Three Patch Podcast - Episode 3

March Moriarty Madness

March 1, 2013

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243 Types of Tobacco Ash: Morse Code

Consulting Fan: Olivia Guest: Berlynn Wohl Berlynn Wohl at:

-Tumblr: http://berlynn-wohl.tumblr.com

-A03: http://archiveofourown.org/users/berlynn-wohl

-DeviantArt: http://berlynnwohl.deviantart.com/

-NORWESCON: http://www.norwescon.org/

(Music intro)

John: People want to know you're human.

Sherlock: Why?

John: Cause they're interested. Sherlock: Why are they?

John: Remember what they told you, don't try to be clever and please, just keep it simple and

brief.

Sherlock: I'll just be myself. **John**: Are you listening to me?

(Music fades out)

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Olivia: Hey everyone. This is Olivia, or Octopieces here from The Notebook of Kitty Riley for this, the third episode of The Three Patch Podcast. I'm here today interviewing the lovely, illustrious Berlynn Wohl. She's an author in many fandoms, has over fifty pieces in the Sherlock fandom and has attended the Sherlock Con in Seattle and will be featured on several panels, including a BBC Sherlock panel at Norwescon, March 28^{th-}31st, link in the show notes!

Berlynn, welcome to Three Patch. It's an honor to have you here.

Berlynn: Well, thank you for having me, darling!

Olivia: Wonderful. All right, so we're going to be going through a few questions today about you and fandom and your work and what else you plan on doing. Without further ado, let's get started!

The first thing that wanted to talk about was the wonderful story of how you found fandom and started writing fic and any previous fandoms that you wrote in.

Berlynn: Oh sure. Well I discovered slash completely by accident when I was sixteen. It was 1998 and the thing that maybe some of the younger listeners must understand is that at that time, the mainstream media had basically no awareness of slash. These days, every once in a while, you'll see a mainstream newspaper or magazine make snide comments about fanfiction. But at this time, even on the internet, there was no Tumblr. There was no Livejournal. There was no Google. You really had to be looking for things to find them or you would just stumble upon stuff completely by chance. That's what happened to me.

When I was a teenager, I was a big fan of Tommy Lee Jones for some reason and I was on Altavista, or one of those pre-Google search engines, just looking for stuff about Tommy Lee Jones. One of the results that I got was a slash story about Tommy Lee Jones and Harrison Ford's characters from The Fugitive, where Tommy Lee Jones' character has this dream where they have sex. My sixteen year old self read this and said, what?! Why would somebody write something like this? And I remember even wrote in my journal that night. You know, "Dear diary, today I read this story where these characters..."

I was baffled and a little grossed out. At the time, I thought it was kind of gross. But apparently there was something about it that I found strangely fascinating because I went back.

Olivia: (laughs)

Berlynn: And read it. I copy and pasted it into a Word document and it formatted nice and I printed it out. I still have it! After that, whenever I was interested in something new, I was like, I wonder if they wrote slash? I wonder if anyone ever wrote slash about Hawkeye and Trapper from M.A.S.H? The answer is – spoiler alert – yes they did.

Olivia: Yes, of course (laughs).

Berlynn: When (Star Wars) The Phantom Menance came out in '99, you were just wading through the Qui-gon and Obi-wan slash. It was really amazing. So that is how I sort of stumbled upon it and the first couple of fandoms I read in.

The first fandom I wrote for was U2 and in 2001, 2002, I was really heavily into the U2 fandom. People who are Sherlock fans or Doctor Who or Supernatural, or whatever, you have no idea how fortunate you are to have the number of fics is in the quintuple digits probably.

Olivia: (laughs)

Berlynn: Whereas with U2 – I don't know what it's like now, but in 2002, there couldn't have been 50 fics in the entire fandom.

Olivia: Ohh.

Berlynn: I read them all! Can you imagine reading every fic in a fandom?

Olivia: Oh no.

(Laughter)

Berlynn: When I got to the end and I basically said to myself, if I want there to be more slash in this fandom, I'm going to have to write it myself. So then I did. I wrote this epic 17,000 word fic about Bono and The Edge, about their relationship over the course of 20 years.

Olivia: Wow.

Berlynn: I thought it was going to be the only fic I was ever going to write, so I crammed every single idea that I could into it. That's why it took place over such a huge amount of time because every idea I had, I just poured into this fic. The feedback was really incredible and positive and it just made me want to write more. It's like, okay, so now what do I do?

(Laughter)

Olivia: God, what do we do now?

Berlynn: Exactly! I was a big hit in the U2 fandom at least for no other reason than because I was writing it, which was, you know – I'm sure a lot of people were very grateful. After that I moved onto Lord of the Rings and this would have been when the movies were coming out and it was super huge. That was a very different experience because there was so much. I was a big fish in a small pond and when I moved to Lord of the Rings, no one cares.

It didn't help that I was writing Frodo and Aragorn, were my first couple of fics and that little subset of the fandom, they were very in-group, out-group. I think it was because it was interspecies and they took a lot of crap from people. They were very defensive. So when I came in, just waltzing in, very confident in myself because I was such a popular U2 writer and I just plopped this fic in everyone's lap, they were like, "Who are you?" I didn't do very well in the Lord of the Rings fandom.

(Laughter)

Berlynn: Then when I moved onto Star Trek, the original series, I wrote Spock and McCoy. That fandom is just ancient and when you walk in there, it's intimidating in a different way. Because I wrote Spock and McCoy and that is a less common pairing, people were happy to see me and I did get a lot of positive feedback, but you just feel like a drop in the ocean when you write in Star Trek.

I wrote some other little things, here and there, but Sherlock is currently my main thing and it is definitely the fandom that I have enjoyed the most and gotten the most, the best feedback, just the best fans of my work. In addition to being around other fans of the show, the community is just so amazing, I don't want to leave.

Olivia: When and how did you discover the Sherlock fandom, this wonderful, bizarre, lovely group of people?

Berlynn: (laughs)

Olivia: And what do you think has kept you here?

Berlynn: Well, the story of how I discovered it is pretty straightforward. My brother happened to have the DVD and he said, "Oh hey, this is a really good show, are you interested in watching it?" and I was because of Steven Moffat, because I was a Doctor Who fan. I said, "Oh I've heard about it. This is the guy who does Doctor Who." That's why I watched it.

But then, I mean, in five minutes, I was just hooked. All fandom squeeing aside, I really do believe it's the best television program that's ever been made. Just every aspect of it is flawless. Because it struck me so hard, so quickly, I immediately turned around as soon as I finished watching the first series – just turned around and said I just have to see what there is on the internet.

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Somethings strike harder than others. Avengers is so huge and Supernatural and Sherlock, but sometimes you get something that comes and goes, like Prometheus.

I was very pleasantly surprised to see how huge Sherlock was. It's basically as simple as that. That's what I do. When I see something I like, I turn around and get on the internet.

(Laughter)

Olivia: Now we're going to move onto your work and your writing, specifically in the Sherlock fandom. What first inspired you to write fic in this fandom and what pairings appeal to you most and why?

Berlynn: The show definitely spoke to me because of the dynamic between John and Sherlock. There's a trope that you see people talk about on Tumblr now, the dark haired genius and the blond soldier? I had in my own mind found this archetype of the cold genius and then the guy who stands next to him and humanizes him. Prior to Sherlock and John, I had Bono and The Edge. Edge is the guy who is a science nerd and everything and Bono is this guy who wears his heart on his sleeve. Spock and McCoy, obviously cold genius and the guy who stands next to him and humanizes him.

That dynamic – I was basically already prepared to love that. I think the reason why I continued writing is, like I said, the fandom is so amazing. The positive feedback and the positive energy that I get is very encouraging, like I say, much better than walking into a huge fandom like Lord of the Rings and basically being shut out by these very defensive fans and that sort of thing. As far as pairings, other pairings within Sherlock? Outside of that really depends on the writer. I don't really ship John/Lestrade or any heterosexual pairings.

(Laughter)

Sherlock and Mycroft is another one, very tricky. I've seen some really incredible fics that I enjoy on an individual level that involve those characters, but really I'm just kind of Johnlock five-ever.

Olivia: Your quite prolific in your kink meme fills. I, for one, have maybe read every single one of them multiple, multiple times and may have a few saved onto my phone. What attracts you about a prompt and do you find any patterns with what you like to fill?

Berlynn: I have a whole thing about why I love the kink meme. I wrote about it – if you go to my Ao3 page, you will see I wrote a slash tutorial called "Berlynn Wohl's Awesome Slash Tutorial For Cool People." There's a little bit in it where I talk about prior to the kink meme, it was a lot harder to come up with ideas for stories. It was a lot more difficult. There really wasn't a place for – if you listeners got into fandom after 2008, you have no idea how there was no place for people to

anonymously say, "I want to read weird stuff." Authors were also intimidated because they were afraid. "Oh if I write something that's too kinky, I will be stigmatized. People will think I'm gross."

And now, I'd heard the term "kink meme" in regards to Doctor Who and I thought of the term "kink" in the way it used to mean – which was BDSM, you know? And oh, I'm not interested in that. Once I realized what it was, I'm like, oh this is a porn vending machine! You just type in what you want and someone writes it. That appealed to me more as a writer. I've posted a couple of prompts myself, but I am much happier – just thrilled – that people are telling me what they want. What attracts me – if there's a pattern, it's wanting to do things that are different. I certainly not going to claim, oh I'm the only person that wrote this, or, I'm the only person who wrote that.

But, for example, I wrote "Dizzy Spell," which is one of my more recent fics, specifically because I kept seeing over and over and over on the kink meme, "Where is all the sex pollen fic in this fandom?" I felt like it was my duty, since nobody else was doing it.

(Laughter)

I saw that it was a rare thing and something that I felt comfortable writing and that's what attracts me. That's why I've done so much omegaverse, for example. I saw so great a demand and particularly when I started writing it, there was almost no omega! Sherlock. And I was like, but that's how I would picture it and so I need to help out all those omega! Sherlock people and write some of that.

Yeah, I guess – it attracts me, something that – and keep in mind, I have filled like thirty kink meme prompts, but I have about 300 saved on my hard-drive, number indexed so that I can go back and post the link to the fill. Because I see these things and I think, oh I might write that someday. Oh that sounds appealing. I just wait for inspiration to strike.

Olivia: Just following up on that, some of my favorite pieces of yours are your omegaverse stories. Is that kind of like your exploration of the kink meme? Is that what originally drew you towards it and is there anything in particular besides the pure demand for it that appeals to you about it?

Berlynn: The kink meme was definitely where I first discovered the omegaverse. This is so far back in the mists of time, you know, a year ago, that I don't remember precisely where it came from. But I remember seeing a prompt and even though it wasn't explained, I got the idea. I figured it must have come from some sort of anime thing. I didn't realize it came from Supernatural. I dunno, I thought anime or yaoi or whatever to me.

I was not drawn in by the mpreg, I can tell you that. I had seen mpreg in the Lord of the Rings fandom because in something that big, you're just going to see everything. Eventually, everybody's going to be paired up and everybody's going to be pregnant. I happen to be child-free. I think of idea of women being pregnant and having kids is kind of squicky. So when dudes were doing it, I was like, "Why would you even do that?"

But! I was won over as far as the omegaverse is concerned by the alpha and omega dynamics. The power and of course, the frenzy of this idea. It's a perfect way to take a character like Sherlock, who is very cold and aloof and is probably canonically asexual, and just turn him into a sex fiend. You know, what a great excuse. So that whole idea, just like the sex pollen thing? I was kind of writing sex pollen before I was writing sex pollen because I doing omegaverse. But that whole mpreg aspect has snuck in a little more. Once the omega dynamics put its foot in the door, then the mpreg kind of came in on that. Now I'm okay. I'll read an mpreg story if it's a writer that I trust.

That high weirdness, it's just like tentacles or any other kind of science fiction alternate universe. For some reason, those things speak to me and so that is what gets me started. The most flattering thing for me is when someone comments, "I am not normally into 'insert kink here', but the way you wrote it was so amazing." That to me is the most flattering thing because that is how I – you know, pennydreadful

(http://archiveofourown.org/users/pennydreadful/pseuds/pennydreadful), unfortunately does not write for the Sherlock fandom anymore, but she would write watersports and medfic and stuff that I wasn't really into. But she wrote is so well that now I will happily click on one of those kinks because I know that I can enjoy it. I adored pennydreadful so much. When people tell me that same thing, "Oh, you were the one that convinced me this was hot." That is basically the best compliment that a writer – that this writer – can receive.

Olivia: Now we're going to be focusing on current or future projects. Is there anything that you're working on now?

Berlynn: Well, I hate to spoil the magic, listeners, but we are recording this and I've just posted the first two chapters of a new sci-fi AU and I will be posting it in installments that will be finished by the time this comes out. I'm expecting to have it finished, completely posted, by Valentine's Day. After that I have a Hiddlebatch fic that I need to finish. I realize that's not precisely Sherlock related, but I do have a sequel to "Snow Day" that I am trying to complete.

And, as I mentioned earlier, I have 300 kink meme fills – or kink meme prompts, I should say, that I once I have my schedule cleared, I will probably just start going down the list.

Olivia: You've been attending a few conventions. I think most recently was the Seattle Sherlock? Am I correct in that?

Berlynn: I did four panels, I think, or maybe six. I was pretty ubiquitous there. Very grateful by the way to Mimi who runs the Sherlock con. She was very kind to take a chance on me and let me be as much of a presence as I was.

Olivia: Just briefly, any predictions or hopes for season three?

Berlynn: I don't want to make any predictions because I don't want to look foolish a year from now. I do have some hopes. There are three specific things I would really love to see. The first is: I want to see John's bedroom. Now that we've seen Sherlock's, we have to see John's and not only as a consumer of the program. I think there are a lot of people who want to see it because they just want to know more about these characters. But as a writer, it is always helpful to have that sort of information so that you can, you know, inform your stories.

The second thing I would really love to see is any kind of adaptation – even if they just squeak it in for like a third of an episode – Charles Augustus Milverton is my favorite canon, original Holmes story. So I would really like to see any adaptation of Milverton.

The third thing is I just want to see more London location shooting. It's such a thrill. I've been to London and it's just gorgeous and it was such a thrill to see, for example, when they walked through Trafalgar Square. Cause London, if you're not from there, it's just a magic place. I understand that if you do live there, it's a city like any other, but for me when I saw them walking through Trafalgar Square, it's like watching Middle-Earth (laughs). It's like seeing Gondor or something. So I'd love to see anything with Tower Bridge – I think would be a great location for a suspenseful action sequence. Or St. Paul's. Absolutely gorgeous.

I think I mentioned in one of my fics, Sherlock hanging off the railings in the Whispering Gallery. Then the Houses of Parliament, which, if you're going to London, go in August because that's when they do the Parliament tours and it is incredible. I'd love to see them – since they've been in Buckingham Palace, I'd love to see them in the Houses of Parliament (laughs). Causing trouble.

Olivia: Before we wrap up, I just want to ask you one final question: Why is writing fanfic and being in fandom, and slashing and doing all that wonderful, wonderful stuff – why is that important to you?

Berlynn: Oh. This is such a huge question and the thing is fandom is a big part of my life and slash has made up the majority of the fandom activity. I have spent a lot of time writing – there's a couple of essays that I posted on my Tumblr about why – because people always want to know, "Why do you do this?" I posted a couple of essays on Tumblr which I will relate here.

Women have a hard time consuming popular culture because we're so marginalized and our roles are so stereotyped and minimized. So when you see two characters like Sherlock and John, or Kirk and Spock would be a classic example. When you see these characters and they have this wonderful friendship. They have these fantastic adventures together and then you see the treatment of heterosexual couples in television and it's always just this soap opera. It's always tainted, even a friendship. What may begin as a friendship is usually tainted by the question of sex. You know, they sleep together then they regret it. It's just this thing that lingers on the show.

So when you see these two very different representations in popular culture, you long for the one with the two guys. The one that is exciting and funny and thrilling and you say, that would be the perfect relationship. I'd love to have a relationship like that. All it needs is a sexual element and it would basically be a perfect romance. And it's like, oh well why can't there be a sexual element?

I think that's where the original light-bulb, that prompts women who if not write slash, at least read it. It's sort of a pushing back against what mainstream media should be appealing or important to you. I always applaud any – I think it's very important – any time anybody pushes back what the mainstream, what corporations, what they are telling you what you should enjoy and what you should want. Because that's the beginning of the moneymaking process. It's how they feed on our insecurities and get us to spend money to try and feel better about ourselves.

What is so great about slash is, it's free. It's just people getting together and taking time out of their busy days. They're doing it for the love the game. They're giving it away and they just want people to be happy. They just want to be creative and contribute to this community and they're not motivated by money. They're not motivated by a desire for fame. I think that is just wonderful in this modern world.

For me my own self personally, everybody writes it for a different reason and everybody gets something different out of it. For me, I have a hard time – I haven't spent a lot of time in relationships. When I was, sometimes I was happy, but a lot of times, I wasn't. I think a lot of it has to do with that baggage, all of those gender dynamics and all that emotional baggage. Even when it's not there, it's there because of all the messages that you receive as a woman about what you need to do to make a man happy or what should be making you happy. To remove the gender element, to consume and produce stories about two people who are the same gender, that particular type of baggage vanishes and then you can worry about the more fun stuff. That has been my way of coping with the insecurities and anxieties that I have about relationships. I've been very fortunate that most of the friends that I've had and relationships that I've had were with people who were cool about what I did. They even sometimes thought it was amusing. I mean, I've had more than one guy watch Sherlock and say, "I totally understand why you do what you do." So that's very comforting.

The other thing – I think that's my reason why I do it for myself. That's kind of my primary motivator. But I also want to entertain people. I've always been that way. This is just what I'm good at. This is how I entertain people best. There's other things that I have done and not gotten the amount of positive feedback. Of course, I get – not criticism – some members of my family who know what I do, they wish that I would stop wasting my time writing pornography and write fiction that I might actually be able to sell and maybe be a professional writer.

To me that just sounds like work! That's a very different – it's not the same thing. It doesn't work the same way. I have written for money and it's much more stressful. Dealing with an editor is much more difficult for someone like me who has a lot of anxiety about what I do. I just think this is more fun and it's easier and it gets me where I want to be, which is entertaining people.

Everyday people tell me that they love me. I guess you have to be kind of messed up to need people, like strangers to tell you they love you everyday. But really, when I get stuck in the middle of a story and, ohhh I don't want to finish this. I just think of, this is going to make people happy and they're going to say nice things about me and that is a really powerful motivator. I'm sure just about every writer feels the same way, so people who are listening, please comment on fics that you like. Tell people that you like them! Because it's so important.

But yeah, whatever I can do to spread the word about slash. I mean, that's why I wrote the slash tutorial and that's why I wrote the essays that I posted on my Tumblr. You can scroll back; they are maybe in November 6th, 7th of 2012. I wanted something to encourage people. I thought, this is something I'm really good at and I know there are people who also want to do this and they are scared and they shouldn't be. Once you get started, it's actually pretty easy. I want to encourage – not that the Sherlock fandom needs any encouragement! We are already a very exuberant group. I just want to do what I can to make fandom a better place (laughs). If I can't make the world a better place. I guess that's why it's important to me.

Olivia: Well this concludes the file in the Notebook of Kitty Riley. Berlynn Wohl can be found on AO3, Tumblr and on Deviantart. She will be attending panels at Norwescon March 28th through the 31st, link in the show notes for all of these.

Berlynn, it was an honor to have you here on Three Patch. Thank you for joining us.

Berlynn: Thank you, it was a genuine pleasure.

(Music outro)

Transcription Team

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Music

From the Notebook of Kitty Riley: Miles Davis, Kind of Blue: So What (get it here)

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