Article

'Snapewives' and 'Snapeism': A Fiction-Based Religion within the Harry Potter Fandom

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Abstract: The book and film franchise of *Harry Potter* has inspired a monumental fandom community with a veracious output of fanfiction and general musings on the text and the vivid universe contained therein. A significant portion of these texts deal with Professor Severus Snape, the stern Potions Master with ambiguous ethics and loyalties. This paper explores a small community of Snape fans who have gone beyond a narrative retelling of the character as constrained by the work of Joanne Katherine Rowling. The 'Snapewives' or 'Snapists' are women who channel Snape, are engaged in romantic relationships with him, and see him as a vital guide for their daily lives. In this context, Snape is viewed as more than a mere fictional creation. He is seen as a being that extends beyond the *Harry Potter* texts with Rowling perceived as a flawed interpreter of his supra-textual essence. While a Snape religion may be seen as the extreme end of the *Harry Potter* fandom, I argue that religions of this nature are not uncommon, unreasonable, or unprecedented. Popular films are a mechanism for communal bonding, individual identity building, and often contain their own metaphysical discourses. Here, I plan to outline the manner in which these elements resolve within extreme Snape fandom so as to propose a nuanced model for the analysis of fandom-inspired religion without the use of unwarranted veracity claims.

Keywords: *Harry Potter*; Severus Snape; Snapewives; slash; J.K. Rowling; fandom; film methodology; fiction-based religion; religion and film

1. Introduction

In this article, I explore two main features of the religion 'Snapeism'[1]. The first feature is its context within fandom and the negative reception it has received from this group of people. The second is the manner in which the Snapists themselves have articulated their faith structures. When considered together, these elements of Snapeism reveal how online, popular culture-based religions are forming and the strong notions of what is 'properly religious', which abound both in fandom more broadly and within the Snapist community itself. Fandom sub-communities like the Snapists are a good case study for the problems of interpretation when facing a faith that seems to be objectively untrue in terms of its historicity and logic, and based on metaphysical beliefs that are impossible or absurd. As this article will demonstrate, Snapeism is usually interpreted as a ludicrous—and therefore invalid—religion. This anxiety towards fiction-based religions and the behaviour of their adherents is based upon a general fear within fandom of being excessively outrageous and pushing the boundaries of 'good taste' too far. By policing extreme manifestations of the *Harry Potter* fandom, other eccentricities can be placed in the more neutral category of 'ironic' or 'playful', as opposed to 'insane'. This boundary policing is a virulent and under-researched manifestation of fandom communities.

In order to contextualise the relative 'normalcy' of the Snapists, I will start my methodological considerations with an exploration of *Harry Potter* fandom and its surprisingly substantial quota of 'canon sceptics'. This fandom was at its most powerful during the release of the original books (1997–2007), and underwent resurgences as the movies slowly caught up with their source material (2001–2011). This led to a substantial amount of creativity amongst fans as they attempted to predict future plots, fill in gaps in the canonical texts, and criticise areas in which they felt Rowling was lacking. The exploration of alternative universes in which canon could be disputed or re-framed was also highly popular. It is within this imaginative zone that Snapeism emerged, and criticisms of its followers flourished. Because the Snapists drew from a fictional novel and a series of popular films as sacred source material, they have been categorised as mad rather than devout. In this article I will problematise received ideas of religion by showing that the Snapists actually satisfy common *a priori* assumptions about what it is to be religious (based on Western Judeo-Christian understandings of this term), and use these same standard ideas in order to frame their beliefs.

There are a variety of problems inherent in approaching a belief system such as Snapeism through a methodological obsession with veracity. This is a problem found both in fandom and within scholarly projects that seek to find some kind of 'true' definition for what religion is and is not. I aim to demonstrate a more objective exploration of Snapeism, exploring the genuine power that a filmic narrative can possess in the imagination, and even religiosity, of a devout fan. It is vital that both scholars of religion and scholars of popular cultural products such as film advocate either the seriousness with which we need to treat any religious viewpoint, or the ludicrous and invented elements of *all* faith-based systems.

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[1] The material used in this article has been gathered from a combination of archived and active blog posts. Unfortunately no up-to-date contact details exist for the Snapists and ex-Snapists, thus participant observation or interview techniques were not employed in this ethnography. Quoted material has been faithfully reproduced with no corrections to spelling or grammar.

To methodologically explore the Snapists' relatively common metaphysical approach to fiction and film, I will employ Danielle Kirby's classificatory system of metaphysical uses of popular fiction. Her taxonomy delineates the category of 'text as reality', in which "the text is constructed as a reality in itself, not simply within the internal logics of the narrative, but owning some form of extra-textual ontological status" ([1], p. 403). Under this schema, Snape exists as a being with thoughts and feelings independent of Rowling as author. Of additional consideration will be the veracity of any given religion, including the scriptures of Christianity—used by the Snapists as an example of another possible system of beliefs with equal validity to theirs. This question lends itself to Carole Cusack's *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction and Faith* (2010) in which she concludes that fictive faiths are an inevitable part of a society where identity is garnered from the consumption of products [2]. Markus Davidsen's definition of 'fiction-based' religions, as distinct from fandom itself, will also be explored in order to discuss this milieu. He argues that fandom is a self-aware zone of imagination and experimentation, in which players are always aware that they are in a game. When this imaginative play ceases to be a game and fictional narratives are taken and authoritative, the line is crossed into that which is a fiction-based religion [3]. These methodologies demonstrate that religion and popular culture are not, by definition, separate worlds. Fandom experimentation and imagination can be a very real source of metaphysical belief and even transcendent experience.

The virtual world of fandom is increasingly becoming a primary means of identification and world building for those who participate within it. The easy sharing of information and ideas with likeminded individuals has created a supportive environment for creative ventures such as fanfiction, role playing games, and meta-analysis of the fandom communities and their core texts. It is also a place where appreciation of these texts can take on religious dimensions, and these ideas can be easily proliferated amongst sympathetic friends around the world. It is in this environment of international sharing and co-operation that fiction-based religions can grow to unprecedented degrees. The internet has helped the Jedi religion to flourish, and Matrixism to gain an international audience [1,2]. Fandom adoration of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* films also seems to be a contributing factor to a rise in Tolkien-inspired faiths [3]. Spatial limitations do not hold back communities to the same degree when religious ideas can be shared online, and emphasis can be placed on the home practitioner. But despite any temptation to label this world of fiction-based religions as unusual and difficult to comprehend, there are many aspects of these new faiths that are surprisingly traditional and owe much to conservative Judeo-Christian understandings of what it is to be religious.

Even though elements of Snapeism are overtly anti-Christian, they are nevertheless posited as alternatives or improvements rather than full reconceptualisations of faith structure. Much is borrowed from the idea of a reciprocal covenant between human and divinity, and the moral codes required are remarkably similar to those of Christianity. As will be explained, Snapeism prohibits homosexuality, limits polygamy, and configures the core divine figure as a jealous god who rewards servility and punishes disobedience. Sexual metaphors for divine unity with Snape are also likely to have come from Christian mystical traditions. To this end, this article explores interest in channelling Snape for new wisdom and a feeling of closeness to him, the rigorously-controlled and meaningful marriage that binds the Snapists to him on a metaphysical level, the many proofs offered for his manifestations on the physical plane, and also seminal debates that reveal the seriousness with which orthodoxy and orthopraxy are discussed.

Even though the 'improper' nature of their religious beliefs has led to the mockery of the Snapists, they have clearly attempted to structure a religion based on what they think religion should be—a perception clearly informed by the normative nature of the Christian church in their communities. As J. Z. Smith has noted, "it is the study of religion that invented 'religion'" ([4], p. 80). That is, the notion of religion as a category serves an analytical function within the academy as a means of comparing ideas or making generalised statements on observed phenomena. I believe this idea of religion also has a function as a means of helping to define and legitimate new religious movements in a milieu where participants are aware of religion as a seemingly discreet category, and seek to emulate features of this category in order to demonstrate their sincerity and respond to criticisms. By acting in a manner that their societies have deemed to be 'religious', the Snapists can feel as though they are addressing the criteria for legitimacy. This is not, however, an excuse to engage in a discussion of their theological legitimacy or debate the validity of a fictional text as a source of divine inspiration. Rather, it is an exciting opportunity to objectively observe the very particular manner in which fandom employs the religion category as a means of delineating territories of insanity or describing the ecstasy garnered from deep adoration of a narrative and its characters.

2. Understanding 'Snapewives' and Snapeism

An intense heat washed through me as I felt being electrically charged and exploded. I cried, I moaned, I screamed, I howled my Masters name as wave after wave and surge after surge hit and washed through me. I knew he was pleased as right after I felt him explode in me as well [5].

This stirring line of fanfiction epitomises the pleasure and ecstasy of an ethereal dalliance with Severus Snape. It is also an example of why the author of this passage has been mercilessly lampooned for her assumed insanity—the madness of the Snapewives. The term 'Snapewives' is an etic descriptor—primarily pejorative—which nonetheless reflects a serious and long-term commitment to Snape. The *Urban Dictionary* describes the Snapewives as:

A group of middle-aged women on the internet who believe they are all married to Severus Snape from the Harry Potter books—on the astral plane. They have real-life meetings where they take turns channeling the spirit of Snape so they can have wedding ceremonies with him.

There is in-fighting over whom Snape loves more and whether Snape is an emotional wooby who just needs to be loved, or a domineering master who lives to be dominant.

There are several problems with this description. Firstly, the Snapewives reject 'Snape' as an appropriate title for the object of their affections [2]. In addition, they live in different countries and only two have met in person. Not all are able to channel *Harry Potter* characters, and there is mass consensus that Snape is powerfully domineering. Nevertheless, this definition does reflect popular

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[2] 'Severus' or 'Master' are the most common, although there is debate over which is preferred by Snape himself. In regard to Rowling's frequent use of 'Snape' in interviews, Conchita writes, "[p]lease read everywhere she states 'Snape' Severus Snape! I really dislike the way she talks of him, the man has a name for Merlin's sake!" [6]. She also scolds Tonya for using 'Master' because "it reminds him of Hogwarts" [7].

attitudes towards the wives within *Harry Potter* fandom. In 2008, two of the wives coined the term 'Snapists' to describe themselves. They write,

> Basically we are Snapists.. Followers of Severus Snape, and since he has become our Religion, Snapeism! [8]

Thus, it seems fairer to describe the wives and their faith as 'Snapists' and 'Snapeism', as this lacks the misleading and pejorative denotations of 'Snapewives', even though it is a retrospective term.

In this article, I will focus on the three main wives: Conchita, Rose, and Tonya [3]. Each of these women has dedicated numerous online journals to their discussions of Snape as a supernatural figure and his role in their lives. They all acknowledge each other as fellow Snape devotees, fandom companions, and spiritual spouses. Rose and Tonya both have vivid experiences of Snape within their lives, frequently experiencing clues as to his presence and intentions for them (see Figure 1). Tonya even channels Snape and has assisted others to hear his voice. Conchita seems to have the greatest trouble in terms of her inclusion within the group and her ability to encounter Snape in a supernatural manner. Despite personal schisms and differences in spiritual experience, there is a very coherent theology of Snape shared between the wives. To examine this manifestation of religious fandom, I will first discuss the canon scepticism and anti-Rowling sentiment that helps to contextualise the wider belief in Snape as a character who extends beyond book and film. I will then explore fandom reactions to the Snapists, primarily characterised by an overwhelming belief in their madness and unsuitability as parents. Although their views are indeed quite striking, I aim to subsequently demonstrate that these beliefs are not as unusual as they are portrayed to be when viewed within a wider schema of religious adherence.

Figure 1. Snape as pictured with Rose (left) and Tonya (right). Photomanipulation made by Rose [9].

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[3] There have been some other peripheral wives and Snapewife supporters such as Jassie and Phyllis from the 'Snape's Castle' website. Their contribution has been far less substantial.

3. Rowling was Wrong: Canon Scepticism as a Context for Snapists

The idea that Rowling was somehow wrong in her portrayal of Snape or the decisions she made for him is surprisingly common. Because there was a large gap between the publication of books (the largest being from July 2000 to June 2003) and a very active fandom awaiting new material, speculation about the future of almost every character abounded. Each book left many unanswered questions—a major one of these being whether or not Snape was on the side of evil after the penultimate *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* (2005). Many fans of Snape felt that he was not properly redeemed after it became clear that he was on the side of good. Another common response was that Snape was not given his just rewards after he was killed off in the final book. Fans had two full years between the ambiguity of Snape's allegiance at the end of *Half Blood Prince* and his arguably disappointing death and redemption in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007). Many had come to expect a more public display of his essential goodness and loyalty, and some kind of reward for the dangers he had faced. These expectations were shared and supported via two years' worth of community discussion, speculation, and fanfiction.

When his expected rewards did not eventuate, a more extreme wing of fandom began to see Snape as something of an objective reality with Rowling as a flawed scribe who does not 'own' him. On the whole, this does not manifest in the belief that Snape literally exists, but it can be seen as a logical precursor to this attitude. For example, after a long polemic on why Snape is a 'Good Guy', Livejournal blogger 'Rattlesnakeroot' concludes with the plea "please, Ms. Rowling, stop telling lies about this character, and admit he is a Good Guy" [10]. She later speaks of her frustration at Rowling "trying to edit Snape's character after the fact" in post-*Potter* interviews [10] [4]. Many Rowling critics are also frustrated by what they see as hagiographic treatment of the Marauders and Lily Evans at the expense of Snape [5].

Fandom has stepped in with various antidotes for this Snape abuse. Epitomising this, Dreamwidth blogger 'Severusinvictus' celebrates "the wonderful Snape-centric corner of HP fandom with its gifted writers and artists that take so much better care of him than JKR ever could and, indeed, did" [13]. This care includes efforts to rescue Snape through the creative re-writing of canon. The 'Severus Snape Rescue Squad', or SSRS, was an attempt to do just this [14]. The public profile page for the community reads:

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[4] Because Rowling's unpublished notes on the *Harry Potter* universe are so in-depth and substantial, many fans are very comfortable in regarding them as canonical once she discusses them during interviews. Taking this arguably canonical dissemination of information even further, the website "Pottermore" was launched in 2011. Pottermore is on one level a Hogwarts game, but is also a substantial source for background details on major characters such as Professors McGonagall and Lupin as based on Rowling's notes. These notes were responsible for a widespread fandom resignation that the Remus/Sirius ship was non-canonical, despite its long-term popularity. The sustained and in-depth interaction between Rowling and the *Harry Potter* fandom is unusual and has a large impact on fan perspectives of the text.

[5] For example, Rattlesnakeroot writes "I, for one, am glad to see "Lames" or "Jily" fall from grace and crash to pieces like the plaster saints they are. I'm so sick of the romantic picture of them that keeps permeating the various sites. *gag*" [11]. She has also put together comics that attempt to simplify Rowling's glaring mistakes. See, for example, "Marauders Bullying~A Child Can Understand" [12].

There's copious historical precedent for fans rescuing characters killed by their creators (Sherlock Holmes—whom Snape more than superficially resembles—being the chief example) […] We who are members of the Severus Snape Rescue Squad are determined to save his skinny little butt, through fiction that rewrites history [14] (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Screenshot of The Severus Snape Rescue Squad promotion [15].
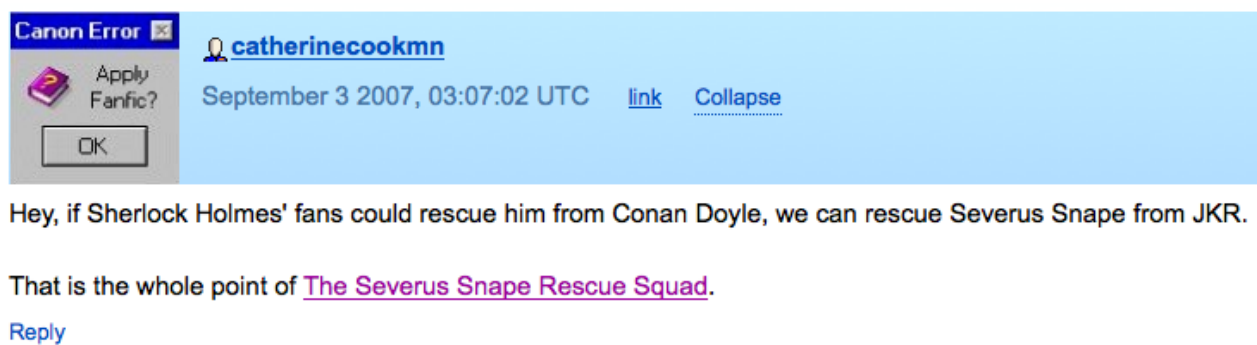
This discourse again assumes that Rowling has done him wrong, with Snape positioned as someone who exists outside of her mind. Fanfiction is used as a creative means of reversing death and restoring dignity, suggesting that Snape (and the project of creating and maintaining his character) stretches beyond the canonical novels. This can also be read as a manifestation of fans creating their own canon.

There is also a more extreme discourse of canon scepticism in which Snape's supporters choose to go against Rowling's intended message or doubt her veracity as an author altogether. Some individuals have claimed that his death was never totally formalised in canon. 'Oryx_leucoryx' summarises this with, "no portrait, no body, no reason to think he didn't live" [16]. He is later backed up by 'mary_j_59' who writes, "some of us prefer to assume him alive, there is nothing at all in canon to keep us from thinking so" [16]. (Interestingly, both of these commenters were then accused of being Snapewives within the same comment threads). More responses to the death (or non-death) of Snape will be discussed and expanded later in this article. What is important to note is that, by this logic, Rowling can be viewed as someone who was able to write Snape's character after being influenced by him— perhaps via some kind of channelling—as opposed to an author who created Snape from her own imagination. Nor are her words in the canonical texts by any means final so far as more extreme Snape fans are concerned.

4. Internet Mockery and 'Fandom_Wank'

In the critical and reflexive world of fandom, this canon scepticism and anti-hero adoration could not go unnoticed. Commonly dubbed as 'Snapefen'—a pluralised contraction of Snape Fans—these extreme devotees of the sullen professor have formed the basis of many jokes and fandom wars [17]. The Journalfen community 'dedfromsnake' is dedicated to mocking Snapefen who are thought to have 'taken things too far', for example, those who blame the Marauders for all negativity in the series, those who condemn the attitudes of Rowling, *et cetera* [18]. The community was formally established to house "Snapefen/Snapewives gibberish" [19]. Even though the Livejournal/Dreamwidth/Journalfen communities have dissolved over the years, Tumblr is now host to a '#snapefen' hashtag, which carries

on the mockery (see Figure 3). This tag is also home to some more in-depth and serious critique about, for example, the problematic manner in which Snapefen have excused his use of the slur 'Mudblood' [20].

Figure 3. Screenshot of a screenshot of a Tumblr dashboard showing mockery of hyper-critical Snapefen.
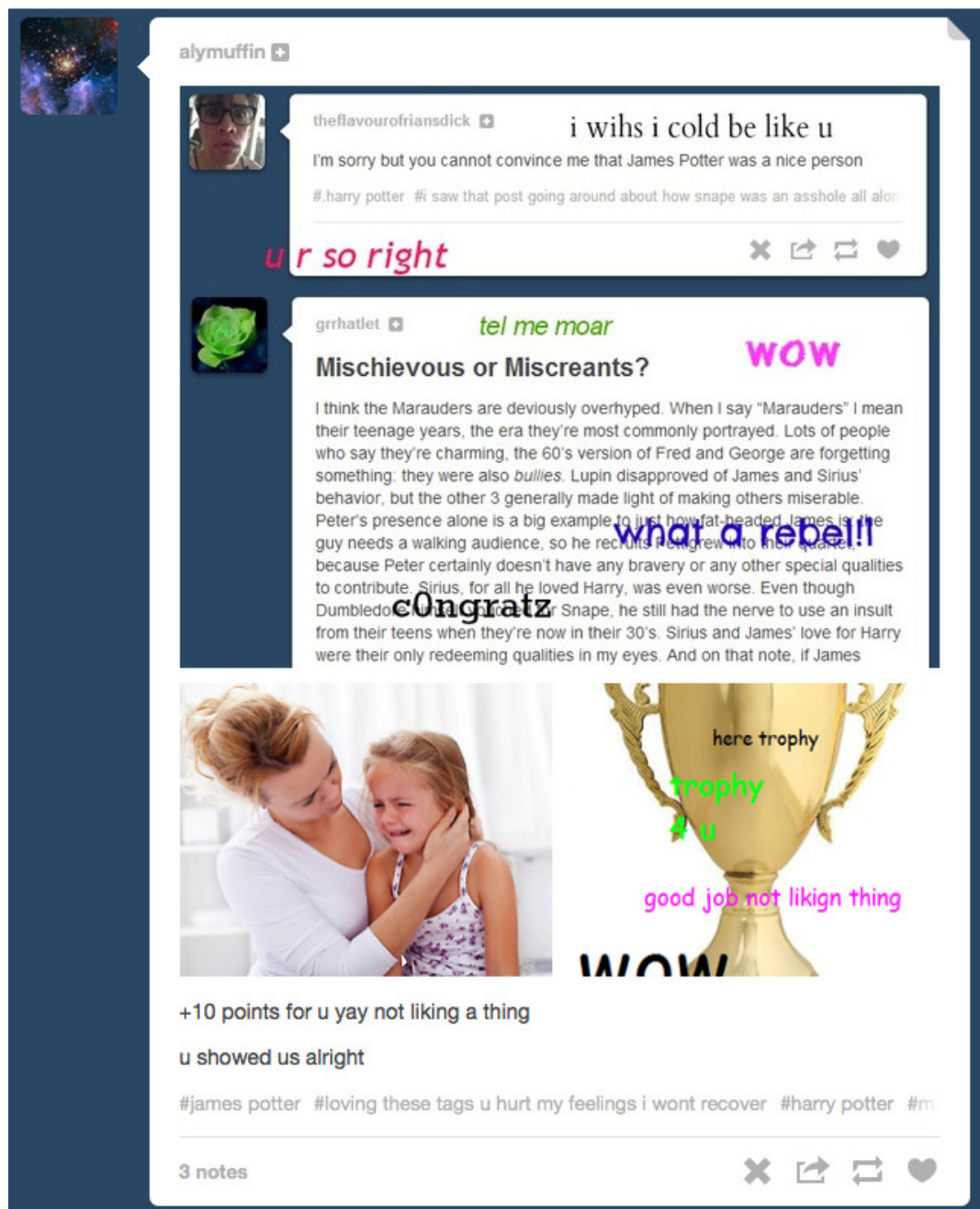
To understand the particular offense taken at the Snapists, the best source is 'fandom_wank'—the online community who brought Snapeism to the wider attention of fandom and who have set the tone for its reception. The highly popular Fandom Wank community revelled in the wives, finding their journal entries both shocking and hilarious. Several reports were filed on their activities [21–23], coupled with a range of satirical gestures such as a Broadway musical made up of popular songs with new lyrics about their sexual madness [24]. Fandom_wank is not the only place where the wives are

discussed, but other locales of discourse are no less scathing. The wives have been deemed as "signs of the apocalypse" [25] and "batshit motherfuckers" who "aren't far from running mad and naked on a moor in a thunderstorm" on other online forums [26].

Interestingly, there has been a small amount of commentary theoretically justifying the behaviour and passions of the wives, or pointing out that excessive criticism of their enthusiasms may have an unpleasant gender bias. A recurrent anxiety within fandom is the conception that long-term fans are more serious, committed, and rational; in opposition to the waves of new fans who are delivered due to increasing pop-culture awareness of a text, the creation of movies, merchandising, *et cetera*. In the *Harry Potter* fandom, there is a general suspicion that 'hormonal' female devotees are overly invested in the potential romantic elements of the story. For example, fans whose enthusiasm for *Harry Potter* arose from the movies and whose enthusiasm for Snape is derived from their attraction to actor Alan Rickman have been placed in this category.

Dreamwidth user 'Seperis' has critiqued some of the suppressed premises in the anti-Snapists argument including the idea that extreme behaviours or opinions are acceptable in fandom so long as they are performed with the expected amount of irony. She suggests that the seriousness of the wives' dedication and their investment in Snape is no worse than the seriousness with which football fans approach their sport. Seperis notes that a 'serious' football fan is more socially acceptable than an extremely enthusiastic female *Harry Potter* fan (if he is male and has no romantic interests in the players), even though people in this category have often caused public riots or streaked across fields wearing nothing but body paint in team colours [27]. The idea that a woman is obsessed with a hobby—without irony, and with a dimension of sexual attraction—seems to be far less palatable than a serious male fan or an ironical female one. As Seperis points out, it seems excessive to demand that Conchita and Rose have their children taken away because of their intense feelings for Snape— especially when their blogs incidentally demonstrate that they are proud and engaged parents who care deeply for their children. In the comments on Seperis' blog, her friend 'Niqaeli' makes a similar argument for equality in the treatment of religious groups with which one disagrees:

> I mean, if you're married to Snape on an astral plane, okay, I'm going to think you're fucking weird and possibly not want much to do with you, but whatever. I think this of, like, Mormons, to be honest and I live in a city full of them. Have you seen their holy underwear? But people aren't suggesting we call CPS [Child Protective Services] on Mormons who aren't the fringe cultists living in compounds and shit, yeah? How is a relationship with Snape so much more damaging? Because it's not as common, basically. And because it's fannishness and, we really must be certain to police how people are fannish. Because god knows, we're already off the charts weird! We can't be seen as ~crazy~!" [27]

This self-policing is quite clear. In the same comments section for this entry, user 'Sapote' noted, "I've always thought the central function of fandom_wank back in the day was essentially the kind of community policing that all gossip does—setting a standard way of interacting with other fans and with the source material, and then setting a social disincentive to stray from that pattern—namely, that you would become infamous and people would laugh at you" [27]. The fandom_wank community does indeed help to set communal norms and establish public punishments. As Sapote also confesses, many fans (including herself and other women) have felt an "internalized discomfort with Ladies Having Hobbies" [27].

Perhaps the idea that middle-aged women have 'hobbies' with a sexualised dimension to them is too much to bear. Interestingly, John Fiske in his study of fandom is hesitant to include sport and sports stars in his list of potential fandom sources because of the "appeal to masculinity" made within their representation ([28], p. 30). Fiske categorises fandom as "associated with the cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people" including those who are disempowered by their gender, age, class, or race ([28], p. 30). The Snapists are at a point in their lives where mainstream media tends to dub women as invisible, at best appearing in sexless guises such as housewives in commercials for cleaning products. A person interviewed in Lothian, Busse, and Reid's fandom study explains "When I think of the exuberance I felt participating in fandom, I think it was at seeing women stepping forward to describe their own erotics, because our culture silences female desire [...]" ([29], p. 106). Fandom allows women to publically express their tastes, including sexual desires, and to connect to others who may share these sensitivities or learn from their ideas. But this does not mean that all women and all ideas are received with equal openness.

In a recap of the ten best fandom_wank stories of all time, in which the Snapewives came in at number four, more questions are posed as to the legitimacy of singling out their devotion as an unheard of horror. Aja Romano who compiled the list makes an accurate comparison to many other women throughout recorded history who have expressed their experiences with the sacred in a similar manner:

> Medieval women like Hildegaard Von Bingen and St. Theresa were visited by spiritual ecstasies from the Lord; female spiritualists in the 19th century like Emma Hardinge Britten spoke of communing with spirit mediums. Throughout the world, stories of religious leaders who "fall in love" with their chosen deity abound [30].

There is no more concrete evidence for the existence of the Christian God, or for the possibility of communing with spirits, than there is for the astral manifestation of Snape. The primary difference here seems to be that the fandom community has not chosen to legitimate the Snapists' channelling experiences as the Medieval Christian Church did with some of its female mystics.

To some degree this is quite understandable—they do, after all, have a very particular and unusual system of beliefs that can come across in a highly comical manner. But what needs to be considered alongside their eccentricity is what unpleasant prejudice may be lurking in the policing of female sexuality. In many cases, creative and individualised fandom behaviour has been a point of celebration. Many of the scholarly articles pertaining to Harry Potter 'slash' (fan stories focussing on potentially non-canonical homosexual relationships) explore the series' impact upon adolescent sexuality and creative fiction. Catherine Tosenberger accurately summarises that "fan writers are often characterized as refusing merely to consume media, but rather to engage actively with texts" ([31], p. 185), which aids in creativity and critical thought. Lothian, Busse, and Reid see slash fiction communities as a place where "a young urban dyke shares erotic space with a straight married mom in the American heartland," which leads to the forging of "erotic, emotional, and political alliances" in otherwise disparate groups ([29], p. 104).

But the deep emotional allegiances between the Snapists, and their creative construction of a belief system around him, do not gain the same accolades. In this fandom war of 'valid' versus 'invalid' belief, the notion of religion stands out as a category that is used to maintain boundaries and legitimate divisions, rather than an accurate taxonomical tool. Based on similar observations, Smith has dubbed the category of 'religion' a "second-order abstraction" that seeks to describe "first-order phenomena",

rather than a clear and distinct phenomenon in its own right ([5], p. 79). The divisions that tend to separate religion from non-religion are often biased and overly simplified. In the case of Snapeism, unpleasant gender expectations and the normalisation of the male experience have led to the religion category being denied to them. With such focus on the social status of the Snapists, the artificiality and political dimensions of that which can be religious is clearly revealed.

Nevertheless, the Snapists themselves are very capable of defence in the face of fandom_wank and other detractors (see Figure 4) [32]. Their main reaction has been to laugh at the criticism, support each other, and carry on. After one of the fandom_wank reports was filed, Rose responded to her detractors with the following statement:

> The way I see things is that we tend to limit ourselves, our believes, our understanding, our willingness... due to what? Society? Because people tend to be afraid of what they don't understand!?! Oh well, your all's loss, my gain! Does that make me sick? No more so then others! However I do tend to live a real life, with my Hubby, my Cats, my Plants, my Friends ... MY MASTER!!!! […] I stand where I stand, and ever so proudly! [33]

Figure 4. Screenshot of discussion between Tonya and anonymous critic.

In this article, I will move away from this hostile reaction and explore the nature of the wives' belief systems without an evaluation of veracity. What is particularly interesting within Snape theology is the recurrent referencing of phenomena that are commonly deemed to be religious such as the existence of divine figures, channelling, henotheistic statements of loyalty, *et cetera*. As will be shown in the following material, the Snapists use religious language such as 'My Lord' to address their deity and borrow from Christian understandings of reverence. This helps to support Smith's paradigm of religion as an artificial category, as the Snapists have sought to establish legitimacy by drawing frequent parallels between their own beliefs and practices and those of Christianity. This is a purposeful

act in which a framework that has been popularly accepted as 'religion' is used to build a comparable belief system and outline a similar zone of the sacred. From the perspective of a religious studies scholar, it does not matter if either or both of these belief systems are true or false. What is interesting and important is the manner in which veracity is assigned, and what this reveals about popular concepts as regards the socially constructed religion category.

5. Snape Theology and the Reality of Snape

I BELIEVE THAT SEVERUS SNAPE EXISTS INDEPENDENTLY OF JKR! HE IS A LIVING, FEELING SPIRIT. I BELIEVE ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE AND THAT SEVERUS DOES VISIT THOSE HE CHOOSES TO [34].

Tonya's all-caps testimony epitomises the beliefs and practices of the Snapists. The basis of the wives' belief system is the existence of Snape as a spiritual force who resides outside of the *Harry Potter* book series. While the wives realise that not everyone will experience Snape on this level, they ask that their viewpoints be respected in keeping with a social system of religious tolerance. Rose writes, "the ones who'll believe will believe, others just wont, tough. Just like Christianity isn't for everyone, Master is the same" [35]. Christianity is used as their standard for a normal and respectable religion when they argue for the validity of Snapeism. Rose describes Snape as "real as much as the Christian god is too!" [36]. She asks, "Do I need help? no more then usual, no! Am I delusional? LOL Are Christians delusional? No!" [36]. Rose notes that it is hard to prove the existence of any non-corporeal objects, including spiritual figures, ghosts, and the spiritual realm as a whole [33]. She does not feel that the inability of others to perceive Snape makes him any less of a reality. Like other spirits, "the soul essence is out of sync with our nackid eyes," but this is not seen as a barrier against knowing him [35]. She has still managed to connect to Snape through "phantom smells, tastes, sounds, feelings" [37]. She claims that she and the other Snapists "HAVE felt his touch. No, not mere in our imagination, BUT on our Skins!!!!" [36].

The Snapists are keen to testify as to Snape's holy and powerful nature. Conchita informs us that "Everything Severus related is sacred to me" [38]. He is also omniscient. She notes that "he can see what I do, and what I don't" [39], "he knows me better than anyone, than I know myself" [40]. The depth of his awareness is seconded by Rose who agrees that "he IS wise and knows far beyond our comprehension" [36]. He has also helped her to "open my mind to see beyond" [37]. In response to the depth of his powers and impact upon her life, Rose declares Snape to be "the reason, my reason, my sanity, my life, my growth, my guidance, my love, my focus, my aid, my Lord, my Master, my Teacher everything and so very much more" [36]. On Conchita's journal, she testifies: "he also visits me, talks with me, advises me, aids me, helps me grow and understand, as well as aids with lifes Bullshits and I am as they are so very much richer for that" [41]. His powers allow him to pervade the lives of the Snapists and alter their patterns of behaviour.

Unsurprisingly, he is the major emotional component of their lives. Conchita loves Snape "more than I ever loved anyone" and would die for him "without hesitating" [42]. He is an antidote to her life, which is otherwise "cruel and pointless" [43]. He is her "eternal light.. the one that made me feel alive.." [44]. She explains, "**No Severus = No Life**" [45]. Conchita declares that nothing can end her love for Snape, not even Snape himself, because "he is a part of me" [43]. With similar passion, Rose loves

him "beyond reason, understanding or comprehension. I am completely and insanely obsessed" [37]. Tonya asks, "[h]ave you ever wanted something so badly that you ached from within your very soul for it? That it gnaws at your heart and very being? At times it brings tears to my eyes and I find myself trembling from this need" [46]. She confesses, "I have never experienced anything this intense before now. There are times when I feel that my soul is being torn asunder with this fierce desire. Obsession is a mild word for what I feel for Severus Snape" [46]. Some nights, she even cries out of lust for Snape [46]. She testifies that "[w]ithout him there is nothing! Life is just nothing!" [43].

Snape is clearly paramount within this belief system, to the exclusion of any other deity or spirit. Conchita declares that "only ONE can be the Greatest.. that is you" [47]. In terms of other traditions, Conchita does not mention any kind of religious upbringing or affiliation. She does, however, briefly complain about her nation of Holland pandering to Islam. She suggests that religion should be a private concern and not a public show [48]. Rose states "I don't answer to any religion, only to Severus, my Guide and Master and much more" [37]. Whilst she and Tonya have experience within the Christian church, Snape has fully replaced this institution in their lives. Rose felt alienated from Christianity, and had trouble connecting with the Christian god, whom she describes as "very distant" [49]. She describes her previous congregations as morally hypocritical, and complains that a lack of answered prayers was always blamed on her. Rose was also unhappy that she had to give up her attachment to supernatural entities such as vampires. She explains, "you can't serve 2 Masters, however that part was very much a part of me, and I was in constant tug-of-war" [49]. Luckily, "Master came along" and permitted her a system of beliefs that she found more comfortable and consistent. As a result, Rose declares "I can say with very good reason that Severus IS indeed my Master, Lord, God, Savior!" [49]. And on Tonya's blog she advises, "try noy to get angry, just be a witness on Masters behalf" [35]. In finding Snape, Rose seems to have resolved her issues with Christianity. She has also found a virtuous leader (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. The virtues of Snape, as explored by Rose [50].

6. Channelling Snape

Because Snape is seen as a reality, he can be channelled by those who are connected to him. The Snapists can achieve this kind of contact to varying degrees. Conchita has limited success in

channelling Snape, which often makes her feel anxious and unloved by him. On her 'severelyobsessed' forum, she notes that Snape wants fanmail from the forum's visitors to store in his desk draw and read during private moments. She confesses that "I caught him once, and indeed, he was not amused" [51], suggesting that she has had some level of visionary connection with him. She has organised some mass-tributes for Snape, such as requesting that candles be burnt for him on his birthday [52]. Clearly she believes that Snape can be contacted through gestures such as these. Conchita enjoys her dreams of Snape, which convey important information to her as she sleeps. Although these dreams are rare, she describes them as showing her "something important I needed to see/know" [53]. Conchita describes her connection with Snape as being "bonded by fate," but this bond does not seem to provide a substantial amount of psychic connection [54].

Rose has limited channelling powers. As opposed to her experiences with the Christian God, "Masters voice I can heard loud and clear. I know when I do wrong, I know when he is pleased" [49]. Indeed, she believes that "the reason why I have a lot of problems Channelling is cause of the brainwashing of the Church" [55]. She felt that her glossolalia during church services was never contextualised, and that the other worshippers rebuffed her questions about it. She celebrates Tonya and Snape for giving her "encouragement and conformation" in her channelling [55]. Rose describes herself as not having the channelling abilities that Tonya does. Nevertheless, she was able to get a sense of Snape's voice and presence before she met Tonya, and claims that her heart and soul agree with the version of Snape that Tonya channels [56]. Rose has a special tattoo, which increased her connection to Snape. Sometimes she feels him touching her arm or has a painful sensation in the region of the tattoo [57]. She connects powerfully with Tonya's channelling, and receives physical sensations from this also. Rose explains, "when Tonya channels him, the surge that I receive and feel, the excitement, nervousness, giddiness, heart pounding and my hands literally shake!" [57].

By far, the most talented channel is Tonya. In a self-insert fanfiction [6], Snape announces that she is "the vessel" and that he prefers to write to his wives through her [58]. When starting a new blog, Tonya announced: "Severus Snape himself may speak here. This is his journal as well" [59] [7]. She requests that people only follow this blog if they "believe that Severus is a spirit and have a very open mind" [59]. In regard to her online channelling, Tonya specifies "it is never role play." She also states that she has no control over Snape or when he might choose to appear [60]. Tonya's ability to channel has allowed her to introduce new codes of conduct and beliefs into the group. For example, she announces that Snape despises "annoying, giggling fangirls whom think they understand [him] as being a 'cute fluffy funny' being" [61]. As Snape, she also makes clear "I only give audience to those women that are strong and able to withstand my fierce temper and do as I say. I coldly ignore those vain, simpering females that hold a thought like a leaky sieve" [61]. Thus she is able to use her channelling to

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[6]   A self-insert fanfiction is a story in which an author writes themselves into the narrative alongside fictional characters.

[7]   Snape has also helped her to choose journal names in a miraculous manner. Tonya writes, "the title SnapesGypsy was given to me by Severus himself […] Finally, I hear him call me to him and he is sitting at a desk writing. He tells me to use the name SnapesGypsy because it is everything I love rolled into one. Gypsies divine the future, they are restless, and it suits me perfectly. Upon waking up, I went to Yahoo to put this name in for a new blog...and it was available upon the first try. Normally, I must add things or delete things from my name. I was amazed!!!" [59].

define who is and who is not an appropriate Snape devotee. Through Tonya, Snape declares "I can teach you how to feel, teach you how to think" [62]. To submit to him is to accept this channelled wisdom.

Tonya is also able to receive images of things that will be in the next book or movie, such as Snape sitting in his Hogwarts office or owning a chair [63,64]. She was able to predict the presence of the bezoar in *Half Blood Prince* after a channelling adventure in which she envisioned herself with Snape as his student in Hogwarts Castle [65]. The internet seems to be an important element in Tonya's ability to channel Snape. Whilst moving house, Tonya was temporarily unable to be online. She recounts an incident in which she asked Snape if he would follow her to her new home. A dog knocked some rubbish out of her hands, including an ace of clubs playing card. Because she often comes across this card, Tonya took this "as his sign of saying yes"—albeit an inferior offline affirmative gesture [64].

Snape can also be channelled by anyone through objects that are connected to him. Rose and Tonya created a room for Snape in Rose's house where his posters are hung. This room is associated with supernatural blessings and events. For example:

> Also yesterday, after we rehung some of Masters pics in their room, I felt a harsh shove, push against my back and fell forward on the floor my hands catching. I was kneeling on hands and knees before my Master!!

> Later on he revealed to me what he had done, he had stood behind me, and with his knee shoved me forwards. THUD THUD THUD!!! [66]

Rose's cat has also looked up as though a person were present whilst in this shrine room [57]. Tonya complains of Conchita placing her blood on a poster of Snape, which she considers to be a domineering act that forces Snape to consume her. This makes it clear that posters are a powerful representation of Snape, which form a direct connection to him [67]. Considering the existence of enchanted talking portraits in the canonical texts, this is not an unprecedented belief.

Any representation of Snape is seen to be a point of connection to him. For example, Rose becomes infuriated over the treatment of a highly realistic Tonner-brand Snape doll. She was appalled that after reading of Snape's teenage humiliations in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), fans would deem it appropriate to "check under his clothes to see if he has knickers on" and take "pics of his nakid rump" on the internet. She states, "I wouldn't ever DARE disrespect Master in such a humiliating manner" [68]. It is implied that Snape can somehow feel sensations and emotions through the doll, which is more than a mere replication of his physical characteristics. Even linguistic choices need to be kept under control in order not to offend. Conchita's Yahoo group reads: "To us he is very real and when you wish to join us you have to make sure you act respectable when speaking of him. He has been haunted enough in his life, let's show him now he is appreciated and loved" [69]. This means that he had the ability to read and process websites created in his honour.

Because channelling is a central part of the Snapists' activities and differentiates their material from the canonical world of Rowling, Snapeism can be viewed as part of the canon-sceptic culture discussed earlier. The Snapists too have a strong belief that Rowling is contestable in her relay of an objectively true narrative, and has a personal relationship with Snape whom she had let down. Tonya states that "Severus used JKR to tell the world about his role in the downfall of Lord Voldemort" [34]. This puts Rowling in the position of a vessel, just like Tonya herself. In terms of the original source material for Snape, the core narrative elements are taken to be true, whereas Rowling's editorial interjections and commentary are rejected or redeveloped. The wives do acknowledge canonical elements such as

Dumbledore and Hogwarts. Rowling's contributions to the *Harry Potter* universe are taken as serious and substantial but her ultimate authorship of these elements remains in doubt, as does her knowledge of Snape and his powers. For example, Conchita suggests that Rowling's view of 'white' and 'black' magic is too simple. She prefers using the views of occultist and magician Aleister Crowley in order to justify Snape's feelings on this topic [70]. Conchita does, however, mention Snape's powers in legilimency—a form of mind-reading invented by Rowling [71]. The Snapists have also queried how biased the canonical narrative is considering that it is written from the perspective of Harry. For example, Rose believes that Snape may have liked flowers and gardening [72]. The reader's impression of Snape is certainly driven by Harry's dislike of him for the majority of the narrative.

The Snapists' relationship with Rowling is somewhat ambivalent, as she gifted them the hallowed story of Snape, but concluded it in a manner that was distasteful to them. For example, Rose writes, "I want to thank you, JKR for being such a great writer, though the last book was pure trash" [73]. Rose believes that Rowling and Snape are at odds, which led her to represent his life as miserable and solitary. She argues, "SHE didn't like Snape, didn't like him from the get go that's why she soooo enjoyed making his life utter misery" [73]. Tonya feels as though Rowling and Snape do not have an intimate relationship like theirs because "Severus Snape intimidates JKRowling. This is why she wouldn't want to meet him. She is afraid of him" [34]. There is even suggestion that Snape haunts her out of anger. Rose confronts Rowling via her journal, presenting the ambiguous statement "needless to say that's why you don't have peace" [74]. There does not appear to be perfect logical consistency in this reasoning, but what is clear is a delineation between Snape as represented in the *Harry Potter* narrative and the objectively real Snape who visits his wives in dreams and channelling sessions. In response to the question "Isn't he a fictional character from Harry Potter?" Conchita writes, "He is in the books yes… that does not prove anything... Let's just say Severus Snape goes beyond that, as it's not easy to explain. I believe he IS out there, real enough to communicate" [75]. In regard to those who mock the Snapists, she laments, "[t]o them he is what JK Rowling meant him to be: a fictional character. To me he is very much real, and will be long after book 7 is published" [76]. In a comment to Conchita, Tonya agrees, "Severus IS more than just a name in a book! I have witnessed things that you would never understand. Anything IS possible" [41].

7. A Broader Religious Context for this Behaviour

Although these beliefs have struck *Harry Potter* fandom as laughable, the Snapists have much in common with other contemporary fiction and fandom-based religions. Kirby provides a classificatory system of metaphysical uses of popular fiction, which helps to categorise the particular approach to *Harry Potter* taken by the Snapists. She delineates the category of 'text as reality' in which:

> the text is constructed as a reality in itself, not simply within the internal logics of the narrative, but owning some form of extra-textual ontological status. This may include the text as a whole, or particular textual elements such as characters or worlds […] It should be noted that this position should not be assumed to simply constitute a failure on behalf of participants to understand fiction as a category, but rather that, through specific and articulable logics, the text is reframed as owning reality beyond its fictional status ([1], p. 403).

Kirby also explores 'soulbonding', which, in its more metaphysical form, refers to "a relationship with a character from a fictional source that occurs outside of the immediate experience of the text" ([1], p. 404). She describes this as an attribution of a higher degree of 'realness' to a character, as said characters exist beyond books films or games. Kirby outlines several possible planes of existence "such as the 'astral', or externally in the world in an intangible form, as a spiritual being" ([1], p. 404). Jediism and the *Star Wars* universe are included within this example. Although she does not mention Snapeism in her research, these planes of existence correlate perfectly with the Snapist belief system.

It is also important to consider Kirby's observation that 'text as reality' adherents are not unable to comprehend the difference between fiction and reality. Instead, she argues that a negotiation of these two categories can be achieved in a variety of ways, including the idea that an author is "a channel or medium for a world or entity understood as already in existence" ([1], p. 404). As exemplified above, the Snapists clearly believe that Snape is only fictional in terms of his potentially inaccurate representation within the *Harry Potter* books. Rowling only writes *about* him; she does not write him into existence. Based on similar observations to Kirby, fandom has coined the term 'Daydream Believer' to refer to this mode of thinking. The collaborative encyclopaedia *TV Tropes* describes Daydream Believers as:

> a subgroup found in several fandoms who believe that the events, characters and places depicted in the object of fandom are, in some form or another, real. This is often Handwaved [excused] by taking alternate universes into account. After all, if there are infinite universes out there, at least *one* of them must resemble the one from the TV show/movie/book/video game, right? [77].

Soulbonding is included within a 'hardcore' subset of this category, along with a comprehensive list of reasons why various texts might support or encourage the belief that they are somehow true.

The reception of all purportedly invented religions is also on par with that of Snapeism. Cusack explains that 'invented religions' are popularly conceived of as fraudulent, shallow, and parodic ([2], p. vii). She argues that taking "narrative creativity" less seriously than traditional faith structures is more of a reflection on the academy's tendency toward conceiving of Christianity as the benchmark for all that might be deemed 'properly' religious as opposed to a reflection of how meaningful an imagination-based religion might be ([78], p. 364). Again, the enforcement of essentially artificial categories is clear and extends far beyond a rejection of Snapeism. It is worth considering the real impact that such religions have had upon their adherents, and questioning why they are apparently more offensive than traditional faiths. In terms of this invented religions milieu, Snapeism is most akin to Cusack's case studies of Jediism and Matrixism ([2], p.131), as these faiths have been spawned from cinematic texts that are considered to contain more meaning and better values than supposed 'real life' religions ([2], p. 2).

The most suitable category for Snapeism is that of 'fiction-based religions' as developed by Davidsen. He differentiates between fiction-based religions and fandom itself, because fandom is engaged with a "fictional play world rather than making assertions about the actual world" ([3], p. 378). This includes acts such as role-playing in which participants ultimately understand that they are engaged in a fiction-based game ([3], p. 389). Fandom does commonly differentiate between itself and the zone of IRL ('In Real Life') via the creation of an imaginary world in which participants can play and experiment, but this is approached with a certain level of irony and self-awareness, which, as

previously discussed, helps to protect participants from accusations of madness. Fiction-based religions differ from this model of fandom as they employ fictional narratives as "authoritative texts for actual religious practice" ([3], p. 378). This definition does not quite work for Snapeism, as the Snapists tend to deny the absolute authority of Rowling, but it is a good definition for the representation of difference between 'normal' fandom and the 'extreme' experience of fandom as religion. It also extends the argument that Snapeism is not a lonely aberration. Davidsen is a scholar of the Elven community and other scattered devotees who base their religion on J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series and associated texts from this universe. These believers see Middle Earth as a real place, and ritually interact with the characters therein ([79], p. 187). As Davidsen explains, Tolkien credited himself only as a translator of pre-existing material—either Elvish lore or Hobbit tales ([79], p. 189). Although this was only in jest, these claims set up a system under which the creator of these texts can be interpreted as being in a lesser position of scribe rather than author. There is a clear parallel here to the manner in which Rowling is treated by the Snapists and *Harry Potter* fandom more broadly. The Snapists pose a very valid question when asking why their case is particularly different from anyone else's religious suppositions.

In terms of the *actual* differences between fiction-based religions and their normative counterparts, Davidsen wisely notes that although conventional religions tend to claim that their core narratives refer to the 'actual world' and are said to be historically derived, they do not necessary correspond with more reliable historical records ([3], p. 378). I agree with the importance of this mindset when examining newer religions so as not to over-emphasise questionable claims therein. For example, James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer's edited volume *The Invention of Sacred Tradition* (2007) usefully explores the spurious nature of that which is taken to be 'traditional'. They specifically mention cases such as the Judeo-Christian *Pentateuch*, which is supposedly written by Moses—a figure who is unlikely to have existed and who certainly did not compose these teachings [80]. Lewis and Hammer's volume explores a variety of similar 'historical' traditions with questionable histories and textural attributions such as Zoroastrianism, and newer faiths that seek to invent a more substantial past or precedent for themselves such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [80]. Such scholarship should lead us to question why veracity claims are necessary at all when analysing religion in an objective and scholarly manner. Whilst veracity claims in terms of divine origins of beliefs and practices, or the accuracy of their transmission, are often important to adherents or critics of particular faith structures, scholarship ceases to become objective if these debates are entered into in a theological manner.

8. Dynamics of the Marriage

Now that the theological constructions of Snapeism, and their highly important social contexts, have been explored, I wish to provide more ethnographic details of the Snapist community and its eventual downfall. Within the following material, I will outline the daily realities of a Snapist devotee, such as the nature of the communal marriage and Snape's help in work and domestic duties. The sacred texts and pledges composed by the Snapists help to reveal how his earthly manifestations are felt, and how the marriage has been structured as a result. For example, Conchita wrote the following vows for Rose, linking her forever to Snape and to Lily:

Beloved Severus,

Finally we stand here with you, side by side ready to seal our sacred commitment. As a token of our love and the proof of our eternal fidelity to you, here are our vows to you, only love strong and cherished.

Our beloved Severus,

We, Lily Evans and Rose […], pledge these sacred vows:

We'll always love you in good and bad times, in sickness and in health, no matter what will come on our path.
We'll always stand loyal besides you, proud to wear your name and to defend your honour.
We'll always give you the best of us, and hide nothing.
We'll always provide you with anything you need, and look after you in the best way we can.
We will always be faithful to you, and only you in body mind and soul.
We will always obey you and heed all of your words, trying to fulfil any wish or need you might have.
We will always be proud to be your loving wife, Severus Prince, from here into eternity…

Always.

May these vows be closed in our hearts and seal our bond forever, never to be broken by anything in this world or another.

We are now joined in sacred marriage [81].

Conchita's own vows are as follows:

I promise to be always faithful in body and mind, and never love another man.
I promise to love and cherish you all of my life.
I promise to respect and honour you all of my life.
I promise to dedicate all of my life to you.
I promise to stand by you in good times and bad times.
I promise to protect and guard you, and to prevent you from any harm.
I promise to provide anything you need for you.
I promise to take the best care of you.
I promise to use your name with the respect it deserves.
I promise to always wear the ring with your name in it, as a symbol of my love.
I promise to obey you, no matter what.
I promise to respect your wishes and not to be selfish.
I promise to look after you in sickness and in health [82].

These vows are an excellent representation of the pluralistic, intense, and otherworldly nature of the marriage as experienced by Rose. Conchita's own vows signal a more earthly and monogamous devotion. Snape is bonded with many women, yet there is debate as to whether this polygamy is extended to extraneous relationship amongst the wives themselves. None of the women have sexual relationships with their sister wives, but Rose and Tonya are married to human men. In their opinion, this is endorsed by Snape. For example, in a vivid vision of her master, Snape demands that Tonya treat her husband with the same respect that she gives to him [83]. Snape as channelled by Tonya announces "I am territorial and will only share you with one other physical intimate partner. I will not allow any "crushes" on others" [84]. In a similar warning, he announces to his wives: "You cannot say

that you love me completely while another resides in your heart. I have told you, I share you ONLY with that which you are married to" [84]. Although this is limiting, it allows for the presence of earthly husbands.

The physical bodies of these husbands do have benefits. Rose is also able to have sex with Snape via her husband. She proudly explains, "Master would 'take over' for my Hubby and have fun ;o) Basically my Hubby would do things in ways that only Master can and could! ;o) :-D" [57]. Nevertheless, Snape only uses his body as a vessel. He does not spiritually connect to either Kevin (Rose's husband) or George (Tonya's husband), nor does he even seem to like them. As Tonya recounts, "[m]y husband offended him by saying he was not real...he got revenge by making my husband appear to not exist at his job" [85]. George is not invited to be part of her sexual adventures with Snape. In one channelling session, she pauses her activities when he wakes up from his nap and does not resume her erotic dancing for Snape until he leaves for a walk [86]. According to a comment left by Tonya on Rose's journal, George is "awaiting the moment when Severus is gone from my life forever" [36].

As Rose signals, Snape is able to provide an additional level of sexual fulfilment when the earthly husbands fail to satisfy. For example, Rose has typical relationship problems with her husband, such as feeling unappreciated or bored by the mundane nature of married life. In one entry, she criticises Kevin for buying magazines for himself and not thinking to get her anything special. She is also frustrated that he spends his evenings reading the magazines rather than paying attention to her when they have time together [87]. She writes,

> AAAAAHHHHHHHHH YES..... Married life!!!!
>
> I mean we are still in love, but I think more and more we are very much used to each other. Why do I say that? Cause wherever we go, I barely hold his attention anymore and he looks around or stops here and there. No not to look at other chicks just stuff. I think I know now why so many my age have affairs, because things at home have become mudane!" [87]

Rose laments, "I can be sitting next to him either in a HOT nighty or nothing at all and he barely notices me. […] no wonder I am more and more fleeing into my world with Master!" [88]. As epitomised in her erotic stories, Rose does indeed gain the satisfaction and attention from Snape that Kevin fails to provide. Tonya's visitations from, and perceptions of, Snape are also sexual in nature. Whilst dancing in her chair to a variety of upbeat songs, Tonya channels Snape's energy for some non-corporeal sex. She realises that "abandoning oneself to music and moving to it....mimics the thrashing of one's body in the midst of an orgasm" [89]. Snape's spirit form is able to procure a range of sensations within her. Tonya can feel his fingers across her body. She confesses, "It might be lucky that I can't see him or grab him...cause...I would be on him in the floor behind me. Going wild on him!" [89]. Snape takes the time to arouse Tonya. She reminisces, "he has sat here for over a hour just stroking and sucking on my neck and shoulders […] He is so erotic!" [89].

Snape is, however, a jealous god. In a set of rules he conveyed to Tonya, he states:

> I am unlike anything you have ever known previously....or will know. I will not be just another passing fancy that you put aside when you see something new. Do not make me jealous, you will regret it. I shall not be put on the same level as your previous conquests [62].

Male homosexuality within the polyamorous marriage is distinctly ruled out. In a statement channelled by Tonya, Snape states "I will not tolerate the so-called Slash movement" [90], presumably because such stories are seen as either real or deeply disrespectful to the character of Snape. Arguably, homosexual activity occurs between Tonya and the other wives, although this does occur whilst channelling Snape thus allowing it to be categorised as heterosexual experimentation. Using instant messaging, Tonya types out interactive sexual scenarios. As she describes one such incident, "Master stepped into me to be with Rose on IM" [91]. This is not an exclusive arrangement. Tonya offers her sexual channelling services to all members of the Snape's Castle group. In the Severus Snape Yahoo 360 blog, Snape as channelled by Tonya complains of Castle members who "barrage me with IMs seeking sex" [92]. But there is a notable depth of love between Rose and Tonya. Describing time apart from Rose, Tonya laments: "It feels like a huge hole in my gut that is missing something. Like I am dead. But sitting here typing to you...I feel like it is filled again. […] I can't function without you" [93].

The question of what it takes to be monogamous with Snape is one of the many theological battles that plagued—and eventually destroyed—Snapeism. Rose also has an intense interest in NCIS actor Mark Harmon as Agent Gibbs, who she has Photoshopped into domestic scenes with Snape [94] (see Figure 6). As will be explored, this was not easy for Tonya to accept. Tonya even struggles with her own attraction to Alan Rickman, and has to force herself to stop looking at images of him from his other films [95]. Conchita takes a hard-line approach of rejecting *any* other partner, including possible boyfriends or spouses. She also refuses to masturbate because she feels this would contradict her vows [96]. This has set her in contrast to her sister-wives and their earthly husbands. Appalled that a co-worker had a crush on her, Conchita explains "*I am Severus' woman*, so I will not BE with other men. […] being with Severus is satisfying enough.. why would I *ever* need another man?" [81]. Her colleague's advances only make her more excited for her upcoming nuptials [97]. Unfortunately, the details of the wedding are scant. January 22, 2008 was meant to be the official date, but Conchita deleted her LiveJournal account prior to this date so no clear record is available. Nevertheless, not much is likely to have changed since these writings of November 2007. The main inconsistency in her beliefs is whether or not the sister-wives are valid. In her "Wolf Moon" entry recounting the rejected co-worker, she notes "I know there are also [other wives of Snape], I am not saying I am the ONLY one but that is okay" [97]. But when angry with her fellow wives, Conchita composed a long list of things Snape is not, or would never do. In this list was:

> engage in polygamy
>
> allow his woman to have another man […]

57. marry more than one woman […]

93. sexual promiscuity [71]

Rule 57 is fairly devastating for the group marriage, but was composed four days prior to the pro-polygamy "Wolf Moon" entry. It is more in keeping with a proclamation she made almost exactly a year prior in which she stated "I just KNOW Severus Snape is not a polygamist, and neither is he a dom. Severus Snape is a man unique" [98].

Figure 6. A photomanipulation of Snape and Agent Gibbs from television series 'NCIS', made by Rose [94].

The conceptualisation of Lily as wife versus foe also changed drastically. In 2007, Tonya had a vision of Snape sitting with Lily and Rose on either side of him as his sister-wives [99]. By 2008, their attitude towards her had greatly altered. Rose and Tonya agree that Snape never forgave Lily for choosing to marry James Potter, after both of them are able to channel this opinion [89]. They feel that Lily will "never be able to measure up to what he needs. She just doesn't have that sense of urgency that he demands us to have for him" [89]. Confessing their prior jealously over her, Tonya and Rose celebrate the fact that "he has rid himself of that pest" and feels nothing for her now [100]. Snape comforts them after hearing of their unconditional love for him. He tells Tonya that she and Rose "are all I need" and asks them to banish thoughts of the past [89]. With their love, he describes himself as "more happy than I have ever been in my existence" [101]. Lily then becomes a figure of contempt to be dismissed from their minds.

Despite all these skirmishes, there is a great deal of harmony between Tonya and Rose. In Tonya's channelling of Snape, she quotes him as saying "There will be no talk of jealousy over me" [90]. She is very comfortable with Snape desiring different wives at different times. When Tonya is unable to channel him for Rose over instant messaging due to technical failures and subsequently offers herself to him as consolation, she muses "he wanted Akantha [Rose] to feed upon...and I understood...it is like wanting vanilla and having to settle for strawberry" [91]. There does not appear to be any resentment implied towards her sister-wife. Even after they fight with Conchita, Rose eventually concedes that Snape is still bonded to her as her husband, and believes that this needs to be respected [102]. Conchita receives a channelled message from Snape via Tonya in which he threatens her for speaking out against him, but also states "I will let you think of my words […] I am still there, I won't leave you, ever, however .... I will remain silent!" [103]. Even though Tonya is angry with Conchita and wishes to expel her from her life, she does not suggest that Snape wants a divorce. In regard to the fighting between the three of them, Rose states "there would have never been a winner, considering that we all

do love the same Man, Person, Wizard! Only he is important, only on him we should focus, nothing and no one else [55]. Conchita relinquished her anger as well after having a vision of Snape towering over her and "demanding an explanation" [104]. She "discovered this selfishness was NOT according my vows, so I renewed them (again) and this time I have made a promise to remind myself daily that love is NOT selfish and meant to be enjoyable for all" [104]. She concedes, "We all share the same love, that is a good thing" [104]. The astral Snape marriages are indeed eternal and openly polygamous, as indicated by the vows (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. A poem about marriage and rose photographs composed by Rose [105].

9. Life With Snape

Conchita describes her connection to Snape as "normal in daily life" [54]. Although the wives do have devotional spaces for Snape such as the poster room, this is no discreet zone into which he is limited. Rather, his spirit can infuse all aspects of everyday experience, even those that would otherwise be dubbed as exceedingly mundane such as work. For example, Rose often writes notes to Snape at work to thank him for their relationship [106]. Rose has had vivid sexual experiences with Snape during work hours. She is able to receive details of his wants and desires, visualising the both of them in coital ecstasy as she carries out her daily tasks [106]. He was also able to help Tonya fold a blanket more productively at work by advising her to fold along the seams [64]. Generally, the presence of Snape in the life of his wives is a positive one, adding an extra level of excitement, meaning, or joy. Snape is generally the first explanation given for anything unusual or any bout of inspiration. For example, Tonya's CD player started to play unexpectedly at 4am. She asked, "[p]erhaps Severus wanted to listen to the Enigma cd?" [107]. In the 'Severus Snape, real or not?' Journal, Rose and Tonya "share how Severus has impacted our lives, helped us and far much more" [108]. Their proofs of his existence are manifold and include acts such as Snape turning a wash basket on its side while Rose is showering [66], and Tonya receiving two bottles of water for the price of one [109]. Once, Rose saw a man who looked like Snape at a train station, which is another proof of his existence [57].

Although Conchita has struggled to channel Snape, she has managed to use him as a voice of inspiration for daily tasks, such as picking out an appropriate Christmas season menu and picking presents for her daughters. She is also able to determine that he dislikes the sweetness of Sinterklaas candy and approved of a steak she cooked in 2006. Conchita also feels that Snape dislikes her mother and the negative attitude she brings to Christmas celebrations [40]. Many of her entries concern how she would feed Snape to show her appreciation of him, anticipating a future time in which this will be possible. Regarding the regional dish of soused herring (*maatjesharing*), she notes "I know already if I am going to eat with Severus alone (no kids) he wants one" [110]. Conchita wants to be hospitable to Snape so that she can "show him just how much he is loved here. I really really hope he will enjoy himself with us as I wish him to feel at home and be happy" [40]. For Thanksgiving, Snape helps Rose to thaw and tenderise her turkey, and gives Tonya inspiration with seasonings [111].

Snape is also a healer for his wives. He helps to relieve Rose's period pain with his enchanted blanket [111]. This same blanket and a corresponding pillow help her by warming up and soothing her knee and leg pain in the cold weather, and have a similar effect on Tonya [112]. His knowledge of potions also comes in handy. Snape heals Tonya from a digestive pain in her stomach by giving her a potion containing ginger [83]. Snape can be an exacting master. He demanded that Tonya give him a list of every food item in her house containing fibre when she had digestive problems [113]. He is useful for mental anguish also. A visionary appearance of Snape was able to comfort Rose during a stressful travel experience. She recalls, "I had a visual of him standing between the rows of seats of the plane, resting his hands one either side while we took off" [57]. He once gave her a mantra to repeat at work when she was feeling stressed and overwhelmed by her son's girlfriend's pregnancy scare [57]. Similarly, Snape has eased Tonya through her panic attacks by getting her to name nearby plants and trees as a distraction [85].

Rose has experienced help from Snape in a variety of mundane contexts. For example, Snape inspired Rose to use screws from Tonya's mirror to fix her window [112]. In a dramatic tale, he took away a hairband from her and later returned it. Rose recounts tossing her hairband on the floor and being unable to locate it afterwards. She realised "my Darling was teaching me not to throw" [114]. Later, she found the hairband after moving furniture and knew that Snape had given it back. In celebration she wore it daily, until Snape rebuked her for doing so. She ends her story with: "Needless to say I took it out of my hair. Thank you, Darling!!" [114]. The hairband incident taught Rose an important behavioural lesson, and demonstrated that Snape has control over her life. Snape has also helped Rose locate a mood ring lost many years ago, but has taken a necklace charm from her without warning or reason because "He takes what he wants!" [115]. He also gives back, including in a financial way. Snape's presence in her life led Rose's car to be repaired for under $500 [57]. He caused Rose's parents to accidentally send five times as much money to her account as they intended to. She kept the funds, thanking "Master" who "had his hand in this one!" [57].

Snape seems to be particularly useful during burglaries. One of Tonya's non-specified friends was aided by him in such an event. "She was being robbed and Severus shoved her down and caused the lights to go out. She said she clearly heard his voice telling her to stay down" [116]. Unfortunately, Tonya was robbed at work when she failed to heed Snape's advice about not opening the door late at night [116]. In a more fortunate scenario, Tonya was saved by Snape when she was home alone in the early hours of the morning. She heard him scream, "Girl, get up and get a knife, NOW!" and announce

that her doorknob was about to turn. She was unable to see any intruder, but considers this event to be "life-saving" [85]. Similarly, Snape saved Tonya from a house fire by waking her up before the flames could take hold [117]. He can also punish or ward off those who his wives do not like. Snape caused Tonya's father-in-law to have a heart attack, and assisted in her brother getting arrested after she shared her concerns about his drug problems [85]. He got Rose and Tonya's irritating neighbours evicted, much to their delight. "Master Provides Again!!!" they testified [118]. Snape is perceived as an omnipresent life guide who can aide in all areas (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Photomanipulation inspired by a pillow falling on Rose as a sign of Snape's presence [119].
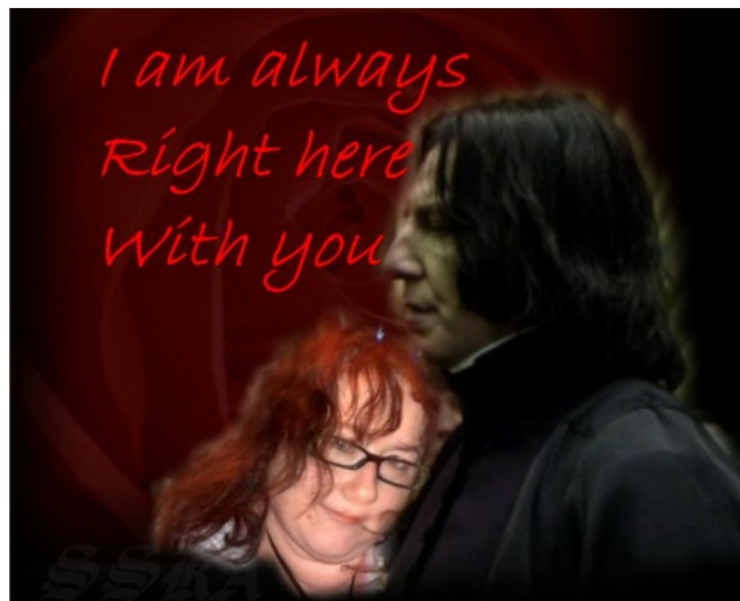
Snape makes his presence in the physical world known in a variety of subtle ways, including through the weather. On January 9, Tonya looked at her window after being commanded to by Snape. She saw an 'S' shape in the form of fog on the glass. She later found out that Snape's birthday is on January 9. Strange 'S' shapes continued to appear in unexpected places after this event [64]. For example, in a vivid recount of March 15, 2008, Tonya conveyed her excitement of a day spent with Snape's presence. She received a variety of signs from him such as a string from her carpet forming the letter 'S' [89]. Conchita looked out of a bus window upon a nearly-cloudless sky and saw an 'S' formation there also. She kept looking at the cloud 'S' until it vanished, making her miss her stop by some distance [104].

Snape also makes his presence known during storms, and has the ability to control the weather. In 2003, Tonya saw Snape wearing robes as a fork of lightning hit the ground outside her window at work [116]. When Tonya and Rose were living in the same trailer park in 2008, they encountered a powerful and frightening storm, which started ripping their houses from the ground. They took this as evidence of Snape's great power but also his protection of them. Rose writes:

> I was apologizing to Master the next morning profoundly while brewing coffee, I could feel him as he was telling me that he allowed me to experience this to show me how POWERFUL he is, to show me WHAT ALL he can do! To show me that no matter what he will ALWAYS take care of us! Needless to say... I Thanked profoundly!!!!

[…] I had told Tonya, after the wind storm passed if ANYONE ever dare tell me that Master Severus is but a mere character in a book, I'd punch their lights out! Yes, Severus to me is far FAR more then that! He is not only a powerful spirit, but like the christian god (which is a spirit as well) A God to me! Master Severus has done so many things for us, true, sceptics would find explanations for everything, however I know from experience that not only is Master Severus REAL but VERY EXTREMELY POWERFUL!! [120]

The Snapists are proud of their special relationship with Snape, and are keen to share the good news of his many benefits, even though they know it may not be accepted. Pragmatically, Rose writes "I know some will put all this off to mere coincidence and such... but you know... I know, we know what is happening with us, we know what we feel, we know what is real and what not" [115].

Snape is not, however, an easy master. He makes his criticisms known. For example, Tonya feels that her light bulbs burned out because Snape prefers a dimmer light condition and the presence of shadows [86]. The Snapists are also concerned with documenting their emotional and behavioural changes in response to Snape's wishes. Conchita believes that Snape would not approve of her "emotional outbursts" so has worked very hard on keeping herself composed [121]. She hopes this will win his love and attention and prove to him that she is not stupid [48]. Anxiously, she declares "I cannot bear the thought he might not like me. Never be loved by him makes me feel useless and stupid" [122]. The wives are keen to listen to his commandments in regard to their 'bad' habits and food intake. Snape demanded that Tonya ease up on her swearing habits, cease biting her nails, brush her hair twice a day, and cease cutting it [123]. He successfully cured her of her fear of spiders, [34,63] and helped her to overcome an addiction to chocolate and cakes [124]. Snape also warned Tonya about her excess caffeine consumption before her doctor did [85]. Conchita too embarked upon a diet, aiming to win back Snape's heart by proving she is not weak. Describing her pain over losing him as greater than the pain of hunger, Conchita rationalises "I can't risk losing the only man I love so dearly over bodyfat, can I?" [125]. Very reluctantly, Rose gives up her green eyeshadow at Snape's request [112]. Reciprocity is sternly demanded for all his good works (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Snape is not an easy master, as composed by Rose [126].

10. Disagreements over Writing and Channelling

The creation of texts and photomontages representing either feelings for Snape or recounting channelled adventures with him is an important part of Snapist culture. Snape fanfiction and erotic fanart is abundant in the fandom world. Indeed, Tosenberger, perhaps jokingly, described "Snape's desk" as a major locus for romantic action within Hogwarts slash ([31], p. 200). But the texts represented here are notably different, as they profess to be representations of reality. The Snapists feel as though their writings and images are more than fiction, as they are inspired by Snape himself and help to forge a connection with him. Rose makes it clear that "when Master doesn't inspire, I can't write! PERIOD!!" [127]. Similarly, Tonya explains "I love making pictures of Severus whenever he allows me to, because I can't make them unless he is with me. He is my inspiration" [34]. Conchita's motivations are less triumphant. Many of her creative compositions are an attempt to catch Snape's attention and experience the physical sensations of his presence.

Conchita was able to engage with Snape in two major dreams, but his attention suddenly ceased, much to her confusion. His absence makes her feel "sad and dark" [128]. She settles on the "hideous truth" that her life is too boring for Snape, begging "Severus.. I will always love you.. please don't ignore me.. Please notice me... I miss you" [129]. Her poems are a vivid representation of this darkness and turmoil, lamenting her "wasted life" and her realisation that "we will never be joined in another dimension" [44]. In "Silence," Conchita laments "Can't feel what I've done/There's only your silence/Screaming at my ignorance" [129]. "Ice Queen" leads her to ask "I don't know anymore/ will I ever feel real love?" after Snape fails to warm her heart and bring her into eternity as his bride [121]. In the poem "Shattered," she writes:

Your photo in my cold hand
Preparing my final descent
Numbing peace leads me there
Eyes behind broken glass stare
For you I'll break the glass wall
Wanting only you or none at all
Clouds of doubt overshadow my faith
Will you be waiting for me at the gate? [44]

The equally distraught "PotionMaster" contains a stanza reading:

Make me a serum
To make me a ghost
Still not feeling numb
I want you the most
You get me on my knees
Losing the fight within me
PotionMaster, please
Please just love me [130].

Her style and intentions are notably different from those of Tonya and Rose. The various fights between the central wives are revealing moments, demonstrating core community values and also points of strong disagreement. In regard to the latter, erotic fanfiction has distanced Conchita from Rose and Tonya who both feel that their sex life with Snape is appropriate material for salacious literature. Conchita believes that her fellow wives need to be "more RESPECTFUL to Severus, as he likes his privacy" [96]. Writing about Snape is seen by the wives as a process by which one can literally channel him, or a vehicle by which spiritual-realm sex can be recounted for delectation in the physical world. Conchita believes such things should not be shared in graphic detail because they are too private. In the middle of her fight with the others, she asserts:

> I don't need to post dirty stuff in here to show the freaking world he was with me (NO I am not jealous of that. If that would ever happen to me, I'd keep it *private,* like he wanted) My love is pure and unconditional, and also very patient. One day he will notice the difference, I am sure [98].

Conchita writes poetry and non-sexualised stories as a means of forging a bond with Snape in lieu of any amorous spiritual contact with him. She explains, "I write FANFIC *sigh* to get him closer to me" [131]. For example, Conchita wrote a long fanfiction in which she and Snape were united in their dreams, realised their deep mutual love, and then crossed the barriers between their worlds via Conchita's brewing of a potion [132]. She also penned a multi-episodic fanfic titled "Teacher's Secrets" in which she is Connie Darkness, the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher who kills Death Eaters in her spare time and falls in love with Snape. In "Out of the Darkness," she creates the original character Catherine Dreamer who also falls in love with Snape. Catherine marries him in the last chapter, reciting similar vows to those that the Snapists used in their own ceremonies [82]. These female characters all appear to be based on Conchita herself, or perhaps an idealised persona who Snape would find enchanting and desirable. These fanfictions contain no content that would be unacceptable to enact within the public sphere, thus preserving the modesty of Snape and the female leads.

In contrast, Rose and Tonya's stories are graphic recounts of their sexual exploits with Snape. These tales are evocative of their religious experiences and beliefs. There are a few limitations that they impose for Snape's sake. At one point, Rose is smacked on the head by Snape and feels as though he is telling her not to share her stories containing him with anyone but Tonya. She suddenly feels that Snape's jealousy is the reason her stories and poems were rejected for publication in the past [133]. Rose is also upset by any element of disrespect in the fanfiction of other people. Upon reading some upsetting stories, she declared, "I was totally and utterly outraged, that not even in death MASTER has peace! WHY?WHY?WHY?WHY?? Hasn't Jo [Rowling] done enough? Hadn't he already a miserable life? does (according to some of his FANS) Severus truly have to be miserable in death as well????" [68]. Here she suggests that the canonical texts and any other material referring to Snape has the power to torment him. In contrast, Rose uses her narratives as declarations of love and respect.

Rose's story 'Dark Desires' is a very interesting blend of personal confession and channelled sexual experience. She starts her confessional story by clarifying the source of her desires, singling out dark and mysterious men, and vampires. Ever since she was ten, she had felt "it was downright sexual when someone received the blessed Vampires kiss" [134]. Rose also describes stormy nights as a sexual experience that is best felt whilst naked. A good storm was "like a night with a wild lover from which one would wake up bruised but satisfied" [134]. Building on these "Dark Desires," which she kept

private at that time, Rose discovered the figure of Severus Snape whilst watching the first *Harry Potter* movie. Upon introducing Snape, her story moves away from personal (and primarily mundane) narrative into a supernatural journey in the cinema. Moving on the screen, Snape turns to Rose—only Rose—and acknowledges her presence in the audience:

> I gulped and gasped then something happened that I didn't think it could, he bowed to me, I raised my brows and looked around to see if everyone else was seeing the same thing. No one paid any attention as everyone was watching the movie, I turned my attention back to it as he stretched his hand out to me and invited me. I was flabbergasted and speechless, no this couldn't be happening, it's a dream, an illusion, I've must have fallen asleep. … With a great flash he pulled me into his world [134].

Once 'Dark Desires' shifts into the paranormal world behind the cinema screen, Rose remembers deleted memories from her past and recognises Snape as a nightly erotic visitor who had, until that point, habitually erased her memories of their dalliances. In the Hogwarts Castle on the other side of the screen, Snape ties Rose to a chair. She realises she is "his slave from now on" and remarks, "it started to sink into me that he was not just my Master, my Lord and God but also my Captor" [134]. This captivity is decidedly erotic.

In the sexual adventures that follow, Rose recounts a mix of pleasure and pain inflicted by her cruel master. Both feelings are clearly tied to an ecstatic experience. Rose explains, "he wanted to push me as hard as he could, to my very limit and perhaps beyond. After all it was my dark desires that had brought me back to him" [135]. Linked by this dark sexual bond, Snape helps Rose to reach heightened experiences by virtue of his touch and teasing. Fire is a recurrent theme as Rose slowly gives in to Snape's desire to burn her so she can prove the depths of her love and devotion.

> He whispered into my ear "Burn for me, show me your love, your loyalty, your dedication, your devotion, burn for me, my little Fiery Witch!" As I heard those words I shivered and with a loud pop I felt myself burst into flames as he held me [136].

He burns her through her vagina in one scene, causing a purification and rebirth in a deeply sexual manner [137]. Whilst forcing her to fellate him, Snape's attractiveness leads Rose to declare, "he was not just my Master but truly my God" [135]. After he finally allows her to orgasm, Snape kills Rose with a potion and then joins her on yet a higher plane where they float through the sky together. In this fantastical cloud realm, Snape rewards Rose for her loyalty by joining their souls together in the deepest level of intimacy possible [138]. It is at this comparatively paradisiacal point that the long story draws to a close.

From the moment that Rose slips through the theatre screen, it is up to the reader as to whether or not they wish to take her adventures as an accurate recount of a supernatural event, a metaphor for the powers of Snape, or as pure fantasy. What is clear is that her story contains many important themes in terms of her spiritual/sexual identity. Rose is forthright in her belief that Snape fanfiction has been a deeply impactful element of her life. She explains, "I used to be a shy wall flower, backwards and had a hard time talking about things, over time Severus Snape helped me to explore me, he helped me write two very in depth and sexual ladened Fan Fictions, and through them I discovered myself" [57] [8].

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8   Rose's story 'The Promise' is very similar to 'Dark Desires', so it is likely she is referring to this text also.

Rose was able to use the sadomasochistic dimensions of her stories as a way of developing her intimacy with Snape via loving submission. There are also clear parallels with Christian bridal theology in which love and unity with the divine are expressed in sexual metaphors. For example, in the popular metaphor of the Church as bride and Christ as groom in verses such as *Ephesians* 5:22–33, or in aforementioned historical Snapist parallels such as Catherine of Siena who claimed to wear the foreskin of Christ as her wedding ring. This is further evidence of Rose and the other Snapists building upon a Christian view of religion and mystical experience rather than seeking to reject these structures outright.

Interestingly, Rose and Tonya have opted to conduct their marriage with Snape in a very traditional way as concerns power and dominance. Tonya and Rose "know our place. Yes, Severus is the head of our homes and we do defer to him and we OBEY him. We do as we are told and we are most happy for it" [100]. Tonya explains, "I am to behave like a lady and lavish my attentions upon him. Focusing upon him daily, is required. He does things for me when I am obedient and I am thrilled for it!" [123]. Reciprocity occurs when Snape is approached from a subservient position. She enjoys being his 'pet' and having him as her domineering master [139]. Snape's masculine identity is used as a means of asserting his power. Complaining about Conchita, Tonya states "Severus will not let a woman out do him" [100]. Noting Conchita's trouble connecting with Snape through channelling, Tonya posits that "all she had to do was give her control over to him […] he will not allow a female to collar him or guide him about like he has a ring in his nose" [100]. As channelled by Tonya, Snape barks: "I expect you to do as I say, woman! I want to have complete control over you. I will never free you!" [62]. As for Conchita, she is adamant that Snape is not a dom in a sadomasochistic relationship with his wives [98] and is disgusted by "Dark Desires" because of the rape scenes, which she thinks misrepresent Snape and shows that Rose cannot possibly love and respect him [96].

This combination of intimacy and domination is the core of sadomasochism, but may also have a textual basis. In a broader fandom context, Tosenberger believes that *Order of the Phoenix* was an important influence on Harry/Snape 'powerslash' because the narrative involved their uncomfortable intimacy. Snape is able to be intensely domineering in his one-on-one tutoring with Harry, whilst Harry accidentally becomes privy to a humiliating memory that haunts his teacher ([31], p. 198). This mini-narrative is a likely inspiration source for the Snapists. Its 2003 publication date fits in with their developing Snape obsessions, and, most importantly, the Harry/Snape tension provides an interesting template for Snape's interpersonal relationships. We are shown Snape as a domineering and frightening character who is nonetheless devoted to carrying out his duty. The accidental revelation of Snape's worst childhood memory by Harry also allows the reader to relate to him in a more intimate manner by knowing his youthful weaknesses and humiliation. The need to respect and fear Snape can, to some degree, be traced back to private and uncomfortable scenarios such as the failed Occulmency lessons. By looking to Snape as 'Master' the wives are able to restore the disrupted power balance brought on by Harry's accidental spying, and also enjoy the powerslash elements of knowing that their object of desire is tempestuous but ultimately kind of heart. Considering the deep importance of this kind of literature to Rose and Tonya, it is of no surprise that they raised this issue as a reason for shunning Conchita.

Another substantial point of disagreement is that of channelling. All of the wives accept that channelling is real and possible, but have fought over imperfect channelling techniques or self-serving behaviour in the transmission of messages. Whenever Rose and Tonya fought with Conchita, channelling

would be raised as a means of criticism. For example, when Lily was in their favour, Rose claimed that Conchita could not channel her because "her heart isn't pure" [140]. It is implied that all of Conchita's channelling problems stem from some kind of flaw in her character. In her defence, Conchita spread the message that Tonya was lying when she channelled Snape and that she and Rose were running a deceitful venture through Snape's Castle. On her Severely Obsessed site, she offers advice for anyone who might become involved in "a group where 'Severus Snape' speaks." Conchita writes,

> IF Severus Snape wants to speak to you, he will do that himself!! Believe me no one could ever impersonate him, other than the real man/spirit! Do NOT believe mediums/channelers that say they know him for years and spread his word. Perhaps one day they used to, as sometimes we all can catch something from the other side but most they tell you are lies and nonsense. Do NOT believe it and please do not let it effect you, it is damaging! [141].

She also offers help for anyone who may have become stuck in a Snape channelling group where they are unable to exercise freedom of speech [141]. Her rhetorical choices are clearly borrowed from anti-cult discourses.

Threatened by Tonya's ability to contact Snape and tell him to leave her, Conchita states, "*No matter what you do, you will not be able to make him leave me.* He will see who is truthful and faithful and who isn't" [98]. Conchita exclaims, "HIS words do mean a lot to me, not your made up fantasy stories" [96]. Nevertheless, she is not convinced that the channelling itself was necessary fake, just maliciously misguided. She carries on with the question: "HOW can you be sure it is in fact Severus?? Do you have any clue how many spirits there are that are easily picked up? Buy a board and ask, all will give you the answers you want. Spirits LIE dear, that is a fact" [96]. She believes that Tonya's Snape-channelling LiveJournal is a forgery that makes the real Snape "cringe of irritation" [103]. Tonya does admit that she is sometimes uncertain that she is channelling Snape directly, and will query any message that does not appear to be from him [55]. She in turn accuses Conchita of channelling the wrong Snape and receiving a warped message as a result. In the month following the channelling dispute, Tonya and Rose present their own opinions on who has misinterpreted the spirit of Snape. In a long chat transcript between the two, Tonya channels Snape who allows her and Rose to glimpse his visit to Malfoy Manor. Here he discusses "a matter concerning the dark side" in which a spirit wants revenge for a "certain spell he performed in Holland" [142]. It transpires that someone in Holland, presumably Conchita, has been using a duplicate of Snape as her guardian. Lucius Malfoy works for this evil entity who impersonates Snape for the misguided Conchita [142]. At no point is the veracity of channelling itself doubted, nor is the possibility of channelling Snape at all discounted. The wives are able to criticise each other, but no one doubts that Snape can, and does, speak to those he loves in the earthly realm.

11. Belief After the Books

The death of Snape in the canonical *Harry Potter* books had a significant impact upon his wives and their communities, but it was not as devastating as may have been predicted. There was some anxiety prior to the debut of the final text. Just prior to the release of *Deathly Hallows*, Conchita

organised a global internet vigil for Snape. She asked that his devotees burn a green candle in unison and dedicate a single red rose in his honour [143]. A poem she wrote to mark the occasion reads,

Our love
A humble tribute to you
Unconditional and endless
Regardless of what Mrs Rowling might do [144].

Tonya's reactions were equally passionate, albeit somewhat contradictory. Before the release of the final book, Tonya wrote: "I can't deny I am a nervous wreck and it is getting worse daily. I just don't know how I will react if she killed him. Yes, I do know. I will scream and cry. It will ruin the books for me, too" [145]. But in another entry, she ponders, "I am starting to wonder...will we find out in book 7 that he has died and moved on...OR has he been reinstated as a teacher?" [146]. She gives no indication that his death would have any kind of impact upon her belief system or any great deal of emotional stress. Tonya, channelling Snape, referred to *Deathly Hallows* flippantly as "that damn book" [147] prior to its release and "that piece of trash" [148] a few weeks after it came out. When speaking as herself, Tonya complains, "Severus is not a fluff piece nor is he soft! […] Although JKR might have put that crap about him in her "last" book, I can personally tell you that Severus is NOT that way!" [149]. Clearly she was unimpressed by its content and feels that it contains significant inaccuracies. On a similar note, Rose writes, "she mess[ed] up the last book so thoroughly" [74].

After the release of *Deathly Hallows* on July 21, 2007, the wives slowly retreated from their online presences. This can be explained in a few different ways. Conchita deleted most of her online accounts prior to the release of the final book in order to mimic the conclusion of Snape's public appearances via *Harry Potter* releases [150]. This was prior to the publication of his death. There is also the gradual morph of Livejournal from an English-language platform with significant fandom presence to a primarily Russian-language blogging site with far less active fandom content. Many Livejournal bloggers lost interest during this timeframe. Overall, the impact of Snape's death can only be speculated upon, as none of the wives gave up their blogging immediately upon reading the final book. Indeed, in 2009, Rose clarified "the obsession with Severus Snape continues, as IF it would have EVER had stopped! :-D That would be like the world stop turning" [151]. The wives have made very few direct statements about his canonical death or how this might mesh with his astral plane life.

Examining the fandom more broadly, Snape's death remains a point of contention for many of his devoted admirers. It is also a prominent discussion topic for those fans who believe that Rowling was either wrong or disrespectful in her treatment of this character. As explained, some of these fans have accepted his death as a canonical reality, and have looked to fanfiction as a way of exploring appropriate tributes or alternative realities for Snape (see Figure 10 [152]). For example, the snape_after_dh community advertises itself by stating: "We seek a different future for Snape, the sort that can only be supplied by fandom. Because he deserves so much more" [153]. On a more extreme note, the now-deleted 'Snape Never Died' community described itself as a place for "canon skeptics". As explained in the introduction to this article, the idea that Rowling was wrong or misguided is prevalent. With this level of disconnection from canon as the unarguable source of authority within the Harry Potter universe, it would not be unprecedented for the wives to ultimately deny that Snape ever died.

Figure 10. Advertisement for the Snape Never Died community [152].

The canonical death of Snape was upsetting to the wives, but they seem to have been overcome by frustration towards Rowling rather than grief at his passing. Part of this may be chronologically motivated. *Deathly Hallows* is set from 1997–1998, meaning that the publication of Snape's death occurred almost a decade after he died in the chronology of the narrative. This would mean that *all* of their Snape visions occurred after the death of the character, not just those that happened after the publication of the final book. If the content of the books is to some degree 'real', it would seem pointless to draw a difference between dreams and visions before or after July 2007. Surely this publication date is not as important as 1998—the year in which Snape 'actually' died. To a degree, Tonya's discussions of how Snape exists in time can be used to investigate their potential take on issues such as this. Speculating on the contents of the final book, she described the Snapists' journals as being "real time" [154]. By this, she meant that their engagement with Snape was based on the assumption that he was in a liminal zone between *Half-Blood Prince* and *Deathly Hallows*—between having fled Hogwarts as an assumed traitor and receiving possible redemption. At this point, Tonya hoped that he would be allowed back to Hogwarts to teach whatever he desired. She gently dismissed those who see him as "being in Hogwarts still," claiming that they were engaged with alternative universes which were oppositional to she and the Snapists' 'real time' [154].

This attitude would tend to suggest that Tonya would be heartbroken by his death or would need to re-adjust her conceptions of time. This was not the case. Instead, Tonya reconceptualised Snape as two chronologically separate beings, thus upholding both the integrity of *Deathly Hallows* and the integrity of the universe that the Snapists had constructed. This is demonstrated in her story "Bringing Him Home," which is reproduced in full below:

"Bringing Him Home"

After Severus told me exactly how he wanted this handled, I nodded and stepped to him. Then, he looked at me. 'Brace yourself for this. We must go to Hogwarts grounds to the new cemetery that was erected after the war. Those that died at the school or on the grounds are buried there.' He grabbed her waist and apparated to

just outside of the grounds of the school. He turned and disillusioned me, before doing himself. Quietly, we walked up to the front of Hogwarts, a most impressive sight that it was.

Off to the side of the school was Albus Dumbledore's tomb and right beside him was Severus' tombstone.

[Here lies Severus Snape, a brave wizard who was misunderstood in life, yet, died a hero's death, doing what he felt was right.]

It was painful.

I heard his voice in my mind, 'I am going to perform a tricky spell to remove my coffin without disturbing anything on the surface.'

I murmured, 'Okay.'

Since I could see nothing but his tombstone, I moved to touch it. Harry had made sure this was taken care of. I wept silently as I waited for Severus to speak.

Soon I heard him in my mind, 'Walk to just outside of the gate.'

I obeyed and once we were outside the gate, he took the spell off and grabbed my waist once more and apparated back to our home.

We stood looking down at his coffin. I stared up at him, and placed a hand on his back. 'If anyone can do this, it is you, Severus.' I told him quietly.

With a nod, he opened his coffin and saw himself dressed in his robe and coat. Hands clasped, marble white. He turned and conjured a Black Onyx casket. Black outside, white inside. I prepared it and watched as he lifted his body and floated it to the new casket.

I brushed my fingers against his cheek, just like a marble statue. I coughed and got myself under control [155] [9].

Although Tonya finds the experience to be emotionally draining, she still has the companionship of the astral Snape whilst burying the Snape of the *Harry Potter* novels. It is clear that the transcendent Snape who has guided Tonya and Rose through life did not perish with his canonical twin, who is seemingly a mere replication of him with lesser powers [10]. Tonya's story functions as an interesting manifestation of how a belief system can come to terms with a crisis point such as the death of a leader, or, in this case, the canonical death of the central figure of worship. By focussing on Snape's metaphysical body and allowing his 'physical' body to die, Tonya is able to navigate this substantial theological quandary. Obvious parallels can be drawn between this and the story of Christ rising from the tomb in a semi-corporeal state—a narrative that helped to describe how an entity could die but not perish. Again, we see the Snapists selecting elements of Christianity and Christian storytelling in order to borrow from the perceived theological legitimacy of this tradition.

As with early Christianities, schismatic responses to the seminal death occurred almost immediately, furthering divides within Snapeism as regards sacred canon and metaphysical 'realities'.

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[9] This version is a re-write because Snape requested that Tonya delete Lily from her writing as she is "no longer a part of his life [...] She was a marauder all along and didn't give a damn about Severus. Well, she is gone and thank goodness for that!" [155]. The original date as stated at the beginning of the recount is 16 October, 2007.

[10] This narrative is also another slight against Rowling for failing to bury their hero properly in her text.

Conchita handles Snape's death in a different and more literal manner. After the candle burning, Conchita created a website called '*Flamma Aeternus*: Our Tribute to Severus Snape'. She writes: "Is for all of you that want to contribute in showing Severus you still love him and that he is still alive to you" [156]. This posits his death as a fact and celebrates his memory instead. In a poem on this topic, Conchita writes, "Too soon you were gone/Death took you so cruelly [...] You'll never really go/Cherished in our hearts" [157]. Her project shifts to mourning him. Conchita drafted a petition to Rowling on 24 July, 2007 as a means of coming to terms with her cruelty in having killed him. She laments, "my feelings range from disappointment to being utterly sad, as I had to discover you did not do any justice to Severus Snape" [158]. She asks Rowling "[w]hat did he ever do to you that you seem to hate him so much?" [158]. Contesting Rowling's authorship of Snape's character, she states "you do NOT understand one thing about Severus Snape, but that should never have been a reason to hate him so much" [158]. The comments left on the petition, which reached 220 out of a desired 100,000 signatures, are equally emotive and fascinating. For example, 'Misia' says, "I love you, my sweet, my holy Severus Snape" [158]. 'Virginia' writes:

> I love you Severus, i know you can stop death, you\'ll be in my heart forever, i am yours, you deserve all the best, JK doesn\'t understand you, but there are many people who loves you and support you. Honor to our potion master, a great teacher and an admirable person, loyal and brave, i believe he is still alive [158].

It would seem as though Conchita has done her part to inspire or encourage canon scepticism. But even with this morning in mind, Conchita still considered herself to be engaged to Snape in November of 2007, suggesting that she too was able to see around his canonical death and re-imagine him as a more eternal creature. She, Tonya, and Rose all continue to avow their love to the eternal Snape (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. A loving tribute to Snape from Rose [159].
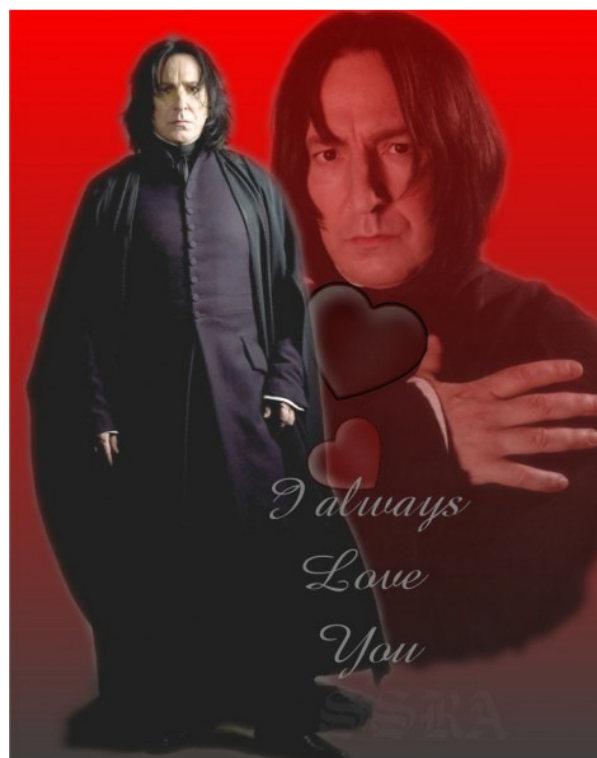
12. "Tonya was my Lily": The End of an Era

The most finite end to the original Snapists is the eventual falling out between Rose and Tonya. It is difficult to know exactly what occurred between the two due to a lack of publically available journal entries documenting the schism. Rose alludes to online fighting that is no longer archived. In regard to Tonya, she remarks "I could have been a total Bitch, like she was when she slammed me on her LJ [Livejournal]" [160]. Nevertheless, she seems quite traumatised by the schism between herself and Tonya. She describes herself as being on a healing journey in which she is "LEARNING from the lesson, the damage and moving on" [161]. There is an implication that this fight may have been due to Rose's growing interest in the *NCIS* character Jethro Gibbs as portrayed by Mark Harmon. Rose writes, "Sure I have now another interest, but oddly enough, Jethro Gibbs from NCIS, reminds me a lot a lot of Severus!" in an entry containing the most detail about her split from Tonya [160]. She also increasingly favours the actor Richard Dean Anderson, which would pose similar problems for Tonya if she felt only one preeminent love was justifiable.

In part, Rose blames Rowling for her growing interest in other men besides Snape. In regard to the paucity of Snape merchandise, she asks Rowling "how can you keep a flame burning when you starve it?!??!!" [73]. She believes that fans will move on to Twilight of NCIS because the demand for strong and brooding men "IS being MET thoroughly!!!!" in these texts [73]. She explains:

> I do love Severus Snape, I love him with all my heart and I always WILL!! No one can take him away from me, but even I've to say that I found someone who is pretty much just like him, and my passion, obsession, need is being met there [73].

Rose's post-Tonya journal shows some consistencies in her interests and proclamations of belief, but also some substantial changes. In late 2010, Rose still makes collages of Snape [162] and dreams of him [163]. Her belief in the possibilities of the supernatural is quite consistent. She remarks that the differences between reality and illusion are merely "eons worth of Societal brainwashing" [164]. She describes the reality/illusion divide as a protective wall:

> yet more and more people who want more, who ache for more then the prescribed normalcy, have found loose bricks, looks spots in the wall and are working them loose and more open.

> And while doing so, sharing the news as others become aware as well. We do make our own reality, here and elsewhere. The box has been opened and people are pouring out in curiousity and excitement. Though some will stay within the safety of their box, which is fine, that's the beauty of it all, each their own [164].

Her acceptance of alternative viewpoints remains just as strong as during her Snapeism era.

Rose's brief final interaction with Tonya leads to the creation of a journal entry more reminiscent of her previous style than any other in the 'Red8rose' blog. She finishes her dismissal of Tonya with a rousing "Thank you, Master!" [160]. The entry itself is perhaps the most revealing document available about the end of Snapeism. George "dragged [Tonya] over" to Rose's house because she had been miserable and had been missing her estranged friend. Tonya apologised to Rose and asked for her Snape posters back, thinking that Rose had moved on from her Master and would no longer desire them [160]. Rose considered this to be a laughable mistake. She writes:

LOL LOL Not even when hell freezes over!! I LOVE HIM! ALWAYS WILL! Period end of story. […] when Snape captured my heart in 2000, that was that. Sure I have now another interest, but oddly enough, Jethro Gibbs from NCIS, reminds me a lot a lot of Severus! Tonya Brooks was my Lily. She couldn't accept me for whom I was, she couldn't deal with the close Friendship we had [160].

Here, her love for Snape comes across as eternal and endless, with her feelings for Gibbs rendered in a manner that allows them to be subsumed within the category of Snape admiration.

Nevertheless, content of this nature is notably absent from the journal as a whole. Rose last updated the now-deleted 'Red8Rose' blog on November 13, 2011. Her final post was a brief review of the *Deathly Hallows* movie. Interestingly, Rose states "I know even though it was mere a story, I do hope that Lily in the end did forgive Severus" [165]. It is difficult to know if she means the *Harry Potter* narrative as told by the flawed narrator Rowling is a 'mere story' or that Snape himself is the 'mere story'. This also goes against earlier treatment of Lily Evans as a supernatural force who could also be experienced in the same timeless and non-corporeal manner as Snape. At this point in Rose's journal, there was no talk in regard to Snape as supernatural or as her erotic Master. In a comment to one of her newer friends, Rose explained:

I used to be Obsessively HUGE into Harry Potter, but more Severus Snape, am no lesbian, BUT was accused of being one [166].

And thus ended the original Snapists. Luckily, images, poems, and other tributes to their love remain preserved online forever (see, for example, Figure 12).

Figure 12. Snape and Rose with flowers in happier days [72].

13. Conclusions

The Snapists are a small and specific group who have now disbanded, but their community and belief systems provide a fascinating template for broader issues of fandom, religion, and the intersection of the two. The Snapists have combined traditional with non-traditional belief structures—something that seems to be an inevitability of online religions where technological advances lead to new forms of practice (such as fanfiction and chatroom channelling), but older forms of worship (such as shrines and sacred images) remain socially relevant. Their more traditional beliefs and practices draw heavily on Christian culture as a source of legitimacy, whilst their internet channelling and fanfic ecstasies have earned them mockery and scorn for being fraudulent and insane. This confusion of legitimacy and illegitimacy is a symptom of constraining categories of religious versus non-religious. As Smith has demonstrated, there has been no successful taxonomy for sorting the religious from the non-religious, and the search for the *sine qua non* of the religion category has been unconvincing ([167], p. 5). He also warns that categories and definitions can be meddled with for apologetic reasons ([167], p. 5). If Snapeism is rejected from the canon of 'true' religions, it is important to critique the political decisions that may have led to this judgement. I believe it is more convenient for Snapeism to be placed in a category of untrue and ludic than it is for Snapeism to be explored as being equally legitimate to older and larger faiths. This schema preserves a tacit understanding of religion as serious and ancient—even if this understanding may be false and religions may be more malleable and fictive than we may like to think.

The issue of what it means to form a religion from a fictional text is indeed a fascinating one, made even more complex by the presence of film as a core inspiration. It is certainly worthy of scholarly exploration, and also respect. I think it is very likely that we will see an increase in explicitly fiction-based religions as technology brings online identities and communities in greater harmony with everyday life. It is important for scholars to examine the manner in which these intersections manifest, and the politics behind them. The internet also facilitates the sharing of ideas to a far greater degree than was previously available to the average person. This idea sharing can help to spread material with mythical potential, and feed a passionate obsession with popular cultural texts. For example, in regard to *Lord of the Rings* religion, Davidsen notes that there was a dramatic increase in adherence to these groups after the Peter Jackson film trilogy was released ([79], p. 186). The *Lord of the Rings* fandom is prolific, and has catapulted interest in these texts far beyond the reach of pre-internet communities. It has also brought together likeminded devotees who are separated by previously problematic physical distance. Interestingly, Davidsen does note some suspicion felt between those who are influenced by the original books and those who have come to the faith via the movies ([79], p. 186). The latter-generation Tolkien religious groups, emerging after the release of the films, have been seen to have a far greater focus on attributing historicity and intrinsic reality to the Tolkien texts ([79], p. 198).

There is a similar anxiety amongst the Snapists, who do note that they were book fans first. It was, however, the movies and the promotional images of Snape that captured the wives' attention and led to the development of the overall aesthetic of Snapeism, manifesting in a text-to-text liminality that includes the important association of Snape with Alan Rickman and his filmic affectations. Rose writes, "When I saw the 1st pics out from HPS I was floored, I fought the attraction, the urge, the need to see him, the longing for him, his Mystery and allure and so forth but after 3 days I had to submit to Severus Snape!" [57]. His visual presence seems to have made his astral manifestation all the more

powerful for his wives, who habitually peruse images of Rickman as Snape and who feel as though items such as movie posters are a direct connection to him. This very particular intersection of film and religion is important to consider, especially when coupled with the abundance of this mythic source material online.

What has been clear throughout my research on this topic is the seriousness with which the Snapists take their beliefs, and the sacrality of Snape as their central figure of worship. Davidsen notes that fiction-based religions are often treated as though they lack substance and sincerity ([3], p. 380). To treat the Snapists in this manner is to ignore a vast quantity of evidence that shows the time and attention that has gone into their theology, and the emotional investment that they have in Snape as their erotic leader. The Snapewives are an extreme facet of a much larger fandom milieu. There is a surprising amount of precedence for a separation of Snape from Rowling, and the creative aspects of fandom do encourage a deep personal investment and sense of control over the canonical texts. Yet their reception indicates deep discomfort and suspicion. Perhaps the mixing of fandom and IRL is too messy and dangerous. Certainly, fandom seems to have treated Snapeism as a problematic aberration that needs to be actively cast asunder from acceptable experimentation and play such as 'normal' fanfic. The act of determining what is a normal religion versus an abnormal or fraudulent faith is clearly a problematic one. Smith rightly observes that the classification of supposedly essential characteristics of religion generally devolves into "a quasi-temporal ranking of slogans" ([167], p. 8). It is popularly assumed that Christianity, by virtue of its age and the seriousness with which it has been endowed, is valid and worthy of respect. Conversely, as this article has demonstrated, Snapeism is popularly received as strange, hilarious, alarming, and untrue because its adherents talk to a character from a fictional text.

This 'slogan-ranking' is unhelpful as it assumes veracity and tradition are linked, which subsequently diverts attention away from ways in which religions such as Christianity and Snapeism share similar relationships between humans and the divine. For example, Tanya Luhrmann study of American evangelical Christians reveals a church culture in which participants are encouraged to develop a personal relationship with God and Jesus, and interpret signs or ideas in their minds as the presence or voice of these divine figures. This helps to establish a deep personal involvement with the divine, and allows participants to feel as though God and Jesus care for them as a friend or family member would [168]. The parallel between this and the experiences of the Snapists is clear. What is not clear is the evidence that Christian divinities are non-fictional. Poetically, Rose muses:

> Who is to say what is real and what is not? If anyone denies something is real, then the fool is on them. Though for some, its their defense mechanism too and it works for them, cool. Though tell such to the inventers, the dreamers, those who reach, reach higher then the earthly plane, beyond boundaries where planes, dimensions, universes collied and meet [169].

Her argument seems fair if this same consideration and protection is afforded to other, more traditional, belief systems. As scholars of religion, it is important to consider whether or not our methodological approaches are sound. It is easy to fall into the trap of considering religions such as Christianity to be a base standard for the examination of all other faiths. When faced with a contemporary manifestation of human behaviour and belief such as fandom, it is also common to assume that nothing genuinely sacred can be born of Livejournal, Dreamwidth, and Yahoo Groups. Yet, there is much evidence to the contrary. Snapeism satisfies even the most conservative definitions

of religion by having a divine figure who can be channelled, a core inspirational text, and a set of practices that modulate community behaviour and expression [11]. Because the historicity of traditional faiths can and must be challenged, this should lead us to ask why one fictional text is so much more ludicrous than another as a basis for a belief system.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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[11] Consider, for example, the oft-quoted description given by Durkheim of religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" ([170], p. 62).

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