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Power the Dark Lord Knows Not: The Fractal Serialities of Fanfiction

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Abstract: This article examines contemporary fanfiction as a special type of engagement with popular serial narratives. It proposes the concept of fractal seriality as a lens through which to gauge the proliferation and popularization of fanfiction as a potentially fruitful strategy for critiquing fiction: part of fiction's persuasiveness inheres in an author's ability to consciously or unconsciously set the rules of the fictional world in ways that reinforce the author's message and their vision of the real world, while fractal seriality allows fanfiction authors to change the focus and reorient stories in ways that will engage readers of the original series while refusing to circulate key aspects of the initial worldbuilding and moral values. E.J. Lomax's *boy with a scar* builds on J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series not by continuing it chronologically but branching off from it in a series of "what-ifs" that broaden and deepen the wizarding world by focusing on characters, events, and circumstances that the original series has elided, oversimplified, or otherwise treated in ways that Lomax finds inadequate. VeroniqueClaire's *Volée*, meanwhile, expands the action of three scenes from the *Phantom of the Opera* stage play into 25 chapters, realizing the potential for transformative justice already inherent, but unfulfilled, in the original.

Key terms: *Phantom of the Opera*, *Harry Potter*, E.J. Lomax, VeroniqueClaire, fanfiction, fan cultures, restorying, popular seriality

This article proposes fractal seriality as a way of thinking about the circulation of world building strategies and moral values in fanfiction, specifically in dirgewithoutmusic's *boy with a scar*[1] and VeroniqueClaire's *Volée*. As we shall show, *boy*

1 In her fanfiction, Lomax uses lowercase titles, in keeping with one of the conventions of Tumblr, one of the platforms on which she publishes.

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For the purposes of this article, we draw from seriality studies to coin the new concept of fractal seriality and trace its occurrence in fanfiction. Frank Kelleter describes seriality as a practice that balances "the satisfaction of conclusion and the appeal of renewal" (2017: 9). It "emerges from situated historical actors and agencies with particular modes of describing and performing themselves" (11), Kelleter continues, and it develops as it is being consumed, with its creators "in perpetual interaction with what they set in motion" (14), resulting in "a particularly close entanglement of production and reception" (13). These aspects of seriality work for the kind of seriality we describe here, though it occurs along a different trajectory. The most basic sense of seriality, as Kelleter describes it, involves the creation of works in a sequence (8). We, on the other hand, are interested in narratives that sprout off a main canonical narrative, adding greater complexity and richer detail in ways that challenge the original work. Evoking the mathematical concept of the fractal, a recursive pattern that is infinitely complex even at small scales (FractalFoundation.org), we call this process fractal seriality. Fractal seriality is characterized by budding from a central narrative, the capacity for refocusing, and the preservation of the central narrative's patterns – albeit with variation – at that tighter focus.

Operating parallel rather than subsequent to the canon narrative, such a practice has a different relationship with closure than that posited by Kelleter. Each of Lomax's retellings of the Harry Potter story have the same ending, the defeat of Voldemort, while VeroniqueClaire's lengthening of Act II, Scenes 7–9 of *The Phantom of the Opera* results in a different ending, but a definitive ending nonetheless, albeit one gesturing towards possibilities for future growth and change. In both cases, the original story is reiterated, with variation, but not in a way that continues it. Moreover, where Kelleter points to modern serial narratives as evolving narratives, repositioning *themselves* with every new entry in response to audience feedback and a changing world (2017: 14), the examples of fractal seriality in the current study have been written from outside the sphere of the creators of the original

material, working at the same repositioning from the outside. We argue that fractal seriality constitutes a particularly effective way to critique popular works of fiction.

Although we concern ourselves with twenty-first-century examples, many of the dynamics and processes present in fractal seriality are not new ones. One example is the legend of St. Brendan, a fifth-century Irish monk who, after a vision, is said to have set out with a company of his fellow monks to search for the Isle of the Blessed. The monks threw away their oars and drifted to a series of islands corresponding to stations of the liturgical calendar, circling for seven years before coming to the Isle of the Blessed. Versions of the legend changed as it traversed the continent, allowing scholars to track the circulation of the voyage of Brendan across Europe based on the addition of different passages or episodes (Gerritsen and King 2002: 104, 347). Another example is the legend of King Arthur, which, as encyclopedist Norris Lacy reports, accumulated over centuries, with regional variations in what kinds of stories were emphasized, in the values that they expressed, and in the personage of Arthur himself (Lacy 1986: 19–20). In these traditional stories, as the tales were copied, new material could be inserted among earlier episodes like beads on a string. However, the modes and circumstances of their production and circulation were very different from those of fiction and fanfiction today.

This is not to say, either, that fanfiction is the only present-day medium that supports something like fractal seriality. Mark McGurl suggests that Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* gestures in the direction of fractal seriality, with its characters meditating on the subjunctive possibilities of the decisions they did not make (McGurl 2021: 146). Moreover, Frank Kelleter writes that popular serial storytelling is "characterized by *proliferation*" (2017: 20, original emphasis) creating possibilities for "diegetic overflow" (20), some instances of which are authorized, and some of which – such as fanfiction – are not. Large franchises that employ multiple creators over a period of time, such as comic book universes, the *Doctor Who* universe, the *Star Trek* universe, the *Star Wars* universe, and *Borderlands*, offer possibilities for multiple creators to build complex worlds where details glossed over in the original properties are filled in, events that were historical in the original properties receive full narrative treatment, characters given short shrift by the original properties are reclaimed and fleshed out, and so on. However, these latter officially sanctioned contributions are subject to a certain amount of editorial control. As sensibilities and personnel change, so may the directives of the editors to the creators. In the current study, however, we are interested in contributions that operate outside of the control of the original author or copyright holder and thus outside of the official realm of serial circulation.

1 Fanfiction: A Background

Fanfiction, as the name suggests, is fiction created by fans of a particular movie, book, series, or other intellectual property for fans of that same work (Jenkins 1992: 154; Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2). It uses the characters, settings, plot details, and tropes of the original work as source materials but recombines them into new stories that take the world of the original work in different directions from those necessarily envisioned by the original creators (Jenkins 1992: 155; Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2). Since the turn of the millennium, fanfiction has increasingly gone online (Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2), at first hosted on fan-authors' websites and later moving to large aggregate sites such as fanfiction.net and Archive Of Our Own (AO3), where the vast majority are located today. These sites have caused an explosion in the amount of fanfiction available in a wide range of media universes because they present far fewer barriers to publication than previous modalities (Jenkins 1992: 159; Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2). What is more, on sites such as fanfiction.net and AO3, stories are not vetted prior to publication. Granted, this lack of gatekeeping leads to a wide range in the quality of writing and storytelling on offer, but it does impart to the world of fanfic a level of democracy not found in other forms of publishing. What is more, fanfiction is generally circulated for free (or for only the cost of printing and mailing back in the days of analogue fanzines) (Jenkins 1992: 158; Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2). That said, in some fandoms (such as that of *The Phantom of The Opera* discussed below), it has become quite common and accepted to self-publish fanfics on sites such as Kindle or Smashwords, especially if they have been highly successful on fanfiction.net, though, with explicitly copyrighted material altered or removed (McGurl 2021: 181).

In addition, as with other kinds of seriality that are "being watched or read while [they are] developing" (Kelleter 2017: 12), allowing "serial audiences to become involved in a narrative's progress" (13), fanfiction is highly interactive (Jenkins 1992: 159) – perhaps even more so, because where studios and publishers form barriers between fans and creators, sites such as fanfiction.net and AO3 allow readers to leave comments on individual chapters of a story, and they allow authors to reply (Jenkins 2006: 179; Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2). Because long-form fanfics are themselves presented serially – rolled out chapter by chapter over an extended period – these comments and replies are often made while the story is still being written (Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2), although, of course, comments and replies can come long after the final chapter of a work has been posted as well. This is not to say that fan-authors bow to the dictates of their reviewers by any means, but the feedback is considered valuable and, for the most part, strongly affirming of the author's ability and vision (Jenkins 1992: 159; Jenkins 2006: 178–179;

Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2). While Kelleter acknowledges "a particularly close entanglement of production and reception in serial storytelling" (2017: 13), the interaction between fanfiction authors and readers occurs at an individual level, with no studio or publishing company to mediate. All this, then, gives fanfic a level of interactivity beyond other forms of publishing and creates a strong sense of fan community among authors and readers (Jenkins 1992: 154; Jenkins 2006: 179; Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2). It also helps to generate a broad if loose consensus around what constitutes "good" fanfic in a given fandom: how far away from the optional work a fanfic may circulate, or how much characters drawn from source material can be altered before they become "OOC" (Out Of Character), how far plot elements and tropes can be altered when the setting is transposed, which crossovers work and which do not, and so on (Jenkins 2006: 180; Sackville-McLauchlan section 2).

This practice of fanfiction, then, is one of the ways in which fans of a given media text lay claim to that text (Jenkins 1992: 155; Jenkins 2006: 176). Fans' deep emotional investment in a text imparts a sense of part-ownership of the text, or at least, a right to make it their own through practices such as fanart and fanfiction (Jenkins 1992: 154; Jenkins 2006: 173). These practices can also be venues where fans lovingly push those texts to be more inclusive or adventurous than they are in their canonical form. This pushing can be done through practices such as "bending" (altering a character's gender or race from what it is in canon) and "slashing" (putting characters into same-sex/gender relationships who are not paired that way in canon), both of which are quite common in many fandoms (Jenkins 1992: 175; Jenkins 2006: 183; Thomas and Stornaiuolo 2016: 319).

2 The Fractal Harry Potter Fanfictions of dirgewithoutmusic/E.J. Lomax

E.J. Lomax is an author, fanfiction author, and game designer whose works explore themes of social justice, survival in unjust systems, and building healthy communities. Under the names inksplotch on Tumblr and dirgewithoutmusic on Archive of Our Own, she specializes in addressing critiques of beloved franchises, such as the *Chronicles of Narnia*, the *Harry Potter* novels, and the Marvel Cinematic Universe. She does so primarily through what Thomas and Stornaiulo call "counter-storytelling" (2016: 319): making room for marginalized identities, perspectives ignored or elided in the original text, and fuller characterization. These pieces are written with clear affection for the original stories and their characters, even as they address the gaps and failures of imagination therein.

I (Cat Ashton) first became acquainted with Lomax's work through her short piece "We Need to Talk About Susan Pevensie", in which she imagines the life of the titular character after, in the second book of C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, Aslan tells her that she is too old to return to the magical kingdom. Susan, having been a queen in Narnia, returns home to put her skills to work on the world of the mid-twentieth century. At time of writing, the story has received almost 34,000 views and 3,884 kudos (AO3's equivalent of "likes)". Its sequel, "a call rattling in her bones", is nearly as popular, with just over 30,000 views and 3,142 kudos. Even more popular, though, are her engagements with the Harry Potter universe: each entry in *boy with a scar* has been read between 30,000 and 242,000 times. It is on these entries that the current study will concentrate.

The *Harry Potter* novels are the best-selling book series in history, with over 600 million copies sold as of 2023 (Scholastic 2023). Their author, J.K. Rowling, is the highest-paid author on earth. In the books, an orphaned boy receives an acceptance letter from a magical boarding school called Hogwarts and discovers that he is the Chosen One, destined to stand against Voldemort, the evil wizard who murdered his parents. Turn-of-the-century American evangelicals, perhaps alarmed by the series' popularity, denounced it as promoting witchcraft (Komschlies 2000; Kurtz 1999), although the concerns subsided following the release of the last book, in which Harry becomes a Christ figure, giving his life to defeat Voldemort and then rising again (Saunders 2015). As the generation that grew up on Harry Potter matured, though, other criticisms arose. Students did not seem to learn traditional academic subjects at Hogwarts, meaning that wizards could not be counted on to demonstrate literacy and numeracy beyond a fifth-grade level (Belinkie 2009). The school staged elaborate celebrations for Christmas and Halloween, but the sacred days of other faiths were never mentioned. Based on house affiliations assigned to incoming eleven-year-olds, a quarter of the student body was evil (Jones 2023). Severus Snape, a teacher who functioned as a minor antagonist, was lauded as a hero because he was a double agent, even though he bullied Harry and his classmates relentlessly (Wyatt 2019). Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster, was trusted by Harry but repeatedly placed him in danger and used him as a pawn in the battle with Voldemort (Asif 2021). The series incorporated only a few token characters of color (Thomas 2019: 145). Goblins were depicted as fulfilling antisemitic stereotypes (Berlatsky 2022). House Elves were biologically encoded as chattel slaves (TheyMightBeHouseElves 2021). No one was queer or disabled, although Rowling clarified outside of the series that Dumbledore was gay (Harris 2007), and disabilities would be magically "corrected" (Rowling 2015). Fat bodies functioned as an indicator of weakness or evil (Lockyer 2022).

Also troublingly, in the late 2010s, Rowling began to circulate increasingly transphobic opinions on social media, at first simply "liking" transphobic tweets

and then, in late 2019, beginning to post her own (Romano 2023). In 2023, one of her tweets referred to trans women as "violent, duplicitous rapists" (Rowling 2023), while in an interview she compared the movement for trans rights to Death Eaters, the followers of Voldemort (Romano 2023). This has moved many supporters of trans rights to withdraw support for the *Harry Potter* franchise. Indeed, I myself had qualms about writing an article about fanfiction of her work – fanfiction that Lomax herself has stopped writing – but ultimately concluded that Lomax's fanfiction, a reimagining of the Potterverse that openly and explicitly challenges transphobia, from which Rowling derives no financial benefit and which so ably illustrates the concept of fractal seriality, deserves attention nonetheless.

boy with a scar presents a series of eighteen fractal additions to the seven original *Harry Potter* novels, eighteen alternative retellings of the seven years leading up to the final defeat of Voldemort, each budding off from the canon narrative to deal with a given "what if" scenario: what if someone else – or no one at all – had been the Chosen One? What if Harry's living situation prior to Hogwarts had been different? What if the main characters had been affiliated with different houses at school? What if Harry were a cis girl? What if Harry were a trans girl? What if an antagonist had made an effort to change his or her behavior? What if Harry had been born without magic? Lomax uses these instances of canon divergence to imagine the wizarding universe and its characters in richer detail, to rewrite situations and characters through different lenses, to better enable people with marginalized identities to see themselves in the series, and to more consistently apply the original novels' core values of friendship, kindness, and justice. The stories are individually moving and persuasive, but some of their strongest arguments they make in aggregate.

As a collection, the pieces implicitly argue that most of the series' relationships, both friendly and antagonistic, that in the original novels seem to be predicated on characters' good or ill natures, are rather contingent on circumstances. However, first and foremost, antagonism is a far more fragile construct, easily dismantled. Lomax's storylines that sprout off from canon, allowing her to 'zoom in' at different points, accommodate more detail and more perspectives, creating a wizarding world in which more people, and more *kinds* of people, are depicted as doing their best in bad situations and deserve sympathy and understanding.

Lomax's short stories are written and structured in such a way as to foreground their relationship to the original text, as well as their departures from it, with the implicit expectation that readers are already familiar with the original. In, for example, "no place like home", in which his aunt and uncle, the Dursleys, refused to take Harry so that he is raised at Hogwarts, Lomax writes: "*This* Harry had shared a Common Room with Luna Lovegood's slightly distracted smiles for years now. He learned *even more quickly than he had in other stories* what fun she was to invite to

parties Harry didn't really want to attend" (Lomax 2015e, my emphasis). Elsewhere in the same story, she says of Warrington, a minor Slytherin House-affiliated character in the original novels who becomes a major character and ally of Harry's in this reimagining:

> (In a different world, Warrington had failed a year and was repeating his seventh when Umbridge came to Hogwarts. In a different world, Warrington wore an Inquistor's Squad badge on his robes, captured a scowling Harry in Umbridge's office, and slept easy at night.
>
> This Warrington woke up in his cheap little flat wondering what on earth his little hellions could have gotten up to now. This one woke up almost wishing that Hermione Granger was less good at tutoring than she was, and that he had failed his sixth year after all. He didn't like the stories that were coming out of Hogwarts.) (Lomax 2015e)

Large parts of the original novels are told in summary. These constructions of course save Lomax the work of retelling a story it is assumed that the readers know, but they also allow her to foreground the issues and episodes that matter most to her – in many cases, repetitively.

One of these issues is Rowling's handling of Slytherin House. In the original books, Slytherin House was founded by a wizard concerned above all else with blood purity and therefore with the exclusion of students who have non-wizards – "Muggles" – as parents. The Sorting Hat initially offers to send Harry into Slytherin House, but after an encounter with the aspiring Slytherin Draco Malfoy, Harry has been warned that it is the house of dark wizards, so he asks the Hat to put him elsewhere. In Rowling's work, Harry's choice to refuse Slytherin is framed as a virtuous one, one of the things that sets him apart from the evil Voldemort, despite their similarities (Rowling 1998: 245). One of the recurring themes in Lomax's work, however, is that no one house has a monopoly on good or evil. In "no place like home", Harry has to contend with

> Big Slytherins hissing at him, at his scar – but also Ravenclaws who didn't like this pipsqueak taking their teachers' time, Gryffindors who had to prove their badassery by picking on little kids, or Hufflepuffs who whispered about how he talked to snakes in the greenhouses. But plenty, also, with no reason at all – all of them, honestly, with no reason at all. Bullying is about power, about fear, about *tradition*, and here Harry was a small child with no family and no friends. (Lomax 2015e)

Just as Ravenclaws, Gryffindors, and Hufflepuffs are capable of acting badly, Slytherin students – who in the original books are depicted as unpleasant bullies eager to join the Death Eaters when Voldemort's forces begin their takeover – are just as capable of acting well as anyone else. Warrington is one example; another from the same story is Hestia Carrow, the younger sister of two prominent Death Eaters from the original novels. In a discussion with a ten-year-old Harry, rather

than embracing the ideal of pureblooded wizardry uncritically, Lomax's Slytherins express complicated feelings about an idea passed on to them by their families:

> "Why would we hate you?" said Warrington. "My mom's a Mudblood."
>
> "Not supposed to use that *word*," Hestia Carrow chided, slouching in her library chair and shooting multicolored sparks out the tip of her polished wand. "If we're going to be nice, War, we might as well go all in."
>
> Warrington rolled his eyes. "Yeah, and old You-Know-Who's dad was a straight-up Muggle. So I really don't know what he was on."
>
> "I've got a guess," said Hestia. "Same things my parents are on, probably."
>
> "I bet his cost less," Warrington said. (Lomax 2015e; emphasis in the original)

Hestia and her twin sister Flora join the resistance. Hestia does so not despite her affiliation with Slytherin, but *because* of it, failing her exams deliberately to avoid graduating (Lomax 2015e), and she uses the cunning and ambition that the house cultivates to fight for Hogwarts.

In "the heir of something or other", Harry does not meet Draco Malfoy until later, so Hagrid, the groundskeeper who conducts Harry to Hogwarts, never warns Harry that Slytherin is a breeding ground for dark wizards. When the Sorting Hat offers him Slytherin House, Harry has no objections:

> Because what if Harry had gotten his House opinions from the song, instead of age-old conflict? *Slytherin, where you'll make real friends.* And this boy with nothing, this boy who latched onto the first kindnesses he'd ever seen, he thought *yes that is what I want.*'
>
> [...]
>
> Slytherin was the house of cunning, of ambition – but if you know better, the Hat will let you ask for something else. If you know better – so Slytherin's dungeon was filled with the kids who thought *blood purist* sounded like home, with the children who didn't know better – with children. The dungeon was filled with children. (Lomax 2015c; emphasis in the original)

In this iteration, Harry has less help from Dumbledore, who is concerned that Harry has chosen Slytherin House (Lomax 2015c). Harry still befriends his best friends Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley – the latter a little more slowly and cautiously – but is closest to his fellow Slytherin Millicent Bulstrode. In the original novels, Millicent's "large and square" (Rowling 1998: 143) build situates her among characters such as Harry's Uncle Vernon, his cousin Dudley, and Malfoy's henchboys Crabbe and Goyle, whose fatness is treated as an aspect of their moral shortcomings. In "the heir of something or other", Millicent "could never quite keep her tummy tucked in enough, could never brush all the cat hair off her robes, never quite keep her temper in check" (Lomax 2015c), but in their first year she hangs back with Harry to rescue Hermione from a troll that invades the girls' washrooms, and the three become steadfast friends, a circumstance that allows Lomax to argue against fatphobia as well (Lomax 2015c). In this version, Death Eaters still take over the school in what would be Harry's seventh year, and Slytherins are still widely

assumed to be complicit with them, but Harry's friends in Slytherin quietly use their freedom of movement to form part of the resistance, feeding "the hidden members of the [resistance] news, scavenged supplies, and which kids needed protecting" (Lomax 2015c) and running interference on the Death Eaters (Lomax 2015c).

In "the girl who lived (again)", Harry is a trans girl mentored by Slytherin Blaise Zabini, who in this story is a trans boy and who teaches her how to do her hair and makeup. She makes a bargain with him: "You teach me about eyeliner. I'll teach you about being nice" (Lomax 2016a). When Voldemort's Death Eaters take control of the school and the students rebel, Blaise aids the rebellion and brings along other Slytherins. Harry asks why Blaise sought her out in the first place, and he answers:

> It's about sticking with your people, right? Packs, cliques – no that's not quite what I mean. [...] A Hufflepuff girl did this for me, once. Nymphadora. [...] She didn't have to. And Madame Pomfrey talked about, you know, paying it back – you get, and you give back. [...] I am not kind – she was kind. You, also, are not kind, but you're good, and I am not good. But you're my people. I have been where you are, or something like it. There are things about me that Millicent and Daphne are never going to quite understand. But I recognize me, in you, and that means something to me. (Lomax 2016a)

In this retelling, as in "no place like home" and "the heir of something or other", Slytherins join the battle for Hogwarts. They are not always necessarily kind, but their House assignment at age 11 does not fate them to be on the wrong side. Even Draco Malfoy, whose antagonism Lomax leaves virtually unchanged from the original novels, has chances to act differently. In "the heir of something or other", he coaches Harry for the Triwizard Tournament, not out of kindness, but because he cannot stand for Slytherin to lose (Lomax 2015c).

In the original novels, Draco has been tasked with killing Dumbledore, but he cannot fulfil this task even though his inability is framed as cowardice rather than moral qualms (Rowling 2005: 555). In "the last son", in which the Chosen One is Ron Weasley, Draco succeeds, but his one act of resistance to Voldemort, when he is asked to make sure Ron is dead, is a deliberate choice:

> Draco had killed Albus Dumbledore. He had lived in the back of Voldemort's entourage for months, laughing when he was meant to and never cringing.
>
> Draco had been a petty child, a bully and a menace, but he had realized during those long months that he had never been a hateful one. But he had watched Voldemort walk and talk and torture for months, and he knew now what hate felt like, sitting roiling in his gut. [...]
>
> Draco squatted down next to [Ron]. He called, "He's dead," over his shoulder in the same bored tone he'd been carrying for months. Ron stayed very still as Draco leaned a little closer in and whispered, "Give him hell, Weasley." (Lomax 2016b)

The goodness of Slytherin students across many storylines, even in a system that designates them as evil and rewards them for bigotry, is a powerful argument against Rowling's near-total equation of Slytherin with badness or, indeed, against

drawing similar conclusions about any large group of people, especially based on affiliations that are not totally under their own control.

Another recurring theme in Lomax's work is that most of the characters in the *Harry Potter* novels are children: that they should not *have* to be heroes and should not be blamed for the choices they have inherited. Recall that when Harry is sorted into Slytherin in "the heir of something or other", Lomax reiterates: "The dungeon was filled with *children*" (Lomax 2015c; my emphasis). In the final book, Harry is only seventeen. Lomax also emphasizes that during Voldemort's first rise to power, Harry's parents, their friend group, and their former classmates were themselves barely adults: "They didn't know what they were getting into. They were eighteen years old and they thought that was grown. They had signed on for a fight and they didn't know what the end would be" (Lomax 2017b). Elsewhere she points out about Ron's only slightly older brother: "Fred Weasley had died at the same age as Lily and James [i.e., Harry's parents] had" (Lomax 2015e).

Accordingly, Lomax has far less sympathy for older adults who behave badly, particularly Albus Dumbledore, who has placed the children in his care in danger, and the Potions teacher and double agent Severus Snape. In "no place like home", Professor McGonagall takes Dumbledore to task for his "rather cavalier take on child-rearing" (Lomax 2015e). In this story, as he grows older, Harry learns which students, of any house, need extra help, and he makes lists of their names that he shares with members of the faculty. Lomax writes: "He did not give his lists to Snape. He did not give them to Dumbledore. They weren't dealing with the care of children. They were playing bigger games (or maybe smaller ones)" (Lomax 2015e). In "a life of smoke and silvered glass", even a young Snape wonders, "Is it legal for the Headmaster to recruit students to his guerilla army?" (Lomax 2017b). In the same story, Dumbledore hesitantly pulls Snape aside and asks him to become a double agent, and Lomax writes, bleakly: "one day, when asking children to give their lives for the cause, there would be no stumble to this man's voice" (Lomax 2017b).

In the original novels, while at Hogwarts, Snape loved Harry's mother Lily, but her new friends – Harry's father and his friends – bullied Snape to the point of endangering his life. When Lily showed him sympathy in the aftermath, Snape called her a mudblood, a slur directed at wizards with a Muggle parent. He joined Voldemort's Death Eaters until the prospect of Lily's death at Voldemort's hands moved him to change sides. Snape dislikes Harry but protects his life for the sake of Lily's memory. In the original books, Snape is lauded as a hero after his death, and Harry gives his son the middle name Severus in Snape's honor. Lomax, though, argues that Snape's ultimately being on the right side does not excuse his behavior in the classroom. She writes in "baby birds and other adventures", in which Harry and Hermione are friends before going to Hogwarts, that "[l]ove had made him brave, perhaps. It had killed him, but it had not made Severus good" (Lomax 2017a).

In iterations where Lily Potter lives, Snape is never moved to change sides. In the story "boy with a scar", Lomax writes: "In this world, Severus Snape was not a Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. He was never a double agent. Lily's death was never dangled in front of him like bait, like a bauble, to drag him into something like light" (Lomax 2015a). In that universe, Snape goes to jail. In "the last son", Lily mentions Snape obliquely but fondly at one point, and Harry asks his mother what happened to her old friend. She responds: "A Death Eater killed him[.] [...] Someone petty, and jealous, and hurting so bad. He killed my friend. Or something like that. [...] Have I showed you Star Wars, yet?" (Lomax 2016b).[2] In the final battle at Hogwarts, Snape is still on Voldemort's side, and when he threatens Harry, Lily kills him, having "mourned Severus years ago" (Lomax 2016b).

However, in "a life of smoke and silvered glass", in response to a reader prompt, Lomax imagines Snape apologizing to Lily for calling her a mudblood and working to unravel his own prejudices. Much like his fellow Slytherins, Snape is still caustic and unpleasant, but he discovers that when he encounters pureblood bigotry, "he could be an interruption. [...] He could talk, smart-mouthed and snide, until the focus turned to him, and then he could survive anything they handed out. He could give as good as he got" (Lomax 2017b). Later, when acting as a double agent, his enduring friendship with Lily gives him the fortitude to resist the Death Eaters' arguments. "He understood how someone could believe in this garbage", Lomax writes, "could feel at home here, but he had given himself better things to hold onto" (2017b). This Snape is still severe with the children in his care – he initially protests to Dumbledore that he is no teacher (2017b) – but he watches out for all of them, tells his less fearsome colleagues which ones need extra support, and genuinely cares for Harry, albeit from afar. In the original books, one of Snape's functions is as a red herring, and it is difficult to imagine him fulfilling that role as successfully in this iteration, but Lomax depicts this version of Snape as deserving of the tribute that Harry pays him in canon. That the story must diverge so much from Rowling's original work in order for Snape to do so constitutes its own kind of argument. Most of all, Lomax argues that even though Harry is brave and good and excellent in all the worlds in which he survives, he – or any of the Chosen Ones in her reimaginings – is neither necessary nor sufficient for the defeat of Voldemort. Margaret Owen writes that Chosen One fantasies tend to rely on the idea "that a flawed system can be repaired by simply trading out or removing a few bad pieces" (Owen 2020). The trope of the Chosen One "eschews experience and expertise in favor of secret bloodlines and divine limericks, handwaving the innate flaws of a power

2 This is a reference to Obi Wan Kenobi's assertion, in *Star Wars: A New Hope*, that Darth Vader murdered Anakin Skywalker, when in fact Anakin himself became Darth Vader.

structure because the 'right person' has temporarily been empowered" (Owen 2020). Moreover, it places the burden of change on a single person:

> Since the answer is in slotting the *correct* people into existing power structures, and there are clear markers of who has been chosen and who has not, the audience is absolved of their ethical responsibility to confront injustice because they "aren't the type." Someone else has been chosen to fight those fights, to wield the magic sword against the demon king. Someone else will put their life on hold. And unless they come knocking at your door for help, you can go on about your day. (Owen 2020)

Lomax's stories do not openly challenge, or fracture, the notion of the Chosen One – it is, after all, at the very core of Rowling's story – but her eighteen alternative versions effectively stretch the idea until it loses its shape. Other people – Neville, Hermione, Ron – become the Chosen One, and Voldemort is still defeated. In the bleakest of the stories, "the kids who chose themselves", both Neville and Harry are killed as babies, and there is no Chosen One. Voldemort never suffers that first defeat, and the series' familiar characters grow up under his Death Eater regime. Even then, there is resistance, and it is ultimately victorious. Lomax writes: "There was no prophesied boy, but there was still this – dozens of shadowed young faces looking up at Albus and not running, even at the very end of the world" (Lomax 2015d).

With Hogwarts restricted to pure-blooded wizards, the parents of Muggleborn students create a school of their own, funded with James and Lily Potter's money:

> Their school was held in the basements of sweet shops and the attics of old Hufflepuff families and bespelled rooms in the backs of public libraries. [...] They all taught Silencing Spells and how to make Polyjuice Potion, how to lie, hide, run, and how to pretend to be wizardborn.
>
> When Mr. Goldstein found out that wizarding curriculum did not include an education in mathematics, he was horrified; he had been an accountant with his own firm, before Death Eaters had come for his youngest son, Anthony. (Lomax 2015d)

In this school, Muggle teachers teach mundane subjects as well, and the school "that lived in the basements, the attics, the backrooms, and the shadows" (Lomax 2015d) adjusts its rules to protect Muggleborn children, taking them "not at eleven, but whenever they were found, whenever they were threatened, and kept them as long as they would stay" (Lomax 2015d). Meanwhile, Dumbledore's operatives work doggedly behind the scenes to destroy the cursed objects into which Voldemort has placed pieces of his soul. "There was no prophecy to follow", Lomax writes, evoking the purported virtues of all the Hogwarts Houses, "so they would tear up the roots of this evil one by one. This was a work of years; they would be cunning, be brave, be wise; they would be unafraid of toil" (Lomax 2015d). Students from the underground school show up to the final battle with their Muggle parents: "There were no Chosen Ones, just kids who chose themselves – with wands or bottled hexes at their hips,

who had run and hid all their lives, because they had been waiting for the fight to matter" (Lomax 2015d). Dumbledore tries to dissuade them, and one of the parents protests, "It's a magical world[.] [...] But we live here too" (Lomax 2015d).

The final battle uses magic, but also guns and lockpicks: the hybridity that the pureblood wizards shun is a source of strength and ingenuity. When the battle is won, even though Hogwarts is open to all wizards again, the underground school stays, to accommodate students who would have a harder time fitting in at Hogwarts: werewolves, half-giants, and squibs, who are Muggles born to wizard parents. In keeping with Owens' critique, then, without the presence of a Chosen One, the wizarding community is compelled to enact the most sweeping changes to defeat Voldemort, and these changes include breaking down the barriers between the wizarding world and the Muggle world. Further, "the kids who chose themselves" is, of the eighteen tales, arguably Lomax's strongest argument for inclusion, because it is not merely a matter of individual student rights or systemic justice, but very explicitly a survival strategy.

A similar, although less sweeping, argument is made in "he will have power the dark lord knows not". Here, Harry himself is born a squib – again, a child of wizards who has not inherited their magical abilities – but he is still admitted to Hogwarts because he is the Chosen One. Although he cannot cast his own spells, he is still able to use a lot of the magic around him. "Brooms are magic unto themselves", Lomax suggests. "Invisibility cloaks are magic unto themselves. Little boys who believe in fighting for other people are magic unto themselves. Harry would never cast a charm or a hex, but he would throw a lot of punches, he would laugh at a lot of midnights, and a lot of people would raise their wands in his name" (Lomax 2015b). Being a squib in the wizarding world is analogous to being disabled, and Harry's confidence is initially shaken:

> "I can do less, so I have to do more?" Harry said.
>
> McGonagall looked at him sternly. She didn't know what she was going to say before she opened her mouth and she tried, when the words hit air, to not look surprised with herself. "What you can do is not *less*." (Lomax 2015b; emphasis in the original)

Although Snape refuses to teach him, other teachers have him learning magical theory or mundane techniques that will produce the same results as a spell.

Meanwhile, Harry also learns that other squibs have been barred from learning at Hogwarts. One of these is Leah Goldstein, the big sister of Harry's classmate Anthony Goldstein. Anthony is at first hostile because, as he tells Harry, "I don't have a problem with squibs[.] [...] Just special little kids who get things handed to them" (Lomax 2015b). Anthony and his family are Jewish, giving Lomax an opportunity to explore how non-Christian faith traditions work at Hogwarts. "[A]s Hogwarts fell into its intensive and absurd obsession with Christmas", she narrates, "Anthony

[...] shared sympathetic long-suffering glances with Cho Chang (Buddhist), the Patil twins (Hindu), and Lee Jordan (also Jewish), and wrote home to his parents and his big sister Leah" (Lomax 2015b). Eventually Anthony invites Harry home for the holidays, where Harry meets Leah and the rest of the family. As in the previous story, Anthony and Leah's father "made sure the kids got an education in mathematics and science past age ten and that they knew how to use a telephone, balance a checkbook, and drive a car" (Lomax 2015b).

Harry is able to use his familiarity with the theory behind magic to help correct students on their technique, and then to teach them (Lomax 2015b). In the third of Rowling's books, Harry wins the day by casting an advanced spell, a Patronus, after months of coaching. In this story, Harry uses his knowledge of magical theory to coach Hermione to do the same in only a few moments (Lomax 2015b). As he prepares for the final battle, Harry receives help from a secret network of squibs living as Muggles, unseen because Voldemort's forces do not recognize them as a threat (Lomax 2015b). Moreover, the ingenuity that Harry and others have displayed in finding ways for Harry to participate at Hogwarts with his classmates proves useful in the fight. And, as in the other stories, defeating Voldemort is a collective effort: Harry shouts the command, and others cast the spell on his behalf (Lomax 2015b).

Hermione and Leah become friends, and Hermione sees access to Hogwarts as a justice issue: "Every citizen of the wizarding world deserves an education[.] [...] This is about more than magic. You don't deny people their basic rights to community, culture, and learning just because their abilities are different than the norm" (Lomax 2015b). When Voldemort is defeated, the two women set out to change the law, although they voice different motivations for doing so:

> When *Prophet* reporters asked Hermione why she and Ms. Cohen-Goldstein were fighting so hard for their educational reform bill, Hermione quoted statute, ethical texts, diversity studies.
>
> When they asked Leah why they fought so hard, Leah smiled and said, "They need us. You need us. The wizarding world is less without us." (Lomax 2015b)

This version, too, ends up with a competing school being founded to accommodate squibs, werewolves, and the "magically adjacent". Yet some years later, the Cohen-Goldstein-Granger Bill for Educational Equality Reform is passed, and Harry becomes a teacher at Hogwarts. Here, too, is systemic change.

In *boy with a scar*, Lomax does not merely write and circulate a story that lovingly addresses the shortcomings of Rowling's work. She writes eighteen of them, reinscribing and reinforcing new positions in multiple variations. What Lomax circulates of Rowling's original text preserves Harry's goodness (in instances where he survives), the steadfastness of his friendships, and the inevitability of Voldemort's defeat. At the same time, she also circulates the assertions that the wizarding world

asks too much of its children and not enough of its adults, and that it suffers when it writes off Slytherins, the unmagical, or the unchosen – arguments made stronger for circulating across multiple stories. Lomax also introduces the idea that the precise configuration of friendships and alliances and heroisms and antagonisms present in the original novels is in fact shifting and contingent, rather than an expression of innate tendencies or simple truths about the world – an argument that can *only* be made fractally, across multiple variations, with a multiplicity of foci. Certainly the persuasiveness and evocative capability of every individual entry in *boy with a scar* is important, but its fractal quality, the combination of repetition and variation over a single canonical storyline – the idea that one can zoom in anywhere, and see that while the contours of the story are different, a basic pattern holds, related to but different from the pattern introduced by Rowling – is its own kind of argument.

One of the great strengths of fiction as a persuasive medium is its ability to frame the world in such a way as to reinforce the author's ideological orientation, making the events and circumstances in a text not only reasonable but inevitable. This is even more the case in fantasy, where the world created does not have to conform to the reader's understanding of the real world at all, so long as it is internally consistent. This process need not be conscious or deliberate, either; some tropes, thought patterns, and genre conventions are rooted in prejudices so widespread that even members of the groups they marginalize must work to unlearn them. In fan communities, readers who point out these prejudices are sometimes ostracized and the legitimacy of their fandom questioned (Thomas 2019: 149–150).

Lomax's fractal stories constitute, arguably, an effective way of writing back to texts precisely because they attract the most engaged, and are clearly written with love for the series, following most of its rules but subtly tweaking the world to make it richer and deeper than the original material while challenging – and thus refusing to circulate further – its core values. By turning a single sequential narrative into a kaleidoscope of shifting alternative scenarios, Lomax complicates the moral landscape of Rowling's original novels, argues for the greater inclusivity of imagined worlds, and underscores the possibility of collective action creating systemic change.

3 Fractal Seriality in VeroniqueClaire's *Volée*

The Phantom of the Opera (hereafter *Phantom*), which first appeared as a novel by French author Gaston Leroux in 1911, is somewhat unusual both as a media universe and as a fandom (Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2). This is because unlike

the *Harry Potter* franchise with which Lomax engages, *Phantom* is not a story universe that sees regular expansion through the release of new canonical media that extends the plot, fills in history, adds new characters, or adds sub-plots (Jenkins 2006: 104, 114; Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2). Rather, the novel focusses quite tightly on the central love triangle between the Phantom, Christine, and Raoul, the struggle between the opera managers and the Phantom over the latter's "salary" being the only subplot (Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2). What is more, the vast majority of the films, books, and plays released since the original novel are not expansions of the world of the story, but rather variations on the plot structure of the original novel in intertextual dialogue with the original and, often, with each other (Perry 1987: 56, 60–61; Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2). This includes the 1986 stage musical by Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, which is by far the most widely known such variation both outside and within the so-called "Phandom", and which is typically the "gateway drug" that gets "Phans" hooked on the story (Perry 1987: 81; Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2).

This mode of reiteration with variation, then, turns the central characters into serial figures (Kelleter 2017: 21) and gives the universe of *Phantom* media a hall-of-mirrors quality as themes, motifs, characters, and plot tropes reflect back and forth, the reflection always diverging from the original in ongoing intertextual conversation (Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: sections 2, 3, 4). This is true of 'Phanfics' (*Phantom* fanfics) as well, as these, too, are typically variations on the plot template of the source text. Even sequels – a popular subgenre – partake in this reflective quality as elements of the source-text plot must be reimagined to make the sequel work. This is especially true of sequels which, like *Volée*, alter the ending of the source-text plot to give the Phantom the happy ending denied him in canon.

A word about source texts before proceeding, however: although there is no completely universal consensus among Phans as to what, apart from the original novel by Leroux, constitutes canon, the original novel, the Lloyd Webber stage-musical, and the prequel novel by Susan Kay have wide acceptance in the Phandom (Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2). Thus, these three incarnations of the story are by far the most common source texts for Phanfic (Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2) – in Kelleter's framework, more likely to be used by audience members in their capacity as agents of narrative continuation (2017: 13). Typically, the main plot structure and characterizations of the Phanfic will be based on the original novel or the stage-musical, while the Susan Kay novel fills in backstory details not given in the original novel or musical (Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: sections 2 and 3). The 2004 film adaptation of the Lloyd Webber musical is also a common source text, although it remains controversial among Phans due to its departures from the stage version (Sackville-McLauchlan 2013: section 2) and its divergence from the expected circulation of story elements.

VeroniqueClaire's story *Volée*, then, takes an approach that contrasts with that of Lomax but can still be understood through the framework of fractal seriality. Rather than using a series of connected short stories to present a kaleidoscope of different possibilities of how the source-text might be re-imagined, in *Volée*, VeroniqueClaire zooms in on a single key moment in the Lloyd Webber musical of Phantom – the sequence from Act II scene 7 to scene 9 – to produce a single, long-form (147,883 words over 25 chapters, begun on 10 March 2006, and finished on 4 September 2020) Phanfic. In doing so, the author is able to take up themes of transformation and justice implicit in the source-text and expand them beyond what is imaginable within canon. She does this by transposing that action sequence into a modern setting and transforming the simple flight down through the opera house cellars of the source text (Act II scene 8) into a months-long, globe-spanning journey that is as much emotional as it is geographical. Indeed, as exciting as the action sequences enabled by the contemporary setting are, it is the emotional, relational, and moral growth of the characters that truly drives the Phanfic. As VeroniqueClaire herself describes in the story's fanfiction.net summary: "Gunshot wounds, fast cars, first class flights, FBI in pursuit – but it's the quiet moments, the conversations, that leave Christine shaken. Hurtling towards her inevitable decision" (VeroniqueClaire fanfiction.net summary for *Volée*).

Because the plot of *Volée* begins so close to the end of the Lloyd Webber musical (the end of Act II scene 7), most of the familiar plot nodes of the source text are shifted to backstory. Thus, the reader is not privy to most of the details of Christine and Erik's (the Phantom's) complex relationship prior to the moment when chapter 1 opens. A Phan with knowledge of the musical will be able to infer some of that context, but how these canon plot-points have played out in the world of *Volée* is left largely to the reader's imagination. All the reader is definitively given is that Erik first began teaching Christine to sing from hiding disguised as the "Angel of Music" (drawn from Lloyd Webber Act I scenes 2 and 3 and Leroux chapter 12), that one night he brought her to his home and revealed himself as a man (drawn from Lloyd Webber Act I scenes 3, 4, 5; Leroux chapter 12), and that Christine subsequently unmasked Erik revealing his facial "deformity" without his consent (drawn from Lloyd Webber Act I scene 6; Leroux chapter 12). Moreover, the reader sees that when she learned her teacher was a human being and not an angel, Christine felt foolish and ashamed for having believed the deception (VeroniqueClaire 2020: chapter 8, drawn from Leroux chapter 12). This mistrust, compounded by the mistrust on Erik's part generated by her having unmasked him, causes their relationship to break down before it can even get started. This much is revealed to the reader in a flashback sequence in chapter 8 of *Volée*. What happened between the night of Erik's revelation and the moment when, in chapter 1, Christine performs as bait in an FBI trap for Erik and is subsequently abducted by him right off the stage is only

referenced obliquely in Christine's private reminiscences and fights with Erik (VeroniqueClaire: chapters 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 12). For example, the reader is not given details of how Christine's childhood friend, Raoul, re-entered her life (chapters 2, 3, 7, 9, drawn from Lloyd Webber 1987: Act I scene 3; Leroux 1910: chapters 2 and 12). And the reader is only given vague hints as to the circumstances under which she and Raoul became engaged, notwithstanding her complicated feelings for Erik (chapters 3, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 16, 17, drawn from Lloyd Webber 1987: Act I scene 10; Leroux 1910: chapters 11 and 12). Thus, in a fractal way that demonstrates the hall-of-mirrors quality of Phantom media previously described, *Volée* is in dialogue with the Lloyd Webber musical even as it spirals a new story out from the point of a single key moment in the show.

The rest of the Phanfic, then, unfolds through their geographical travels (as they flee from the FBI and one of Erik's old enemies), which are the backdrop for and facilitator of Christine's and Erik's journey of personal and relational growth. For Christine, that journey involves learning to stand up to Erik even when he lashes out, to call out his worldview and behavior when necessary, and not to take his mercuriality and mood-swings personally (VeroniqueClaire 2020: chapters 2, 7, 9, 10, 16, 17). Even more, it is about learning to accept and become comfortable with complexity and messiness, grounded in empathy and compassion rather than rules of "good" and "bad" (chapters 3, 10–15, 20–22, 24). And her journey is about learning to assert her needs and boundaries, but from a place of empathy and compassion rather than of judgement, blame, or shame (chapters 2, 6, 7, 9–10, 13, 16, 17, 19). As VeroniqueClaire writes: "This wasn't a broken woman sacrificing her free will in exchange for the safe oblivion offered by a controlling man. This was Erik, desperate for her love, and her being strong enough to tell him what he needed to change for her to choose him" (2020: chapter 17).

Erik's journey, though we see it through Christine's eyes as the narration focuses on her point of view, is to begin to learn healthy relationality after a lifetime of abuse and violence. He must begin to unlearn the instinct to lash out whenever he feels threatened, and to become aware of how his words and actions impact Christine (VeroniqueClaire 2020: chapters 2, 6–7, 9–10). And he must unlearn the instinct to take what he feels he needs by whatever means necessary for fear that he will be denied because of his disfigurement if he asks (chapters 1–2, 8, 15, 19, 24). But, most crucially and most difficult, he must unlearn the deeply internalized belief that his facial disfigurement renders him fundamentally unlovable and undesirable, which belief has been the root of the conflict between him and Christine from the start (chapters 1–2, 6–10, 15–17, 19, 21, 22). It has rendered him unable to trust that her growing feelings for him are genuine (6–10, 15–17, 19, 21, 22):

> "It's the only way I could ever be... certain. You must remember, I have never had kindness in my life, before you, let alone – [...] Let alone... affection. It requires near-constant effort on my part to believe this isn't all some ploy to free yourself; some deception of yours or delusion of mine, all playing out excruciatingly slowly. You could fake an... attraction, feign tenderness, even, but a lifelong commitment? No one would ever marry a monster. If you married me, I would know it was real. That I was seen as a man, by the only woman on Earth who mattered." (chapter 19)

In her book *All About Love*, renowned Black feminist bell hooks has a passage that perfectly describes the Erik of *Volée* in this regard:

> When someone has not known love, it is difficult for him to trust that mutual satisfaction and growth can be the primary foundation in a coupling relationship. He may only understand and believe in the dynamics of power, of one up and one down [...]. [A]nd ironically, he may feel safer when he is operating within these paradigms. Intimate with betrayal, he may have a phobic fear of trust. At least when you hold to the dynamics of power, you never have to fear the unknown. You know the rules of the power game. Whatever happens, the outcome can be predicted. (hooks 2000: 153)

Indeed, Erik's inability to dislodge this belief in his fundamental unlovability, and the inability to trust that it engenders, nearly cost him and Christine everything when Raoul and the police finally catch up with them in chapters 21 and 22. It is only after this final calamity, as part of which both Christine and the reader spend a chapter and a half believing him dead, that Erik is finally able to come back to Christine ready to learn to trust (VeroniqueClaire chapters 22–24).

Christine, for her part, both throughout their long journey and in light of the final confrontation, has had to learn to accept Erik in his full human complexity, and to come to a place where she can forgive him (VeroniqueClaire chapters 11–15, 17, 20–24). She has had to come to understand that, although Erik has indeed done things that are objectively terrible in his life, he is not simply reducible to his worst actions. He is a complex human being who has been through a great deal of pain and comes from an extremely violent world, who nevertheless contains the capacity for both good and evil, hate and love (chapters 11–15, 20–24). This understanding allows Christine to finally fully accept her feelings for Erik without the shame of fearing that something must be "broken" in her to make her love and want someone so damaged (chapters 12, 23, 24).

This recognition that people are complex, and therefore not reducible to either their best or worst actions, is ground *Volée* shares with the Transformative Justice movement, which looks to move beyond retributive models for justice that impose punishment for wrongdoing, focusing rather on restitution and rehabilitation (Dixon 2020: 16; Mingus 2019; Morrigan 2020). Where retributive justice invests in policing, maintaining a strict separation between criminals and ostensibly orderly citizens, Transformative Justice seeks to address the systemic causes of

harm. *Volée*, like the Transformative Justice movement, recognizes that with the right emotional and material supports, someone who has caused harm can unlearn that behavior and learn healthier ways of relating (Mingus 2019; Morrigan 2020). To say that Erik, because of his actions, cannot or should not be loved, denies that there is a human being behind his mask. The seeds of this recognition are implicit in canon as well, but by spiraling off and circulating its own variation from the source text, *Volée* is able to expand them to create a more hopeful ending to the story. In canon, while it is Christine's demonstration of compassion for the Phantom which breaks the cycle of mistrust and violence in which they have been trapped, and which wins her and Raoul's freedom, it ends there (Leroux chapter 26; Lloyd Webber Act II scene 9). Due to his extreme isolation, the Phantom has no support structure to help him continue the work of transformation thus begun, and he dies shortly thereafter (Leroux chapter 26 and Epilogue, Lloyd Webber Act II scenes 8 and 9, although Act II scene 9 is more ambiguous regarding his death).

In *Volée*, however, zooming in on the three scenes in question and expanding them to book length gives Christine the space to ultimately come to love and forgive Erik, enabling her to offer him that needed support structure, including by calling out his behavior when necessary (VeroniqueClaire chapters 10, 13, 15, 16, 18, 24, 25). This allows him to go much farther along the journey of learning healthy relationality than the Phantom of canon, and it, likewise, allows the Christine of *Volée* to go much farther in the work of learning to accept complexity (chapters 10, 13, 15, 20, 21, 23, 24). Yet, the Phanfic's ending is also left more open in recognition of the fact that, for both of them, the work of building a healthy relationship remains ongoing (chapter 25). While every officially sanctioned and circulated version of *The Phantom of the Opera* ends with the union of Christine and Raoul, *Volée* zooms in on one scene and expands it to the length of an entire novel on its own, with all the complexity that entails. This gives both Christine and Erik the time and space they need to build a relationship together, making good on the promises of Transformative Justice that the musical alludes to, but it is also clear about the amount of work and change that goes into such a transformation.

4 Conclusion

Fractal seriality, as it is practiced in fanfiction, gives authors, and therefore readers, the ability to linger on a moment in a familiar text, refocus it, and take the narrative in different directions. As with mathematical fractals, 'zooming in' reproduces the patterns present in the original, with different variations. In *boy with a scar*, E.J. Lomax uses fractal seriality to create a series of parallel texts that both individually

and in aggregate circulate Rowling's values of kindness, friendship, and standing up to injustice, while insisting not once, but eighteen times, that these values must have a broader reach, and apply to more of the world, than the original text acknowledges. In *Volée*, VeroniqueClaire holds up a magnifying mirror to the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical of *The Phantom of The Opera* by zooming in on three scenes so closely that they create a new story that reflects on and speaks back to the source text. In doing so, she offers a more hopeful ending for the protagonists by exploring and deepening the powerful affinities with Transformative Justice already present in canon. Both strategies, breadth and depth, allow authors and readers to practice restorying, creating places for themselves in beloved texts, and reorienting those texts to point towards a more hopeful future.

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