Kenobi: Star Wars Fan Films and How Embodiment Influences Fan Perspectives on Canon

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Fans of media franchises like Star Wars or Doctor Who actively participate in shaping the views of other fans through fan creations like fan films. Star Wars fans have created fan films, depicting events seen in movies like *A New Hope* or creating new characters and plots to show previously unexplored parts of the universe. One of the earliest examples is *Hardware Wars*, a 1978 parody fan film of *A New Hope*, that reimagined famous scenes of the film with low-budget props (Crow). However, as fan creations, fan films automatically become non-canon material because Disney, which owns Lucasfilm and the Star Wars IP, does not commission fan films and therefore a barrier is raised between fan creations and official creations. Official creations, as I define them, have official backing and authorization from Disney, giving them copyright protections and the assumption that the presented material is canon. This barrier is not unwarranted as fan films typically introduce elements that contradict canon and inviting two separate interpretations into the cultural discourse of Star Wars fandom would likely convolute how fans view characters and events. Still, discovering the merits of fans watching fan films and then reshaping their interpretation of canon, even though fan films are non-canonical, is interesting. One of these merits includes a new way for Disney and Lucasfilm to engage with and learn from their fans as fan films centralize discussions on platforms like YouTube in a free and open manner.

Canon represents the true narrative of a fictional universe that fans or official creators believe is authentic (Booth 27). Booth's definition provides a general overview of what canon is, but I will frame my arguments around a more specific definition of canon from Ahuvia Kahane. In Star Wars, canon material includes the nine "Skywalker Saga" films (e.g. *Revenge of the Sith* and *Return of the Jedi*), TV shows (e.g. *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*), numerous books and comics, along

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with other sources such as video games. Each piece of canon material mentioned above is an official creation because Lucasfilm, under Disney (since 2012) or beforehand when it was independent and owned by George Lucas, created the material and marketed it through official channels. From this point on, "official creators" will be a way I refer to individuals at Disney and Lucasfilm. Lucasfilm also helped to curate and build a database called the Jedi Holocron, detailing numerous events and characters across all Star Wars media to help its creators manage an extensive amount of information (Canavan 279).

Gerry Canavan, in "Fandom Edits Rogue One and the New Star Wars," argues that the Star Wars anthology film, *Rogue One*, shows Disney engaging in a paradoxical relationship with its own content. Disney's handling of Star Wars canon, in contrast to Lucas' vision, displays that different creators now have the power to shape the creative license of the franchise (Canavan 280-1). This fractured structure results in *Rogue One* simultaneously adhering to canon, drawing its plot from *A New Hope* and featuring famous characters, but also deviating from it, featuring new characters and events that are not mentioned in the following film, *A New Hope*, and making fans wonder why the movie's events are forgotten, conveying a lack of narrative unity (Canavan 282-3). Canavan notes that *Rogue One's* paratext material (interviews, fans discovering what was cut from trailers, etc.) leads both creators and fans to speculate about the state of *Rogue One*, obscuring who made the film the way it was because, in the past, George Lucas, would be the usual answer (284). This case already reveals some issues when creating canon Star Wars content and how multiple creators now influence Star Wars canon. Fans participate in these discussions, and official creators trying to make appealing content to fans loosens the barrier between creators and fans but not entirely. Other creators shaped Star Wars when Lucas owned the franchise, but the emphasized focus on Lucas typically minimized their presence in the wider fandom. Either way, the creators of *Rogue One* left their mark on canon material that used to be considered part of Lucas' vision, but fans, in contrast, cannot leave any similar type of mark with any authority or legitimacy. This does not mean that fan films should be considered (or made) canonical, but these fan films offer divergences from canon that broaden what the limited number of official creators can muster relative to millions of fans. These millions of fans do not create millions of fan films, so even with this discrepancy the number of fan films compared to canon films is much closer than it would first appear.

With this context in mind, the applicable nature of fan films like *Kenobi* comes from their ability to give official creators direct access to (online) fan perspectives. The division between fans and official creators, or the hierarchy of canon, favors IP owners and reinforces the barrier that makes canon material more legitimate than fan material. Regardless of this legitimacy, treating fan discourse as a viable method for explaining how canon material can adapt to fan interpretations of characters like Kenobi would signal the importance of fan discussions. Not in the sense that fan material would alter or become canon, but it would generate reasons for official creators to value these conversations in how they reshape one's understanding of a particular character or plotline.

Even though fan films may lack official backing (legitimacy) and resources, that does not mean that they cannot provide a similar number of ideas to official creators. Star Wars fan film creators will generally include statements that their film is not associated with Disney or Lucasfilm to prevent copyright infringement issues. For example, the fan film I am analyzing in this paper, *Kenobi*, mentions in its YouTube description that it "is a fan film with no official affiliation to Lucasfilm/Disney" (Costa). The non-canon nature of fan films places them under canon material and canon interpretations prevail over non-canon ones. However, the conversations found in YouTube comment sections indicate that fans discuss different canon implications that fan films present. Even if the creators of fan films do not intend to spark these arguments, they nonetheless occur and show that non-canon material provides a similar level of discussion that canon material does. These fan films, such as *Kenobi*, offer new interpretations of Star Wars that form a fan-influenced canon that will exist until canon covers the same area and determines how the story unfolds.

Obi-Wan Kenobi is a notable character within Star Wars, first featured in 1977's *A New Hope*, acting as Luke Skywalker's mentor. I chose this fan film because Kenobi's long history has allowed many (official) interpretations of the character and seeing how fans compare a fan's rendition of Kenobi's canonical characterization and even judging the creator's execution on its own merits brings many avenues of discussion. My analysis of *Kenobi* only covers one version of the character during one instance of Kenobi's existence. Another fan film about Kenobi would depict him differently and comments responding to the film would similarly be different.

Concerning my methodology to explore these concepts, I collected hundreds of comments from *Kenobi*. Recording different types of comments helped me see

what commenters focused on. I found that comments revolved around general praise, embodiment, canon, authenticity, and comparisons between the fan film and the canon *Obi-Wan Kenobi* (2022) TV show. Discovering what commenters found important helped guide my research toward analyzing viewers' perceptions of the fan material and comparisons to canon. Factoring in a hierarchy of canon will also challenge how fans use these comparisons to choose which interpretation they prefer, even though most recognize that their interpretations will remain non-canonical. Some aspects of Kenobi's canonical story and character, specifically that he oversees Luke Skywalker on the planet Tatooine and protects him from the Empire, are well established and cannot be (easily) changed. Ultimately, these decisions do not change Star Wars canon as fans do not possess any authority over what is or is not canon, but recognizing that fan films create an environment where official creators can learn from different fan perspectives on characters like Obi-Wan Kenobi and the nature of lightsabers improves the relationship between the two groups.

Canonicity of Fan Films

One of the major aspects this paper will analyze regarding comments on Star Wars fan films is canon and how fans determine how closely a fan film adheres to or diverges from canon. Ahuvia Kahane's "Fan Fiction, Early Greece, and the Historicity of Canon" analyzes fandoms and how they interact with canon in the digital age. Kahane describes canon as "not as any particular fact, storyline, or set of characters nor as an object, but, more flexibly, as the text's (sometimes self-chosen) containment practice that is invoked by the perception of superabundant potential…." Fan fiction, in turn, becomes a sign of a structured system where fans create material, known as fanon, which works around the boundaries of canon or sometimes in line with canon (Kahane). The superabundant potential of canon, consisting of all the material fans can create (especially in the digital age), is therefore restricted because separating canon and fanon allows creators and fans to separate their work and discuss it with a common frame of reference (Kahane). Comparing the treatment of canon in Ancient Greece, specifically the *Iliad* and an inscription on Nestor's Cup that tells a non-canon story about Nestor, a Greek hero featured in the original text, and the modern digital age, where fans can make thousands of non-canon creations on the internet, shows a connection between thousands of years of history. Kahane notes

that this connection displays that, no matter the difference in technology or historical context, canon acts as a restrictor but does not silence or erase fan material.

Using Kahane's definition of canon, this abundant potential that causes self-containment is seen through fan films. Creators and fans can produce their own interpretations in a multitude of ways, driving the need to set one canonical version (in this case, by Disney, the current owner of Star Wars IP) that is separated from everything else or the abundant potential. Stringent copyright enforcement could be one way to deter fans from viewing fan films as canonical. Forming two different worlds between fans and official creators may result in varying canon; however, developing a mutually beneficial relationship between the two groups is possible and would avoid the disintegration of canon.

Star Wars fans, who outnumber the number of official creators, will be able to produce more material outright, but they do not hold a collective power because each fan has their own understanding. There is no system in place where Star Wars fans can pick and choose which fan films may be canonized or not. Such a system would lead fans into the same position as Disney and Lucasfilm, who impose canon limitations as described by Kahane, leading to disagreements over which fan films occupy a space in their canon. Making more material would likely cause a fractured fandom as fans would select different fan interpretations to represent what they believe in, and no unanimous choice would present itself. Consequently, canon is maintained because a divided fandom cannot easily proclaim fan material as canon.

Similar to the existence of Nestor's Cup and its relation to its canonical story, fan film creators post on sites like YouTube, entering them into the digital record and allowing their version to exist simultaneously with Star Wars canon. The ideas displayed in fan films may derive from canon, and the comments I discuss reveal that fans' expectations of the film itself can also derive from canon. Fans influencing each other might intrigue official creators to understand why fan creations cause certain conversations that their own creations might not. Fans who compare Star Wars movies to fan films invite discussions about the perceived quality between them and official creators could learn why fans think as they do. Analyzing these comparisons puts adherence to and divergence from canon into focus.

The first type of comparison commenters discussed was the quality of the fan film to official Star Wars productions. One commenter, Wajibu Wynn, stated that

they "thought this was a professional film. It looked way better than the Disney ones." Noting the "professional" quality of the fan film shows one factor of how viewers judge the canonicity of fan films. With hundreds of millions of dollars spent on Star Wars movies like *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, audience expectations are primarily based on the financial investment Hollywood studios make when producing blockbusters. Fan films, on the other hand, do not enjoy the same luxuries when it comes to budgeting, so it would be unlikely to see the same quality of visual effects or costuming. This stark contrast plays into resourceful official productions that reestablish a canon hierarchy where fan films have fewer resources and overall viewers. Advancements in technology for personal use, like personal computers, have provided new tools for fans to interact with the media they like (Jenkins 146). Fan filmmakers can also share their films with more people on the internet, connecting fans through their similar interest in Star Wars (Jenkins 147). Jenkins' explanation of the history and progression of Star Wars fan films can explain why Wajibu Wynn mentions the quality of *Kenobi*. Noticing these fan films introduce new elements and look visually impressive allows fans another way to experience "high-quality" Star Wars without the need for official creators. Official creators, however, could conclude that the creators of the fan film employed filmmaking techniques that appealed to some fans, and learning why would improve their understanding for the better.

Fan films and the stories told in them exist outside of canon, but the ultimate reason why they cannot be considered canonical is because of the fans making them. Wajibu Wynn does not mention canon or the canonicity of the fan film, but others made a connection. Talon says that *Kenobi* has great production values, and that "If you didn't know certain actors, you'd swear this Star Wars/Kenobi film depiction is actual canon." Talon shares similar feelings as Wajibu Wynn as they praise the film's quality, but also mention the canonicity of the creation through knowledge of the actors. Saying that the actor portraying Kenobi, Jamie Costa, can match Ewan McGregor's performance of Kenobi and essentially trick someone who does not pay attention to who plays the character in canon, advances the idea that making higher quality fan films would allow official creators to more easily gather relevant information as fan films try to reflect movie productions with much less money.

Another way to consider fans assembling to discuss fan films may be through recreating the feeling of sitting together in a movie theater and watching a new Star Wars movie. Jenkins' analysis of new technologies allowing fans more

opportunities to interact with media, putting fan films on YouTube, and gathering everyone to talk about them brings a sort of theatrical experience to fans' homes. Fans of musicians who go to concerts for a particular type of experience increasingly use their phones to record that experience and show it to those who are not there physically (Bennett 127). This premium experience exists for concertgoers, but for Star Wars fans who may want to have a similar occasion, which could involve going to a movie theater to watch a fan film with other fans, that does not exist. Putting together Star Wars fans into a shared, collective experience (digitally, physically, or both), fosters more productive fan discussion and does not undermine canon.

For some fans, the problem of canonization still exists, but fan films achieving a closer resemblance to canon productions allows fans to then argue about *Kenobi*'s story decisions and acting performances within the confines of canon. Even without considering canon, Wajibu Wynn believes in the fan film's quality and shows a way for fan films to reach equal footing with official creations. This belief seems to be that a fan film can and should emulate the standards of a professional film. High-quality fan films set the stage for more fans to deliver stories that remind fans of official Star Wars movies but with the knowledge that a fan conceived of the creation. Having that knowledge helps fans to discuss their opinions and makes their fanon an evolution of how they perceive canon.

The embodiment seen in the fan film more than makes up for any lack of Hollywood money in the eyes of the commenter. A comment regarding canon could be made here to say that if the commenter believes that the quality of the fan film is comparable to official and canonical Star Wars media, they might be suggesting that the fan film itself be seen as canonical. Fans creating media that is perceived as professional may start to conflict with official media, and Kahane's analysis of digital media allowing for abundant potential is certainly in play here.

Fan media can assert itself when there are gaps in the timeline of a fictional universe, and fans can theoretically insert whatever they desire. As mentioned in Kahane's article, Fanon is fan-produced media or ideas that are seen as canonical within a fandom because it adds to canon and does not contradict it. As a result, fan films like *Kenobi* provide an opportunity for fans to make their own stories. There are 19 in-universe years between the prequel and original trilogies of Star Wars, making it possible for both fans and official creators to place hundreds of different stories within that time. While fan stories are not canon, their existence helps to imagine how a potential canon story may navigate the story of Kenobi,

and the TV show, *Obi-Wan Kenobi*, presented that canon reality. Another commenter, Pillars of Light, states that "these short films help expand the imagination, and for Canon." Providing a window into the lives of characters, whether it is fan-made or official, offers more ways to think about canon and the stories that comprise it. It is difficult to say if the commenter is specifically referring to expanding canon in terms of believing that the fan film itself is canonical. Regardless, Pillars of Light's comment gives way for Star Wars fanon to further reinvent itself through new fan creations.

Intertextuality and intra-textuality from Paul Booth's *Digital Fandom 2.0: New Media Studies* explores how fan fiction can contribute to not only canonical texts but also to developing a fandom. As defined by Booth, intertextuality is a discussion between different texts and how they fit together, while intra-textuality is a discussion occurring within texts (11). Booth's fourth characteristic of intra-textuality is meta-knowledge, which references the ways fans exhibit their understanding of both canonical texts and fan fiction pieces to inform their perspective through intertextuality and intra-textuality (70). Going back to Wajibu Wynn's comment and the quality of fan films, this discourse shapes how some fans believe that they respect canon better than official creators. Citing Henry Jenkins, Booth further elaborates that fans conform to canon while also encouraging new interpretations of canon to legitimize what is created (qtd. in 71). Another comment, made by Travelling Storyteller, states that "this shows far more respect for Star Wars then Disney has yet to show. Amazing!" Compared to Wajibu Wynn's comment, Travelling Storyteller more directly questions the legitimacy that Disney and Lucasfilm have if a fan film can surpass them. Showing respect to Star Wars can be interpreted as Star Wars canon that fans, within their own intra-textual discussions on YouTube, can seem to show more respect to because there is an intimate discussion occurring. Social media makes it easier for official creators to join online fan conversations, and, while tensions may arise, having a direct line to fanon should clarify some fan perspectives and construct a more productive dialogue.

Authorial ownership of canon during the age of social media and online interactions between fans and creators seems to muddle the line of canonicity. Cailean Alexander McBride's, "The Fight for Creative Ownership in Franchise Fiction," analyzes how creators have tried to manage the canon of fictional universes as fans have become involved in the creative process, establishing a creative hierarchy. McBride describes this hierarchy as motivating tensions

between fans and official creators because creators make canonical decisions when writing, and fans who disagree engage in online criticism to voice their opinions on what is made canon or not. Fan reaction to *Kenobi* points to what individuals hope is considered canon, indicating that fanon can influence canon through the collaboration of fans (e.g., discussing and liking comments) and the indirect involvement of official creators who would brainstorm ideas from these discussions. From the creator's perspective, taking in fan interpretation from fan films and their respective discourses can modify the franchise's storytelling in potentially unforeseen ways. The audiovisual format of fan films also allows them to more closely resemble the blockbuster productions they draw inspiration from, displaying an evolution in the production techniques of fan works. Authorial ownership, therefore, creates a hierarchy between creators and fans, but the existence of YouTube and the discursive gathering it provides to fans grants a potential solution to maintain canon while increasing fan involvement. The following comment highlights a prominent element of Star Wars, lightsabers, and acknowledging how fans comprehended *Kenobi*'s representation of lightsabers can help inform canon material.

LiquidSpiral comments on the topic of canon and shared creative spaces: "Someone explain to me how this isn't canon - the lightsaber scene was a work of art." LiquidSpiral's perception, after watching the fan film, is that it is unexplainable that *Kenobi* is not considered Star Wars canon. Considering McBride's analysis, a low-lying tension may be present here if there is an outcry for the fan film to be made canonical. Fans play an important role in shaping non-canonical interpretations in the digital age and question how their perspectives can be canonized. To remedy this divide, an official Star Wars creator can look and analyze what fans say, using LiquidSpiral's comment as an example, and understand how canon may implement what they proposed. The second part of the comment, regarding the lightsaber scene, reflects a way that some viewers want fan films to be legitimized through canon imitation. Creating a visually captivating lightsaber scene seems to prove the credibility of the fan film and its creators to LiquidSpiral. Lightsabers are one of the most recognizable symbols of Star Wars, so it is not surprising that a skillfully done lightsaber scene would be praised. In turn, this skillful showing increases the legitimacy of *Kenobi* being viewed as canon because it proves, at least in some fashion, that it can measure up to professional creations. LiquidSpiral's mention of canon and calling *Kenobi* a "work of art" points to a potential interpretation that fan films that reach

a certain level of (Hollywood) quality should be considered canonical. However, focusing on this interpretation ignores the immense difficulty in making a fan film canonical (if it were even possible), and instead discerning how and why fans reach their respective conclusions will provide much more useful information for the development of future canon.

Embodiment and Portrayal

Understanding how Star Wars fans comprehend fan films through their knowledge of canon helps to also better understand why fans want authentic embodiments and portrayals of Star Wars characters even in non-canon material. Linking fan studies and performance studies is one way to do that. Before doing so, however, broadly defining performance will help establish why there is a connection. Richard Schechner defines performance as the ever-present actions and behaviors someone exhibits and performance arts as one type of performance where performers highlight their own actions for others to view (3-7). Some important concepts of Schechner's theory of performance include restored behavior, detailing how certain actions have and will persist because they exist as part of a culture, and people who live in a certain culture will know the meanings and usages of those behaviors more than those who do not (10). Star Wars fandom exists as one of these cultures and fans know how Star Wars is "performed." These expectations of performance fuel discussions centered around meeting or diverting from those expectations. Noting the differences between each performance helps observers realize the particular contexts and decisions of performers and what they show (Schechner 11-12). Avoiding generalizations in one actor's performance, especially in a fan film where an actor has to portray an established character, should limit false perceptions of their performance.

Performance grounds certain actions in cultures and, continuing from that, performance studies tries to discern how performances interact and shape the world around them (Schechner 26). My research of how fans react to *Kenobi* ties directly to performance studies. Each comment reflects a fan's performance as they share their opinion on the quality of the film, the acting, or compare it to canon material. These discussions display different viewpoints of Star Wars, and each perspective originates from the fan film itself showing a performance to

those who watch it. Having fan films provoke lengthy conversations about the nature of canon and performance offers a much greater view into the fandom.

Considering the reality that each fan has a unique perspective, Kahane's superabundant potential of canon and the multitude of fan creations that can exist make fan performance harder to predict. When fans only have one canonical version to interpret, they can discuss that particular version, and, in the case of *Kenobi*, the fan film presents its version of the character. An "authentic" embodiment then may derive from canon, establishing that fans revolve their perspectives around canon and attempt to judge Costa's performance through their own fanon.

To potentially solve this problem of what makes an authentic embodiment, one look into fandom as a performance may help. Nicolle Lamerichs in Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures argues that fan textual productivity, the different ways fans produce meaning through numerous forms (performances, fashion, etc.), and affectivity, how fans express their feelings (positive or negative) and draw themselves closer to texts they like, shows how fans give new meanings to texts instead of simply reconfiguring them (17-9). Lamerichs' research into cosplay, where fans dress as characters from their favorite media, involves the concept of embodiment and how fans display their deep connection to media (200). Lamerichs interviewed cosplayers portraying characters from Japanese video games, noticing that they cared about learning the characters they portray, their appearances, how closely they resemble who they are, understanding the narrative context of those characters, and creating the costume itself (220-2). These elements may fit well together or not at all, leading to different outcomes for cosplayers and how fulfilling their experience feels (223). Lamerichs mentions a "problem" where some cosplayers portrayed characters but had not played the games those characters originated from, giving observers a new source to learn about those characters that was not from the source text (226). Inspecting an authentic embodiment then seems possible, at least when it comes to comparing the source text of Star Wars and Costa's portrayal of Kenobi. Fans may judge Kenobi's costume, for example, evaluating how evocative his attire is of canon and thus the authenticity of Costa's cosplay to canon.

The canon TV show, *Obi-Wan Kenobi* (2022), is centered around Kenobi and provides a comparison between canon and fan material of the same broad area of the story. However, I am discussing comments made before the release of the

show and any direct comparisons were not available outside of expectations for the show and its portrayal of Kenobi.

The comments I analyzed derive from each fan's understanding of the text (for example, no comments mention that the individual had never seen Star Wars in any capacity before) and this would probably avoid the problem of divergence from the source text and what constitutes something authentic. In the case of Obi-Wan Kenobi and the fan film, fans judge Costa's performance because Costa tries to embody Kenobi as the character fans canonically perceive him as. Kevin Rytter comments, "The actor is an impressionist by craft. He had a few moments where is sounded very similar to Ewan McGregor, but also, Alex Guiness." Rytter compares Costa's performance to his canon counterparts and the way they sound, speaking to one aspect of his performance and how he embodies Kenobi. Sounding similar to McGregor and Guinness enhanced the performance for Rytter as it reminded them of something familiar in canon. Rytter views Kenobi and Costa's performance through canonical performances, altering their perception of Costa. Costa cannot choose how viewers will judge him, so the fact that Costa resembled McGregor and Guinness's performances to the point where a fan thinks he is doing an impression of them is either deliberate or a coincidence. I did not find a comment from Costa where he might have stated his "decision" to mimic their voices, but either way Rytter's reaction is one example of how fans variably interpret performances that the actor may not even intend to elicit.

Applying this concept to fans who recognize Kenobi's literal body and voice is quite simple and certain comments mention similarities and differences between Costa and McGregor's performance. An authentic performance can be reached if Costa closely matches what fans expect his performance to be, allowing his performance to be recognized as imitating canon. Francesca Coppa's article, "Writing Bodies in Space," analyzes fan fiction and how fans create a theatrical performance from their creations. Coppa explains that "Readers come to fan fiction with extratextual knowledge, mostly of characters' bodies and voices" (228). Coppa references Richard Schechner's theory of performance that performance is the repetition of past behaviors and never unique (qtd. in 222). Using Schechner's theory, Coppa posits that fan fiction writers transform characters from their original sources into updated versions that align with how they see certain characters (223). An actor performing Obi-Wan Kenobi, as one of those constantly reimagined characters, changes how fans perceive Kenobi as his character's "body" is placed in new situations. While canon remains in place,

having Costa's interpretation allows for enhanced fan discussions that may then show why fans believe that, for example, sounding like the canon version of Kenobi is important.

This combination of focusing on the body (performance studies) and fan fiction (fan studies) changes how fan film performances can be judged. Coppa continues and describes productions of Hamlet, which introduce new interpretations of Hamlet as different actors embody the character (229). When considering theatrical scripts and the performances that derive from those scripts, some meaning is either lost or added in the performance itself and this variability instead supports the idea that different productions promote varying and unlimited interpretations (Coppa 231). Applying this idea to fan fiction, Coppa argues that fan fiction stories help to add to canon and these stories do not become redundant (231). Kenobi, as fan fiction, exemplifies this idea through its addition of a new version of Kenobi. Fans understand how Costa performs the character and then either judge the performance on its own or compare it to canon. It would be hard to say that Costa, even if some fans think he is doing an impression of McGregor, is capturing a redundant performance because other features of his work speak to unique aspects. For example, Hevi Tevi says, "I absolutely love that scene where he throws the lightsaber. I feel like I did this because the saber was like a constant reminder that anakin is gone and he failed him." Hevi Tevi's comment mentions a particular scene where Kenobi throws a lightsaber, highlighting Kenobi's frustrations with his past failures in letting down Anakin Skywalker and him becoming Darth Vader. As a result, these new interpretations arise from watching *Kenobi*, causing an enhanced understanding of canon through fan material.

The more unique part of Costa's performance is the narrative situation he is put into. The theatrical script is only one part of the overall production and Costa's Kenobi faces a threat not seen in canon. In the fan film, Kenobi has to protect Luke Skywalker, who is still a child, so the fan film stands on its own. However, the canon Disney+ show, *Obi-Wan Kenobi*, also showed moments where Kenobi, played by McGregor, showed grief over the same failures and while it may be easy to say that the fan film got to show these moments of regret "first," it would be better to say that both versions, fan and canon, work together to provide different interpretations. Ultimately, canon material holds power over fan material as discussed previously but the additional material, especially if fans view it as authentic, only supports the overall fandom and its relation to official creators.

In Star Wars fan films, viewers imagine the embodiment of characters as ethnographic fragments that resemble canonical material. Jen Gunnels and Carrie J. Cole's study, "Culturally mapping universes: Fan production as ethnographic fragments," explores how fan creators use source material to form their interpretations of the source material through dramaturgy and ethnography. According to Gunnels and Cole, fans select characters to portray them in specific scenarios externally, through ethnographic observation, and internally, through dramaturgical portrayals that conform to fans' needs. Analyzing fan commentary through ethnography and dramaturgy allows for a deeper understanding of fan expectations.

Concerning *Kenobi,* Xavier Destremau comments that "his face doesn't scream Obi Wan Kenobi, but his voice and mannerism are on point. This is Obi Wan Kenobi." Fans expecting authenticity to canon in the actor's portrayal of Kenobi shows why actors might have to play to those expectations. Using Ewan McGregor, who played Obi-Wan in the prequel trilogy, would be authentic to canon and not clash with fan expectations. Jamie Costa plays Kenobi, and the comment above shows that Costa, even without McGregor's facial appearance, can meet a viewer's expectations through his performance. Costa's performance embodies the voice and mannerisms that the commenter most likely saw from McGregor in the prequel trilogy. It is difficult to discern what specific voice imitations or characteristics the commenter is referencing, but Xavier Destremau is satisfied with the portrayal. The creators of *Kenobi* were able to ethnographically and dramaturgically influence Obi-Wan Kenobi's portrayal, resulting in a fan creation that balances the line between imitation and originality. This balancing act can help official creators to analyze fanon and learn why Costa's performance resonated with fans.

Performance studies and what a performance is may reveal how these portrayals captivate viewers. *The Performance Studies Reader,* edited by Henry Bial, offers multiple ways to recognize how authentic embodiment can boost the canonical perception of a fan's performance. Marvin Carlson's introduction "What is Performance?" defines one aspect of performance as individuals who can expertly portray others through their talent (71). Carlson cites Richard Bauman's *International Encyclopedia of Communications* and introduces Bauman's consciousness of doubleness, comparing a standardized action (typically an ideal model) and what is performed in reality (qtd. in 73). These comparisons, either done individually or by someone else, can validate

performances (qtd. in 73). Xavier Destremau's comment describes how an observer can affirm an actor's portrayal of an established character if the actor showcases their skills. A performer can train those skills, voice, and mannerisms to emulate what was achieved before. However, performances in fan films remain within the realm of live theater performances and not Hollywood film performances, so Costa's performance will never fully compare to McGregor's. Dramaturgy relates to the performer's interpretation, and Costa's portrayal of Obi-Wan Kenobi may be interpreted as a self-affirmation to perform a character with great expectations for whoever portrays him. Any Star Wars fan film has to contend with actors not looking the exact same as the actors in official films. Certainly, Xavier Destremau's praise validates Costa's performance and similar comments suggest the skill set required for an authentic performance.

Alex Venter comments that Costa "did an amazing job of capturing the spirit and voice of Obi-Wan." Alex Venter also mentions the voice of Obi-Wan, but the mention of his spirit is different. Is it possible to portray the spirit of a character that would be more abstract than the character's mannerisms? The "spirit" may refer to Obi-Wan's greater mythos and understanding as a character throughout his multiple appearances. Costa's portrayal may be seen as an amalgamation of decades of Obi-Wan's character that has informed fan perspectives. Reaching a high level of canonical perception would then be a combination of physical and mental attributes that form the canonical Obi-Wan. Fan perception influences what may be considered more important, but Xavier Destremau and Alex Venter's comments offer a good estimation of what is valued in the fandom.

Jerry Grotowski's "The Actor's Technique" explores different types of acting methods that help show how authentic embodiment can develop a performance that does not become canonical, but motivates fans to rethink Kenobi's character. Grotowski's concept of an actor's score is an encounter that forces actors to confront their own beliefs and respond to what is given to them (226-7). Actors must find a way to be free during their performances and not objectify themselves to spectators but be open to others to achieve authenticity (Grotowski 227). Costa's performance, therefore, can be read as an authentic performance from the perspective of some fans. An actor's interpretation is compared to the original, canonical film version primarily because authenticity is seen through how closely that actor emulates the original. Straying too far may make some fans apprehensive of the quality of the performance, and one particular comment voices this fear. Ein flinkes Wiesel comments, "when I saw this was not Ewan

McGregor as Obi Wan: Oh not good…," indicating another perspective that not having the canonical actor for Obi-Wan would be a detriment to the fan film. In addition to Xavier Destremau's initial apprehension of the actor's face not matching McGregor's, Ein flinkes Wiesel's comment points to a grander apprehension regarding Costa as Ein flinkes Wiesel did not think Costa could portray Obi-Wan. Watching the fan film, Ein flinkes Wiesel would have had to be convinced of Costa's authenticity to what Ein flinkes Wiesel saw on screen, judging multiple aspects of imitation. Then, the second part of Ein flinkes Wiesel's comment continues with "Me, halfway through the movie: It is… acceptable." As Ein flinkes Wiesel watches the fan film, their changed stance on Costa's performance shows a willingness to adjust their opinion and accept the portrayal as a product that compares to the original. Grotowski's beliefs clarify why actors in fan films can base their performance on canon because, while fan expectations may unfairly judge a fan's performance, the resulting interaction between fanon and the performance adds to both sides' knowledge of canon and what can be created from that knowledge.

Eugenio Barba's "The Deep Order Called Turbulence: The Three Faces of Dramaturgy" shows how actors in fan films can interpret the work of original actors to forge something new. Barba explains that doing theater is challenging because it relies on convincing others that one's performance is satisfactory and that theater is one way to form one's identity (300). Performing a Star Wars character reveals a certain level of attachment to the character that others will notice. What the audience sees in a film is the most critical part, so creating a unique identity that satisfies viewers becomes the most difficult part. Barba's idea of coherence in dramaturgy expresses that actors' performances must be logical when devoid of their original context (305). That transfer would be more difficult for fan films and Costa's performance because knowing who Obi-Wan is within the Star Wars universe is encouraged due to the little background exposition presented in the fan film itself. As noted by commenters, Costa's performance emulates certain aspects of Obi-Wan from canonical movies, adding to the layers of material a viewer needs to know. Gunnels and Cole similarly express that fan material works as a more extensive offering to canon material that provides more details surrounding events. However, this does not make any actor portraying Star Wars characters stoic figures; instead, performers like Costa employ their own fanon and fan perspectives judging his performance becomes fanon that may expand Star Wars fan discourse to new areas never considered before.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have analyzed the canonicity of *Kenobi* and the performance of fans in a digital space. Using *Kenobi* to link fan and performance studies can show the transference of someone being a Star Wars fan and then how they express their fan interest. These various fan performances showcase different fan interpretations of how the fan film interacts with Star Wars canon. Canon is an overarching part of my research because fan films typically interact with canon material, especially one that handles the story of Obi-Wan Kenobi and the canonical background information one must consider when making a fan film about the character. Some comments mentioned canon directly and the desire to have *Kenobi* canonized outright. Others praised the fan film's production quality and how it reminded them of Star Wars movies. Comments discussing Costa's performance and how he embodied Kenobi convey the importance of fulfilling fan expectations based on what a fan has seen of a significant character like Kenobi. The interplay between Costa's performance and fans reacting to and judging his performance through their knowledge of canon turn this single creation into a potent environment for fans to interpret and argue among themselves. However, it would be unfortunate if official Star Wars creators ignored such environments and discussions because the non-canonical nature of fan films and the fanon that spawns from them still reinforce certain canonical elements, and learning from these perspectives would help create unique canonical portrayals of Kenobi and other characters.

Fans will always create and modify canon material into new forms (superabundant potential), and *Kenobi*, as discussed in this paper, remains as fan material (even though it resembled canon to some fans) because it was not made with the necessary legitimacy or authority from Disney and Lucasfilm. Therefore, the superabundant potential of Star Wars canon could be organized around the creators of Disney and Lucasfilm recognizing and drawing inspiration from fan discourse to produce a dialogue that supports the authority of canon while utilizing that fan discourse to align some parts of canon with fanon. Whether fan film creators want or need to reach Hollywood production levels to be taken, in the eyes of some fans, as canonical material is not relevant to my argument because trying to elevate fanon to canon ignores more beneficial uses for fan interpretations that I have mentioned. Examining fan films through performance

and authentic embodiment introduces new methods for exploring how fans could assist future Star Wars canon material through the process of creating and recreating fanon.

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