shakespeare created, while Garrick's canonizing of specific Shakespearean plays/characters served to create a solid world for them to inhabit, from which audiences and actors could expand. Can repeated viewings/stagings of *Macbeth* serve the same function as an entire season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*? I would argue that they can – the depth of the world conjured up in each of his plays, the

abundance of peripheral characters with allusions to their pasts and current non-play conflicts, and the large variety of ways in which the plays have been staged, interpreted, and re-interpreted offer ample opportunity for the viewer to enter the world of a Shakespeare play, explore it, and add to it. Hills lends credence to this notion, specifically calling out Shakespeare (admittedly, in terms of the contemporary attention paid to him) and labeling his body of work “the perfect media cult (*Star Trek* is but a blip on the cultural timeline by comparison) in terms of its expansion beyond an original point of textual and historical context” (2002, 134). Hills later describes the hyperdiegetic world as having a role of “stimulating creative speculation and providing a trusted environment for affective play” (2002, 138); Carey showed it was possible to speculate creatively within the Shakespearean body of work, and Garrick’s religious proclamations of devotion to Shakespeare are nothing but affective.

On that September night in 1809, this, then, is the context in which the Covent Garden theatregoers found themselves: happy for the reopening of their national theatre, theirs by birthright, yet outraged to discover the capitulation of the managers to aristocratic preference. “The riots that followed were not simply a response to change, but to the perceived illegitimacy of the new conditions imposed on this public space” (Baker 82). As John Philip Kemble, the most visible of the managers, stepped on stage to begin his performance as Macbeth – significantly, of course, a character whose defining feature is corruption via overreaching ambition, to the detriment of his entire country – a large contingent of the audience had reached a boiling point, and disrupted the production before it had a chance to begin. The O.P. Wars had begun, and over the course of the months that followed, they engendered a special insignia, a hat, a signature dance,

countless slogans (such as the “rallying-cry” cited by Moody above), parades, political cartoons (or “graphic reportage” (Baker 89)), and much more. A not insignificant amount of this protest paraphernalia was in some way framed around Shakespeare; I will choose three examples in an attempt to present these particular rhetorical approaches as an expression of fan behavior, and an example of Jenkins’s “*Avatar* activism” (“*Avatar* Activism: Pick Your Protest”).

As Lawrence Grossberg noted in 1992,

[b]y making certain things or practices matter, the fan ‘authorizes’ them to speak for him or her, not only as a spokesperson but also as surrogate voices (as when we sing along to popular songs). The fan gives authority to that which he or she invests in, letting the object of such investments speak for and as him or her self. (Grossberg 59)

Jenkins cites, as a contemporary instance of a similar sort of fan “authorization” of a text, a protest in which Palestinian, Israeli, and international activists marched through the occupied village of Bil’in in February, 2010. What made this protest atypical is that each protestor was painted entirely blue, dressed as a character from the 2009 mega-blockbuster film *Avatar*, in which the fictional, blue “Na’avi” people are displaced from their ancestral homeland. As Jenkins explains, “[t]he film’s larger-than-life imagery, recognized worldwide thanks to Hollywood, offered them an empowered image of their own struggles” (“*Avatar* Activism: Pick Your Protest”). The protestors were connecting with an immensely popular myth, in the hopes of capitalizing on the wide audience appeal of the film, and drawing attention to their plight by making parallels with a myth so many people had already connected to. In Grossberg’s terms, the protestors were letting the object of their (fan) investment speak for their larger purpose. In Jenkins’s,

they were “blurring [the] line between participatory culture (especially as manifested through fandom) and participatory politics” (“*Avatar* Activism and Beyond”).

Two hundred years before this protest, the O.P. rioters employed similar tactics to make their own political point resonate. Marc Baer, in *Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London*, notes the rioters’ widespread use of both Shakespeare himself as an icon, and Shakespeare’s work as symbolically relevant to their protest. The first example he notes is of the former case; he finds a protest pamphlet, addressed to Kemble, admonishing his behavior in verse, beginning with a comparison to the Druids, then moving to Shakespeare:

The Druids, who ‘build far larger Theatres than thee,
And yet those Theatres to all were free
...
Old Shakespeare, John, whose brains had furnish’d thine
With wit to speechify so very fine,
Both men and manners studied well no doubt,
Yet he was modest, John, he made no rout –
He brought no engines ‘gainst his Audience, no
He set no traps to catch his friend or foe;
He bow’d submission to the public voice
And deem’d that best which seem’d the people’s choice’
(*Broad Hints at Retirement* qtd in Baer 56)

Here the anonymous pamphleteer invokes Shakespeare as a paragon of not only excellent craftsmanship, but also excellent behavior – certainly building off of the notion of Shakespeare as heaven-sent, popularized by Garrick. As Jenkins explains in regard to *Avatar* activism, “[t]his new style of activism doesn’t require us to paint ourselves blue; it does ask that we think in creative ways about the iconography that comes to us through every available media channel” (“*Avatar* Activism: Pick Your Protest”). This pamphlet uses a creative approach to engage with iconography important to the era; rather than simply invoke past cultures (the Druids), it also invokes the behavior of an artist from the

past, who exists in the current moment as a cult icon. This is also a subset of Jenkins's concept of poaching, being "a strategy for appropriating materials produced by the dominant culture industry and reworking them into terms which better serve subordinate or subcultural interests" (1992a, 215). In this case, the materials produced by the dominant culture are the details of Shakespeare's biography, or popular conceptions of his behavior as an artist in his society. In de Certeauian terms, this is a clear tactic - a subordinate class (put into that subordinate position largely by Kemble and the theatre management) using the tools available to them to "subvert and appropriate dominant discourse" (Staiger 112).

While pamphlets were being circulated around London, outside of the theatre, protests were raging inside of it as well. James Baker cites a *Times* piece that noted a life-size portrait of Kemble being displayed in the theatre, with the superscript "'To guilty minds a terrible example.' – SHAKESPEARE" (*The Times* qtd in Baker 103). The quote is taken from *Richard III*, and is spoken in that play by the character King Henry. If the phrase does not seem recognizable now, it certainly was then. As Baer remarks,

[a]udiences in late Georgian and early Victorian playhouses knew a great deal of Shakespeare, and this seems to have been true in Parliament, the press, and throughout society. If quotations from Shakespeare as used by rioters from all social ranks will have to be looked up by readers, some cultural anchors from that world have been lost. (17)

Invoking Shakespearean verse, rather than Shakespearean biography, represents a somewhat different strategy employed by the rioters – rather than draw capital just from the paratextual information surrounding a text, the rioters, in this instance, were also engaging directly with that *urtext* and the meaning within it. Jenkins claims that the meaning of a popular text (in his case, *Avatar*; in this example, *Richard III*) lies at "the

intersection between what the author wants to say and how the audience deploys his creation for their own communicative purposes” (*Avatar* Activism: Pick Your Protest”). The rioters were engaging with the characters and meaning within *Richard III*, while also adding a new layer of meaning by “deploying” this section of the story for their own purposes. Adding the “- SHAKESPEARE” tagline, however, makes it very clear that they are also capitalizing on Shakespeare’s value/authority as a larger-than-life cult icon. This form of protest is then doing a sort of double duty, using the authority of both Shakespeare and his characters.

The same can be said about the Bil’in protestors, who used both the rhetorical strength of the story behind *Avatar*, as well as the cultural capital inherent in a movie with such a widespread viewership.

A different approach to this double duty protest can be seen in Isaac Cruikshank’s “Is This a Rattle Which I See Before Me?” engraving, published in late October of 1809 (Figure 1). This image, in fact, works on many more

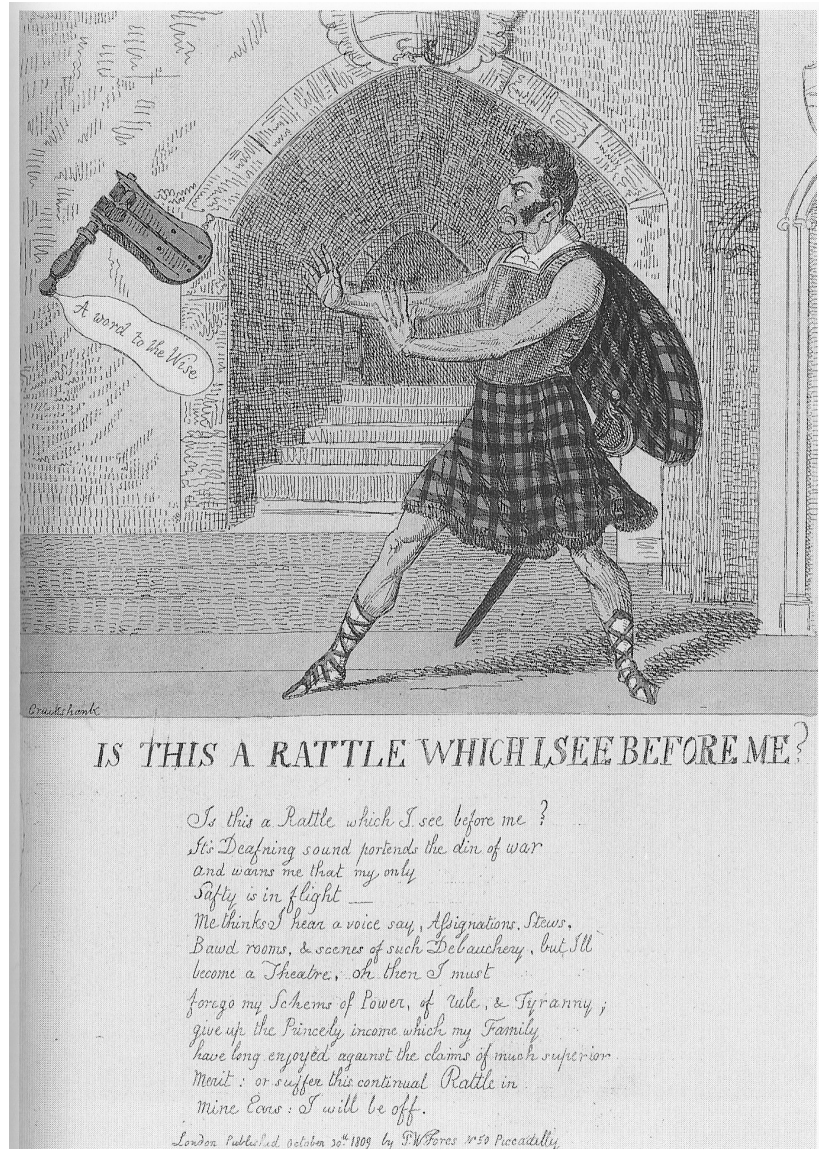


Figure 1. Kemble as Macbeth (Baer 64)

than two levels: it is an audience-made pastiche of imagery from both the riot and the play it was interrupting; it is accompanied by a text written to echo the soliloquy spoken in *Macbeth*, in which the eponymous hero is frightened by the image of a dagger floating in mid-air, but contextualized to suit the circumstances of the riot; it calls to mind Kemble's multiples statuses as an actor, a manager, and a member of a theatrically aristocratic family. The only thing that we have seen elsewhere that this image does not do is blatantly point to Shakespeare himself as a cult icon – but, following Baer's sense of Shakespearean verse as "cultural anchor," we can safely assume that the mere title of the engraving, a bastardization of Macbeth's "[i]s this a dagger which I see before me?" (*Macbeth*, II, ii, line 33), was enough to cue readers as to what Cruikshank was referencing, leaving them to fill in whatever paratextual information that line contained for them. Again, this is clearly poaching, combined with an imagistic manipulation¹⁰, put towards a political use. Cruikshank was "drawing on materials from the dominant media and employing them in ways that serve[d his] own interests and facilitate[d his] own pleasures" (Jenkins 1992a, 214). Since in this case, his interests and pleasures were in the form of popular political protest, which he promoted by mobilizing a popular narrative, it can also be considered a form of *Avatar* activism.

On December 14, Kemble capitulated. While he could not undo the changes that had been made to Covent Garden's architecture, he did lower the ticket prices, and issued a formal apology as well. While a multitude of protest tactics were undertaken through the sixty-seven day span of the riots, references to Shakespeare compose a not

¹⁰ For an interesting foray into the effects and dynamics of collage/pastiche in terms of imagery, see Jenkins's chapter "Photoshop for Democracy" in his book, *Convergence Culture*.

unimportant portion of the protestors' rhetoric. For those interested in theatre audiences, reception studies, Romantic culture, popular protest tactics, or fandom studies, this is an important moment in human history, and the O.P.s use of *Avatar* activism can broaden our understanding of each of those fields. In "Strangers, No More We Sing," Jenkins notes that fan texts can "teach us about tactics of cultural appropriation and the process by which artworks produced for one context may be remade to serve alternative interests" (1992a, 214) – and we can learn much by viewing these protests as a part of the history of that appropriation. Whether or not their use of Shakespeare helped to tip the scales of public sentiment towards the rioters, Kemble certainly took note of the power of audience engagement: it was he, thirteen months after the riots ended, who mounted the revival of George Colman the Younger's *Blue-Beard*, and called for the use of live horses on a "legitimate" stage for the first time.

Conclusion

William Robson opened his 1854 memoir, *The Old Play-Goer*, with a dedication to the actor Charles Kemble (brother to Sarah Siddons and John Philip Kemble):

To you, for so many years as much accustomed to admiration and applause as to the air you breathed or the food that nourished you, the dedication of a volume like this may appear as a compliment scarcely worth offering. And yet, when I consider that in the scenes of which it speaks, we have appeared together, you as a distinguished artist, I as a delighted spectator; and, that having witnessed the exits of most of our contemporaries, we are both receiving the warnings of “the old clock-setter,” who is thinning and blanching our locks, to prepare for the last scene, I cannot help flattering myself that it will be acceptable. (v)

Robson frames himself as a contemporary of Kemble’s, and suggests that he and the actor are both being prepared to do one final scene together in their old age. This notion, that actor and audience member are both flip sides of the same coin, both necessary components for a scene to take place, is an essential underpinning to the paradigm in which fandom studies scholars operate. Thus, when Cornel Sandvoss defines the act of reading as “a form of dialogue between text and reader” (2007, 28), he is echoing a concept that has existed for a hundred and fifty years (and no doubt for longer than that). “Rather than being a transhistorical phenomenon,” claim Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington, “fandom emerges in historical studies as a cultural practice tied to specific forms of social and economic organization” (Gray et al 9). While the authors are probably quite right that fan behavior has not existed in every single moment in time, nor as an aspect of every single media dynamic, their statement raises the question as to what societal structures are more conducive to fandom than others. What other factors contribute to, or detract from, a culture’s fostering of engaged audiences? Does Richard Dyer’s notion of charisma’s direct relationship to “uncertain, unstable and ambiguous”

(83) social orders apply to fan behavior as well? Many authors seem to think that the Internet has enabled expressions of fan behavior like never before. What other technologies have fostered fandom? Is the Internet, in this sense, simply a shinier, faster printing press? If so, what technologies preceded the printing press as new sources for the promotion of fan expression?

In recent essays, and in *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins suggests that we are reaching a new era for fandom. “The old ideal might have been the couch potato,” he writes, “the new ideal is almost certainly a fan” (2007, 361). Fans have come triumphantly out of the shadows in which scholars first found them, in the mid-nineteen eighties, and fandom is an increasingly pervasive social facilitator.

...fandom is everywhere and all the time, a central part of the everyday lives of consumers operating within a networked society. Certainly, there are still people who only watch the show, but more and more of them are sneaking a peak at what they are saying about the show on *Television without Pity*, and once you are there, why not post a few comments. It’s a slippery slope from there. (Jenkins 2007, 361)

Can we not say the same about the lives of Romantic theatre audiences? How does their consumption of the most popular media of their day relate to ours? Certainly, as I have tried to show in this study, many theatregoers in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century London were not simply satisfied restricting their engagement with a play to the time that they spent sitting in a theatre watching it. Texts traveled, imaginations expanded, and characters migrated. Due to the availability of contemporary audience research, Jenkins and other fandom scholars are now able to share statistics as to what percentage of media consumers log on to fan sites, what percentage make posts, and so on. It is this kind of quantitative information that allows Jenkins to credibly state that “more and more” television viewers are extending their experience through fan-related

websites. Can such a study be undertaken for a moment in media history as well? Can we measure what percentage of Romantic theatregoers went on to engage in some form of public debate about their evening's entertainment? What tools do we have to discover how "slippery" the slope that Jenkins envisions has been for theatrical audiences of generations past?

In terms of *Avatar* activism, Jenkins was quick to note in his initial proposal of the term that the methods it describes are part of a larger historical context.

The *Avatar* activists are tapping into a very old language of popular protest...protesters in early modern Europe often masked their identity through dressing as peoples real (the Moors) or imagined (the Amazons) seen as a threat to the civilized order. The good citizens of Boston continued this tradition in the New World when they dressed as native Americans to dump tea in the harbour. And African-Americans in New Orleans formed their own Mardi Gras Indian tribes, taking imagery from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, to signify their own struggles for respect and dignity... (*Avatar* Activism: Pick Your Protest")

The O.P. rioters fit very nicely into this contextualization of the practice of *Avatar* activism – even more so, I would argue, since they were engaging with a body of work (Shakespeare's) that, much like *Avatar*, was an object of fan interest, thereby adding a similar rhetorical weight to their statements to that which the protesters at Bil'in did. As fandom scholars dig deeper into the media consumption dynamics of the present moment, it would do them well, as Jenkins does above, to concurrently search for historical fan behaviors that can serve as precedents to the phenomena they describe. Such historical study can provide a deep, concrete context to contemporary fan behaviors, as well as help to highlight those that are truly unique to the present moment. It will also open fandom studies to entirely new academic audiences that could benefit from the work done under the mantle of fandom. Romantic scholars, for example, might never have thought to look

to fandom studies for an understanding of certain aspects of eighteenth and nineteenth century audience dynamics. A study like mine (or ideally, one that provides deeper archival analysis and/or the support of quantitative reports) can provide the cognitive leap necessary to prove that much can be learned about Romantic audiences if we study them as fans. The rioters' deployment of Shakespearean rhetoric can be seen in a new light, and can also be seen as connected, through the concept of *Avatar* activism, to protest strategies before and since. Much can be gained when we admit that Romantic studies and fandom studies, as Robson would put it, appear together in the same scene.

Most importantly, however, these kinds of studies can tell us more about the societies we live in, and have lived in. As Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington put it,

[t]he often cited 'battles over hearts and minds' by which elections are won, and by which individuals' behavior towards their health or the environment is changed, or millions decide to turn to the streets in protest against war, racism, or poverty – all do not solely depend on rational discourses but on the ability to present a cause or public figure in which we, as readers, can find ourselves and to which we emotionally relate. Hence, studying fan audiences allows us to explore some of the key mechanisms through which we interact with the mediated world at the heart of our social, political, and cultural realities and identities. (Gray et al, 10)

If we are to continue to study the logical, political, geographical, and legal mechanisms by which our societies have operated throughout history, then we must also study the emotional mechanisms that have driven us as well. What stories, what icons, what heroes - real or fictitious - have captivated our imaginations? How has that captivation manifested itself? Is "talk" a good enough unit of measurement for our imaginative expansions? There is, it becomes clear, much more work to be done.

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