SIMPLY ONE HELL OF A FANBASE: PERFORMING FAN COMMUNITY IN YANA TOBOSO'S *BLACK BUTLER*

A Thesis

By

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Abstract

This thesis investigates and analyzes the online performance of fan culture through the creation

and discussion of what are known as fan theories, which are ideas or critical analyses done by

fans of a particular media that are generated from questions, symbols, or references noticed by

fans of that particular media. For the research, I focus on Yana Toboso's *Kuroshitsuji,* or in

English *Black Butler,* fan community and some of the theories discussed amongst the fans within

the community in order to analyze how fans are engaging and interacting with one another in

order to create an online performance within online fan spaces . The thesis takes a look at the

history of the anime genre, the various references present within the *Black Butler* series, and how

the fans are performing their devotion, dedication, and passion for this particular series through

fan theories. Through interviewing fans and online ethnographic work, I argue that fans are

performing fan community and creativity through the sharing, discussing, and debating of fan

theories posted to online spaces.

Dedication

Dedicated to Timothy Buoy, a friend who believed in me and encouraged me to pursue my

dream

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

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INTRODUCTION

For most of my life, anime has been an escape as well as an enjoyment for me. From when I was five years old and first saw Sailor Moon transform, I knew that anime was going to stick with me for a long time. It wasn't until I became older and discovered shows like *Attack on Titan* and *Cowboy Bebop* that I discovered the online anime community. Once I joined a few, I discovered this amazing world of online fan culture and with it, I discovered what are called fan theories. In the world of fan communities, fan theories, which will be expanded on in chapter 3 of this thesis, are an idea or critical analysis created by fans. It wasn't until I started college that I finally sat down and watched a series that had been highly recommended to me known only as *Kuroshitsuji,* or *Black Butler* in English. I was in love after three episodes. The Victorian aesthetic and murder-mystery vibe instantly made me a fan. I immediately took to social media to express my love for the series, but I found something far more interesting within the fandom of *Black Butler*. I found a blog dedicated to what was called fan theories. Reading the posts made to the blog, I was falling deeper and deeper into the story of these characters and the story trying to unfold in the series. I discovered so many fan theories and unlike other anime fandoms I was a part of, these theories were engaging and causing fans to interact with one another. Through the creation of these pieces of fan culture, fans are performing their fandom in online media spaces.

This thesis looks at fan performance within the *Black Butler* fandom through the creation of fan theories. Fan theories have been defined by scholars such as Morgan E. Ellitrope and Sarah E. Brookes as a different form of a 'spoiler' for a particular media title, but opens the thread and idea up for debate (Ellitrope and Brookes 251). In Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, he examines how fans write about particular television programming by either changing or adding to the narrative, such as fanfiction or fan zines (Jenkins 162). Jenkins's definition and description of fanfiction and fan zine writing

showcases that fan writers who partake in these forms of fan creation are altering the narrative that has already been established by either recontextualizing, expanding the timeline, or doing crossovers with other media (Jenkins 163 - 170). Fan theories keep to the narrative that has already been created without changing or altering it to fit a different narrative. Fan writers of this particular fan creation study the narrative that has already been provided in its various forms in order to analyze the clues left behind by the creator.

Fan culture can be performed through a variety of different things such as fan art, fan fiction, and even cosplay. Through fan culture performance, fans can perform identity, passion, and even how they are feeling based on the post. Whether that be through typing in all caps or having emojis in some sentences, fan culture performance is present in many ways. However, the fan theories allow fans to engage in discussion in online spaces that showcase a very analytical side to fan culture performance. Throughout this thesis, I will break up my research into three separate chapters. The first chapter will cover the history of anime as we know it and how anime fans become, discover, and consume the genre. We will also learn about anime adaptation with folklore, literature, and a variety of different references that act as the base for fan theories. The second chapter will look at how *Black Butler* originated along with some of the references fans take notice of, which will play an important role in understanding how fan theories begin. Lastly, the third chapter will look at how the fans perform in the online community spaces by looking at online forums and social apps, which is where fans read, post, and discuss these fan theories. Fan culture performance, especially online, is very important for fans to stay connected with each other even during times of isolation as we currently are in. This research is important for discovering new forms of fan performance and fan culture that can be put towards other research into other fan communities.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the research has gone through changes on how I would be conducting my research. Due to the cancellation of in-person fan conventions, I have switched my research to online fan gatherings, where the fan performance and theories are the most intense. I am conducting this study by going into these online fan communities to observe how they are interacting with each other through fan theories and discussion as well as how they are reacting to them. Being both a fan and a scholar, there were some advantages and disadvantages I faced while conducting the research. As the fan, I sometimes wanted to interact with the theories I was reading, but I knew that would have a massive effect on the data I was collecting. For example: reading a particular theory a fellow fan created, but the information isn't correct or I myself may have viewed the scene differently. If I comment on the theory as the fan instead of the scholar, my comment may not give me the results I am looking for in this study or it could tamper with some of the ethnographic research present at the current time. However, as the scholar, I am taking the time to read these theories with an ethnographic viewpoint and I'm able to see how the fans are feeling through their posts, comments, and analysis. I will also be interviewing some fans from these forums about their thoughts on fan theories, fan interactions, and fan performance.

Some of my informants wished to remain anonymous and have chosen to go by their usernames for this study. All of my informants were only given a short description of the research and didn't know of the questions that I would be asking them. Goose20, DrGreyGoosey, and ChonChii are three users I personally know through the anime and fan community. I have known them for a few years now and reached out to them for an interview to which they graciously accepted and provided their perspective on fan theories, community, and performance. Through one of them, I met three other informants: OnePieceFan, Isai, and Sam Esser. The

informant, who introduced me, extended my research to them to which they were interested in talking to me about fan theories and fan culture. They also provided me with a variety of new areas to do ethnographic research online and new ways of looking at fan culture performance through fan theories. The last of my informants is a graduate student at Texas A&M University named Duha, who reached out to me after seeing my email about the research. Duha provided extensive commentary as someone who watched the anime first and then read the manga, similar to myself. All of my informants see fan theories as an active way for fans to create, share, and perform their devotion and investment to a series. They see it as something that gives fans who may not be able to do other forms of fan creativity a chance to still be involved with the community and showcase their dedication to the series and its creator.

My research showcases that performance through fan theories helps us understand fan identity, culture, and representation. Fans represent, identify, and perform their culture through showcasing their devotion, dedication, and craft. Through my research as both a fan and a scholar, the thesis I present to you will hopefully bring about future research into other fan studies for online performance as well as further study into fan theories.

HISTORY OF ANIME

When I first began to develop an appreciation for anime, my Dad once told me about when he was a kid and a series titled *Speed Racer* would air after he returned home from school. He would watch it every day and he told me that the animation was similar to that of, in his words, 'the *Sailor Moon* and *Powerpuff Girls* cartoons I would watch'. As a teenager in the beginning stages of becoming an anime fan, I was shocked that my dad knew *Speed Racer*. Of course, we watched *Dragon Ball* together when it occasionally aired after *Pokemon* or *Sailor Moon*, but I was fascinated that anime fans and anime culture existed in America way back when. This chapter will take a look at the history of anime and its transition over to America by studying the earliest forms of the genre, the establishment of companies, and the distribution of home video and English translations. We will also dive into some of the gateways for American fans like Toonami and Funimation. Knowing the history of anime, we will understand how the elements that fan theorists use to create their theories started to appear within the media genre. Through this chapter, we will get a sense of how anime fan culture formed in the West through the earliest days to the modern day.

Anime is an animation art style that comes from Japan. Like other forms of pop culture, anime didn't start out as widely known in the US as it is now. Anime, like all types of media, had humble beginnings and like American animation, it began with a drawing on a piece of paper. However, in this case, the piece of paper was actually an old film reel and the drawing was made out of chalk rather than pencil. The oldest recorded anime can be dated back to 1917 with a little five-minute-long reel titled *Mischievous New Picture Books*, or *Dekobo Shin Gacho* in Japanese. The shorts were created by Oten Shimokawa and had been lost to time until 2004 when they were discovered in a lock box in Kyoto by Matsumoto Natsuki, a researcher (Clements 20). These shorts played in the cinemas that were beginning to pop up across Japan during the year

1917. Because the shorts were of the silent film variety, they were accompanied by what is called a *benshi[1]*, or a narrator who would talk over the film, similar to that of the *benshi* seen at Noh and Bunraku theaters. However, the idea of these animations may have links to what is called *kamishibai[2]*, or paper theater. These street performances, that also incorporated the *benshi* storytelling style, would consist of pictures being slipped in and out of a frame to tell a story (Denison 71). The *kamishibai* performances were very popular during the 1920s and the postwar era of Japan, but declined in popularity when movie theaters and television became big in Japan's entertainment industry. However, they left behind quite the legacy with being the possible inspiration for *Dekobo Shin Gacho*. With the inspiration from *kamishibai* and the success of *Dekobo Shin Gacho*, Japan had unearthed cartoons and animation.

Rayna Denison states that according to fellow theorist, Nobuyuki Tsugata, there were three cartoonists that started up the Japanese animation industry: Oten SHIMOKAWA, Junichi KOUCHI, and Seitaro KITAYAMA (Denison 72). The three of them are collectively referred to as the 'fathers of anime' and it was thanks to their hard-work and massive productivity during their first year of animating that helped light the way for further animations. Junichi Kouchi was the animator for a cartoon short called *Namakura Gatana*, or *The Dull-Edged Sword* in English. The animation ran for a total of four minutes, one minute shorter than Shimokawa's five minute short, and was released the same year as Shimokawa's *Dekobo Shin Gacho*. The drawings were done in ink on blank sheets of paper, which to fans of American animation is recognizable. Lastly, Seitaro Kitayama used paper cut outs that were later animated. Out of the three pioneers of the art style, Kitayama made the most animations as his were adaptations of folktales, such as *Urashima Tarō*. According to Rayna Denison, the reason for these three animators turning to

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[1] *Benshi*: narrator for silent films
[2] *Kamishibai*: paper theater in Japan

folk tales and comedic antics for their animations is because the folk tales would be familiar to Japanese audiences and the comedy within the shorts allowed adults to have fun as well (Denison 72).

From its earliest days, anime has drawn on a variety of pre-existing sources and adapted them into this new form of entertainment for the future. The intertextuality present in series like *Black Butler* and many other modern anime series may have their origins in these earlier tendencies of using recognizable text to draw in attention from fans. It is what invites fans to theorize about various references, symbols, and clues that are present within the narrative. Even though, in recent years, anime may not be directly adapted from the original folk tale, there may still be remnants of the original being used as references, allusions, or even development material. *Neon Genesis Evangelion,* for example, is known for containing many religious subtext and references within its writing and storytelling. Another example of modern day anime using old material is Studio Ghibli's 2013 film *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, which was adapted from the famous Japanese folktale about the princess of the moon.

The latter two 'fathers of anime', Kitayama and Kouchi, would both go on to found their own studios. Kitayama was the first to set up shop in 1921 with his company called Kitayama Film Production Works, and his company became Japan's first animation studio (Clements 32). Japan saw the establishment of Kitayama's company as the turning point in the animation industry as it was starting to look profitable, until 1923.

The Great Kanto Earthquake destroyed many buildings and establishments, including Kitayama Film Production Works. Many pieces of animation created before 1923 were lost or destroyed. This disaster not only forced Kitayama to move his studio to Osaka, but it also caused a rift between the *benshi* style of film and the industry beginning to form. According to

Clements, many Japanese film creators saw this as a blessing because they no longer felt like they had to follow tradition, allowing the industry to modernize amongst the tragedy of the 1923 earthquake (Clements 35). With the barriers of tradition being knocked down, animation could now take a more modern route in Japan. Kitayama and his animation crew began first with making animated tutorial cartoons that were made for educational purposes. These educational cartoons ranged anywhere from how to do banking to pumping air into a tire. Thanks to these editorials, Kitayama was a well-known name amongst the film and cartoon industry, but the animation world saw a big boom in America with the introduction of Mickey Mouse in 1928. This caused a massive demand for narrative cartoons and led to the establishment of the first Tokyo-based film festival called Children's Film Day. To many animators, the Children's Film Day festival was the due date for a massive project as the festival was created to help encourage consumption amongst younger viewers. However, the festival also allowed for new technology such as cels and the addition of sound and music to be used in animation. During this time as well, Kitayama saw the exportation of his 1918 film *Momotaro*. Speaking of *Momotaro*, by the time the 1930s hit, Japanese animation saw a rise in new themes to their storytelling. One of which was militarism.

Japanese propaganda was beginning to merge into animation such as, for instance, the *Momotaro* films created by animator Seo Mitsuyo. The first to show such political themes was *Momotaro of the Sky,* released in 1931. The film depicts Momotaro going to war against a rival pilot to protect a tiny island housing penguins and seals on it. The film was then followed by its sequel *Momotaro's Underwater Adventure* in 1932, which reused some of the same themes, tropes, and storytelling of the first. The themes within these two films were showcasing that even the tiny islands off the coast require Japan to intervene with the eagles of the sky (Clements 54).

The *Momotaro* films even used anthropomorphic animals in them in order to showcase 'good'

folk animals going up against 'bad' folk animals. The animals were made to mask the racism that

were present in these films as the 'bad' folk animals were designed to represent the allied forces.

This use of allegory within these military type films was something that would later be used in a

variety of anime to come out of the modern era, but not for propaganda use. One example of the

modern era's use of allegory within anime is *Beastars*, which uses anthropomorphic animals to

tell a story with themes of racism and classicism. Allegories that are present within a series that

was either used as a base for the narrative like *Beastars* or occasionally makes appearances like

the 2015 anime *Death Parade*, which focuses on reincarnation and judgement, are also

information and clues fans create their theories off of. For example: the anime film *Perfect Blue*,

which tells the story of a pop idol turned movie star can be seen as an allegory for reality vs. the

avatar. By 1936, the animation industry in Japan saw the rise of 90-minute theatrical programs

that consisted of mixed genres and entertainment within small cinemas that began appearing

across Japan. It was here where the industry saw their chance to showcase new cartoons for

audiences, but there was a slight problem. Foreign imports such as Disney were taking up the

slots and this caused massive competitions for animators to get their cartoons into a theater's

slot. This situation would be addressed by the 1939 Film Law.

  The 1939 Film Law was proclaimed in April of 1939 and an expanded version came into

force that October. The law stated certain requirements for a cinema to follow, especially when it

came to what could be shown. Many of the laws and regulations were seen as a censor on many

films, made in or out of Japan, that says no film can question the government, empire, or

imperial family. The biggest impact comes from Clause 7, which states that all films made in

Japan had to be contributors to national policy (Clements 55). This law affected many young

people who looked forward to going to the cinema to see the newest foreign cartoon from America, but the law allowed for Japanese animators to have a chance at the big leagues and for their animations to be seen. All they had to do was follow the guidelines and keep the cartoons within a military view. By the 1940s, World War II was in full effect and Japanese animation continued to produce cartoons following the 1939 Film Law, but in 1941, some of the top animators were invited to a secret screening of Walt Disney's *Fantasia* and a cartoon from China called *Princess Iron Fan*. Both films were met with high praise from the animators who were present. *Fantasia* was praised for how just music, color, and animation were able to tell a full narrative without the underlying propaganda messages. *Princess Iron Fan* was also one of the last great cartoon events before the end of the war times (Clements 61). Both films were also regarded as full, feature-length pictures, something Japanese animation had yet to achieve. Not even the *Momotaro* films currently playing in cinemas were feature length. That all changed in 1945 with the release of *Momotaro's Divine Sea Warriors*, which is regarded as Japan's first full-length animated film. Like the *Momotaro* films before it, *Momotaro's Divine Sea Warriors* had propaganda messages and militarism themes sprinkled throughout. However, the film was still in black and white animation rather than the beautiful colors animators noted were present in *Fantasia*. After the war's end in 1945, many animators started to work for companies that were being established across Japan. One such studio to appear out of the ashes of war was one animation company that would go on to create some of the most well-known anime titles of the modern era: Toei Animation.

By 1953, television sets were introduced to Japanese households and were now the main source of entertainment outside of the theater. Due to the demand for household entertainment, studios were working hard to have content that could be shown on television rather than in

cinemas. Here is where Toei Animation and one of its biggest animators enter the history of anime. Toei Animation was established in 1956, when Masaoka Kenzo's New Japanese Animation Company was bought by the Toei Company. Through Toei Animation, animators would begin training through the studio's provided classes. Many of Japan's current animation companies were born from animators who took these classes (Dension 76). Toei Animation was the studio responsible for bringing the world of color to Japanese animation. In 1958 a film titled *Hakujaden*, or *The Tale of the White Serpent,* based on a famous Chinese folktale of the same name became Japan's first full-length animated film with animation cels in color released by Toei Animation. The film was received very well by audiences as Toei Animation's goal was to make cartoons suitable for a general audience and ones that could be distributed to other countries, mostly located in Asia. However, one name in all of Toei Animation is a name that would go down in history, a name associated already in the world of manga, or Japanese graphic novels: Osamu Tezuka.

Osamu Tezuka is one of the most famous animators to ever work at Toei Animation, creating other feature films based on folklore like *Sinbad*. In 1958, he worked with Toei Animation on adapting one of his own manga creations titled *Boku no Son Goku*, or *Son-Goku the Monkey King*. It wasn't long before Osamu left Toei Animation to found his own company, which began as Mushi Production. According to Clements, Osamu started with only five animators and by 1961, he gained a total of thirty (Clements 114), all of which came from Toei Animation. It was from this studio that the world would meet the boy who would go on to become the origin of anime today: *Astro Boy*. *Astro Boy* was one of Osamu Tezuka's manga titles published in the 1950s. The manga ended in 1968, seven years after Osamu founded Mushi Production. *Astro Boy* made his television debut on New Year's Day in 1963, but apparently was

first shown at the Mushi Pro Showcase eight weeks prior. Regardless, *Astro Boy* was paving a path for anime to appear on television. Why didn't Japanese animators try before *Astro Boy*'s debut to bring anime to television? Because the cost to broadcast animation on television was extremely high and many animators were having to rely on merchandising and sponsorship of the character in order to help out with cost. *Astro Boy* was distributed to the United States in the summer of 1963, debuting on NBC in black and white with new soundscapes and an English-dubbed voice track. The distribution rights and cost for *Astro Boy* helped cover many expenses Osamu and his team were struggling with in order to produce more *Astro Boy* episodes for Japan and now America. On a trip to America to meet with executives of NBC to go over the broadcasting of *Astro Boy*, NBC wanted Osamu to create another series, but this time in color, in order to have more of Osamu's work rather than just playing *Astro Boy* the entire summer. *Kimba the White Lion* was the creation of this agreement and became the first anime series to be shown in color. Following the success of both *Kimba* and *Astro Boy*, Mushi Production would go on to create more hit shows of the 1960s such as the first female directed series *Princess Knight*. All of these productions were based off of Osamu's own works. Of course, with success, comes rivals. Many other animators, including those at Toei Animation, were trying to copy the formula Osamu was using to generate lots of successful series. With each rival creation, Osamu and his team remained on top as they continued to produce hit after hit. The 70s brought many changes, some good and some bad, but it introduced an animator who would go on to make some of the most well-known anime films of all time.

Hayao Miyazaki is a household name when it comes to anime and anime films, but his part in the history of anime began in the mid-1970s with an anime series titled *Heidi, Girl of the Alps*. *Heidi* was a series produced by Zuiyo Eizo and was the series that introduced the world to

Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata. While *Heidi* brought a career in animation to Miyazaki and Takahata, the 70s would also produce some titles that would become staples in Japanese pop culture and be, what some fans called, their introduction to anime. The first title was *Space Battleship Yamato*, a space opera series that was released in 1974 in Japan by Group TAC. The series was later distributed to America in 1979 under a different name called *Star Blazers*. The reason for the name change was because one of the biggest science fiction films to ever be released was currently raging across the film market. That, ladies and gentlemen, was George Lucas's *Star Wars*. Thanks to the success of *Star Wars*, science fiction themed shows and movies were helping with sales and marketing within the film industry. Everyone wanted a piece of the science fiction market pie once *Star Wars* became big. However, while *Space Battleship Yamato* was making headway in reviews and production, many viewers of the female demographic preferred *Heidi* (Clements 149 - 150). For now, let's take a look at a series that made waves within Japan's pop culture in terms of merchandise sales.

If you were to ask anyone in the anime community what is the most well-known mecha anime series, the answer would most definitely be Sunrise's *Mobile Suit Gundam*, a series that has stood against the test of time as it has many incarnations being made today. Released in 1979, *Mobile Suit Gundam* didn't find its success through the anime series, but through the model toy line released by Bandai after the rights were purchased. These models helped keep the series a float for a while, but the original *Gundam* series ended in 1980 after a forty-three episode run. Many fans of the mecha anime still collect the models to this day. There are quite a few fans of the series who aren't afraid to show their *Gundam* pride by displaying their extensive collection of models that have been released over the years by Bandai. These days, the *Mobile Suit Gundam* models can be bought at a variety of fan gatherings and anime stores across the

West. This is another way fans can perform their love and dedication to a series by collecting the merchandise and supporting the official series by buying them. During the time of *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Mobile Suit Gundam*, television really helped the anime industry by exhibiting the various series that were available to the public while the anime films were still being released in Japanese cinemas. However, the biggest form of anime consumption came in the form of what is called a VCR, or video cassette recorder. During this time as well, anime fan culture was beginning to bloom in 1977 (Clements 157). How did this VCR boom help the anime industry?

The act of owning some of the anime titles released during the war times to enjoy in your own home was something not unknown to the people of Japan. Many people, including Osamu Tezuka's own father, were able to have some film prints of the *Momotaro* films for instance to watch in their own house. However, in order to 'own' the film, you needed the cash to do it and usually the film prints fell into the hands of private collectors. How did this change for others to own the titles they loved? Meet Fujioka Yutaka, the founder of a company called Tokyo Movie. Fujioka strived to attain funding in order to try and release animation titles on the medium of VCR. The title, however, for the first anime to be released straight to video cassette was an anime called *Dallos,* a science fiction film released in 1983 by Studio Pierrot. While the critics labeled the anime as bad, *Dallos* did showcase a change in the anime industry by introducing it to the world of video marketing. This way anime series could continue to thrive even when their time has ended. However, like all the mediums of anime before the VCR, there was slight confusion on how to exploit them correctly and commercially. An example provided by Clements in his book *Anime: A History* is *Momotaro's Divine Sea Warriors*. The film was rediscovered after so many years of believing to be lost, but once it was found, it was re-released

on VHS (Clements 160). This new market of home entertainment even helped fans overseas be able to own their favorite titles for continuous watching. One anime fan named Carl Gafford in 1978 created the term Japanimation and through this new term, English subtitled versions created by fans of anime started to become a common market amongst fans in America. These VHS releases of old anime titles from the 60s and 70s allowed them to find new life with new audience members and fans. Thanks to this new form of medium, shows were also able to get reboots or sequels such as *Space Battleship Yamato*. After *Mobile Suit Gundam* ended its run in 1980, it was a new age for anime dubbed 'The Golden Age'.

'The Golden Age of Anime,' or as most people call it, the 1980s, was a time for some of the biggest names in anime to be born and make their debut appearances. Whether that be through cinema, television, or VHS, the anime industry was seeing a rise in consumerism and ratings with the titles released during this era. One of the first big hits was in 1981 titled *Urusei Yatsura*, an anime about a perverted human and his alien finance based off of the works done by Rumiko Takahashi. The 80s also saw the rise of the sports genre of anime with the release of Tsuchida Production's *Captain Tsubasa*. In 1984, Miyazaki and Isao Takahata released their first movie titled *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*. *Nausicaa* started out as a manga series written by Miyazaki in 1982 that was published in Animage magazine, an entertainment magazine that is dedicated to animation and comics. The film was released in Japanese cinemas in the spring of 1984 and was released on VHS a few months later. The American release of the film in 1985, however, saw drastic changes to the original film. The film was reduced in running time and had many scenes edited or cut out in order to appeal to a children demographic. The title was also changed to *Warriors of the Wind* rather than *Nausicca*. Miyazaki was angry with this as the themes and messages of the film were completely lost in the edited edition released in America

and the UK. This started a new chain in how anime was to be released in America, especially with Miyazaki's future films. It was dubbed the 'no cuts' clause in the Studio Ghibli contracts. *Nausicaa* wouldn't see a full American release until 2005 with the Walt Disney Company purchasing the rights. Toei Animation even saw a big hit in the 80s with the release of an anime series adaptation of Akira Toriyama's manga series *Dragon Ball*. During the reign of *Nausicaa* at the Japanese box office, Toriyama published *Dragon Ball* in a magazine titled *Weekly Shōnen Jump*, a magazine series aimed towards a young male audience that published manga chapters of action genre series. Toei Animation then bought the rights to make an anime series based off the first 194 chapters of the manga series that would be titled after the manga series itself. The first episode was broadcasted in 1986 and the series ran until 1989. The series would then be followed by *Dragon Ball Z* in 1989 that would go on to adapt the last chapters of the manga series once Toriyama finished the series in 1995. *Dragon Ball* would then see its' American release in 1998 through a company called Funimation.

If you grew up with titles like *Dragon Ball Z* and *Cowboy Bebop* in the 90s and early 2000s, then chances are you have heard of Funimation Entertainment. Funimation was founded by husband and wife team Gen and Cindy Fukunaga in 1994 (Bennison 8). According to Fukunaga, an opportunity arose from a relative at Toei Animation to acquire the American rights to a series called *Dragon Ball* which at the time grossed over $3 billion from revenue alone (Bennison 8). Thanks to funding and investment, Funimation was established to begin on its first project: the dubbing of *Dragon Ball* for American audiences. However, it wasn't as easy as one would think. While *Astro Boy* and *Space Battleship Yamato* were easy to prepare and release for American television, *Dragon Ball* was quite a challenge. There were two failed attempts at releasing *Dragon Ball* onto American television, but as luck would have it, the third time's the

charm when *Dragon Ball* was released in 1998 on Cartoon Network's anime time block called Toonami. Toonami is a very important entity in the spread of anime in the 90s, but for now, we will continue with Funimation. The broadcast of *Dragon Ball* and its sequel, *Dragon Ball Z* were massive hits on American television. The hit of the *Dragon Ball* series allowed for Funimation to acquire the rights to other big hits of the company such as *Cowboy Bebop*, *Fruits Basket*, and *Full Metal Alchemist*. Over the years, Funimation would go on to establish an anime channel for television in certain cities, a streaming service, home video releases, and become one of the biggest distributors of anime in America, especially when it comes to dubbing the series in English. How were other anime titles being distributed though?

The 80s also saw the rise of the mecha anime once more with the release of *Robotech* in 1985, but with *Robotech*, there was a slight difference in its broadcasting. According to Fred Ladd and Harvey Deneroff in their book titled *Astro Boy and Anime Come to the Americas*, *Robotech* was an adaption project done by a man named Carl Macek and Macek took three separate anime series done by a studio named Tatsunoko Production called *Super Dimension Fortress* (Ladd and Deneroff 93 -94). The series premiered in America as *Robotech* and the sales once released on home video were very high for the company. The biggest hit of the 80s, however, came in the form of a cyberpunk film released in 1988 titled *Akira*. *Akira* was one of Japan's biggest financial anime films of the time due to an increase in budgets for animation companies to improve on quality and animation. With *Akira*, the animation team used CGI, or computer-generated imagery, for some parts of the film while the rest was done in the traditional cel format. It was also the first anime to incorporate pre-recorded dialog that the animators then had to match. While *Akira* was labeled as a subpar film in Japan and didn't make much of its revenue back at the Japanese box office, the film was a commercial and international success in

America both at the box office and home video. *Akira* became the first anime film to be an American blockbuster film hit (Ladd and Deneroff 192). According to Ladd and Deneroff, the term anime was hardly being used still in America until *Akira* came on the scene and showed America that cartoons could be for adults too due to its violent imagery (Ladd and Deneroff 2). Anime, by this time, was starting to be recognized in America. By the time of the 90s, anime would soon be labeled as mainstream.

During the 1990s, Japan saw an economic crash and this caused many budgets to be pushed back. Animation companies were either beginning to close down or release big hits on small budgets that made back revue such as Studio Ghibli's *Kiki's Delivery Service* or Toei Animation's *Sailor Moon*. *Sailor Moon* and a few other titles of the 90s play a key role in the distribution of anime to the west as we know it today. In 1991, *Sailor Moon*'s manga was published by Naoko Takeuchi in the *shōjo*, or female orientated manga, magazine called Nakayoshi. *Sailor Moon* was purchased by DIC, an American animation company, through Kodansha in order to be released in America. However, DIC had quite a problem when it came to adapting *Sailor Moon* for American audiences. Anime series that were made from the 60s onward have always been pretty long in terms of how many episodes there were and the content of these shows ranged from violence to slight nudity. *Sailor Moon* had it all. DIC needed to follow both the terms and conditions of its own company while also making sure any changes that were made were agreed upon by Kodansha. Carl Macek of *Robotech* fame was called to help adapt *Sailor Moon* for television in 1995 and he made sure that any scenes of violence, especially towards children, were cut from the final product (Ladd and Deneroff 100). *Sailor Moon* made her American debut in September of 1995 on the FOX channel. According to Ladd, only the first season was aired on television while the following two seasons dubbed *Sailor*

Moon R and *Sailor Moon S* were released on home video. *Sailor Moon* would find itself airing alongside *Dragon Ball* on a time block created by the channel known as Cartoon Network that would be centered around airing anime at certain times of the day for American audiences.

Toonami is currently a part of the late-night television block on Cartoon Network known as Adult Swim and airs regularly on Saturday nights with new episodes of ongoing series along with reruns of old favorites. However, Toonami originally didn't start that way. Using a combination of the words 'cartoon' and 'tsunami', Toonami was created by Sean Akins and Jason DeMarco and started its first broadcast on March17, 1997 on the Cartoon Network channel. Toonami aimed to air action packed shows during the afternoon to evening time slots with most of the shows being anime. Shows that have been covered in this chapter like *Robotech*, *Sailor Moon*, and *Dragon Ball* had much larger impacts on American audiences through Toonami than it did on other channels as the time block was broadcasted during the day, making it easier for audience consumerism. In 2004, however, Toonami was moved to a Saturday evening time block and the weekday time block was replaced with Miguzi, the friendly version of Toonami's programming. Shows like *Naruto* and *One Piece* that were part of Toonami in the early 2000s were becoming too violent, hence the move to Saturday evenings. Another impact Toonami had on fans of anime in America was introducing the West to Miyazaki and his collection of films.

Being a kid in the early 2000s, one commercial bumper on Cartoon Network my friends and I have vivid memories about are of a white dragon and a young girl calling for him. We remember seeing pigs in human clothes, a witch covered in jewels, and a spirit with a white mask. This commercial was for the award winning film, *Spirited Away*. While Disney bought the rights to Studio Ghibli for the home video and theatrical releases of the films, Toonami would

have weekend movie nights in 2006 where films like *Spirited Away* and *Princess Mononoke* broadcasted on television. This was dubbed the "A Month of Miyazaki" movie marathon by fans. On a reddit post for the tenth anniversary of the marathon, a user named Rozeline commented "This was my introduction to his work. These movies were like nothing I'd ever seen before," (Rozeline). Another user named jjday replies to Rozeline's comment about their own experience with the marathon by stating "I remember this marathon like it was yesterday! I had this little CRT television in my room and I had it hooked up to cable and I would watch these intently," (jjday). Many of the comments following after were of fellow fans talking about being 5 years, 10 years, or even 16 years in 2006, hooking up their CRT television sets, and being introduced to anime through Toonami and most importantly, the Miyazaki marathon. Sadly, after many years on Cartoon Network, in 2008, Cartoon Network announced that Toonami was set to be canceled after receiving some low ratings in recent years. Many fans were devastated to hear that the only time block dedicated to action shows, especially anime from Japan, was being canceled. Toonami would not see a return until four years later when Adult Swim, the late-night program on Cartoon Network, announced that Toonami would be back as part of Adult Swim's time block with new programming and episodes of everyone's favorite shows. To this day, Toonami continues to bring new anime series and movies to American television, even bringing back some old favorites from the past like *Cowboy Bebop* and the *Dragon Ball* franchise. For many anime fans, including myself, Toonami was our gateway, but as the years roll on, a new gateway to the world of anime opened up.

Returning to the idea of streaming anime online, thanks to the internet's role in socialization and connection, anime fandoms began to emerge and grow in online websites and communities. With companies like Funimation and eventually Crunchyroll, another popular

anime streaming company, anime became accessible to fans outside of television. Whether that

be in video rental stores or through the early age of YouTube, anime was beginning to flourish in

online spaces. While many fans can recall renting anime films or series like *Akira* and *Sailor*

Moon from video stores, others recall the early days of YouTube when anime was uploaded in

parts to the YouTube video sharing website. This was how more obscure and lesser known titles

were gaining popularity before the likes of Netflix and Hulu existed. Over time, the internet

flourished and websites dedicated to fandom began to help in the spreading of anime culture.

Websites like tumblr for instance helped many titles shine in the spotlight if only for a short time

to welcome new fans who stumble across the posts from other users who are fellow fans.

Now that we know the history of anime, we now see how anime has made such an

influence on American audiences and became a massive pop culture icon. Not only that, we

learned how anime fans in America were able to consume the anime genre and create fan culture

centered around the animation genre. With the release of streaming in recent years, more and

more titles of anime are being introduced to the West and, in turn, creating new fans of the genre

or allowing current fans to indulge in new material. We do have Funimation to thank for the

series I wish to introduce you to. This show, who's first season premiered in 2008, is why you

are here, isn't it? Without further ado, let me introduce you to *Black Butler*.

While I was in high school and helping out with an after-school club that catered mostly

towards anime, one title was constantly being brought up by some of the girls in the club. They

always talked about the 'handsome butler' and 'his young master', but never gave me much

context to what the show was about. Over time, I heard different summaries of the show, but all

of them didn't make the show sound interesting. It wasn't until my first year of college when the

show returned to my life. Only this time, I actually gave it a chance and watched it after getting

an actual summary. I was hooked. Being the attentive-to-detail person that I am, I was quick to notice the references to literature and history within the series. It just got me thinking about why they are in the series and what they could be alluding to. The air of mystery these references created and the puzzle I was trying to solve really had me thinking about various things that could possibly happen next based off the references. Needless to say, many fellow fans I have met along the way thought the same thing. In this chapter, we will discuss the history and various adaptations of Yana Toboso's *Black Butler* in the first half and follow it up with taking a look at some of the references within the series. The references we will take a look at in order are historical references, references to literature, and references to two different religions. These three sets of references are important as they are the bulk of many fan creations and ideas. They are the details that are quickly noticed and analyzed by fans of the series. The history references refer to actual police cases and historical figures that lived during the Victorian era. The literature references are from popular writings of the Victorian era or were written in England. Lastly, the religious references to Catholicism and Hinduism represent religious discussions present during the Victorian era.

In September 2006, a new manga title graced the pages of *Square Enix's Monthly GFantasy*, a shonen magazine or young teen/adult periodical publication containing the newest chapters for manga published by the company. The manga focused on a young boy and his demonic butler solving crimes and on a quest for revenge set against the backdrop of Neo-Victorian England. The series was titled *Kuroshitsuji*, or in English *Black Butler*. *Black Butler* was the creation of *mangaka*[3], or manga artist, Yana Toboso, who has worked on other series and creations by *Square Enix* such as *Rust Blaster*. Toboso has even had her hand in other projects outside of the manga industry such as the Japanese mobile game *Disney: Twisted*

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[3] *Mangaka*: manga artist, artist for Japanese graphic novels

Wonderful and the 2021 anime series *Skate Leading Stars*. The *Black Butler* manga series is still on-going with Toboso releasing a new chapter each month in *Monthly GFantasy*, which is then available on Kindle devices and licensed eBook websites like Book Walker in other countries. *Black Butler*'s first anime adaptation began airing on Japanese television in October 2008 and would be published to anime streaming sites a year later.

In *Anime: A Critical Introduction*, Rayna Denison states that when *Black Butler* appeared on the cover of the anime magazine *Animage* for its December 2008 issue, the cover featured the two main characters, Ciel and Sebastian, in an embrace (Denison 163). Ciel, who identifies as male in the series, is dressed as a girl, wearing a pink formal ball gown with a hat to match while Sebastian holds him in a romantic embrace. Their eyes gaze out towards the viewer of the magazine. Denison notes that the cover of the magazine as "the text around the image lays out the content of the magazine, but adds little information about the show other than its title, the fact that it is giving away free merchandising for it, and that it contains a special discussion between two of its voice actors," (Denison 163). In the article titled "The Victorian Childhood of Manga: Toward a Queer Theory of the Child in Toboso Yana's *Kuroshitsuji*", Anna Maria Jones defines what is called a *shōnen ai*[4] or boys' love as "manga that focuses on male-male romantic and erotic relationships" (Jones 4). These type of stories, similar to what is called Slash Fiction, or romantic fan fiction of a same sex couple, in America, are mostly popular with a female demographic and Jones notices that while *Black Butler* is published by *Square Enix* in a *shōnen* style magazine, the characters are drawn in what is called the *bishōnen*, or beautiful boy, style of manga that is aimed towards a female audience. The *bishōnen*[5] art style consists of characters being drawn as ultra-slender with sometimes feminized lines. Similar to the popular all-female

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[4] *Shōnen ai*: boys' love manga
[5] *Bishōnen*: defined as beautiful boy

theatre performance known as Takarazuka Revue, where women cast in the role of the male lead appear and sound androgynous, the *bishōnen* art style has its characters drawn in a similar fashion that, like the *otokoyaku*[6] role within Takarazuka, appeals to the female demographic. The character of Grell Sutcliff, a transgender woman character within *Black Butler*, has been argued by fans to be drawn in an almost androgynous style. Jones goes on to describe the relationship between *Black Butler*'s two main leads as "not explicitly sexual, it is suggestively so, with the narrative providing numerous 'eroticizable' scenarios" (Jones 4). She provides some examples of these scenarios such as scenes of Sebastian helping Ciel get dressed for the day and teaching him how to dance. While some scenes tease at the idea of a *shōnen ai* anime being presented, the anime contains mostly a dark mysterious atmosphere with some comedy and drama patched in throughout. The year 2008 saw the release of quite a few titles that fell within the *bishōnen* style or *shōnen ai* genre. Titles like *Junjo Romantica*, *Rosario + Vampire*, and *Vampire Knight* being released before *Black Butler*'s anime debut showed that this style and genre of anime were very popular since all three titles received second seasons after *Black Butler* started airing.

While the advertisement published for the *Black Butler* anime series showcased the *shōnen ai* or boys' love genre, upon closer inspection of the anime itself, it was clear that the series was much different from the advertisement being presented in the *Animage* magazine. The manga that the anime is based off of is also published in a magazine that caters to titles of the *shōnen*, or action, variety that are based mostly within a realm of fantasy. Compared to another popular publisher of *shōnen* manga, *Weekly Shōnen Jump*, which caters to a mostly male demographic, the manga being posted within *Square Enix's Monthly GFantasy* caters mostly to varied reader demographics. *Monthly GFantasy* was running other popular series with the same supernatural and fantasy themes as *Black Butler* around the same time such as *Nabari no Ou* and

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[6] *Otokoyaku*: the male role within a Takarazuka Revue performance played by a woman

Higurashi When They Cry. Just like these other two titles, the manga had its fair share of adaptations, whether for good or badly adapted.

The first season of the anime adaptation followed closely to Toboso's original storyline featured in the manga, but would later add characters and scenarios that don't appear in the manga to create an original plot. Toboso's original manga was still being written at the time of the first anime adaption and with a new episode coming out each week, she couldn't create new content for the animators and writers to use in order to keep up. Therefore, a new plot and ending was given to the series in order to allow the anime to continue on and not be put on hiatus. In "The Repurposed Fantasy: Doujinshi and the Japanese Media Mix, Anya Benson states in her essay "the first season of the *Kuroshitsuji* anime provides an ending not shown in the manga, dangling the possibility of Ciel's soul finally being consumed by Sebastian" (Benson 136). Benson also states that the ending of narratives or works of fiction can often be left incomplete and sometimes even altered. This was the case with Sebastian and Ciel's next anime appearance.

In 2009, *Black Butler* would see its second anime adaption in the form of a sequel, or second season, to the first anime adaption. This time, the series was dubbed *Black Butler II* and would focus on a completely original story that did not appear in the manga. Season two picks up right where the last season ended and would only span twelve episodes. This season also introduced fans to demon butler Claude and his master, Alois Trancy. These two characters, while at first appearing to be the main focus of the second season, are later revealed to be the main rivals to Ciel and Sebastian respectfully with Claude and Sebastian battling for the right to Ciel's soul and Ciel and Alois battling for life. It is here where Benson's statement about endings being altered or revised comes to light. The reason behind *Black Butler II*'s story is that Claude has swooped in to claim Ciel's soul, stopping Sebastian from completing the contract as seen in

the ending of season 1. Benson states that the different adaptations of the Black Butler story all have set endings, but they take place between the beginning and the ending that has yet to be published in its manga format (Benson 128). "The second season alters that ending and then proceeds to provide its own version of an ending, [in which] Ciel becomes a demon himself" (Benson 136), almost giving the ending of *Black Butler* an air of completion to those who may not want to read the manga. These differences in endings and even in original content outside of the manga play a huge part in the creation of fan theories. If Toboso had a hand in creating something in the *Black Butler* universe outside of her original manga, fans don't take it out of the realm of possibilities. To the fans, Black Butler II could be seen as an alternate ending to the original manga or foreshadowing what is to come in the manga. Both season 1 and season 2 of *Black Butler* were picked up by Funimation for streaming and dubbing in English for American audiences.

Once *Black Butler II* came to an end, it would be four whole years before *Black Butler* ever saw another anime adaptation. The third adaption and season of *Black Butler* brought audiences back to Toboso's original manga's plot line. The third adaption, dubbed *Black Butler: Book of Circus*, is described by mostly the fans as a continuation of the first season, but done in a way where it can also be watched as a stand-alone series especially if you want to watch a series closely related to the manga. *Book of Circus* introduces us to the performance troupe of Noah's Ark Circus and the dark mastermind behind many kidnappings throughout England. The series, or season as some fans dub it, began airing on Japanese television in the summer of 2014 and ran for a total of ten episodes before ending on September 12th. During the run of *Book of Circus*, another anime adaptation was in the works that would premiere as a two-part original video animation, or OVA, in cinemas across Japan. A month after *Book of Circus* came to an end,

Japanese cinemas and *Black Butler* fans saw the release of *Black Butler: Book of Murder*. Once again, the creators went back to the original source material and adapted the *Book of Murder* arc of Toboso's story, but this time for the big screen. The plot of *Book of Murder* focuses on Ciel hosting a get together at the Phantomhive mansion, but the guest of honor turns up murdered and Ciel becomes the prime suspect. Part 1 of the OVA premiered on October 25 while Part 2 premiered on November 15. The final anime adaption would see the *Black Butler* cast return to the big screen in a feature length film adaption of another key plot in Toboso's manga. The film adapts the *Book of Atlantic* arc of the story and was released in Japan on January 21, 2017. The title of the film was *Black Butler: Book of the Atlantic*. An American release of the film, done by Funimation Entertainment, would be released as a two-night limited engagement in the month of June on the 12th and the 14th. On one of the nights, the film would play in its' original Japanese audio language and on the other night, the film would have its' English dub premiere. The plot of the film focused on Ciel and Sebastian boarding a luxury cruise line called the Campania to investigate a secret society bringing the dead back to life, but when the undead escape from their coffins and start walking the halls of the ship, no one is safe.

As of now, no other anime adaptations of *Black Butler* have been planned by Toboso or anime production companies, but there have been other adaptations of the series in many different forms of entertainment and media for fans to enjoy. However, some of these adaptations are not canonical to the *Black Butler* universe according to fans, but Toboso has had some hand in helping to create or the adaptations provide a bit of background as to where they take place in the manga's canonical story. *Square Enix*, for instance, published a Nintendo DS game based off the manga and anime series. The storyline of the game takes place after the events of Chapter 13 in the manga. However, the game has never been released outside of Japan. A live action film of

the series was released on January 18, 2014, but received mixed reviews from both critics and audiences as it changed many things from the manga series such as Ciel's gender, the setting, and time period. There have also been a total of six musical adaptations of *Black Butler*, each one focusing on an original idea or a plot from the manga series. The first two musicals were based on original concepts and therefore did not appear in the manga. However, the opening introduction by the character Abberline in the first musical and Sebastian in the second musical helped the audience understand where the musicals take place in the *Black Butler* universe. The other four musicals were based on the following plot lines from *Black Butler*: The Jack the Ripper Case, Noah's Ark Circus, the Campania Incident, and the public school case. The first five musicals, however, had recurring actors such as Japanese actor Yuta Furukawa reprising the role as Sebastian for three of the musicals and Japanese actor Shuhei Izumi reprising the role of Undertaker in five of them. The first five musicals have been filmed and released on DVD in Japan for fans to watch and enjoy from the comfort of their home. The sixth musical started its line of live performances at the Galaxy Theatre in Japan on March 5, 2021. With all the various adaptations of the original source material, it is quite fascinating how many different renditions there are of the characters, story, and themes.

"My, How the Plot Thickens," [7]: References and Adaptations Within *Black Butler*

Now, what do all these different adaptations have to do with the fans? Could these references to other titles, locations, and ideas that exist outside of the *Black Butler* universe be seen as forms of adaptation? In the preface of Linda Hutcheon's book titled *A Theory of Adaptation*, there is a quote that states "an adaptation is likely to be greeted as minor and subsidiary and certainly never as good as the 'original'" (Hutcheon xii). When looking at the various adaptations made of the original manga, *Black Butler* manga fans argue that the first and second anime adaptations are not the greatest as the creators added scenes, characters, and narratives that don't exist in the manga, making it harder for fans of *Black Butler* to follow the actual narrative if they've never read the manga. However, fan theorists would argue against this and state that anything made for the *Black Butler* series, whether in the original or not, is up for analysis. The fans would even go on to state that if Toboso herself had a hand in the various adaptations outside of her original creation, then it is still a part of her original creation as she, the creator, worked on it. When it comes to fan theories, if the creator is still attached to the various adaptations being created, then fans will still consider it within the same narrative as the original story and very well may hint at upcoming events for the manga.

It is the references and adaptations that fans are noticing when reading or watching the series that get their creative juices following. Throughout *Black Butler*, both in manga and anime media, there are many subtle references to literature, history, and religion scattered throughout the plot of the story. This even pertains to the parts of the anime that don't appear in the manga at all. Many of the references are used as either forms of foreshadowing, world building, themes, or as allegories. According to one pop culture fan, who wishes to go by their Xbox username Goose20, "I really liked how the theme of everything in the series matched up perfectly with the

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[7] Quote said by Lau in *Black Butler: Book of Murder*

darkish themes they were going for" (Goose20). As seen with the background into *Black Butler*, when the anime first aired, it wasn't a true adaptation of the manga as it was still being written, but it is still an adaptation. The many references featured in the series seem to be direct adaptations or direct references to the different intertextuality being spread throughout the series. We will first begin by looking at how actual London history is portrayed in *Black Butler*.

Black Butler is set during the Victorian Era of London, which was between the years of 1837 and 1901. In the first season of the anime, Ciel mentions that Queen Victoria's husband has passed away and that the queen had been in mourning ever since. Victoria's husband passed away in the year 1861. *Black Butler*'s main story first takes place in 1888 before moving on to 1889. The timelines are already matching up from fact to fiction. The queen's first appearance in both the manga and anime is during the Curry Fair at the Crystal Palace, but she is accompanied by different servants in both versions. However, she is depicted as wearing all black in both versions, but only the anime is shown to be in mourning as would be historically accurate. Black Butler fan Duha states "The queen is real. She is seen wearing all black and she used to wear all black during this era! It was real!" (Duha). The manga still depicts her wearing mourning clothes, but she is happy and carefree in her first appearance. Queen Victoria doesn't make another appearance in the anime adaption until *Book of Circus* in the second episode, where she narrates the contents of her letter to Ciel. Her attire matches that of the actual Queen Victoria and depicts a more faithful adaptation of the historical monarch. However, during the climatic arc of the first anime season, it is revealed that the queen that was making public appearances alongside her angelic butler, Ashe Launders, was actually her younger and more childlike self than the true queen. While her demeanor and clothing in the first anime adaption are true to history, this part changes history in order to fit with the narrative of the story.

Another piece of London history featured in the series is still one of the city's biggest mysteries and it involves the disappearances of two young princes from the infamous Tower of London. In 1483, King Edward V and his younger brother, Duke Richard of York were given lodgings in the tower by their uncle, Richard III in order to prepare for the coronation of Edward V and protect the young princes from assassination attempts. However, Edward would not see the throne become his for himself and his younger brother disappeared from the tower, never to be seen again leaving their uncle to take the throne in his stead. For years, many skeptics, writers, historians, and London civilians have tried to find out what happened to the two princes with some claiming they were murdered while others claim they may have escaped and lived as civilians for the remainder of their days. The story has become quite the ghost story for tourists to the Tower of London with many paranormal investigators trying to see if they can contact them so they can find out what happened to them. *Black Butler* takes this famous mystery and ghost tale of London history and adapts it into an episode for the anime only. In the anime's 16th episode, Ciel and Sebastian travel to Ludlow Castle after hearing that it was haunted by some workers. According to history, Ludlow Castle was where the two princes lived for most of their lives before being moved to the tower. Ciel and Sebastian do meet the two missing princes, who claim that the castle is their home and they don't plan on leaving. Ciel also loses Sebastian to the princes when he plays against Edward V in a game of chess. It is up now to the both of them to help the two young boys find peace and move on. The episode follows closely to the legend that the princes were murdered for the throne. However, it follows a different trail than history did about the princes' remains, saying they were dumped in a river rather than buried like many believe due to a pair of skeletons being found on the grounds 200 years later after their disappearance. This legend and another infamous piece of London history to be discussed soon,

while being unsolved, are very much similar to the fan theories that'll be discussed in the next chapter. Fans are trying to solve these unsolved mysteries that Toboso is scattering around the series, similar to how many historians to this day are still trying to solve the mystery of the missing princes. Within the Ludlow Castle, Ciel also finds a painting of the two princes in the tower, which is an adaptation of an actual painting of the princes.

The last adapted piece of history I will discuss is the infamous Jack the Ripper mystery. Within London, Jack the Ripper is one of the most famous unsolved cases next to the disappearances of Edward V and Richard. Jack the Ripper is documented in history as a serial killer who murdered female prostitutes and whose identity has never been revealed. In *Black Butler*, Ciel is given the task by Queen Victoria to capture Jack the Ripper and bring him to justice. With the aid of his aunt, Madame Red, and ringleader of the opium underground, Lau, the young boy and his butler investigate the various crime scenes and enlists the help of Ciel's informant Undertaker in order to capture the killer. The list of victims that are given to our main protagonists is the exact list of victims in the exact order they were murdered as adapted from history. The locations are also taken from the historical records of where the bodies were found. The only thing changed from history is the description of the bodies as stated by Undertaker. "The uterus is missing, which is quite… odd," (*Black Butler*) Undertaker tells Ciel after making a comment that the bodies are missing the uterus. The name of the last victim in both historical documents and the series was Mary Kelly, whose death was described as the most brutal and disturbing. Ciel is actually seen reacting to the crime scene when he and Sebastian stumbled upon Madame Red's butler, a grim reaper named Grell Sutcliff, murdering Mary. While Jack the Ripper in reality was never caught, Madame Red is revealed to be the culprit during the case. One piece of information that has been argued by historians is whether or not Jack the Ripper

was a doctor due to the police files stating that the wounds on the bodies could be compared to surgical cuts. There have even been theories that Jack the Ripper was a woman. Similar to fan theorists and their work, historians with the Jack the Ripper case and the actual police in charge of the case were coming to conclusions or theories based on scant evidence. However, just like in history, Ciel refuses to reveal the true name of Jack the Ripper to the queen, leaving the case to the underworld and to history. This is how Toboso chose to end the adaptation of the Jack the Ripper case to her manga and the anime as that is how history has closed the case. The killer's identity had never been revealed so Toboso chose for Ciel to never reveal that his aunt was the killer.

Duha brought up an interesting comment by stating "Since the series takes place in the [Victorian era], it has been done very, very accurately…The houses and how they're designed, the characters and what they wear…Everything is very well studied," (Duha). Duha even brings up how other anime or manga series that are set during a particular time in history or against the backdrop of a real city sometimes take creative freedom with it or fantasize it a bit in order to help with the story they are trying to tell. However, with *Black Butler*, she states "it seems like [Toboso] did a whole history about England…I took a history class on British history when I was watching *Black Butler* for the first time and everything that was happening actually happened, just with added characters," (Duha). Many of the sites featured in the series such as the 1889 world's fair in Paris, Crystal Palace in London, and Weston College that is featured in the manga are all actual sites or historic events. Even though the Crystal Palace burned down in 1936, the design of the building in the series matches the real one that once stood in Hyde Park. In the extras of the *Black Butler* volume 1 manga, Toboso states "I wasn't too familiar with Great Britain itself…I started doing research because the manga is based in Great Britain, although it is

a parallel world," (*Black Butler* vol. 1). Toboso clarifies Duha's observation and that Toboso did

do her research in order to make sure everything was accurate from the clothing to the buildings.

Fans, like Duha, take notice of this. I, myself, have as well once upon a time when I first started

Black Butler. Being the history nerd I am, I was even taking notice of similarities between

history and the series like Duha. The history references within *Black Butler* help with not just the

world building and time, but also the tone of the story. Many of the historical contexts present in

Black Butler were not the happiest of times. They were quite dark and the history present helped

shape that for the mystery slowly unfolding as the series progresses.

      Now how does Toboso use literature references in *Black Butler*? Jones states that *Black*

Butler "alludes directly and indirectly to British and American works whose authors have a long

history in Japan" (Jones 4). The *Black Butler: Book of Circus* storyline centers mostly on

allusions and details from the fairytale called "The Pied Piper of Hamelin". As stated before, this

particular part of the story focuses on a traveling circus troupe known as Noah's Ark Circus. Ciel

and Sebastian are given the task of going undercover within the troupe to find out if the circus's

actors are responsible for a string of kidnappings that have been happening along the route the

circus is taking. Throughout this part of the story, one famous fairytale continues to make an

appearance whether through one familiar version or another. Once Ciel receives the letter from

Queen Victoria that explains all the information about the case, she mentions in Volume 6 of the

Black Butler manga "it seems the children suddenly disappear in the dead of the night almost as

if they have been taken away by the Pied Piper of Hamelin" (Toboso vol 6). "The Pied Piper of

Hamelin" is an old fairytale and urban legend that comes from Germany during the Middle Ages.

The story has been adapted several times, both for film and for children's literature, making it a

well-known tale among many ages. As the legend goes, there once was a piper who claimed to

the mayor of Hamelin, who was in the middle of dealing with a rat problem in the town, that he could get rid of them and end the terrible plague of rats that have been causing problems. If the piper was successful in luring the rats away, the mayor agreed to pay him. The piper played his flute and was successful in luring the rats out of town. Sadly, the piper never received what he was supposed to as the mayor blamed him for the rats and the town turned their backs on him. The piper vowed revenge and on a day dubbed Saint John and Paul's Day, he returned with his flute in hand. Playing his magical flute once more, the children were lured away this time out of the town and over the hills, never to be seen again. The quote said by Queen Victoria isn't the only time the fairytale has been referenced. One of the main characters of the *Book of Circus* arc is the ring leader named Joker. Throughout the arc, in both the manga and anime adaption, Joker appears in brightly colored garments, which according to the original fairytale is how the piper was dressed hence the word 'pied' in the title. In one particular scene with Joker, the audience can see him playing a flute-like object, which lures a child to his hiding location and sends them into a dream world that masks reality. Within English literature, the piper has appeared quite frequently, but one of the most famous versions is by German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

Toboso has confirmed that another circus troupe member, a man by the name of Snake, has serpents all named after famous writers who all have written about the selling of one's soul. One of the serpents is named Goethe, after Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Why is this? Because of Goethe's famous two part drama called *Faust*, which makes a reference in the first part to the Pied Piper story. Not only that, but Goethe also wrote his own rendition of the fairytale in the form of a poem, which later was turned into a song by a man named Hugo Wolf. Whenever Toboso reveals things like this in the extras of the manga volumes or on her twitter, fans are

quick to take notice and even research the reference. The Black Butler fan wiki for Snake's character profile added the information Toboso provided for how his serpents were named and then went into the extensive amounts of research they did to find the authors that match the names and what they wrote. It gives fans a chance to be detectives like Ciel and Sebastian and solve the case based on the little amounts of information Toboso reveals in her statements.

However, "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" fairy tale is not the only form of children's literature mentioned in this arc. There is another and it has close relations to the Pied Piper fairy tale as it too contains a character who is a piper. The nursery rhyme known as "Tom, the Piper's Son" is a song that Joker sings at one point in the series and makes subtle references to when talking about a future for his family and troupe. However, the name is also his alias. As the nursery rhyme goes:

"Tom, he was a piper's son

He learnt to play when he was young

The only tune that he could play

Was over the hills and far away

Over the hills and a great way off

The wind shall blow my top-knot off" (*Tom the Piper's Son* 1795)

There are two separate versions of the rhyme out there in the world, but the one featured in *Black Butler* is the longer one of the two. The first time the nursery rhyme makes an appearance in the series is when Ciel is investigating the star tents of the circus troupe and starts to look through Joker's. Within the confines of the tent, Ciel finds a letter addressed from a 'Tom, the Piper's Son', a reference to what Ciel says is a 'Mother Goose Nursery Rhyme'. The second time the rhyme appears is when Joker is singing alone in his room, making sure to sing the first few lines

and mentioning the 'Over the Hills and Far Away' part of the rhyme. That particular line makes several more appearances throughout the arc, being mentioned not only by Joker but also his co-star Beast, Doll, and even Sebastian. The line can be seen as referring back to the original Pied Piper fairytale, considering the piper led the children 'over the hills and far away' in one of the versions of the tale.

Referring back to Goethe's *Faust* drama, Snake's serpent is not the only time the *Faust* folklore comes to light within *Black Butler*. A *Black Butler* fan and Youtuber by the name of SimplyGrouch creates a type of fan performance in the form of fan videos[8]. On his channel, SimplyGrouch has made videos talking about characters facts you should know for *Black Butler* characters as well as details fans possibly missed. Many of his videos take details straight from the anime or manga, but he also takes a look at the musicals and even the OVAs, or original video animation, bonus episodes. In his videos, he talks about the different facts in great detail, providing the places where he found some of the facts and even brings up the intertextuality with outside sources like history and literature. He states in his video titled "101 Black Butler Facts That You Absolutely Must Know" that Sebastian "is thought to be Mephistopheles by many fans" (SinplyGrouch). The reason for this comparison between the two demons is because they both share the same symbol that is pictured on Sebastian's left hand and in Ciel's right eye. There are many versions and adaptations of the *Faust* story as well as the Mephistopheles character outside of the *Faust* legend. The most popular version of Mephistopheles happens to be the version seen within *Faust*, in which the demon is not seen as the kind that corrupts humans, but rather the ones that aid humans in return for their souls. This is very similar to Sebastian's characterization in *Black Butler*. Much of Sebastian's backstory and character has not yet been

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[8] Michael Graves's essay titled "'Guys, Where Are We?': Podcasts, Online Video and *Lost*'s Participatory Culture" talks about online videos as a form of fan culture and performance

revealed in either the manga or anime. However, one cannot deny the similarities between him and Mephistopheles, especially when it comes to the mark upon his hand which has been described in character guide books as a 'Faustian mark'. Mephistopheles is the leading antagonist in Goethe's *Faust* and he places a wager that he can lead Faust on a path of damnation. It makes sense why Goethe is given to one of Snake's serpents. Mephistopheles in many versions of *Faust* still gets the soul in the end. In part one of Goethe's *Faust*, the good doctor signs away his soul to Mephistopheles when the demon promises him help. Therefore, Faust sold his soul.

Another popular literature reference present in *Black Butler* was actually published during the time period the story takes place in. Not only that, but the author himself is a character during the *Book of Murder* arc of the story. The piece of literature is the *Sherlock Holmes* novels written by Arthur Conan Doyle starting in 1886 with *A Study in Scarlet.* Within the *Book of Murder* arc of *Black Butler*, Doyle is a struggling writer, just as he was in real life (Arthur Conan Doyle Literary Estate). As Toboso has stated in the extras of Volume 1 of the manga, she did lots of research in order to make sure she is portraying everything correctly. Within England, Sherlock Holmes is a huge name and has left quite a legacy behind in Doyle's name. The Sherlock Holmes fandom is said to be one of the oldest surviving fandoms ever and Toboso must have seen the impact the books had on the Victorian era. Ciel expresses to Doyle upon meeting him how much he enjoyed *A Study in Scarlet*, which was published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* according to history. The version of Arthur Doyle portrayed in *Black Butler* is also shown to know French when he overhears Sebastian and Ciel having a conversation in French about the guest of honor. The version of Arthur Doyle from real life also knew the language and could speak as well as write it perfectly (Arthur Conan Doyle Literary Estate). Throughout the

Book of Murder storyline, Doyle acts as the leading detective, much like his character Sherlock Holmes, in trying to solve the murders happening around the Phantomhive manor in order to prove Ciel's innocence. *Book of Murder* isn't the only time Sherlock Holmes makes an appearance in *Black Butler*. In season 1 of the anime adaptation, one of the original plots designed for the anime follows a bit of Doyle's *The Hound of Baskervilles*, another Sherlock Holmes story. Episodes 7 and 8 of *Black Butler's* first season follow Ciel and Sebastian as they travel to a town called Houndsworth, where they intend to put a stop to a sport favored by the locals that involves dogs attacking other dogs. However, the locals talk about a Demon Hound that punishes anyone who breaks the laws that are set by the leader, Henry Barrymore. Doyle's *Hound of Baskerville* follows a similar tale with a supernatural dog and a string of murdered victims.

In *Book of Murder*, the version of Arthur featured in the two-part OVA states that his writing career wasn't going anywhere and he was being rejected by many publishing companies. However, the real Arthur Doyle had his first big hit with *A Study in Scarlet* and critics even praised his historical titles that he wrote around the same time of *Book of Murder*'s time frame. Therefore, Toboso changed this part of Doyle's history in order for him and Ciel to have a bit of a decent conversation considering the *Black Butler* version of Arthur states that he is doomed to remember Ciel and Sebastian for the remainder of his days. Even though the Doyle from history had been slightly altered for the sake of Toboso's story, a lot of his character she took from the real Doyle and the legacy he left behind. Compared to the historical references, the literature references present within the series are doing different things. Whereas the history is setting the background and time frame, the literature is showcasing the genre. As stated before, all of the literature present within *Black Butler* was written by authors who were popular during the

Victorian era, but who also have written about dark themes and ideas. The other forms of literature in the series are setting the stage for the genre of the series: the mystery genre.

The last set of references we will discuss is the references to religion, which is one of the major backdrops of *Black Butler*. References to religion are present throughout the series as a whole. The two big ones that have a large presence in the series are Catholicism and Hinduism. Given the origins of one of *Black Butler*'s main characters, demons play a massive role in *Black Butler* as they do in religion. In many types of religions, there are their own forms of demons. Sebastian's name even comes from an inquisitor with the same name. This particular inquisitor wrote a book on the different classifications of demons within Christian and Catholic faith after performing an exorcism on a nun in 1613 who was thought to be possessed by a demon. Toboso herself has stated that Sebastian's true age is a mystery that only she knows and it must remain a secret (*Black Butler* vol.1). This has led many fans of the series to believe that Sebastian may be one of these demons featured in the classification book created by his namesake. Sebastian, himself, claims at one point in the anime's original plot that he was responsible for what was called the Black Death, or the Plague. Also within the original plot of the first season, there is an angel known as Angela when in female form and Ashe when in male form. This character has actually been mentioned before as the butler that is seen with Queen Victoria during her first appearance in the anime adaption. These two angels are seen as corrupted versions of actual angels depicted in the Catholic religion. They are described in a book the grim reaper known as William is reading in episode 18 of the anime's first season as "an angel of massacre" (*Black Butler*). However, just like angels depicted in religion, Ashe and Angela represent purity in the series, but seem to be obsessed with wiping out Ciel who they claim to be impure.

Within *Black Butler*, we are introduced to two men that travel to London all the way

from India. Prince Soma and his butler, Agni, are introduced in episode 13 of the *Black Butler*

anime and in chapter 14 of the manga. They meet Ciel and Sebastian when the two are being

targeted by men after Ciel bumps one of them by mistake. Soma explains to the two that he is

seeking a woman named Nina, who used to take care of him when he was younger and now

wishes to bring her back to India with him. During Soma and Agni's stay with Ciel, the audience

can see links to the Hindu religion. At one point in the episode, Ciel watches as Soma and Agni

pray to a statue of the Hindu goddess of destruction Kali. A *Black Butler* fan on their fan blog

made a post stating that the scene is actually depicted incorrectly and that Soma should be

praying to the God Ganesha as it is early morning when they are seen praying to the statue in

Ciel's house (BitSunshine). J. Holder Bennett wrote in an article titled "Indian Culture in *Black*

Butler" that Agni originally before meeting Soma was from a Brahmin caste, who were religious

leaders of traditional society within India (Bennett). Like BitSunshine, Bennett addresses the

praying scene as well, but from a different outlook. Bennett states that Soma probably prays to

Kali because he is naive and unaware of the destruction and death she represents, but Agni is a

different story. Bennett states "Agni, however, has a long history of murder," (Bennett) and Agni

tells this story to Sebastian. Agni even addresses that he saw Soma as a God for saving his life

and letting him be reborn as a new man under the name 'Agni'. There are also the names of the

two characters: Soma is actually one of the many familiar names for the lunar deity Chandra and

then Agni's name comes directly from the Hindu God of Fire Agni. In Hinduism, Agni is seen as

the voice for the different gods and goddesses, which is something that we can see in *Black*

Butler with Agni's bandaged hand. According to Prince Soma, he tells Sebastian and Ciel that

Agni's right hand is said to be blessed by Kali and allows him to know what spices make the best

curry. It is almost as if Toboso is saying that Agni can communicate with Kali herself. Another thing that Agni is associated with in Hinduism is sacrificial offerings. In chapters 126 and 127 of the *Black Butler* manga, Agni and Soma are attacked while taking care of Ciel's countryside home by the current antagonists of the series. In order to see his prince to safety, Agni locks Soma in another room while the attacker repeatedly stabs and shoots Agni in the back. Agni sacrifices himself to protect Soma as according to Sebastian "Your Master's safety and happiness were your first priority" (Toboso vol. 26). Toboso has stated when creating Agni that she had his faith already in mind, which begs the question if Agni's sacrifice was foreshadowed based on his namesake being a Hindu God who accepts sacrifices.

What do these references and more have to do with the fans? They can be seen as the driving force of creativity amongst fans. Fans use the references to create cosplays, fan fiction, fan art, and more creative ideas. For example: there are quite a lot of cosplays of Sebastian's demon form, something that has not been revealed in the manga yet. Many fans who have created their own version of his demon form say they take reference from what we know so far of his form and what has been revealed in the manga through religion and the time period. Most of what has been seen of Sebastian's true form has always been black feathers, sharp heeled boots, and claws. Almost every cosplay I saw of his demon form always includes these three details from the manga. The fans then add their own ideas to what the rest looks like. One fan who goes by the cosplay tag quuebd on Instagram and tumblr added black ram horns and a black leather corset for their design of Sebastian's form. Another cosplayer named RomaiLee stated for their version "I had this idea in mind that Sebastian's demon form would have similarities to a crow," (RomaiLee). Similar to quuebd's version, RomaiLee's has the large black wings and spiked heels, but the horns are shaped differently and resemble an ox than a ram. Also,

RomaiLee's version contained more feathers and less leather, making their version of Sebastian's demon form be seen as a demon with a cape of feathers. For both of these cosplayers, fans were quick to express their admiration for their different takes on the demon form of Sebastian. The fans were excited to see different versions of the demon form and some expressed how much they hope the versions created by the cosplayers are the real deal in the manga. Even when Toboso confirms a reference that has been used in *Black Butler*, fans still use it for their creativity. It doesn't mean to them that the mystery or questions are entirely over and answered. It could sometimes bring about more questions fans have or new ideas they wish to create. Throughout this research, I have noticed many fans try to decipher all of the history, literature, and religion present in the series and how they are also being portrayed. Considering much of these references are of Western origin, Toboso appears to have done lots of extensive research to make sure what is being depicted is either accurate or inspired by. However, fans do notice these references and they encourage creativity. Whether it be fanart or fan fiction, these references give fans the chance to interact with the media being consumed. However, there is one form of fan creativity that the references and adaptations are mostly being used for that is creating a massive flow of fan creativity and performance. These are what are known as fan theories.

"There Might Be An Interesting Development Lurking Behind the Ending Credits"[9]:
Performing Fan Culture Through Fan Theories

Fans are very creative when it comes to showcasing how much they love a particular title or media. There are many different types of ways a fan performs their love for and devotion to a particular title. "In social media, just expressing their art or cosplay or their passion for the series itself is enough to drive a fandom" states anime fan OnePieceFan about fan culture performance (OnePieceFan). In his book, *Fans*, Cornel Sandvoss takes a look at "the analysis of parallels and differences in fan practices across different genres, as well as their social, cultural, and economic premises and consequences" (9). Sandvoss describes fan performance as "constituted between text and context by turning the object of consumption into an activity with a given micro field of social and cultural relations" (Sandvoss 44 -45). Sandvoss is theorizing that fans start to become the performer when they present their devotion to a particular consumption of media. Fan performance scholar Kurt Lancaster argues that fan performance is based upon the form of immersion (Sandvoss 45). Fans immerse themselves into the text or media they consume, but when they actively engage with the text, it starts to become a performance. However, regardless of where and how a fan performs fan culture, there is no denying that anything a fan does--such as cosplay, fan art, collecting merchandise, and even writing fan fiction--involves creativity in order to keep a fandom going and welcome new people into the community. The more active a fandom is, the more creativity flows and new people would possibly like to join in. One type of fan creativity is what is called fan theories.

What is a fan theory? Many fans may have different definitions of what it is or what it could mean to a fandom where they appear. One fan who wishes to go by OnePieceFan described fan theories as "speculations or predictions about something that is going on in the

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[9] A quote from *Black Butler: Book of the Atlantic* film, said by Undertaker

series" (OnePieceFan). However, another fan going by the username ChonChi described fan theories as "when a fan takes the time and theorizes on events that will happen or may happen in a different context and tries to come up with explanations and reasonings on how [the theory] could happen" (ChonChi). Both of these definitions showcase how fan theories can be defined differently depending on the fan and how they view the interaction with the theory. My own definition of fan theory states them as an idea or critical analysis done by fans of a particular media that are generated from questions, symbols, or references noticed by fans of that particular media. Fan theories take a look at the different events, characters, and information provided within the series. Using context clues and analysis, the fans create their own interpretations of what is going to happen next. Similar to a student analyzing a piece of literature in an English class, fans analyze clues left behind by the creator to foreshadow or build up to a reveal that fans argue could possibly be true. Every person who read the same book or watched the same movie are all going to have different ideas about it.

Fan theories allow the fans to form a community via debating over the variety of theories that are available. ChonChii states "fan theories enhance my view of a show. I could watch it once and have my own thoughts and feelings about it, coming up with my own personal theories as I'm watching it like 'Oh this could happen'," (ChonChii). ChonChii describes his first experience watching an anime series called *Another* that built on the mystery genre and had fans during its run discussing who the killer could be. "Like all I was doing was coming up with theories on who [the killer] could possibly be based on evidence. I was like 'Okay who is the killer?' and when it finally happened…I went and saw forums along with other people's thoughts and reactions as the show was coming out. It was a fresh take…I didn't notice certain aspects and clues like other people did," (ChonChii). Similar to what was stated in the previous chapter

with fans and the mystery genre, ChonChii and the fans he described were all acting as detectives trying to solve the mystery of the curse within the series. Through these forums, ChonChii was discovering that not all fans may see the same clue, reference, or analysis as others, but it was still bringing forth discussion in the form of collaborating, debating, and analyzing what others have said or their own personal ideas.

Within every piece of pop culture, even *Sherlock Holmes*, there is always something a fan will take notice of and the fan will start to ask questions. "Fans want to be invested in a series," one fan of anime who wishes to go by her gamer tag, DrGreyGoosey, described why fans create fan theories: "If fans are sitting there reading a manga as it comes out, whether bi-weekly or once a month, they're speculating 'what is going to happen next'. There is always a 'what happens next' factor"(DrGreyGoosey). *Black Butler* fan Goose20 states that another possible reason fans create fan theories is "to keep the story alive in their own minds so they can relive the series and the characters in a different aspect" (Goose20). It is here where I can see that fan theories can sometimes morph into other forms of fan performance like fan fiction based on Goose20's statement. It makes me think of when a series ends or goes on hiatus, but fan theories continue to thrive even though there isn't any more content coming out for a while for the particular media. The fans keep the story alive and while the story may or may not be over, they find other ways to keep it remembered and the fandom active. Fan theories mostly appear on social media sites that are catered towards fans coming together to share their content such as tumblr or the cellphone app Amino. Even blog sites like MyAnimeList, LiveJournal, and Facebook Group Pages are where you can find fan theories written by fans for fans. However, are they what drive a fandom to create, discuss, and debate? *Black Butler* fan Duha states "After you read a fan theory, say you read it and you believe it, you can manipulate it in a different way or maybe try to support the fan

theory" (Duha). I took her statement of manipulating a fan theory and still trying to support it as taking a fan theory that has already been created by another fan and either changing certain points of it or creating fan fiction that fits the same narrative as the theory but adds other clues and ideas to it in order to showcase another form of the theory that is your own. This way the theory may not look exactly the same as someone else's, but provides a fresh outlook on the theory and the evidence it provides.

MyAnimeList is an anime and manga database website created by Garret Gyssler on November 5th, 2004. The website catalogues every anime and manga title that has been released since the dawning of the genre style and allows fans to create accounts on the website. Once members sign up, they have many different options available to them on how they can interact with the website. They can create a watchlist for titles of shows that they want to watch, they can participate in polls, they can favorite titles and provide their own ratings for them. However, the section of the website where fans tend to spend most of their time is in the community tab, where there are over one thousand pages of discussion forums for a variety of topics. According to one fan who has used the website, "MyAnimeList has episode by episode discussions threads…In the case of anime, [the fandom] is very online. Someone creates a discussion topic and everyone is either like 'Oh that's stupid' or 'That's genius!'," (Sam Esser). Sandvoss describes the online social spaces for fandom as spaces that invite debates (Sandvoss 54). While you do need an account with the website in order to make comments, create lists, or create discussion threads, the community tab is available for everyone, including guests, to read. Through the eyes of a fan accessing these forums, it is exciting as you are going to connect with other people who are in the same fandom as you and you can share your ideas with others. However, when accessing it as a scholar, I was mostly excited to see how fans were interacting with one another to create fan

performance. Throughout my studies in performance, reading and watching the forums was much more interesting now than they were when I read the forums as a fan looking for others to talk to on the internet. Diving into the threads, I noticed that many of them are quite old and have been around since the website's launch. These older forums didn't look too empty of activity though. This, coupled with the fact that I can see when the threads were last updated, I decided to look for a very popular theory within the *Black Butler* community that I was sure I would find threads for.

Since 2009, one of the most popular and well-known fan theories within the *Black Butler* fandom is what is known as the Twin Ciel Theory. The Twin Ciel Theory argues that Ciel has or had a twin brother. DrGreyGoosey states that "Ciel and Ciel's twin was a big driving theory within *Black Butler* because everyone was starting to think 'is there another Ciel or is there not another Ciel?' Based on his interactions with Sebastian and the Undertaker and the Phantomhive family, all the shenanigans that go on in that manga, [the fandom was] very driven by fan theory and fan culture" (DrGreyGoosey). No one quite knows the name of the fan who first started the theory, but the earliest versions of the theory can be dated to 2009. The earliest clues fans were picking up on that led to the possibility of a twin could be found during a flashback sequence in *Book of Circus*. Baron Kelvin, the main antagonist of *Book of Circus*, reveals through a flashback how he viewed the Phantomhive family. Through his eyes, we see Kelvin attending a dinner party where Vincent Phantomhive is also attending, but so is Ciel. However, fans noticed that something was not right about the scene. Ciel is first seen standing to his father's right in front of a window, but when the scene transitions, Ciel is now to his left with Vincent's right side now being blocked by a vase within the frame. In both the manga and anime adaptation, this is very noticeable. Throughout the interaction between Kelvin and Vincent, Ciel is constantly switching

positions from being sociable to hiding behind his father. There is also the manner of Ciel's

reactions to meeting Kelvin. Vincent tells Kelvin "I do beg your pardon. The child is quite shy,"

(Toboso vol. 7) after Ciel is seen hiding again after introducing himself. However, the tiniest of

details that many fans took notice of during the scene was Ciel's hair being parted in two

different directions throughout the entire scene.

The Ciel who is seen hiding has his parted to the right, same as the Ciel fans have been

following since chapter one of the story, but the Ciel who appears to be very polite and happy

has his parted to the left. With other anime characters that are classified as twins, such as Hikaru

and Kaoru Hitachiin from *Ōuran Highschool Host Club,* the parting of the hair is the way

creators and fans can tell the two apart, especially if they are identical. It is these tiny details that

fans pick up on. DrGreyGoosey states "[Noticing the references] is very scholarly to an extent

because they are thinking 'Oh I see this religious relic'…There's all this culture around it that we

can see in actual history and they are starting to piece together tiny little pieces. That is very

much seen in *Black Butler* and its fandom, " (DrGreyGoosey). An example of this comes from

the *My Hero Academia* fandom and the theory about the villain, Dabi being the missing brother

of the Todoroki family. While manga panels are in black and white, the volume covers, anime,

and occasionally official art by the *mangaka* are in color. Fans instantly noticed that Dabi's eyes

are the same color as Enji Todoroki's eyes. What once was a tiny detail necessary for creating a

character as well as translating that character to animation became something fans noticed and

created a theory out of. The same could be said for Reiner and the Armored Titan from *Attack on*

Titan when fans took notice of the facial structure being very similar.

Fans get a brief shot of Vincent, Ciel, and Ciel's uncle during Kelvin's tale. Vincent's

eyes are casted down rather than looking up at Ciel, who is sitting atop his uncle's shoulders.

While some may look at this as an accident on Toboso's part as design mistakes happen on occasion in manga, fans did not see this as a flaw in the design. Fans saw it as intentional and that Toboso was hinting at the possibility. However, there have been cases where ideas, designs, or information about a particular character or plot point from the creators have been misinterpreted by fans and have sometimes caused the spreading of misinformation, creating conflict amongst fans. For example: on the social app TikTok, a fan made a video stating that *Attack on Titan*'s creator, Hajime Isayama, and the animators working on the anime adaptation's fourth season said Levi Ackerman is confirmed to be gay because Isayama stated Levi has no ideal woman (hisokas.wifie). However, many fans commented stating that it was a mistranslation on the fan's part and that Isayama said Levi's ideal type was tall people (ashthebread). Many videos that used the duet feature on TikTok or made comments about the original video that brought the information to light had fans excited about the reveal, but other videos are of fans trying to correct the information being spread. The fans trying to correct the information wanted to make sure other fans understood that there are other means of fact checking information, such as the official wikis for the character or in the Q&A section of the manga volumes. The fans were also letting others know that the *mangaka*'s official twitter is another way to check for any official information on characters, story, or information. However, fans like to believe in theories and ideas even if they never happen. These discussions are a fan performance. Fans are sharing their own opinions on the information provided while also trying to not overlook what the *mangaka* has revealed. Through these fans, one can see the devotion they have to the series they are talking about while also seeing how excited they are to see a character similar to themselves. With Grell Sutcliff, for instance, many fans of the character have expressed that characters who are trans are very rare in anime and manga titles. While Grell's portrayal in the first season is

mostly played from a comedic perspective, Toboso has given Grell various opportunities to display her abilities. Toboso has stated on her blog that Grell is a capable woman and fans see that in the manga with Grell acting and helping out the series's main leads.

Even the first episode of the *Book of Circus* anime adaptation played with the possibility of twins being born to the Phatomhive family. During this scene, fans see Ciel in a cage, but then they also witness him being killed on the altar. These tiny details had fans returning to moments that came before and started to notice that with this new knowledge, some scenes and dialogue no longer made sense if there was only one Ciel. Madame Red, Ciel's aunt, mentions that Ciel has always been tiny, frail, and a sickly boy as Ciel is revealed to have asthma in *Book of Circus*, but later, in *Book of the Atlantic*, Lizzie Midford, Ciel's betrothed, makes a comment on Ciel being frail and smaller than she remembered. The last piece of evidence that fans had was published in an art book by Yana Toboso for the *Black Butler* series. The artwork in question depicted a young Ciel, but the rest of the photograph is burned and missing the rest of the image. It is here where fan theories can become a transmedia event. The art book contains information and art that still falls within the *Black Butler* universe. The manga had been out for a while before the art book came out, creating an intertextual effect amongst the research a fan is doing for their theory. Say one of the musicals had a hint to a theory being discussed from the manga, the fans will watch the musical in its entire length to make sure they didn't miss a single clue. For example: the second musical titled *Black Butler: The Most Beautiful Death in the World* introduces two characters who, at the time, were only seen as shadows in the manga named Alan and Eric, both grim reapers. The musical reveals that grim reapers can die by their own weapons and even from a sickness called the death sickness. Theories centered around the grim reapers and their society pull from this musical to back up any evidence they find in the other

adaptations of the series. The same with the art book and even season 2. As stated in chapter 2, *Black Butler*'s second season does not appear in the manga at all, but the series creator, Toboso, did have a hand in making the second season as well as its story. While many may not have enjoyed the second season, fans can't deny that intertextuality is still present as Toboso did create the new characters who made their appearance in the second season as well as wrote the narrative for it.

According to an anonymous author of the blog site titled "The Double-Ciel Theory: A *Kuroshitsuji* Mystery", which was last updated December 2014, the Twin Ciel theory possibly had an early concept within *Black Butler II* with the character of Claude and his ability to seal a soul into a ring. The author, simply known as The Double Ciel Theorist, states "many didn't take this [version] very seriously, considering that [*Black Butler II*] had entirely no connection to the manga. Yet let's not forget that the concept was still conceived by Yana Toboso and may be used as an Easter Egg…seeing as the anime was finished before the clues in the manga became apparent" (2014).

Over time, the theory grew and grew with many fans creating their own opinions and adding onto the original with more evidence to support the theory of Ciel having a twin. The theory became extremely popular and became widely known within the *Black Butler* fandom. The theory was appearing in YouTube videos, fan art, and even fanfiction. The theory would also be presented as a panel at various anime conventions, which allowed the panelists to present their findings and then open the floor to the audience to ask questions or present their own analysis and knowledge to engage discussion. This is quite interesting as panels allow fan theories to become a live performance in front of an audience that then turns into a participatory performance when the panelists allow fans to engage with the material presented. The panels

help showcase that fan theories are not just strictly online. They can also be in-person discussions.

Fans got their answer to the question that had been an eight-year long mystery with the release of chapter 129 of the manga series. In chapter 129, Ciel comes face to face with his twin brother, the real Ciel Phantomhive. Something that fans have argued, analyzed, and pieced together for years had finally been revealed, but did Toboso create a twin brother due to the fan reception or was it possibly planned? DrGreyGoosey believes that the theory was incorporated into the manga due to the fan reception by stating "fans think that if they talk about it so much and keep bringing hype around their theories so much, then the *mangaka* will notice and maybe implement it into the series. They think that their voice matters even though at the end of the day it is not their story" (DrGreyGoosey). Another fellow anime fan named Isai backs this up by bringing up *Game of Thrones*. "This is in reference to *Game of Thrones*… The [producers] have a direction for [the series], but if they get backlash…due to fans being vocal, the producers…kind of have to [fix] what they thought was better," (Isai). Goose20 even backs up this statement by stating "[the creators] kind of see what their audience and readers are interested in. I mean, your audience and your readers are your most important people because they are attracted and addicted to what you're producing so seeing their ideas help you see where you are going with your storyline" (Goose20). It isn't rare for the creators of pop culture to notice the fandom of a particular work. Square Enix, the company behind the *Final Fantasy* video game series along with the creators of the games, created an entire fan convention that many people, who are fans of the games, can attend and meet fellow fans and the people who worked on the games. Other conventions, such as FunimationCon for instance, where the creators hold the event for the fans give the creators a chance to see how the fans react, perform, and create within

their individual fandoms. While fans think that the theories they create are helping the creators with their story, the creators possibly just acknowledge them, but the creators are aware of what is making the fans excited. The creators at Marvel Studios for instance know what makes the fan tick.

With the release of Marvel's *WandaVision*, many fans have posted online about their theories that have been noticed by people like Jimmy Kimmel. On an episode of *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, Kimmel asks *WandaVision* actress Teyonah Parris if she has seen the theories fans are creating to which the actress describes how her mother is very active in the fan theories and will send them to her. Parris describes how the theories are very interesting and that every week after an episode airs, both her and her mother discuss the theories online to which Parris makes note that her mother and the fans are constantly switching up theories and discussions. Kimmel even tries to create a fan theory just based off of Parris's attire for the interview as hinting towards the Fantastic Four being introduced into the Marvel Universe, which was the theory being discussed by Parris and Kimmel on the show. Parris mentions how her mother will talk to her about the theories and try to discuss them with her, but Parris states that she doesn't tell her anything as it'll spoil the show's upcoming episodes and what is to come which is something she doesn't want to do. Parris does go online and see the things such as theories and easter eggs fans are finding. However, she knows, from how her mother described the online community to her, the fans will continue to make theories. With the Twin Ciel theory in mind, I took to the forums on MyAnimeList to see if there are any discussion threads in regards to the Twin Ciel Theory.

When I first opened MyAnimeList, I typed in *Black Butler*'s Japanese title *Kuroshitsuji* in the search bar to filter it to where only the community forms would be available to me. MyAnimeList provided not only the discussion threads, but also community groups that people

could join. I then found a discussion thread that first started in 2009, the same year as the Twin

Ciel theory, and saw that the most recent post was made in 2018. Upon opening the thread, I

found lots of fan activity from 2014 to 2018 about the Twin Ciel Theory. The username of the

fan who started the thread is ichii_1. In their post to kick off the discussion thread, they provide a

small summary of the Twin Ciel theory and then provide all of the evidence other fans had

gathered from the manga to back up many different claims about the theory. Everything from

Baron Kelvin's flashback to Sebastian's summoning was all documented in the original post. The

fan then posted the thread on May 20, 2014 with the occasional edits here and there to include

more evidence. The last of the modifications were made on October 29, 2016. Some of the

comments following the original post before modifications were made have been very positive

with fans such as the users SnazzGary and Stardew stating their surprise at the theory and even

providing their own ideas. SnazzGary comments in their reply to the original post "I am getting a

very *The Flash* vibe with the whole taking on another's identity, and the other being dead"

(SnazzGary). In order to describe what they meant, SnazzGary describes the scene from *The

Flash* series where it was revealed Eobard Thawne took the identity of Harrison Wells and how

he constantly says "My name is Harrison Wells" and compares it to how Ciel is always telling

those around him "I am Ciel Phantomhive." Another fan named Roth on April 20, 2015 replied

to the discussion as well before any modifications were made and provided lots of evidence from

the manga to back up the theory. Roth also, similar to SnazzGary's comment, brings up another

manga series called *G-Senjou no Neko* that has a similar troupe being depicted in the theory,

which is that Ciel absorbed his twin brother's personality in order to pass as his brother rather

than himself as the twin is shown to be the stronger of the two. Roth describes that in *G-Senjou

no Neko*, there are multiple personalities and brothers being hinted at in a similar way to

Toboso's writing for *Black Butler* through the idea of personalities merging together. Roth, using the similar set up from *G-Senjou no Neko*, asks the following questions: "what if Ciel's absorption of the true Ciel's personality into his own isn't a result of psychological trauma, but because of the contract embedded into his eye?" (Roth). This is quite interesting as fans who are pulling references to series outside of *Black Butler* are trying to show examples of what they are talking about, especially if there isn't much evidence in *Black Butler* yet. It is quite a fascinating thing to see as they can pull references from a series set in modern day and are able to somehow match it to a theory or idea they have from *Black Butler* that is set in Victorian England. It also shows other types of fan communities the fan is in and can help them find others to discuss them with.

The most active fan in the discussion thread other than ichii_1 is a fan going by the name of Omelettecat, who seems to be replying to the various comments being posted to the thread and engaging in conversation with Roth, ichii_1, and a fan with the username SolitaryDarkness. Omelettecat first makes a post stating "I love this theory. I saw most of the hints posted here, but there are a couple I didn't see" (Omelettecat). The user then provides screenshots from the manga and anime adaptations that depict clues left out by ichii_1's original post. The three continue to exchange more clues and statements amongst each other with ichii_1 modifying the original post and new fans adding their own findings to the post. With ichii_1 modifying the original post that started the thread, fans wouldn't have to worry about either scrolling through the entire thread to find specific information or posting information that is already in the first post.

However, one user by the name of stefeman counters the theory as well as how the scenes ichii_1 provides as evidence of the theory can be seen differently by someone else. Stefeman

states "this really proves nothing yet. No good author would leave hints this early in the series" (stefeman). When asked if debates happen within a fan community in regards to a particular theory, DrGreyGoosey answered "some fans are really passionate about their theories and think that it's 100% going to happen, it is going to become canon, and it is going to be true, but that may not be the case," (DrGreyGoosey). She then described how a theory she personally doesn't like, but she knows a majority of the *Black Butler* fandom enjoys is that Sebastian and Ciel are romantically involved with one another. "I do not see it that way considering there is a contract between the two and I'm not sure how contracts are really shown as a romantic interaction, but it does drive the community because if you don't necessarily agree with it, then you're wrong," (DrGreyGoosey). ChonChi even backs up this statement by stating "Some people get a little too heated so that creates a bit of a divide," (ChonChi). However, ChonChi then adds "But for the most part, it brings people together and sort-of creates a bridge. You can respect the other person's opinion for the most part and you can try to persuade them into thinking about your own opinion for the most part," (ChonChi). Going back to when the Twin Ciel Theory was revealed to be true in chapter 129 of Black Butler, there were fans that were happy and some that were not. In ichii_1's discussion thread, a user by the name of Dayan states a few months before the reveal "I think this theory is pretty much confirmed, although I hate it, I did not want it to be confirmed," (Dayan). Throughout the forum, Dayan is one of the users keeping an open mind on the theory, but trying to also show proof that the theory isn't true. Dayan argued on April 20th, 2017 that throughout the entire manga up until the point of the reveal, a brother was never mentioned nor seen in family flashbacks. On the day chapter 129 became available for reading, the forum blew up with users posting their thoughts. ichii_1 posted "And it's confirmed after 10 years, good stuff," (ichii_1) and a user named ChiYama quoted Toboso's official statement on

the reveal by stating "there's no way it just came out of nowhere and we all know [Toboso] had planned this since beginning" (ChiYama). Regardless of what people believe when it comes to a fan theory, it is still bringing a community together to discuss it.

Even though Dayan didn't take the news of the Twin Ciel Theory being true too well, it still showcased a fan performance. Dayan's first comment about the Twin Ciel Theory contains quotation marks around certain statements being discussed in the theories and re-words them as a kind of annoyance to the idea of Ciel having a twin, almost mocking the ones who liked the theory. Dayan also describes in their first comment on the thread "There's really no evidence of a twin in earlier chapters, only now it is starting to look like it, and it feels desperate," (Dayan), showing that the fan is reading the manga and writing as a forced objective. Not all fans are going to agree with one another on certain aspects of a show or even a theory, but these disagreements are still ways fans are showcasing their reactions to the different fan theories that are out there. Fans are still expressing how they feel about the twist the series has taken, whether good or bad. In this case, the fan is not happy with the twist in the story and expresses how they feel about it. In another forum over the Twin Ciel Theory as well, a user named Cindy-Uchiha also expressed the idea of Ciel having a twin as 'not needed' and how they were quite annoyed with the twist. Even though the user didn't like the theory, the user was still respecting other users who were replying to their post and discussing with them about the theory. Here is where a community is still being brought together even through disagreements on what makes sense, what doesn't, and why it should or shouldn't be possible.

One fan who I had interviewed asked me once we had concluded if I ever considered checking out the social discussion website, Reddit. After telling them that I never gave it much thought but that I was open to any recommendations for other online fan communities to check

out, they told me to search *Black Butler* on Reddit and that I will find lots of what I am looking

for. I took to Reddit and searched up the *Black Butler* sub reddit forum and found a large

community of fans. The reddit community had fans posting cosplay pictures, fan art, links to fan

fiction, merchandise, and more. What caught my attention though was that the forums were

tagged by what would be present in the individual discussion threads such as spoilers, manga

only, and anime only. Filtering the community to show me only manga threads led me to see

only discussion threads that dealt with the manga and when I tried the anime tab, the same thing

happened, but would only show me the anime threads. Looking deeper into these threads, I found

manga chapter discussion threads similar to that of MyAnimeList, but far more updated and

keeping up to date with the manga while MyAnimeList was more in tune with the anime

adaptations. Many of the threads were fans asking questions about details they noticed in the

manga and even posting their favorite moments, providing screenshots or even videos of the

scenes. I then started to look up fan theories within the community. One of the recent theories

posted was in regards to Sebastian's demon powers. The fan, going by the username u/susie,

describes how they believe Sebastian's primary power is manipulating time due to his ability to

create objects from nothing and catch bullets from a gun at a split second. The theory, though

only two months old on the reddit forum, had already gained quite a few comments from other

fans chiming in with their own ideas and analysis of Sebastian's powers. One fan with the

username SakuraShinra argues that Sebastian's primary power is the art of seduction, but that he

can also teleport from one location to another. SakuraShinra does agree, however, that

manifesting items from nothing is still within Sebastian's control, but that it is limited and the

item must currently exist within the same universe and time period as Sebastian himself.

Scrolling down a bit more, I discovered another theory post where fans discuss how they think the series will end and the theories they believe will come true. There are discussion threads for what Ciel's true name is, there are threads discussing the theory of Claudia Phantomhive and her death, and there are even theories that fans on reddit created themselves that think outside the realm of possibilities. Many of these refer to what is called a head canon, a subgenre of fan theories. A head canon is defined as a theory a fan speculates about a particular character that has no evidence to back it in the original creation. Many of the posts I was seeing on the Reddit forum would incorporate head canons into their theories such as how they believe demons in the Black Butler universe are formed or how a character would enjoy a Victorian play. One of the most popular discussion threads on the day I checked out Reddit was posted by the user MissusIncomplete. In their discussion thread titled "Hinduism in Black Butler: A Theory", MissusIncomplete analyzes the characters of Soma and Agni and the role their religion plays in the series. The fan describes that the theory came about from their research into the characters for a piece of fan fiction they were preparing to write about Soma and Agni, but needed to make sure they were portraying them authentically and correctly given that Toboso did her own research when creating Soma and Agni. MissusIncomplete states "my basic understanding of Hinduism was the belief in reincarnation, not knowing the greater extent that a soul is always changing, ever cycling" (MissusIncomplete). However, using the knowledge they already knew of Hinduism and what was already known about Sebastian's ability to consume souls, MissusIncomplete came up with the theory that the souls Sebastian consumes are not destroyed nor digested, but instead, they are stored. Fellow fans were quick to interact with this new piece of knowledge as they circled it back to a clue from the Twin Ciel Theory of the writing on the wall in Soma's room that says "Who took the candy out of my tummy?" Two fellow fans by the

usernames Deocatpanda and purpleangel2004 agree with MissusIncomplete that the Hindu religion's portrayal of souls and reincarnation is very much present in *Black Butler*. Purpleangel2004 even states "I originally thought [the writing] was referring to the ring that [got] swallowed by [the real Ciel] when the twins got kidnapped by the cultists…It could have a deeper meaning though," (purpleangel2004). Not only that, but they also theorize that the goddess Kali will return later in the series now that Agni, who possessed the right hand of Kali, was killed by an unknown attacker while protecting Soma. The other comments for the discussion thread depict fans arguing that Ciel's twin brother could be the killer, but others say that the killer could be someone least expected and that the Hinduism within Black Butler may not be as deep as they are being led to think.

During the course of this research, I took to the Amino app and joined a community dedicated to *Black Butler* fans on the app. I created my profile and then made my first blog post to my wall. Taking the Pied Piper theory discussed in the previous chapter, I post the theory to my wall and wait a few hours to see what would happen. After a while, I check the app to see lots of notifications, or alerts, for the Amino app. I went into the community tab to see the notifications are all for the post I made about the character Joker possibly being the Pied Piper. The post gained quite a few likes, but what was surprising to me was that a fan gave me five Amino coins for the post.

Amino coins, otherwise known as props, can be given to a fellow member in one of the Amino communities as a type of currency in the app in order to purchase items like stickers, themed emojis, and lots more for their Amino accounts. It was surprising to me during this research that I was given props for a theory that was enjoyed by a fan. To me, I felt like I was just doing what other fans were doing, sharing a theory with the community and wanting to hear

back from others. Instead, I was given these coins as a sort of 'tip' or payment for the theory.

Along with the props, the fan left me a message stating "Interesting theory!" (anewpotato). As

far as my research into the various theories of Black Butler, there has only been one other person

who brings up the *Pied Piper of Hamelin* story being related to *Book of Circus*. However, I am so

far the only person who is theorizing that Joker is supposed to be the Pied Piper or Tom the

Piper's son. I believe that the fan was intrigued as this is a theory that hasn't been thought of

before and is something new for fans to read and discuss amongst themselves, providing more

ideas. It seemed to me that my theory post brought about a sense of newness to the community

and added ideas that no one quite thought of. New evidence and new ideas drive the fans to

either create new theories or add onto pre-existing ones. I then explored a few more *Black Butler*

Amino communities to see if there were other blogs like mine that were given props, to which I

found quite a few recent ones. I was also given the option on the posts to give them props as well

if I had coins in my account's wallet. This was quite fascinating to me as fans use the Amino app

in order to connect and share with others, but as the app has gone through several updates, the

coins came into effect and allows fans to give other fans a type of payment for their post other

than liking and sharing it. To me, the coins reminded me of the icons that appear on TikTok live

streams. In a live stream on TikTok, fans who are watching can send icons like gifts, fire, and

flowers during the stream of their favorite creator, who is a fan themselves. This is something I

normally witness with cosplayers, who are themselves a fan of a particular title. In order to send

the icons though, you must actually use money that is turned into coins on TikTok, which can be

used to send the icons during a stream. At the end of the stream, the fan can see all the icons

others have sent them. These Amino coins are similar. If you have coins in your Amino wallet,

you can give them as props on a fan's post that you like. It was all quite fascinating to see fans

give each other coins in a kind of currency for their creation. Usually, fan creations like this that are posted online are free to view, but on Amino, it seems like fans can pay each other in props for creating or posting an amazing idea or creation. I decided to interact a bit more with the app and then created a poll based post that fans could interact with about a particular theory currently being discussed in the *Black Butler* community amongst fans, including on Amino where there are a few blog posts that date back years.

The character of the Undertaker within *Black Butler* is a fan favorite amongst many. The Undertaker acts as Ciel's informant in the Underworld on almost all of his cases, for the price of a single joke. The Undertaker, however, is not all he appears to be. On the surface to Ciel and Sebastian, Undertaker acts as a mortician working at a funeral parlor as well as Ciel's informant for his cases, but in the *Book of Atlantic* arc, Undertaker is revealed to be a grim reaper and the culprit responsible for the corpses on the ship. Throughout the first half of the manga's story, Toboso has dropped subtle hints that Undertaker has been with the Phantomhive family for a long time. A couple of examples are as follows: The Undertaker in *Book of Circus* stating that he can't remember how many times he gives Ciel and the 'others' the same warning, and we see Undertaker sitting in the billiard room of the Phantomhive estate with Vincent Phantomhive. All of these tiny clues to Undertaker's reveal in *Book of the Atlantic* left many questioning why Undertaker turned on Ciel and became one of the main antagonists of the series. However, the fans' answer came in the form of Undertaker's mourning jewelry that fell into Ciel's possession at the end of *Book of the Atlantic*. Ciel and Sebastian look into who they might belong to as the lockets are printed with the date of death on them and surprisingly find that one of them belongs to a Claudia Phantomhive, Ciel's biological grandmother. This is also the same locket that Undertaker is seen fiddling with.

The reveal sparked many conversations across online fan communities and had many fans looking back at other moments with Undertaker for any clues that connect to Claudia or to the Phantomhive family. Due to the vast amount of scenes and dialogue about Undertaker, the theory was split into two different versions based on analysis done by different fans. One version of the theory argues Undertaker is simply a family friend and informant that does not wish to see the family die so young under the guard dog role. The fans of this version theorize it started with Claudia Phantomhive. However, the second version of the theory argues that Undertaker is a Phantomhive himself or has been romantically involved with one, making Vincent his son and Ciel his grandson. Both versions of the theory started to appear after Claudia was the name connected to the locket with the infinity symbol on it.

Since this theory, in both versions, is one of the most current theory discussions amongst fans, I decided to search through the various posts and blogs on Amino to see how far back and recently I could find theories about Undertaker on Amino. One blog post I found dated August 21st of 2019 had an article from a website called The Humor Nation attached to it, in which the author of the article describes the Undertaker theory from the lockets to Undertaker's statement to Sebastian. The fan wrote in the blog post along with the article "Now it all makes sense" (Amino). Other posts I have found range from blogs to polls by other members asking the questions many are discussing: Are Undertaker and Ciel related? By far, the most extensive version of the theory that I could find on Amino was published by a fan with the username MeilingPrinceYukari in their blog titled "Theory of the Tears and Love". In the blog post made to the *Black Butler* Amino, MeilingPrinceYukari describes and analyzes various scenes from the manga involving Undertaker and his reaction towards certain actions, sayings, and people. Not only that, they also add other ideas onto the already existing theory such as that Undertaker could

have been a butler to Claudia Phantomhive, just as Tanaka reveals that he was the head butler to Vincent during his reign as the head of the family. However, this fan also brings up actual history by stating that it was always common during these times for nobility to have an accompaniment when traveling or going out. Therefore, Undertaker could have been that person. It is quite possible when fans consider the situation with Grell Sutcliff and Madame Red. Grell, though a grim reaper themself, was acting as a butler to Madame Red. However, the fan argues against the theory that Undertaker is Cedric and instead theorizes that Cedric was his own person and not the Undertaker as many believe. The fan also changes the original theory a bit more by adding that only Vincent is Undertaker's child and that Francis Midford is Cedric's son, making the two half siblings instead of full. The rest of the theory follows suit to what other forms of the theory state as well: that Undertaker is quite possibly the biological grandfather of Ciel and the very reason for his crimes in the manga is to keep the Phantomhives alive as he lost so many. The point of their theory was to showcase something that fans never thought of with Undertaker. Even though he is the main antagonist alongside Ciel's twin brother in the current manga, the fan is arguing that Undertaker is not evil nor the villain, but rather a man just wanting what he had before returned to him. Many fans commented on the blog post with their own thoughts as to what they think of this new information. One fan commented on how the Undertaker could very well have had romantic relations with Claudia, but disagreed that Cedric was a separate being from Undertaker. Another argued that Undertaker's actions in the manga were not caused by the deaths of Claudia and Vincent, but rather because he was curious about immortality and therefore, compared the theory to that of the canon storyline with Madame Red and her love for Vincent.

Similar to what was studied with the Twin Ciel Theory, we have two opposing sides

creating a discussion within the comment section to voice their own opinions and theories.

Taking this widely discussed theory into play, I created another post on my Amino account

within the *Black Butler* community to see what would happen. I debated for a bit on what I

wanted to do for my next post when I decided to take a participatory action and create a poll. The

polls on Amino are another form of fan performance throughout the various communities offered

on the app. A fan in one of the communities can create a poll about a wide range of topics such

as 'Who is your favorite character?', 'Do you think this character and this character will end up

together?', and even on different fan theory topics. While the polls allow users to still leave

comments, like the other available templates, one thing that it does differently is fans can see

who voted for what. The votes are not anonymous and allow fans to see where the majority of

the fandom is with this particular question or topic. In the *Black Butler* Amino, there were quite a

lot of polls dedicated to theories such as whether Ciel had a twin, if *Black Butler II* will appear in

the manga, and even the Undertaker theory. I created a poll that briefly described my own

thoughts on the Undertaker theories, but then mentioned that I was interested in seeing what

others thought of the two conflicting ideas on Undertaker's true relation with the Phantomhive

family. For the description to the poll, I summarized the theory, but left the conclusion open and

not putting my own in the description. This way, I can show the fans through my wording that I

am curious on what they think rather than try to force my own conclusion. The poll consisted of

three answer choices, allowing fans to pick which version they like or if they wish to think some

more on the idea. After posting the poll, I waited a few hours, same as before with the Joker

theory being posted, before checking for any notifications. Once again, I had quite a lot of

notifications on my account and I actually was getting comments by fans wanting to discuss why

they chose a certain answer. One fan by the username Sebbylicious discussed the reason for their answer in great detail. They stated "I do think Undertaker is a Phantomhive for certain…Some could say Rudgar also mentioned [the linege] being because he's close to death…But when mentioning the lineage, it was clear that Ciel had relations with someone else who's DNA [allows] him to see other reapers," (Sebbylicious). Similar to what was observed in the MyAnimeList forums, Sebbylicious provided evidence in their comment in the form of manga pages to back up their comment on the poll. The following image is one of the panels they provided and is the image they described in the comment. Another fan by the name of Diedrich, while not providing images like Sebbylicious did, argued against Sebbylicious's answer and voted for the 'family friend' option on the poll. Their comment as well went into great detail on the reason for their choice. Diedrich states "I'd say less likely in my opinion because you don't have to be close to someone just…to protect them," (Diedrich). Even though Diedrich voted for the opposite side as Sebbylicious, they did, however, provide an alternative to the other answer on the poll. The comment continues on by stating "I think what is possible is maybe [Undertaker] could have been with someone else though in the Phantomhive generation" (Diedrich), not completely throwing away the idea of Ciel being a descendent of Undertaker.

Another fan even challenged one of the answers for the poll in the comment section. The user Elise argues that "the reason I think he isn't related is the way Ciel treats him in the manga," (Elise). Diedrich's comment agrees with Elise by stating "you don't have to be close to someone just for that in order to protect them" (Diedrich). Diedrich even argues that Undertaker and Claudia couldn't possibly have been in a relationship because of his occupation as a grim reaper and their ages, but again, Diedrich doesn't completely disregard the idea of Ciel and Undertaker being possibly related. Diedrich states in their comment that Undertaker may have been with one

of the earliest members of the Phantomhive generation, providing a different outlook on the theory. It was amazing to see two different views of the theory being openly discussed amongst each other within the comment section of the post. Again, I left the theory open-ended with no conclusion in the description, but let the fans decide which version they liked best. These two fans engaged with the poll's answers and then wanted to discuss it further as to why they chose that answer and why they think it will happen. The poll ended seven days later with the theory that Undertaker is simply a family friend winning the poll with second place being given to the theory that he is a Phantomhive. While the poll's answer made the fan side of me intrigued, the scholar side of me was very intrigued by the responses I received on the poll from these two fans. From the text alone on Sebbylicious's comment, I could tell that they were being very informative as they had paragraphs typed out and manga panels posted with their comment. Diedrich's comment as well as Elise's were just as informative as well, but in Elise's comment, I could see traces of excitement with the first line of text. Elise posted exclamation points after the first line of text before continuing on in an informative voice. Diedrich's comment contained quotation marks around certain words mentioned in either the description or a previous comment, such as 'affair' for instance, to add emphasis to the discussion. However, I enjoyed witnessing that a poll had caused a discussion to happen between the two sides and even adding ideas no one thought of before.

After the poll on my account ended, I went to check for any more recent ones to appear on the community site. I found quite a lot. While none of them were about theories, there were lots about favorite characters, whether or not you loved a certain character, and even polls used for feedback on an art piece or cosplay photo. The polls on Amino gain quite a bit of attention. I decided to filter my search to show polls with the word 'theory' in them and I was met with a

wide variety. The polls used to vote on theories like the Twin Ciel theory and even other versions of the Undertaker theory poll that I did would have tons of votes, likes, and comments to discuss their reasoning behind their answer. It was all quite amazing to see where certain fans within a fandom stand on a lot of things within the series and the fandom in general. They provide a lot of info about what fans are thinking when they don't know how to put it into words.

To conclude this chapter, there are a vast number of ways fan theories are discussed throughout online communities. Whether that be through discussion forums or online polls, fans are finding ways to express their ideas, analysis, and findings to other fellow fans within the community. These theories are debated, whether for good or bad, and through them, fandom is performed. It is seen through the text and how it is presented. All caps, no caps, quotation marks, emojis, or the inclusion of exclamation points, the text presented in a fan's theory or comment expresses their feelings. Even through an instructional video, we get a chance to see a fan in front of a camera or through a voice recording sharing their theories and ideas with others and allowing fellow fans to see a step-for-step performance of a theory. Through the creation of these theories, fans find a sort of currency within it as well with the exchange of coins and props. However, another form of currency being exchanged is creativity and fan connection. It is quite fascinating to see how far the fan community and fan theories have come since when I first learned the terms and it is interesting to see that fan theories are starting to get noticed by the actors themselves. Fan performance is being discovered now in places people least expect: the online fan theories and discussions.

Conclusion

      In conclusion, fan performance through the creation, discussion, and sharing of fan theories is performing fan identity and representation. Fans are very creative individuals who wish to share their creativity with others. Whenever and wherever a fan theory gets posted, it grabs quite a bit of attention and in return welcomes other fans to chime in with their own thoughts or ideas about what is being discussed in the original post. Whether that be positive or negative, fan theories give fans a chance to become the detective and try to get into the mind of the creator, but in a way that allows them to showcase their devotion to the story.

      During the course of this research, I thought fan theories only existed in the format of a blog or a panel when being presented at a live gathering such as a convention, but I discovered new ways fans are presenting and performing their theories. Especially through Amino, I discovered that fan theories gather quite a bit of attention in any format whether that be through polls fans can interact with or through the exchanging of the Amino coins whenever they read a post they particularly enjoy. Through reddit, fans engage by creating threads and discussion forms based around a fan theory, but whenever another fan makes a comment on the post to start a discussion, others can upvote the comment to show their agreement or disagreement with the discussion. Fans are even taking the time to make videos of them explaining their theories to post on websites like YouTube. Considering these interactions are happening in online community spaces, a fan performance is being seen through the exchanging of comments and evidence on a thread, the voting of a poll or reddit comment, or even through the posting of the theory itself. Many fans conduct research to support their theory, whether through the physical series itself or outside of the canon, and through that, the scripting of a performance is in the making. Through the process of creating, sharing, and debating the fan theory in online spaces, the performance is beginning and the fan's dedication is performed. The fan begins to type the blog or thread and

through the formatting, one can tell if the fan is excited, curious, disagreeing, or even trying to be informative when it comes to addressing historical or cultural ideas present in their theory. For example: the addressing of religious practices within a particular type of media. Once the theory is posted on the website or blog site, it is only a matter of time before fellow fans begin to read it. While reading the theory, the fan can express the same emotions as the original creator or the opposite depending on their own opinions or ideas. Whether or not the fan decides to perform is up to them is something I was noticing through this research.

While some will engage with the post by commenting to start a discussion or express their own opinions, there are other fans who will simply like or reblog the post, but that itself can still be seen as fan performance as they are taking actions. The fan is showing appreciation for a fellow fan's work: the fan becoming a fan almost of another's work. Similar to how fan artists will sell their art pieces to their fans at conventions, fan theorists or fans who are constantly sharing fan theories and ideas can have fans of their work. SimplyGrouch, for instance, is a YouTuber with subscribers. Subscribers, to a YouTuber, are their fans and people who enjoy the work and content they do for a community. All of these actions create familiarity to the fans since they are creating and performing their fan culture as well as their identity as a fan. Then, there is the case of participatory performance taking place within a fandom. For example: the poll I created for a particular theory in order to hear what the fans think. Not only was I seeing fans vote on what they think, I was also getting comments for open discussions, but the polls allowed for participatory performance as I provided the theory and evidence and I allowed the fans to come to their own conclusion instead of providing my own conclusion to the theory. The poll's setup allowed fans to take on the role of the theorist for a brief second and choose the answer they preferred based on their own knowledge and see who else chose that same answer. It

brought about an engagement that allowed fans to also connect with those on a similar mind as themselves in terms of analysis. The videos fans are creating for their theories is also causing a new wave of fan performance. Considering the state of our current world and the fan conventions being shut down, fans have turned to creating videos instead for their panel discussions they would normally have in person. While fan videos have been around before the start of quarantine, while researching for this project, I have noticed a steady increase in fans creating videos for their theories or ideas about characters, plot points, and even discussions within the fan community. In turn, these videos get shared to other fan websites and communities such as tumblr and Amino similar to the blogs we have already discussed. This increase in fan video productions and sharing has shown me that even through troubled times such as these, fans have never lost their creativity and dedication to fan culture. They, instead, have turned to fandom for comfort and sociability, finding other ways to connect with others and share ideas rather than in person.

Throughout this research, it has become quite clear to me that within fan culture, there are a variety of actions and activities that can be classified as a fan performance outside of what most people associate with fans such as cosplay and fan art. Fan theories fall into the genre of fan performance, but it has a variety of different forms to be performed in whether that be in text or video format. This research has demonstrated that fans are dedicated to their craft just as performers do the same for their art. Whether online or in person, fans perform their fandom and fan culture every day. In the words of Sebastian Michaelis, he may be simply one hell of a butler, but the fans create simply one hell of a fandom. Fans put quite a lot into their theories and fan creations. They are also quite proud to be a part of something big as a fan community with so

many other amazing and creative people. And what kind of fandom will they be if they let their

performance of fan culture be silenced?

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