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*Natalia Samutina*

# **EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPES OF READING**

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## **EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPES OF READING**<sup>2</sup>

This paper focuses on fan fiction as a literary experience and especially on fan fiction readers' receptive strategies. Methodologically, its approach is at the intersection of literary theory, theory of popular culture, and qualitative research into practices of communication within online communities. It presents a general characterization of fan fiction as a type of contemporary reading and writing, drawing upon the influential works by H. Jenkins, A. Dericho, K. Tosenberger, and others. Taking as an example the Russian *Harry Potter* fan fiction community, the paper poses a set of questions about meanings and contexts of immersive reading and affective reading, highly present among the reading strategies of this fan fiction community. The emotional reading of fan fiction communities is put into historical and theoretical context, with references to the works by researchers who analyzed and criticized the dichotomy of rational and affective reading, or «enchantment», in literary culture as one of the symptoms of modernity (M. Millner, M. Saler, R. Felski). The metaphor of «emotional landscapes of reading» is used in the paper for theorization of the reading strategies of fan fiction readers, and discussed through parallels with phenomenological theories of landscape. Among the «assemblage points of reading» of fan fiction, such specific elements are described as «selective reading», «kink reading», «first encounter with fan fiction texts» and «unpredictability».

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<sup>1</sup> National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). The Poletaev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities (IGITI). Leading researcher, Head of the Research Centre for Contemporary Culture: <http://igiti.hse.ru/en/culture/>; [nsamutina@hse.ru](mailto:nsamutina@hse.ru), [nsamutina@gmail.com](mailto:nsamutina@gmail.com)

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## «Archontic literature» and the principles of research into it

This paper focuses on fan fiction as the space of reading and on the peculiar features of fan fiction readers' receptive strategies. But conclusions of this study and the contexts, in which this type of reading is to be placed, may be applied not only to fan fiction. They shed light on reading practices of the first generations of internet users, especially those keen on popular culture in its variety, regardless of whether they read (and write) fan fiction, or used to read it, or just eagerly experience - read, view, or talk about the many products of popular culture.

Fan fiction as the space of reading and writing is certainly one of those areas, which call for the readers' and internet users' utmost engagement with the worlds of mass literature and the media. It should be noted from the outset that fan readers' and writers' reception is neither representative of every possible facet of popular culture reception, nor does it allow to evaluate the changes in contemporary reading «in general». Nevertheless, the most active and competent participants in the worlds of popular culture are usually the first to break many a path, as they invent and/or strengthen the receptive strategies which, in a somewhat less developed form, are sometimes typical of general readers as well. Moreover, as far as the reading practices of the first generation of internet users and subsequent generations of readers are concerned, today the distinction between general readers and fans is less clear than ever before.

Firstly, the internet enables users to participate in an engaged, passionate communication among the enthusiasts of one piece of work or another from time to time, so that they are exactly as involved in fandom activities as their schedule or other factors allow. A present-day fan's identity is infinitely less defined than those of the pre-internet fans whose communication and reading practices were explored by the pioneers of fan studies, such as Henry Jenkins and Camille Backon-Smith (Jenkins 1992, Backon-Smith 1992). The difference is not just in the degree of involvement into fandom practices, but also in the ever-growing number of products of popular culture (books, movies, TV series, computer games, as well as discourses of popular imagery, such as zombie apocalypse or steam punk), which take turns impressing a particular reader or viewer.

Secondly, it is quite likely that after spending even a little while engaging in the fandom online communication (reading fan fiction and its reviews or chatting with other fans on forums or in social networks) an internet user acquires certain strategies of reading, which continue to inform this person's subsequent reading. As Anne Jamison rightly observed in regard to the role of the *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* fandom in the reading and writing of the first generation of internet users, «Like it or not, this has become normal and public, a part of growing up for millions. If *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* have taught us anything, it is that authorial intent has nothing to do with the afterlives of characters» (Jamison 2013: 153). Taking into account the scale of development of internet-based fan fiction reading and writing, as well as the overall scale of popular culture fans' communication, studying these new reading practices seems to be a relevant and compelling task. The question I will

try finding an answer to is, namely, what exactly are the reading practices acquired by the present-day readers of fan fiction and active participants in online communities.

This project is even more important because the reading of fan fiction has not so far received a lot of scholarly attention, however surprising this may sound. Even though fan studies are a thriving field of research, their intersection with literary theory and especially with research into reading has yet to be established. The existing scholarship on fan fiction as a type of literature has focused mostly on conceptualizing the structure of fan fiction texts or the literary field in general, rather than examining reading strategies of fan fiction readers. Of course, everyone who studies fan fiction is well aware of the fact that this is a space of active, involved, emotionally charged reading, to a great extent inseparable from writing (the unparalleled ease, with which reading here transitions to writing, is one of the chief characteristics of this space). Quite a number of informative works have been dedicated to studying fan fiction as a literary field and to the prospects for research into it (Pugh 2005, Hellekson & Busse 2006, Sandvoss 2007, Caplan 2012, Tosenberger 2014). Many of these pieces propose plausible theoretical hypotheses regarding the specific organizational features of this literary field, characterized primarily by the direct correlation of all newly created works with a certain base text or an assortment of texts, known in fan fiction communities as «the canon». The second distinctive feature of today's fan fiction is an incredible variety of forms and possibilities it offers. A fan fiction text can be a drabble of 100 words or an epic novel in 4 volumes; a comic skit or a horror story; a pornographic fiction or a story based on political power struggle; a same-sex romantic story, so called slash, or a traditional heterosexual romance; prose, poetry, and various mixes thereof; a «missing scene» that fills in the gaps in the canon world, or a crossover that builds a new world at the intersection of *Harry Potter* and, for instance, *Sherlock Holmes*.

Latest attempts at giving this literary field a theoretical description have in one way or another tried to find a meaningful definition for the distinct literary features and functions of these texts, whose quantity on the internet is growing in geometric progression. Almost no one denies that fan fiction, viewed as a corpus of texts, is a «postmodernist literary phenomenon *par excellence*» (Stein, Busse 2009). Researchers strive to find heuristically efficient terms for its intense intertextuality and variability, capable of replacing the ambivalent descriptors such as «derivative», «appropriative», and «amateurish». Thus, Abigail Derecho suggests viewing fan fiction as a continuously expanding nonhierarchical literary archive, and calls fan fiction «archontic literature» (Derecho 2006). Catherine Tosenberger uses the term «recursive literature», reflective of fan fiction's incredible textual variability together with its contemporary and literary, rather than folkloric nature (Tosenberger 2014). Mafalda Stasi speaks of the «extreme compression of meanings», particularly in slash fan fiction. As a result of correlating a given text not only with its «canon», but also with a vast number of analogous fan fiction texts, slash writing acquires so many layers of meaning and becomes so semantically and symbolically saturated, that it may well be compared to poetry or a medieval palimpsest (Stasi 2006).

At the same time, as many contemporary researchers of fan fiction agree, quite apart from the issues of copyright, rules of the publishing industry, and official literary hierarchies, consideration

of fan fiction texts by themselves makes one realize that «writing about preexisting characters and plots does close down certain avenues of artistic inquiry, but more than compensates by opening up a whole host of other artistic directions not open to “original” fiction» (Tosenberger 2014: 15).

Inspired by Rita Felski’s phenomenological book *The Uses of Literature*, which dealt with how people read fictional texts in general, in one of my previous papers I undertook an in-depth analysis of the functional potential of fan fiction as literature (Felski 2008; Samutina 2013a). Rita Felski speaks of such basic «modes of textual engagement» filling a reading of an individual, or a subject, with meaning and tension, as *recognition*, *enchantment*, *configurations of social knowledge*, and *shock*. As my research demonstrated, all these modes are applicable to fan fiction just as well as to the officially published literature. Fan fiction writers and readers use texts for *self-recognition* and self-reflection as they compare the protagonists’ actions, and values, and life choices to their own. *Enchantment* and deep immersion into a fictional world are among the fundamental needs satisfied by fan fiction, whose readers are eager to spend more time in the fascinating worlds of popular culture. *Configurations of social knowledge* implemented into fan fiction texts and the personal social experience of fan fiction writers, clearly visible in their stories, make fan fiction a remarkable source of socio-anthropological information on its writers and readers. The experience of *shock* is in high demand in fan fiction, whether it is delivered by means of genre, for example, through elements of horror discourse, or by activating the transgressive potential of these essentially limitless texts.

In addition to these modes of engagement with the text, two more idiosyncratic modes help fan fiction to hold the audience captive. One of these is the *correlation with the canon* — an extra level in the writers’ and readers’ game, which significantly increases the game’s overall suspense and interest. I have named this attribute of fan fiction the «readers’ contract on correlation with the canon» (Samutina 2013: 175). This contract may be implemented in full or in part: in extreme cases, only the names of canonic characters remain unchanged. For example, in the genre of crossover the world is mixed with another fictional world and sometimes modified beyond recognition. Nevertheless, the process of playing the game of recognition and interpretation of the canon never fails to provide the writing and the reading with an extra layer of meaning and to open up the new literary opportunities Catherine Tosenberger mentions. The second peculiar attribute of fan fiction is the sexual freedom this space of writing allows, for these texts may exhibit any degree of eroticism and even explicit pornography. Freedom from the obligation to conform to the conventions of the publishing industry has allowed fan fiction to get far in the sphere of writing about sex. The *pornographic function* has become one of the possible supplementary means (modes) of increasing reader’s engagement with the text.

Lastly, one must bear in mind that the essential feature of fan fiction as literature is that its horizons of expectation are rooted in the communication taking place within fandom communities — even though nowadays’ online communities are easier to access than any fan communities before, and even silent reading and lurking pass as a sufficient «contribution» to fandom activities. Contemporary public communities of imagination create, read, and discuss their texts, constantly increasing the density of their reference field. These communities also develop collective

interpretation practices and jointly set the limits of admissible. Every issue is debated and regulated communally, from the rules on warning potential readers about the contents of the text via multi-tiered disclaimers to the need for readers' critique and the limits and parameters of criticizing.

As Henry Jenkins observed, «Part of the process of becoming a fan involves learning the community's preferred reading practices». (Jenkins 1992: 284). The concept of «preferred reading practices» should be applied not only to practices of communal interpretation of the «canon», but also to practices of reading fan fiction texts – to any reading within the community. Fan fiction as a literary experience produces an entirely different audience. It is neither the widest audience of mass literature, nor an educated bourgeois — the two major, often overlapping categories addressed by the modern publishing industry and by the school practices of instruction in reading. A fan fiction reader is a voluntary participant of presently rather large, yet certainly limited communities of imagination; after every reading, the reader delves deeper into the intertextually-charged space of a certain textual archive and becomes more competent in relation to this particular archive. Catherine Tosenberger rightly sees exactly this specificity of fan fiction's communicative goals and target audience as the reason for the «unpublishability» of fan fiction (Tosenberger 2014). Even though reworked fan fiction romances have been sometimes published to great acclaim (*Fifty Shades of Grey* presents here a notorious example), the best – according to the criteria of this literary field – fan fiction texts cannot be published precisely due to their dependence on the networks of references created by the particular community incessantly working on expanding the archive of the «canon».

This essential feature of fan fiction makes certain demands not only on participants, but also on researchers of this literary field.

Busse, the scholar whose work is most useful for developing a broadbased literary approach to fanfiction, argues that in order to understand fanfiction as literature, one must also understand the community that produced it: <...> “Every fan story is in conversation not only with the source text but usually also with other stories in the fandom and the discussions that permeate the community” (“Intense”). So in order to read and fully appreciate any given work of fanfiction, one should also have an understanding of the body of discourse within that fandom. (Tosenberger 2014: 14)

It thus seems patently obvious that any study of fan fiction as literature and reading, however theoretical its goals and objectives, should be based on contextually thick description of reading and writing communities. In this connection, it is appropriate to recall methodological considerations of Clifford Geertz in his programmatic work on thick description. While conceptualizing the principles of cultural theoretician's work, Geertz specifically emphasized that «Anthropologists don't study villages (tribes, towns, neighborhoods . . . ); they study *in* villages» (Geertz 1973: 22). The method of sufficiently long participant observation, which presupposes extensive reading and

communication within fan fiction communities, appears to be an important condition for the study of specifics of this type of literature, including its distinctive reading strategies. Among other things, this method allows one to observe recurring events of individual reading, regular «waves» of discussions, serialized conflicts, significant instances of miscommunication, etc. Participant observation provides an opportunity to follow in the footsteps of fan fiction readers by recording patterns in discussions about texts and making notes of individual (yet recurring) reactions. This method also helps to see patterns in collective reading and writing strategies as represented, for instance, in the structure of fan fiction writing contests or in the text selection and evaluation criteria used by certain websites and archives.

### ***Russian Harry Potter fan fiction: readers and reading***

By now, I have been reading fan fiction and observing communication in various English- and Russian-speaking fandom communities for over seven years. This work grows from the material collected through membership in the Russian-speaking *Harry Potter* fandom, where I have been conducting participant observation for over five years. I have recently given this community a detailed description both in Russian and in English (Samutina 2013a, b), so in the present paper I am going to restate only the most important points, essential for the characterization of fandom reading.

The Russian *Harry Potter* community is a relatively active — even now, in 2015, — subdivision of the global fandom. The community unites those *Harry Potter* fans who speak Russian, country notwithstanding. Since its inception in ca. 2000-2001, thousands of writers have contributed to amassing an enormous body of *Harry Potter*-inspired fan fiction and attracted hundreds of thousands readers — female readers, to be precise. Women of all ages, from teenagers to 40- and 50-year olds, prevail in this fandom and represent every social and marital status, level of education, and sexual orientation. The *Harry Potter* fandom served as a springboard for many readers and writers who have eventually moved on to other fandoms or abandoned fan activities altogether. The Russian *Harry Potter* fan fiction shows an immense variety in terms of plotlines, textual forms, and quality. This fandom is «open to the world»: a substantial portion of texts is translations from English: a number of participants read English, so they recommend the pieces of fan fiction they especially liked. Fandom-related communication occurs on many online platforms simultaneously, with the sites often expressly differentiated as to their texts quality, specific fandom interests, and fandom generations. Regular day-to-day communication and specifically the readers' exchange of impressions, which interests us the most, takes place mostly on the basis of an online-diary resource, [www.diary.ru](http://www.diary.ru), and, lately, in dedicated groups on social networks. Texts are kept (and actively commented on) in fandom archives, both Russian-speaking (most popular among them being <http://www.fanfics.me/>, <http://www.snapetales.com/>, <http://ficbook.net/fanfiction>, <http://hogwartsnet.ru/mfanf/>) and international (<http://archiveofourown.org/>,

<https://www.fanfiction.net/>). The significance of forums has largely dwindled by 2015, and the many previously popular *Harry Potter* forums have only sporadic surges of activity (fandom fests); only one forum is still comparatively active (<http://slitherin.potterforum.ru/>).

The Russian *Harry Potter* fandom utilizes every instrument of selection and quality control known to fandoms: beta editing; pre-approval of fanfics in some archives; competitions and festivals, including a literary competition of slash fanfiction of «high quality». A significant share of fandom discussions, and even conflicts, has to do with the issue of «constructive criticism» within the community, which is understandable, since any criticism in fandom communication is an unmediated dialogue between a reader and the writer. The fandom has designated a community specifically for anonymous discussions, the *Anonymous Harry*, whose participants do not shy away from passing rather harsh judgments. The latest «debate on criticism», involving many a blog post, took place in the spring of 2015: that was a lengthy discussion between writers and readers about the necessity of criticism and its desired parameters. The so-called Fandom Battles exert considerable influence on every Russian-speaking fandom: these are large-scale literary contests/games, organized on diary.ru twice annually since 2011. In these contests of anonymously submitted works, the *Harry Potter* fandom has traditionally placed high. In 2014, it placed first out of over 200 fandoms.

The Russian *Harry Potter* fans are active, engaged, passionate readers. Many of them have accumulated an extensive reading experience. Like most other online-diary writers, they love flash mobs, such as the «Twenty facts about me», where they would often state things like «I cannot conceive of myself without reading» or «I learned to read very early and have been reading all the time ever since». In an earlier paper I have given a more comprehensive description of fandom readers' reading repertory (Samutina 2013a), so in the present paper, let me stress just several important points bearing on fan fiction reading as done by the larger part of this community of readers (exceptions notwithstanding).

To begin with, fandom reading is extraordinarily extensive: people are constantly reading each other's works, are always on the lookout for new interesting fanfics, consult with each other, request recommendations in specifically created communities, and post requests («prompts») to fandom fests in the hopes of having fan fiction written based on their ideas. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, reading of this kind leaves many traces. Readers never cease talking about what they read, writing lengthy recommendations of the texts they enjoyed, joining more or less provocative discussions about characters' interpretations, «bad endings», and general principles of fandom writing, — thus time and again answering for themselves and others questions such as «what I read», «why I read», «how I read», and «what I do think about it».

In this sense, the space of fandom reading is a paradise for all those interested in the development of reception studies: multiple evidence of reception is available here in plain view and may yield plenty of information, especially if one correctly identifies the contexts in which these sources came to be. In my view, to work with sources on fandom reading correctly, it is important to



trace recurrent statements, endlessly brought up discussion topics, and similar self-reflections on reading regularly mentioned by different readers. In the present paper, I use only the evidence of this kind: multiple and regularly recurrent over a long period, so that it becomes a certain norm of fandom communication.

In this respect, awareness of the discursive nature of this evidence constitutes another important principle. Without casting doubt on the sincerity and agency of fandom participants, one must nevertheless be fully aware of a number of discursive norms and rules on how to talk about receptive experience. Readers stick to these rules, whether consciously or not. For instance, excessive emotionality is one of the influential discursive norms for describing one's aesthetic impressions to the community. Emoticons and exclamation marks, the axiological slang of the internet generation are a must-have in readers' responses: all of these «blew my mind», «took my breath away», «sending you lots of hearts», «the author's stoned», «walking on the clouds», etc. Curiously, the omnipresence of this discursive norm compels some readers to acknowledge their non-concurrence. One of these readers wrote in January 2015 the following:

«Reading diaries from time to time (Diary.ru - *NS*) makes me feel inferior. My sensory organs seem to be in place, yet when I read people's descriptions of smells, music, sights, or certain tactile experiences, I feel like an idiot or a failure of sorts. I, too, experience emotions, but they are distant or somehow numbed: there's never such an outpouring of sentiments that I'd feel overwhelmed and lost for words...»

In the discussion that followed, several viewpoints were articulated, including compassionate support of the allegedly «emotionally challenged» reader. Some admitted to intentionally exaggerating in their comments the degree of their emotional engagement; in fact, these respondents backed up the theory of the communicative nature of affected emotionality in blogs. Even so, something must have triggered this culture of larger-than-life sentiments and willingly demonstrated emotions. It would not have survived for so long, had fandom reading not been such an intense, enchanting process. In the same vein, discussions of fan fiction texts and their reading would not have generated pages upon pages of commentaries or caused conflicts and arguments, had these texts not touched on values of personal significance to every reader, including their literary standards.

Another very influential norm is the rule of «internalizing everything», that is, speaking primarily of the reading's impact on the reader, even when evaluating the text. Even those who use formal argumentation in giving detailed responses to readings, still fill their reviews to the brim with stories about what they felt while reading, and sometimes turn their analysis into some sort of a personal story. It is so difficult to resist this communicative norm (which certainly speaks volumes about the purpose of fandom reading) that the author of this paper caught herself inadvertently

imitating it in her own fandom diary of the «participant observer». As a rule, no other context of written communication has ever tempted me to judge a literary text in such a way. This norm of reader's self-representation again makes one realize that it is but a symptom of keen axiological engagement with reading. Even though adherence to this norm makes all fandom reviews somewhat alike (that is a discursive moment), it underscores the greater value placed on the reader in the fandom communication between a reader and a text. This norm emphasizes the meanings and the reaction reading is supposed to produce in the reader. Through explication and sharing, this reader response should lead to successful reader-to-reader communication, which helps maintain community's effect emotionally.

The third point to remember regarding the peculiarities of fandom reading in the Russian-speaking *Harry Potter* community is the relatively high level of its participants' education and the similarity of their notions about the normative classic literary culture. As one of the readers humorously remarked in connection with a blog post summarizing fandom activity of the day, the sentence «Kierkegaard is looking for snarry by description» (User named Kierkegaard is looking for Snape/Harry fanfic by description — *NS*) is the quintessential representation of the Russian *Harry Potter* fandom. Creative writing has not been part of normative schooling strategies either in the Soviet Union, or in contemporary Russia. The literature is taught as a canon of great names and as a history of high intellectual culture. Ideally, schoolchildren acquire a comprehensive idea of the Russian literary history: their curriculum makes them read and analyze the classical Russian literature of the nineteenth century and the Soviet prose and poetry of the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, fandom community brings in a multitude of humanities graduates, skilled in the basic formal analysis of a literary text. Accordingly, community holds «good reading» in high esteem; orthography, style, and literary standards are not an infrequent cause of conflicts; and the alternative strategies of reading developed by fandom membership ought to be considered against the backdrop of a very strong normative tradition, which they in many ways contradict, — without, however, ever replacing it completely.

### *Meanings and contexts of emotional reading*

Thus, we observe extensive binge reading in the online space of an ostentatiously emotional culture. Above all, passionate communities of fandom readers clearly value the text's ability to enchant, involve its reader in an imaginary world, keep up the suspense, and produce physical reactions — not only a sexual arousal, as in the case of pornographic texts, but other reading-induced affective states as well. For example, the tension that keeps one from putting the text down unfinished makes the reader anxious, leads to binge reading, so that one reads all night long, forgoing food, neglecting commitments until after reading is over. On the other hand, there is also the state of deep satisfaction caused by mulling over an especially successful — both ethically and

aesthetically — resolution of a complex state of affairs. Russian fandom readers have a special formula to describe this particular effect: «the soul folds up and unfolds again». Readers even use this formula to search for new fanfics to read. Then there is also the surprise and amazement with a writer's invention. Fan fiction literature is, in many ways, a world-building, an expanding of an assortment of images, characters, and their multiple interconnections. Unusual solutions may astound even a highly competent fan fiction reader. Reviews tend to phrase it as «I used to think that in *Harry Potter*, I have seen it all, but what you invented is just amazing». Also reviewers often mention cathartic crying, meant to express the greatest praise to the text under review, and so on.

The opposite is also true: negative perception stems mostly from the text's inability to capture reader's attention (right from the start). «Impatient communities» would be another fitting description for fan fiction readers. In contrast to works of classical literature, which may take readers months to work through, fanfics have to capture their audience right away — or risk losing them for good. The reading of the texts submitted to fandom battles presents a perfect illustration: each set of submissions consists of numerous anonymous works. One must read them quickly enough in order to be able to vote for the best one within the brief voting period. Whenever these texts fail to cut to the chase, fandom readers usually just close them and never look back. An interesting testimony comes from a reader who gave up fandom reading after a few months in favour of the infrequent and slow reading of books. When asked why, she confessed that she was afraid of forgetting how to read books altogether, because fanfics «pull you in from the start, they are sexy and impossible to put down». The reader was so concerned about losing her identity, built on the principle of «constantly improving oneself», that she chose rather to turn away from the temptations of fandom reading with its clear preference for reading-as-pleasure, reading-as-immersion.

Let us try answering the following questions: what kind of reading is fan fiction? How does it work? What popular reading strategies does it call to life? I must once again stress here that I am dealing with fan fiction in general — as a type of literature, without separating porn from fairy tales, detectives from philosophical parables, epic novels from drabbles of several hundred words. Surely, any text acquires its significance and value only when its particular semantic and formal characteristics come face to face with the specifics of readers' reception, demands, and horizons of expectations; Cornell Sandvoss explored this issue expansively — in relation to fandom texts among others (Sandvoss 2007). Incidentally, the question of «how we read» is a matter of extreme relevance for fandom readers themselves: they frequently make it a subject of online debates. As an experiment though, by way of answering this question I would like to focus precisely on the strategies of reading and on the recurrent — in many situations and versions — assemblage points of reading, not directly dependent on the text's genre, modality, size, etc. But this certainly requires remembering everything said earlier about fandom communities and the archontic, or recursive, literature.

When considering similarities between fandom reading and other types of literary experience, two types of reading come to mind, both characterized by a similar degree of engagement with an

imaginary world and the general intensity of affect. The first one is the reading of romances, of course. Peculiarities of reader engagement with romance novels have been described a number of times, from Janice Radway to the scholarship of the 2010s (Radway 1984, Frantz; Selinger 2012, Holmes 2006). Female romance readers plunge headfirst into the formulaic storyline, which stands in stark contrast to their own everyday life, and find opportunities for respite and self-improvement in fantasizing and in multiple details embellishing the otherwise standard narrative. The second reading of this kind is children's literature. It, too, manifests an extreme engagement with an imaginary world, produces a strong reaction to images and events, and makes one want to re-read the story many times — fan fiction literature's recursive nature may be seen as a certain equivalent to this, the differences between fanfics «from the same archive» notwithstanding. Both readers of romances and children always want a book that would pull them in *straight away*. Both prefer thinking of the world of the text as if existing independently from the language.

Narratologist Mary-Laure Ryan sees this not just as a symptom of immersive reading, but also as the most important opportunity literature generally provides us with — a way to build imaginary worlds (Ryan 2003). By quoting examples from classical and modernist literature, Ryan undertakes a thorough analysis of these immersive mechanisms of literature as a fictional frame, which produce a sense of «being lost in a book». This sense is achieved, on the one hand, through «spatial immersion» (Ryan 2003: 120-139) — and, speaking about fanfics, an immersion into an already known space is at any rate easier and more effective than into a completely new world. «Temporal immersion», on the other hand, creates «the reader's desire for the knowledge that awaits her at the end of narrative time» (Ryan 2003: 140). Last, but not least is the «emotional immersion», which is the actual «emotional participation in the fate of imaginary characters» (Ryan 2003: 148) — an indispensable, in Ryan's opinion, mode of reception in a realistic paradigm, before the advent of influential lines of criticism, which deconstructed the «reality effect» and insisted on the need to resist the temptation to immerse.

I assume that in a less obvious way, similar immersive reading is typical of a number of popular culture discourses, well beyond the limits of romance reading or children's reading: the worlds of science fiction and fantasy, adventure novel and crime story, historical novel and significant part of the nineteenth century realistic fiction demand the same attitude from its proper reader. In the extreme, these capacities of reading are latent in any literature. In some literary spheres, especially those related to reading classics, the literature of high modernism and avant-garde, these capacities were successfully suppressed by the development of critical analytical practices, such as close reading, or censured as ideologically subversive: as an example of such censure Rita Felski cites *die Verfremdung* («the estrangement effect») in Brecht's concept of theatre (Felski 2008: 55-56). In other spheres, they consistently thrived, and popular culture plays a very important role here. In the former case, reading's affective potential stood in opposition to its reflective capacity, and the pleasure of reading seemed fraught with multiple dangers. In the latter case, pleasure and amusement were consciously postulated as the primary goal of reading, while its

other functions were downplayed or even considered nonexistent. Such reading was criticized in modern intellectual culture as «meaningless», if not harmful.

In the 2000s, a number of researchers analyzed and criticized this dichotomy of rational and affective reading in literary culture as one of the symptoms of modernity: among them were Michael Millner, Michael Saler, Rita Felski (Millner 2012, Saler 2012, Felski 2008). They clearly described and, most importantly, placed the contrasting programs of critical and affective reading in historical context. The rigid modern opposition of affect and rational thinking is put to doubt — as far as reading is concerned. In a similar manner, a number of other disciplines are reconsidering this binary opposition as well, for instance, in theories of non-representational geography «affect is understood as a form of thinking». (Thrift 2008:175)

Thus, Michael Millner in his book with a revealing title *Fever Reading: Affect and Reading Badly in the Early American Public Sphere* shows how the rules of «correct», that is, detached and critical reading came to be in the late XVIIIth - early XIXth centuries as a means of banishing or at least reducing the «pathological», emotionally immersive reading. In his opinion, it was then that something like «Habermas' model of reading» appeared and pushed many reading practices out into the morally punishable zones of «bad reading»:

Habermas emphasizes the values of critical distance, autonomy, and public communication with respect to cultural texts as being essential to development of the modern public sphere (Millner 2012: 8).

The kind of public sphere that Brown and Habermas imagine requires a practice of reading that keeps the contents of the text objective, extractable, transposable, replicable, circulatable, and discussable. Texts which are too close to the reader — texts to which readers become «insensibly attached» — are more difficult and perhaps impossible to bring into public conversation (Millner 2012: 6)

In modern culture, emotional immersive reading is banished from the sphere of public communication: it is suppressed and exiled to the marginal spheres of reading (which are, one should remember, far from being quantitatively marginal). At the same time, contemporary research into the history of reading and popular culture plausibly demonstrates that, even though these marginal spheres lay no claim to influencing the public and build on different principles altogether, they also develop similar laws of rational communication, evaluation, and criticism, and these laws do not bar affective immersion in the text. Michael Saler calls these zones of popular culture «public spheres of the imagination» (Saler 2012). According to Saler, discourses such as detective and

adventure, or science fiction and fantasy encompass not only the stormily developing at end of the XIXth century textual genres, but also the rules for reading and talking about them, as, for instance, in the rules for discussing these texts on magazines' letters pages. These discourses form a sizable segment of modern culture based on the principle of ironic imagination: «as if». Let us pretend we believe in dragons and magic, Sherlock Holmes and Chtulhu; let us delight in sojourning in various imaginary worlds. Let us, however, never forget the rational underpinnings of these worlds or miss the chance to use them as props in talking about our real world, to discuss the different strategies for better understanding of our own realities and to conceptualize the real diversity around us.

In the early XXth century these principles of ironic imagination, which Saler designates as «delight without delusion», rather swiftly led to the development not only of the «virtual worlds» of collective imagination, but also to proto-fandoms: «The initial public spheres of the imagination rapidly expanded from magazines letters pages to societies, fanzines, and conventions» (Saler 2012: 98). Saler analyzes the genre of science fiction — the way it was and is read and critiqued in communities of readers in the first half of the XXth century and today — as a telling example of how popular literature develops simultaneously fantasy and logic, imagination and critical thinking. Popular literature paves the way for discussions in readers' communities and helps the idea of cultural diversity to take root in public spheres of the imagination.

When composed of a diverse membership, these spheres augmented the perspectival effects of the ironic imagination: they forced participants to contend with unpalatable interpretations and to provide justifications for self-evident views. Taken together, the ironic imagination and public spheres of the imagination advanced a modern form of enchantment that tended to delight but not delude. (Saler 2012: 100-101).

The passionate and enchanted reading of fan fiction literature must be viewed within the same tradition of depathologizing emotional immersive reading that has recently depathologized the very image of a fan of the media and the worlds of popular culture (Helekson; Busse 2014: 131-137). Fandom communities do read differently, but this difference is not caused by the ignorance or marginality of their participants; neither should it be explained exclusively by the gender composition of their readership: male-only and mixed fandom communities exist as well. Educational systems and professional critical and interpretative discourses are dominated by the belief that «proper reading requires avoidance of excessive attachment. To penetrate, channel, or methodically address texts is to clearly divide the text from the self». (Millner 2012: 5). Fan fiction readers read by immersing themselves into the text and internalizing it — allowing it to become inseparable from their self. Realization of one's (at times rather diverse) emotional needs through experiencing the text is practiced here as a version of the «care of the self»: in other words, as one of the methods of self-cognition and emotional development.

I have written about this before, while demonstrating how female readers use fan fiction texts to construct their axiological positions (Samutina 2013b). The right to select texts for reading subjectively; the right to pass judgment on the reading from one's own idiosyncratic standpoint — including the right to favor emotional choices («the text may be fine, but I definitely do not like stuff like that», «not my cup of tea», and so on); the right to give a detailed account of what in the text met or failed to meet one's needs and expectations — these rights both implicitly and explicitly, as stated in multiple fan discussions about reading, form the foundation for an intense communication of readers in a fandom. Henry Jenkins has already pointed out these peculiar features of fandom reception in his characterization of media fans' reactions to their dearly beloved canons:

Fan interpretive practice differs from that fostered by the educational system and preferred by bourgeois culture not simply in its object choices or in the degree of its intensity, but often in the types of reading skills it employs, in the ways that fans approach texts. From the perspective of dominant taste, fans appear to be frighteningly out of control, undisciplined and unrepentant, rogue readers. Rejecting the aesthetic distance Bourdieu suggests is a cornerstone of bourgeois aesthetics, fans enthusiastically embrace favored texts and attempt to integrate media representations into their own social experience. (Jenkins 1992:18)

At the same time, the emotional component of fan fiction does not prevent one from using the more conventional ways of analyzing these texts. Affective reading strategies (such as speaking of one's annoyance with the text and one's resentment towards the situations it portrays; expressing exultation about the text dealing exactly with what one likes and exactly in the manner one likes, etc.) indeed have pride of place in readers communication. Yet as soon as a discussion begins, the more formal analytical strategies immediately show up in support of sentiments. The majority of fan fiction readers are perfectly aware of the fact that texts take on a certain form and may be set in various modalities, etc.: they, too, deal with these formal elements when they try on the role of fan fiction writers. Whenever a text needs defending from detractors, formal arguments are brought forth and may well have the desired effect on the opponents. These arguments do not substitute for subjective emotional judgments, but rather complement them.

Nevertheless, an «objective quality of writing» is not what interests fan fiction readers. They seek an opportunity to establish a personal relationship with a text and to read and experience what really makes them tick. My observations on fandom reading fully confirm the conclusions drawn by Rhiannon Bury, who analyzed fan discussions of TV shows:

[fans] ...have learned their lessons in bourgeois aesthetics well, the large majority respecting the boundary between thoughtful speculation based on a close reading of the text and wild

speculation based on personal whim. <...> At the same time, they feel no need to distance themselves from their emotional attachments in favor of “objective” interpretation and appreciation of the text. (Bury 2007: 303).

### *Landscapes and assemblage points of reading*

Largely this particular understanding of the nature of immersive affective reading inspired me to use a metaphor of emotional landscape to describe popular fan fiction reading strategies. This metaphor seems apt to convey the relationship between a fandom reader and texts; it may also prove useful for a conversation about reader reception in other spheres of popular culture. The landscape metaphor allows me to place emphasis on the reader facing both an endless variety of fan fiction texts potentially capable of satisfying every need and demand, and every single text, which she must go through on her affective itinerary. Of course, a text has plenty of opportunities to influence this itinerary, but that is not what concerns me now. How the reader maps the route is the real question: the reader who may have personally commissioned this text from a fandom writer, or waited for it for months, all while cheering the author on with friendly comments, — or simply a reader, with her own assortment of needs and demands on fandom reading. What strategies does someone accustomed to extensive, emotional, subjective, and simultaneously highly sophisticated, intense, multifunctional reading employ in the process of mastering and internalizing the text?

In conjunction with emotional landscapes of reading, I would like to note that my metaphor builds on the contemporary concept of performativity of landscape in phenomenological theories of space, in sociology and geography. A landscape, whether urban or natural, is not extraneous to an observer. The way, in which phenomenology of landscape interprets the role of an observer and a participant of movement through the landscape, matches exactly the way, in which I would describe the role of an emotionally affected reader who preconditions the development of a text and assembles it around the points of her personal interest. As John Wylie writes in his chapter *Spatialities of feeling* reviewing phenomenological theories of space,

For Merleau-Ponty, landscape is not a way of seeing: the term refers instead to the materialities and sensibilities with which we see <...>. When I look, I see with landscape. I am neither looking at it, nor straightforwardly placed ‘inside’ it. I am intertwined instead within an unfolding differentiation. To put this perceptually, I perceive through an attunement with landscape (Wylie 2007: 152)



Sociology of space conceptualizes the relationship between the subject and the landscape in a similar manner. Sociologist Andrea Brighenti describes one of the major participants of a modern urban scene — a flaneur, «The flaneur is not a person but a diagram of affections, a recorder of the territorialities, combinations, variations and stratifications in the urban environment» (Brighenti 2010: 135). Likewise a contemporary reader, especially a fan fiction reader, who aims to use a text primarily as an emotional instrument, is «inscribed» in this text «like a diagram of affections»; all she has to do in picking texts and reading them is to recognize these personally preferable territories. She is performing her desired itinerary through the emotional landscape of reading. It may look like a rollercoaster (these are in a high demand) or, possibly, a tough road with a cozy little cabin at the end, or an easy and pleasant walk downhill. Let us not multiply metaphors further, but instead look at some reading strategies common among the Russian *Harry Potter* fans to examine several noteworthy assemblage points of fandom reading which fully reveal its peculiarities. This is far from being a full list, and I doubt that cataloguing them all is even feasible. These points should at least help initiate a conversation about fan fiction texts in their specific reading habitat.

#### *a. Selective reading*

Even in such a relatively limited space as one literary canon's archive, in this case *Harry Potter*'s, completely different strategies of reading and writing are present from the outset. They reflect significant differences in the starting points of an emotional itinerary of reading. Whenever readers talk about reading in general or about reading specific fanfics, they often reference these differences. These are not self-evident differences, such as readers' age or education level, but precisely the specifics of a given reader's interest in a given archive.

For instance, writers and readers of *Harry Potter* fan fiction have at least four very common, clearly distinct strategies in reading fanfics. The first one is based on love and interest in the magic universe created by J. K. Rowling. The second one is based on an emotional attachment to one of the canon characters (Professor Snape, Draco Malfoy, etc.): this affection often emerges already while reading the canon, but grows manifold through fandom reading. In the extreme form it is a very strong emotional attachment and selectiveness of interest: as one reader states on her diary's title page, «My personal interest in the *Potterverse* is limited to this character alone. It's just how it is...». The third strategy is based on the interest in slash as a narrative construction. The readers that prefer this strategy have an affective engagement with romantic and/or sexual relationships between the male characters of the canon. The fourth strategy just satisfies the need for an intense fandom-based communication about reading and writing: the actual subject of communication is in these circumstances of lesser importance. Of course, these strategies are not always as clearly distinguishable: they may overlap in many ways. For example, a lover of slash is likely to have favorite pairings in the world of *Harry Potter* and enjoy reading slash stories about these characters. Nevertheless, these strategies contribute to significant differences in fandom reading, of which readers are well aware, especially in situations of negative, rather than positive reading scenarios.

Here is a merry example. A very lively, active, naturally joyful fanon of Lucius Malfoy, created by a group of fandom writers and artists, has existed within the Russian *Harry Potter* fandom since about 2012. A Lucius Malfoy team participates in fandom battles; a community *Lucius-mania* on diary.ry, with over 400 permanent members, publishes fanfics and art; thematic festivals with prompts are organized there, etc. It was not the canonic image from Rowling's book series that inspired this joyous game, but, rather, the film adaptations, where this role was brilliantly played by actor Jason Isaacs, as well as an entire tradition of fanon texts about the magnificent Malfoy-manor and its resplendent proprietor. As a rule, texts of this *Lucius-mania* group lovingly play up this tradition, while simultaneously reducing it to a grotesque: Lucius' image is flamboyantly carnivalesque. The canonic villain and Harry Potter's antagonist is presented in these texts as a trickster, a charming and invincible con man. He is an irresistible flirt and paramour of every character in the *Potterverse*; his passion for ostentatious grandeur is constantly made fun of through stories about luxurious robes and snow-white peacocks bred in Malfoy-manor, etc. This creative group of Lucius' fans had its day in the sun at one of the festivals in the summer of 2014, when their humorous request for a story about Lucius hunting for Chtulhu was fulfilled over a hundred times.

Needless to say: this game has not been able to fascinate the entire fandom. Moreover, some readers show an unequivocal rejection of this fanon image. Among game players, most adore Lucius Malfoy as a movie character; many others are also attracted to the general carnivalesque nature of this fanon and a good company it offers. As for the fans of the canonic *Potterverse*, they barely ever read these texts, but pull them to pieces when they do. Their criticism rarely concerns the quality of texts about Lucius (which, admittedly, is rather high by fandom standards): mainly, their critique reflects precisely the particularities of reader interests.

One more point highlighting the selectiveness of fan fiction readers' emotional itinerary is the system of heads and disclaimers, familiar to anyone who has ever come across fan fiction. A reader has a chance to choose a text according to her mood at the time, because some basic elements of this text's effect are clearly stated in advance. She would be informed whether the text has a happy ending or, conversely, angst, or character death; whether the text presents PWP (porn without plot) or UST (unresolved sexual tension), and so on. All these kinds of texts are in demand in fan fiction, but all are read in different circumstances and depending on one's mood. Some texts require a longer period of «psyching up», and their readers then write as much in their reviews: «I spent a long time hesitating whether to read this text. I looked at disclaimers and just could not muster the courage to read it. Finally, I psyched myself up and read it — and have no regrets: it was just what I needed at the time». Fan fiction readers have infinite appreciation for this system of warnings, allowing for the diversity and facilitating navigation through the emotional field of fan fiction. Writer's breach of this convention is one of the worst crimes in fandom communication. At the same time, readers sometimes criticize the influence this system of «comfort zoning» exerts on their reading. As one of them writes,

«At present, the only fics I read are the ones with the characters I am interested in, and I always look at the head. A summary doesn't sound good — to hell with it; when disclaimers warn about «character death» or something like that, I can't help peeking at spoilers: what if it isn't a happy end? Shrinking violet gets scared and unwilling to leave her comfort zone. Meanwhile this zone is steadily getting smaller... This is all sad. Thank God there are still writers whose every product I read and every recommendation trust regardless: at least there is some variety».

### *b. Kink reading*

The most important — perhaps, even the core — element responsible for the emotional landscapes of fandom reading the readers themselves call *kink*. This word goes back to a slang term for the specifics of sexual preferences. In contemporary fan fiction writers' and readers' lingo, kink does not always connote specifically sexual quirks: rather, a kink is a situation, type of relationship, action, image, or a sentiment capable of producing the greatest impact on a particular fandom reader. In particular, fandom pairings and character interpretations are kinks. Some would read anything about Snape's relationship with Harry, but never about Snape's with Hermione. Within the Snape/Harry pairing, some prefer stories about a timid pupil of an omniscient and strict professor, while others are interested exclusively in stories about a strong and smart hero who helps a person with turbulent past find peace. Many fandom readers find their kink in the emotional situations considered «taboo» or «low-brow» by the traditional literature — hence the numerous stories about slavery, narratives in the fandom genre of hurt/comfort, etc.

However, virtually any other relationships or images may be someone's kink just as successfully, even completely non-romantic ones, such as, for instance, expressions of good friendship among the major characters of the *Potterverse*, or the peculiarities of life choices of the Weasley family members, or the images of Voldemort's supporters, etc. In fandom reading, these preferences are consciously conceptualized and cultivated, thus forming a special culture of emotional «care of the self», and serve as an instrument of self-awareness. Kinks are admitted to freely: they are indispensable; it is a must-have to find some in one's emotional luggage. Kinks also serve as a perfectly legitimate excuse from reading a specific fanfic — an excuse which would not offend its author.

*In fandom reading, strategies of kink reading either take priority, or serve as a major complement — or counterweight — to the traditional normative strategies of text reception, which take into account the text's structure and its aesthetic features.* That is to say, in a situation where kink strategy clashes with a normative strategy, the kink strategy has more chances to win. For example, kinks alone compel many a fandom reader to read aesthetically compromised texts, or texts they are not happy with for some other reason, such as dubious ethics, or texts composed «as

original stories», where only the names of favorite characters remain unchanged, etc. Sometimes the presence of one or several kinky moments justifies reading a particular text in the reader's eyes, even if the rest of the story was disappointing. Value clashes are a regular occurrence in this context: for the sake of kinks, one may turn a blind eye to what would never be forgiven, had the text not contained this particular reader's favorite kinks. A fandom community may call a text «bad» if considered, say, as a love story, but «perfect» at realizing certain kinks, especially if fans of these kinks succeeded at defending their interpretation in a discussion of the text's merits. A lengthy example of a debate of this kind in the Russian *Harry Potter* community has been cited in one of my earlier papers (Samutina 2013b: 26-27).

Kink fests — widespread fandom games aimed at satisfying readers' requests for sexual kinks — represent an extreme case of kink reading and writing. Kink fests make the many usual literary parameters of fan fiction, such as credibility, quality of writing, logical resolution, fall by the wayside.

A reference to one's kinks is a fairly standard occurrence in analyzing and critiquing a text (meaning that the rules of the critic's emotional reading are included in the analysis). Kinks are not always easy to separate from the formal analytical parameters or axiological demands on the contents: often all of these are superimposed on one another and thus produce a stronger impact. At the same time, an emotional interest in kinks forms the general vector of text reception. See, for example, a (slightly abridged) critical review of a fanfic by a reader who started by saying that she loved  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the text and hated the rest. The same criticism may have been expressed through more objective categories; moreover, the reader — a smart well educated woman — undoubtedly knows how to do it, but she consciously chooses to talk about her preferences:

«All in all, I very much enjoy morbid love stories and the transfer of feelings for a dead man onto another one, found as a substitute. I have even written about it myself. However! I like this kind of story only when presented like a drama, because it really is dramatic, when you cannot let your beloved go and find him a stand-in.

Hallelujah, I thought. Finally a story that caters to all my morbid love kinks! Even if James were to come back, Draco understands that he's making a huge mistake, but he still makes it, and this whole situation is such an unbearable hellhole that it makes me want to hurl, but this is also good, because this is angst — a drama, after all, and everything it entails. But the author pulls a fast one — and turns the unbearable hellhole into a hellhole with flowerbeds, romance, and a happy end. <...> At the scene (of the happy end – NS) I burst out crying and walked out the window».

Readers' kink-related expectations fill fandom space with a vast multitude of texts capable of shocking an outsider, unfamiliar with the rules of reading them and attempting to interpret them in the same manner as the more conventional literary texts. In fan fiction reading everything is slightly different than it seems. Besides, such an outsider often risks just losing her way in the text, as she is unable to decode causes and effects. This mentioning of an outsider logically leads us to the next assemblage point of reader experience.

*c. The first encounter with fan fiction texts*

One of the Russian fan fiction readers (who does not write fan fiction herself, but actively comments on the others' work and talks about her reading a lot in her diary) once articulated a phrase in some sense applicable to any keen reading, but especially to reading fan fiction: «It is, however, forever surprising, how the cells responsible for reading are constantly renewed. Indeed, it seems that one learns to read not once and for all, but again, and again, and many, many more times».

Emotional landscapes of fan fiction reading are closely connected with the development of a person's fandom experience and go through stages. Thanks to this fact, one can clearly discern the exact moment of one's first encounter with fan fiction's ability to produce immersive reading and kink reading — as well as other typical moments, which the present paper will not dwell on (such as weariness from reading too much fan fiction; a shift of interest from romance to world-building; a nostalgic return to the roots through texts «similar» to the ones read «at the dawn of fandom youth», etc.). Fan fiction reading changes a lot after the first and the keenest interest is satisfied: it transforms along with the acquisition of reading experience.

For many readers, the first reading of fan fiction is a remarkable episode, remembered for an unbelievable outburst of emotions and the effect of the greatest ever immersion in the text. It is the moment when every function responsible for emotions goes into overdrive and the text completely engrosses the reader. This is «enchantment», pure and unadulterated, that Rita Felski is writing about:

Enchantment is soaked through with an unusual intensity of perception and affect; it is often compared to the condition of being intoxicated, drugged, or dreaming. <...> The analytical part of your mind recedes into the background; your inner censor and critic is nowhere to be found (Felski 2008: 55)

Fan fiction readers like to talk about this period of their reading. They are not ashamed of it neither while it lasts nor later: it serves as a litmus test of the sincerity and intensity of their feelings.

Lengthy accounts of immersion in a certain text and descriptions of its effect on the reader, that is to say, a list of everything the text «did» to the recipient, can be found in readers' diaries. One of such stories in a reader's blog, entitled *A crazy week in August 2011*, contains an exhaustive report of the first encounter with slash: the shock, binge reading all through the night, bystanders' reaction, making sense of the reading, and so on.

Many fanfics, first encountered at the beginning of fandom reading, forever remain in readers' memory as the dearest and most beloved, even if their tastes have since completely changed. These texts serve as a testimony of one's personal development through time — a favorite subject for conceptualization and discussion among readers. The mystery of the first immersive reading experience forever comes up in nostalgic conversations. Within the framework of the Russian *Harry Potter* fandom, several fan fiction texts, composed at the early stages of fandom's existence, shook large numbers of readers to the core. One of them, a drarry *On the Other Side of Warmth* by Friyana, is a dramatic slash romance featuring excessive emotions, the magic of natural elements, and Harry Potter's final demise (pressured by the audience, the writer later resurrected Harry for a sequel). Retrospectively discussing in 2015 their first binge reading of this text, readers point out the stark contrast between their present-day perception and the time when an emotional storm caused by the *On the Other Side of Warmth* breached their previously rational reading experience:

«But this «my time» — which, in fact, was only a few years ago, when I first found out about the fandom, — in «my time» I was way past 17, but, for pity's sake, I could tell good literature from the bad even at 17... But how, why, when I first read it, did I miss all these «his emeralds were breathing», endless blonds and brunets, invariably lean youthful figures, desperate hysterics and panic in every chapter, this undisguised hatred towards every — I mean, every! — character in the world of *Harry Potter*? Perhaps, it made such an impression because that was the first time that I lay my eyes on a text like this? Or a highly original interpretation? Or the first time I ever heard of wizards using the magic of elements? Don't know, perhaps. At least now, when I re-read it, all of this really detracted from the reading, and sometimes even seemed funny in places where it shouldn't have been». (Reader 1)

«OMG, same here! I even wept at the end of the first book, when everyone died. Once I decided to re-read it, all of a sudden I saw all the brunets, blonds, hysterics, and emeralds. Quite simply: at first reading, this twelve-year old girl awakes inside every one of us, gasps, devours page upon page, feels anxious... But this trick only works once». (Reader 2)

«Let me join the club! This fic is exactly what brought me to the fandom. I adored it, re-read it, no blonds with predatory grins ever disturbed me, and my entire stylistic pantheon from

Turgenev to Nabokov kept mum, while I drowned in tears and snot. Now I wouldn't even risk rereading it — let it, like the first love, remain a happy memory». (Reader 3).

#### d. *Unpredictability*

Fan fiction reading's intensity is largely due to its basic unpredictability. This reading is far less predictable and in this sense is freer than reading, say, of a certain genre segment of popular literature. This statement may come unexpected, especially after what I said about heads and disclaimers determining fan fiction reading. Nevertheless, the emotional landscape of fan fiction reading requires taking serious risks; besides, in case the text is large enough the risks get higher as the reader proceeds deeper into the text. For the reader, these risks are associated both with the absence of strict genre conventions and with the fact that the notional «quality» of fan fiction text is never guaranteed. Additionally, in the internet space many texts are uploaded as they are being composed, and writers ask readers for suggestions. Readers, in turn, quite often honestly say, «I won't risk reading it until it's finished», for there is no telling whether the text would ever be finished, or whether the author would not kill the reader's favorite character off midway through the story, or if the end would be happy. In fact, these undesirable things and many others happen to fan fiction readers and writers a lot.

The lack of quality guarantees (let us agree that by quality, we understand the text's conformity with the reader's positive expectations) may provide the reader with an even more thrilling emotional rollercoaster, especially if the text is long enough. Fan fiction has an institute of beta editing, but its degree of interference with the text can hardly compare to the editing done by a publishing house, especially in popular literature. That is why fan fiction texts tend to begin at one level of quality and end at another, and vice versa; they may have gaps in the middle or switch sharply from one type of conventionality to another — hence many of them resemble the Rodriguez and Tarantino film *From Dusk Till Dawn*, only produced inadvertently. Given the earlier described immense emotional investment in the text, readers find these failures to meet their expectations extremely upsetting. They are compelled to loudly express their reactions, both negative and positive; they fear seeing a fanfic fail, but rejoice when it is successful. Any relatively long fan fiction story exerts a considerable emotional strain on its readers — not only because of the storyline's dynamics, or because of the unresolved conflict between the characters, — but also because from some point on, the reader begins to passionately wish for the fanfic «not to be ruined». Luckily, the fandom space offers readers many positive examples in this respect.

#### ***Conclusion***

In the present paper, I have thus attempted to propose approaches to studying common reading strategies as practiced by the «impatient communities» of fan fiction readers and writers and to map

out a provisional and *a priori* incomplete map of emotional landscapes of reading this type of contemporary literature. Fan fiction as a field of literary experience, as the space of reading and writing seems to me a complex phenomenon which has not so far been sufficiently explored by literary theorists, even though it deserves keenest scholarly attention. One of the spheres this attention may be directed to lies at the intersection of literary theory, theory of popular culture, and qualitative research into practices of communication within online communities. While remaining marginal from the standpoint of dominant literary institutions, these contemporary public spheres of the imagination, with their own strategies and norms, rules for discussions and laws of development, are growing and will continue growing with every generation of internet users. They are in highest demand by many categories of readers. The study of contemporary reading strategies must not fail to consider this circumstance.



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## **Natalia Samutina**

National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). The Poletaev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities (IGITI). Leading researcher, Head of the Research Centre for Contemporary Culture: <http://igiti.hse.ru/en/culture/nsamutina@hse.ru>, [nsamutina@gmail.com](mailto:nsamutina@gmail.com)

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