# CANON VS. 'FANON':
# GENRE DEVICES IN CONTEMPORARY FANFICTION

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By

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## ABSTRACT

Fanfiction is a genre of literature that scholars can trace all the way back to ancient Greece and thus it has garnered a multitude of definitions over the years. The purpose of this project is to move beyond the description of, "Stories based off of another author's work" and to instead examine the ways in which contemporary fanfiction differs from other types of transformative texts, as well as to highlight how it has changed since its move into online archives. In this thesis I argue that contemporary fanfiction is a highly communal genre that uses other authors' works as a starting point, but the stories fans then produce are unique in the narrative elements they emphasize, the language the stories are written in, and the mediums through which the readers consume them. In order to demonstrate this, I examine numerous fics from four different fandoms in order to establish five characteristics of the genre: shared knowledge, language, medium, "bad" writing, and the inclusion of critical analysis. I then end with a case study of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, using this work's unique move from fic to mainstream novel in order to highlight how fic is its own style of writing, one seeped in both complexity and contradiction.

This thesis is dedicated to my online friends: writers of fic, makers of vids, GIF creators, meta developers, the fan artists, the cosplayers, and all of the consumers who make the work worthwhile.

I would like to thank my thesis committee: Professor Caetlin Benson-Allott and Professor Michael Macovski. Your advice, corrections, and overall support have been invaluable to this project.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and peers. Our discussions in the grad lounge proved nearly as informative as the research itself.

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**An Ad For Fanfiction**


*Please use fan fiction responsibly. Do not read while operating heavy machinery. Side effects for fanfiction include: difficulty distinguishing fanon from canon, spontaneous smushing of names, inability to read fluff in public without making goofy faces, death of feels, and it's a gateway to further fannish involvement. Ask your doctor if you are already taking fanvids or meta. Not suitable for those prone to shipwars* (Casey08, Kristine).

## A Brief, Personal Timeline

**1990** Born; September 7th

**1996-1998** Consumed a great number of books, manga, and anime.

**1999** Discovered fanfiction for the first time on a desktop, Dell computer: *Yu Yu Hakusho,* Kuwabara/Yukina rom coms and H/C fics.

**Late in 1999** Discovered slash: *Yu Yu Hakusho*, a Hiei/Kurama PWP - "Seven Minutes in Heaven" by Mina Lightstar, art by Morgan D. Printed it, hid it in a puzzle box, showed it to my friends. We started composing stories of our own soon after.

**2000-2003** Consumed a great number of books, manga, anime, and fanfiction.

**2005** Wrote "Confessions of a Sentimental Gunslinger" for a class assignment, a fifteen-stanza poem based off of Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series. Began to wonder if this was a type of fanfiction.

**2010** Started seriously writing fic, beginning with "Dream a Little Dream of Me," an Original Series *Star Trek* Kirk/Spock pre-slash. It was about as well written as one would expect (which is to say, not well written at all).

**2012** Published a poem, "I Walk a Path of Cyclicality" in *Sherlock's Home: The Empty House*, making my first published piece (arguably) a work of fanfiction. This generated a whole host of new questions for me about defining fic and how it relates to other transformative works.

**2012-2014** Consumed a great number of books, manga, anime, and fanfiction. Wrote a lot of fic and published it all on FFN; later on AO3. Started reading *about* fic and grew concerned with how contemporary fanfiction is defined (or *not* defined, as the case may be).

**2015** Wrote a Master's thesis that addresses some of the above concerns.

## Introduction: Wibbly Wobbly, Timey Wimey Fic[1]

*"Fan fic texts are very diverse and it is difficult,*
*if not impossible, to draw any general conclusions from them"*
- Berit Åström

Sometimes the universe pairs random events together, allowing us to make satisfying—if indulgent—connections. On February 15th 2014, quite literally the day I started seriously thinking about this project, the fanfiction archive AO3[2] announced that its users had posted their 1,000,000 work. This came just four years after entering open beta and the archive continues to grow at an exponential rate. As of that date, AO3 houses 270,000 registered users, a million unregistered users visit each day, and they issue roughly 750 new invitations every 24 hours. What this means, in AO3's own words, is that:

> [This] rapid growth shows the ever-increasing number of fans **creating and sharing fanworks** online… The sheer number of visitors to AO3 also represents the importance of fanworks to the **everyday life** of millions of people internationally. Whether fans are creating, commenting, sharing, or viewing, they engage in fannish activities every single day—something that's never more clear than when the Archive can't be accessed! (Original emphasis).

Though this milestone was one of the largest changes within transformative culture this past year (due to increased movement away from the older Fanfiction.net archive and towards AO3) it was far from the only notable, fic-related event of 2014. Other transformative works—particularly in the form of film—made their mark on the year: Tolkien's saga finally came to an end with the release of *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five*

[1] "Wibbly wobbly, timey wimey" is a popular phrase from *Doctor Who* and is used by fans to describe something that is in many ways indescribable.
[2] AO3 is the common abbreviation for "Archive of Our Own." The abbreviation stems from the "A" of "Archive" combined with the three "O's" in "of Our Own."

*Armies*, Village Roadshow Picture's produced a race-bent version of *Annie*, and the Marvel Cinematic Universe demonstrated their continued ability to construct varied but nevertheless entertaining films. Furthermore, 2014 saw the release of the first *Fifty Shades of Grey* trailer—a story with roots in fanfiction—as well as the publication through Wattpad of Anna Todd's phenomenally popular *After* series, also a form of fanfiction based on the British pop group One Direction. Though reaching nearly 300 million reads is a success in and of itself, Todd has followed in E.L. James' footsteps and signed a three volume book deal with Simon & Schuster, no doubt accumulating quite the paycheck along with her enormous popularity.

What all of this serves to highlight is that not only do transformative works continue to be a massive part of American and British popular culture but also that they continue to grow and change at a rapid pace. This is true particularly when it comes to fanfiction. Indeed, all of the above examples technically fall under the umbrella term of 'fic.' Or, to put it more plainly, these are all works based off another author's characters, settings, or ideas. As Sheenagh Pugh defines it in her groundbreaking book *The Democratic Genre*, fanfiction is "writing, whether official or unofficial, paid or unpaid which makes of an accepted canon of characters, settings and plots generated by another writer or writers" (Pugh 25). Long time acafan[3] Henry Jenkins says simply that fics are "any prose retelling of stories and characters drawn from mass-media content" but also adds an important cultural element, claiming that fanfiction is also, "a way of the culture repairing the damage done in a system where contemporary myths are owned by corporations instead of owned by folk" (285).

[3] An "acafan" is someone who is both an academic and a fan but whose interest is primarily academic. Someone whose interest is primarily fannish is referred to as a "fan scholar." The terms were popularized by Matt Hill in his 2002 book *Fan Cultures.*

Meredith McCardle defines fic as any writing based off contemporary popular culture that is not "professional," while Natasha Simonova includes in her definition fic that dates all the way back to the 17th century.[4] Gerard Gennette describes aspects of fic in his definition of paratexts, a work that "occupies a liminal space between audience and fictional universe," while Jonathan Gray goes on to define paratexts as "not simply add-ons, spinoffs, and also-runs: they create texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them" (Herzog, Gray). One fic author, Cyndy Aleo, writing within Anne Jamison's *Fic: Why Fanfiction is Taking Over the World*, says simply that fic is, "when you think about [a novel] and dream of what happens after the final page, you are writing a fanfiction" (212). According to Aleo then, fic doesn't even need to involve writing; the imaginative process alone is enough.[5] Furthermore, beyond these massively popular (read: potentially lowbrow) texts, renowned works such as Jean Rhy's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, J.M. Goetzee's *Foe*, Virgil's *The Aeneid,* James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Arthur Laurents' *West Side Story* are all, by the above definitions, fanfiction.[6]

As useful as such breadth can be however, this same scope can make it difficult to pinpoint what exactly "fanfiction" is.[7] After all, though harboring many important

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[4] For more information see "Fan Fiction and the Author in the Early 17th Century: The Case of Sidney's Arcadia."

[5] I would argue that Aleo is edging more towards a definition of "fanon" here rather than "fanfiction." A fanon comprises various responses to a text (thoughts, comments, ideas) that are not necessarily written down in any formalized manner, as fanfiction is.

[6] For a more complete list see Aja Romano's post, "I'm done explaining why fanfic is okay." Addressing the numerous authors who have criticized fanfiction over the years, she prefaces her list with, "Congratulations! You've just summarily dismissed as criminal, immoral, and unimaginative each of the following Pulitzer Prize-winning writers and works" before labeling more than a hundred of the world's most beloved stories as fanfiction.

[7] "Fanfiction" is far from the only term struggling with a definition. Fans have long bemoaned the breadth of the "AU." As early as 1991 Bacon-Smith took issue with the term

similarities, a remake of *Annie* that remains within visual media is not the same as a book-to-film adaptation like *The Hobbit*; neither of these commercially produced works are the same as gift-driven stories written by fans in their free time; and, as I will argue in Chapter Five, these differ significantly from the pulled-to-publish (P2P) novels like *After* and *Fifty Shades of Grey.* Perhaps, more importantly, the non-profit fics of online culture have changed dramatically in form and availability since their beginnings as print stories in edited fanzines. Though all of these works are technically fanfiction, they are not the fanfiction of *today*. They are not, to be blunt, what one would normally term "fanfiction" in a colloquial or an academic conversation, despite what the definitions seem to suggest.

This thesis is not an attempt to redefine fanfiction as a whole. Such an endeavor would be impossible. As Katherine Morrissey rightly points out, "How do we attempt to process a concept that is simultaneously claimed as an activity, an identity, and a connection to others?" It is certainly no easy task. Thus my goal is not to set out unyielding definitions that refuse to take fic's diversity into consideration, but rather to lay out a series of defining characteristics that broadly represent a particular *type* of fanfiction—one that is becoming more and more prevalent among fans and acafans alike: a fanfiction defined primarily by its communal nature, its reliance on the Internet, and its desire to combine the creative with the critical. Given its scope, if we consider fanfiction as a particular sort of creative *technique*, then the fanfiction I define here is one of many *genres* (which in turn harbors hundreds of subgenres and subsets, far too many to easily categorize).[8] Simply put, my goal is to begin separating this type of contemporary fanfiction from other kinds of

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"fandom" itself, claiming that it "arises out of the need of the ethnographer to classify, and not out of the need of the community to define itself" (23).

[8] See Jenkins' list of the ten most common types of fanfiction, each of which contains numerous subgenres (162-77).

transformative works and to highlight the communal and technology-centric ways in which it has evolved since the early 90's (particularly through the emergence of Internet archives in the 2000's). These distinctions will be especially useful given the field's recent move towards analyzing fanfiction as a predominantly literary phenomenon. Prior to Pugh's publication in 2005, academics focused on the sociological 'why' of fanfiction—Why didn't fans create their *own* characters and scenarios? Why did the stories involve so much sex? Why were they written and read overwhelmingly by women?—rather than asking the more practical 'what': what distinguishes fanfiction from other forms of writing? What do those differences offer the literary community at large? Though the sociological questions are both important and closely tied to the literary ones, I hope that by narrowing down a more exact definition of contemporary fanfiction, I and other scholars can begin using that information to tease out some of the answers to both types of questions.

Thus, my thesis lays out and explores four defining characteristics of this genre (from here out referred to simply as "fanfiction"). Chapter One examines what scholars have long acknowledged as a central aspect of fic: the sharing and overlapping of knowledge. This quite obviously begins with fans appropriating the work of others (which, in turn, may have borrowed from or been heavily influenced by previous texts) and reworking it into something they both want to read and/or something they often feel that society needs, if it is not already provided by commercial entertainment. However, the blending of knowledge continues far beyond this initial stage, with fans merging radically different canons together, building off one another's stories, and identifying pieces of knowledge (texts, facts, theories) that are (generally) agreed upon by the whole

community.[9] This sharing allows for writers to craft stories that are otherwise unavailable to those hindered by copyright and other forms of intellectual property laws. The base knowledge fans require of one another allows them to adapt and experiment with aspects of these stories at an incredibly rapid pace, and often times this same knowledge allows for easy subversion of readers' expectations.

Chapter Two moves to the language and the medium of fanfic, citing the ways in which it varies dramatically from other forms of writing. As with knowledge, fic has overlapped multiple forms of language—particularly the language of fandom and the broader, acronym-heavy language of the Internet—in order to form a set of linguistic rules unique to fic. The Internet as a medium has also heavily influenced the development of fic as a genre. Though its roots lie in print fanzines, the movement towards an almost entirely digital form of publication has vastly increased the influence of readers' opinions on a writer's work. With the re-emergence of serial publication and the introduction of commenting, kudos, and hyperlinks, fic writers are more connected to their readers than in any other genre. This connection has helped to solidify fic's traditional "gift-culture" in a time were P2Ps[10] are beginning to threaten the non-commercial industry.

Chapter Three examines the "bad" writing that is so prevalent within fanfiction. I use quotation marks here because I argue that a genre unhindered by mainstream

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[9] This agreement is commonly known as the "fanon." One example is the recent film *Jupiter Ascending* that a) introduces a character who claims that he injured the throat of a royal and b) introduces a royal character who speaks in a whispery (read: injured) voice and wears high collars, as if to hide a scar. Though it is never stated explicitly in the canon that Character A attacked Character B, there is enough evidence and enough consensus to make this detail a part of *Jupiter Ascending's* fanon.

[10] Standing for "pull to publish," P2P as a noun refers to a fic that has been loosely edited into an "original" story and then published mainstream. Though some works differ enough that both the fic and the novel can coincide peacefully, the majority of P2Ps are literally pulled from the Internet, often causing much grief among fans.

publication rules—indeed, a genre that is entirely self-published—will obviously produce a great deal of simplistic, repetitive, and underdeveloped writing due to volume alone. However, it also produces writing that may only be seen as "bad" to an outsider. Within fanfiction, certain aspects of a story are heavily prized over others. A fic with numerous spelling and grammar mistakes may still become popular if it houses an original idea. Fans my still praise a story with a truly awful plot if it handles characterization well, or a story may gain the status of "must read" even if it was never completed (an event generally unheard of in mainstream writing due to contracts and baring the death of the author—and even then those stories are often taken up by children of the deceased or close friends). Sometimes authors compose "bad" fics deliberately in an attempt to elicit laughs or to gain a lot of attention. The point is that "bad" takes on a far different, more complicated meaning within fic than it does in mainstream publishing.

Chapter Four explores the overlap of the creative and the critical within fanfiction. Fic is only one small part of a fandom's creative production—there are fanvids, fanart, graphics, music playlists, etc.—and many of these art forms include critical commentary of their canons. Fic is no exception. I argue here that unlike other genres of fiction, fanfiction is particularly concerned with combining entertainment with an analysis of the stories writers are engaging with. If fans take interest in theories, character development, scene analysis, or any of the other numerous topics one might find in an academic setting, they are just as likely to find arguments on these subjects in a fandom's fictional stories as in a traditional, non-fiction form (such as an essay, manuscript, or meta).

Finally, Chapter Five will be a short case study that looks at E.L. James' successful trilogy, *Fifty Shades of Grey.* As a P2P series that found success both as a fic and as an

'original' collection of novels, *Fifty Shades* is in a unique position to allow a comparison of fic and mainstream stories, to see how characteristics of fanfiction are understood when presented to a non-fandom audience. Despite its popularity (which can be explained by a wealth of non-literary reasons), *Fifty Shades* has come under heavy criticism for

1. Its depiction of an abusive relationship within a BDSM lifestyle, and

2. Its overall "bad" writing.

I argue that these ethical concerns only surfaced once E.L. James took *Fifty Shades* out of its fandom context (which is known for challenging society's norms, particularly when it comes to sex) and that these cases of "bad" writing occur primarily because mainstream readers lack the foundation of knowledge needed to understand *Fifty Shades* as a fic (and E.L. James did not bother to account for that discrepancy in her editing). Simply put, readers are able to understand *Fifty Shades* far better as a fanfiction than as a profic[11] and these tensions serve to highlight many of the characteristics listed earlier in the thesis.

It is worth noting that in describing these aspects of fanfiction, I am drawing on topics that scholars have analyzed before—by Jenkins, Pugh, Jamison, Hellekson, Busse, Gray, and numerous others. It would be foolish of me to claim that all of the arguments I pose here are unique, however, my purpose is two-fold: first, I intend to utilize these scholars' work to better define the genre of contemporary fanfiction. Second, I aim to highlight various minor characteristics of fan fiction that have not, to my knowledge, been examined before. To give just a brief example, many scholars have tackled language within

[11] A shorthand term for professionally published fiction, also sometimes known as "litfic." It is generally used to refer to original fiction but can also apply to P2P stories, like *Fifty Shades,* in which numerous readers are unaware of the novels' fic origins.

fanfiction, mostly within fandom generally and in reference to the Internet at large. However, few have examined portmanteaus—one of my primary examples within Chapter Two—and one of the most influential changes fans made to their linguistics. I intend not only to use these scholars' work to characterize fanfiction but also to examine aspects of the genre that, while not making up the foundation of fanfiction as a whole, nevertheless have helped shaped the genre into what it is today.

In order to accomplish all of this, I will be modeling the structure of my thesis after Pugh's book and drawing examples from four distinct fandoms. Obviously, no fic examined here could ever accurately represent the sheer variety of fanfiction available, and I make no claims that it should. Rather, I have chosen examples that cover as wide a range of English-based fanfiction as possible—given that this is just a single thesis—so as to achieve some semblance of breadth and to highlight that, as diverse as fanfiction is, the characteristics I am examining are (comparatively) universal. Thus, the fandoms I have chosen provide four things:

1. A balance among mediums. There are two TV shows, one film, and one series that started as a single novel (before moving to short stories and later the screen).
2. A balance in the size of the fandoms. Two are incredibly large, while the others are rather small in comparison—though certainly larger than some.
3. A balance in the age of the fandoms, with canons beginning in 1891, 1966, 2011, and 2013.
4. Each fandom also differs drastically in terms of its preferred ships—het or slash.[12]

[12] "Het" is short for "heterosexual" – a male/female ship. Slash refers to a homosexual or male/male ship. "Ship" itself is a stand-in for "relationship," and is used as either a noun or a verb.

Perhaps more importantly than any of these four points, each of these texts represents fandoms that I personally read in extensively, and have also written fanfiction for myself, which allows me to view the stories not only as "finished" texts but also as works in progress from the perspective of an author—a useful ability given fanfiction's inherently transitory nature. The majority of scholars writing about fic admit to reading it (for academic if not recreational purposes), yet few, to my knowledge, have tried their hand at writing it, which perhaps limits their understanding to some degree. I chose these fandoms as they are ones that I am the most informed to discuss—as a scholar, a reader, and as a fic writer.

*Magic Is Coming: Once Upon a Time*

Beginning in 2011 and currently in its fourth season, the television program *Once Upon a Time* is already considered fanfiction by the broadest of definitions. It follows a young woman, Emma Swan, who on her 28th birthday receives a visit from her son, Henry, who she gave up for adoption some ten years earlier. Henry informs Emma that his hometown of Storybrooke is actually made up of fairy tale characters, all of whom have lost their memories due to a curse cast by the Evil Queen. Now they believe they are simply boring, everyday people living in a small town in Maine, unaware of their altered memories or their inability to age. Emma, the daughter of Snow White and Prince Charming, was the only resident of the Enchanted Forest who escaped all those years ago. Due to her escape and as child born out of True Love, Emma is now the only person capable of breaking the curse.

Emma's adventures lead her to interact with all manner of modified fictional characters—from a Rumplestiltskin who is also the Beast of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, to a Little Red Riding Hood who is likewise the fearsome wolf. The show itself is already a type of crossover AU, in which the viewers' reality and the "reality" of the Enchanted Forest (along with other magical realms) are meant to overlap. Though young, *Once Upon a Time* boasts an extensive and dedicated fanbase. There are over 14,000 fics currently hosted at AO3, with Belle and Rumplestiltskin featured as the most popular pairing (though the femslash pairing of Emma and the Evil Queen/Regina follows it closely). *Once* has also inspired a spin-off (a fic of a fic, if you will), *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland.* However, though *Wonderland* gained primarily favorable reviews, ABC announced in March of 2014 that the spin-off would end after just one season.

*To Fight Monsters We Created Monsters: Pacific Rim*

The most recent text of this selection, *Pacific Rim* came out in theaters just two years ago in July of 2013. Like *Once Upon a Time*, *Pacific Rim* combines a host of established tropes and stock characters into one narrative, with director Guillermo del Toro drawing from various Sci–Fi genres, Japanese monster movies, the action-driven blockbuster phenomenon, and—despite claiming to have never seen this series in particular—mecha animes such as Neon Genesis Evangelion (Nivenus). Given that it combines so much that was already popular, it is unsurprising that *Pacific Rim* quickly developed its own fanbase. Now with over 6,000 fics on AO3 and some 700 at FFN, what the film lacks in terms of its literary output—at least in comparison to other fandoms—it makes up for in art, cosplays, metas, and discussion. The response has been positive enough to garner a sequel, set for release in 2017.

The story itself follows a group of soldiers on an apocalyptic Earth, living in the year 2025. Seventeen years previously, a "breach" opened in San Francisco from which horrific, titan-sized monsters—dubbed Kaiju—began to emerge. In the time after the first attack humans developed the Jaeger Program: robots capable of fighting the Kaiju but that require two pilots, connected by a neural bridge, to control. The film itself follows the last surviving Jaegers, their pilots, and a team of science personal in their attempts to finally close the breach for good. *Pacific Rim* has inspired numerous pairings and romantic fics, due in no small part to the canonical detail that partners must be "drift compatible" (i.e. have an incredibly strong bond) in order to pilot a Jaeger.

*Where No Man Has Gone Before: Star Trek*

*Star Trek* will always hold a crucial place within fandom—and particularly within fic—for its work in establishing fanfiction as a genre. It was the first fandom where fic became so central to fans that it was able to sustain multiple fanzines devoted exclusively to their writings (Jamison 84). It is also credited with helping to garner fic more respect, mainly through the publication of *Star Trek: the New Voyages.* Even more influential than either of these things, *Star Trek* acted as a catalyst of the slash subgenre. If you define fic broadly to mean a work heavily influenced by another's, then the popularity of the male/male pairing traces back (at least) to ancient Greece where Homer's popularizing of Achilles and Patroclus in *The Iliad* lead to later authors depicting the duo as lovers.[13] If, however, like me, you take "fanfiction" to mean stories written by fans in media fanzines beginning in the late 1960's, and later in online archives with the popularization of the Internet, then "slash" did not exist until *Star Trek* began airing in 1966.

[13] See Plato's *Symposium* and Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles,* to name just two.

*Star Trek: The Original Series* follows the voyages of the United Federation of Planet's central starship, the USS Enterprise. Its crew is on a five-year mission to "explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man [or woman] has gone before," as the show's title sequence proclaims. Captained by the handsome and adventurous James T. Kirk, who in turn is assisted by his logical (and equally handsome) first officer Spock, the show spends as much time exploring their relationship as it does the stars. With canonical terms such as T'hy'la—meaning "friend, brother, and/or lover"—used to describe their relationship and plot lines in which each continually gives up his life and greatest possession for the other, it is easy to see how the duo has inspired fic for going on fifty years. Despite spawning five additional television series, twelve films, and hundreds of pastiches, Kirk and Spock remain *the* pairing of the fanbase, the one that started it all and continues to inspire.

*To Eliminate the Impossible… : Sherlock Holmes*

Beyond having the honor of arguably being the largest active fandom, Sherlock Holmes is also almost certainly the oldest. Beginning in 1887, when Sr. Author Conan Doyle first published his novel *A Study in Scarlet* in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*, and later with the arrival of his first series of short stories in 1891, the peoples' love of Holmes and Watson increased during this time at a rapid rate. From there, Holmes continued to gain attention until, in Doyle's lifetime alone, there were four novels, forty-six short stories, numerous plays, and an uncalculated number of parodies. Despite Doyle's attempts to "kill" Holmes in "The Final Problem," his fans refused to let the character perish—with the famous

apocryphal tale stating that readers wore black mourning bands in protest[14]—and in the nearly hundred and thirty years since, Sherlock Holmes has become one of the most recognizable figures on earth. From pastiches to comics, the theater to the screen, television shows to web series, and an exponential amount of fanfiction, fans are no more ready to let Holmes die now than they were in the 19th century.

The stories themselves have set the standard for most modern day detective and procedural fiction. When army surgeon John Watson returns to London from time spent in the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers and finds himself in need of lodgings, he is fortunate enough to have an acquaintance that introduces him to one Sherlock Holmes, consulting detective and a student in the art of deduction. From there the two spend their lives solving cases together with Watson generally narrating the events, commenting not only on the sensational mysteries, but also on Holmes' equally sensational habits. It is largely the friends' charismatic dynamic that has inspired so many fan works and allowed for them to endure, but Doyle's own interest (or lack thereof) in his creations has also played a part. In his detachment, Doyle made numerous contradictions and mistakes in his stories—the types of "gaps" that fic writers love to fill— and his overall distaste for Holmes lead him to firmly proclaim, "You may marry him, or murder or do what you like with him."[15] This sort of leeway with a character is hard to come by and even if fans do not understand Doyle's dislike of Holmes, they are more than willing to take advantage of it.

[14] Despite the popularity of this legend, Sherlockians have yet to find journalistic proof that such an event occurred. See also Peter Calamai's challenge for more information.
[15] Said to actor William Gillette when he asked Doyle if he could marry Holmes in a stage adaptation he and producer Charles Frohman were working on in the early 1890's.

## Chapter One
## Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations: Shared Knowledge Among Fic Authors

*"'original' means different things to*
*different people in different circles—*
*much like the word 'fanfiction' itself."*
*- Jamison, 274*

I would like to begin this chapter by echoing the words of Anne Jamison in the introduction to her book, *Fic: Why Fanfiction is Taking Over the World*: "I did not want fanfiction to be represented by a single voice, least of all mine, when at its very essence, fanfiction challenges that model of authorship" (20). I could not agree with her assessment more. Jamison bypasses this problem by bringing together over thirty unique voices into her text, all of whom have a different idea about what fanfiction is, what it is not, and how it is impacting the future of literature. Singularity is not a part of the fic genre but it is, sadly, a part of the thesis genre. Though influenced by numerous scholars, advisors, and peers, I do not have the benefit of drawing on others' contributions in the same way that Jamison has. This work is overwhelmingly written in my own voice.

However, the same could never be said of fanfiction itself. One of its most defining characteristics is that, like fandom more generally, fic is community driven.[16] This means that at no point does an author's work exist within a vacuum. A comic, for example, may take characters from one story and place them into the setting of another. The style may be a blend of numerous artists' work—both amateur and professional—and though the execution is original, the idea may stem from a text-post the author saw months before.

[16] In 2008 Penguin Books conducted an experiment to see if a "community [could] write a novel" and found that "the answer is yes, but a terrible one!" Here, the problem lies in that Penguin had 1,500 people all *actively* writing the same text, rather than funneling their shared knowledge through a single or even handful of writers (Douglas).

That text-post in turn may have been born of another fan's theory, a theory that gained popularity until almost all of the fandom agreed with it—catapulting it into the fanon[17]. This then further boosts the notoriety of the comic. One fan uses it as a starting point for a playlist, making the inspirational comic into her cover art. Another fan starts drawing art of her own, using the comic as a template. Another writes a fic, changing the medium entirely. This circular effect—really more of a Celtic knot, with ideas branching off and overlapping and circling back to where they started—continues until no one fan can truly say who initially came up with what.[18]

This reworking of texts—these modern palimpsests—is known today as "textual poaching." The term was first coined by French scholar Michel de Certeau in 1984 when he wrote in his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, that the purpose of his work was to:

> make explicit the systems of operational combination (*les combinatoires d'operations*) which also compose a "culture," and to bring to light the models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in society (a status that does not mean that they are either passive or docile) is concealed by the euphemistic term "consumers," Everyday life invents itself by *poaching* in countless ways the property of others (xii).

Certeau goes on to describe these consumers as people who, "move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write,

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[17] The acceptance of a fanon can sometimes lead to confusion, when fans first approach a canon with the expectation of seeing certain events or characterizations that are not actually there.

[18] A similar line of creativity occurred from a text-post proposing, "An asexual and a pansexual become room-mates and have wacky adventures. The show is called 'All or Nothing'" (Discontentramblings). The concept became so popular that fans raised over $5,000 for a web series (Stegeman).

despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it for themselves" (174). The use of the word "despoiling" touches on the resistance inherent in fandom, an almost violent taking-back of agency when it comes to interpreting and reinterpreting texts. Ten years later, Henry Jenkins went on to apply this "poaching" to fandom in particular, acknowledging that same resistance in *Textual Poachers*.[19] The goal of poaching is to remove stories from a tightly controlled, consumer environment and place them into the "self-governed regulatory bodies" of fandom (Mayer-Schonberger 8). For fans then, writing is not the "solipsistic operation" that Walter Ong describes[20] and "originality" is rarely achieved by sitting alone at one's desk[21] (143). The act of creating new stories deliberately out of old ones—and then creating further stories out of those—is not merely fun and industrious (though it is both those things, too), but it is primarily a necessity. It is a way of reclaiming consumer agency, of harking back to a time—generally times of myths—when story-telling was a communal endeavor that took place over generations, rather than a (supposedly) solitary one. As Bacon-Smith questioned right around the time Jenkins was writing his first book, "If we turn the question of creativity in the canon back on itself, however, we may well ask: how unique is any literary text?" (56).

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[19] Many scholars today disagree with Jenkins, claiming that, "the metaphor of 'poaching' is too narrow to capture the true extent of fan creativity" (Van Steenhuyse).

[20] Ong goes on to state that he is "writing a book which I hope will be read by hundreds of thousands of people, so I must be isolated from everyone." In contrast, a fic writer would say, "I am writing a story which I hope will be read by hundreds of thousands of people, so I'd better be as sociable as possible—learn who these people are and what they're looking for."

[21] This is a concept that didn't exist until the Romantic Age when a "singular point of creative genius" became popularized (Mayer-Schonberger 13).

**A Million Heads are Better Than One**

Fans thrive on collectivity and ultimately there are numerous benefits to this type of communal work. How many as children heard the idiom, "Two heads are better than one"? What about a couple million heads? What does that produce? When thousands of fans focus in on the same, singular text they will eventually come up with something "better" than the original (however one chooses to define "better"). Simply put, they will fill in gaps in the story that the author left wide open[22]—both intentionally and not—toss in unexpected but surprisingly pleasing details, and speak to groups of readers that the author didn't know existed or didn't care to address. Or, to put it more bluntly:

> No one is more critical of art than fandom. No one is more capable of investigating the nuances of expression than fandom—because it's a vast multitude pooling resources and ideas. Fandom is about *correcting* the flaws and vices of the original. It's about protest and rebellion, essentially. Fandom is the voice of the mob that can do better than the original, that often flies in the face of the original, that will accept nothing less than the best the medium (and the human at the helm) is capable of. Fandom is about putting debate and conversation back into artistic process—*especially* if the artists or author in question has become so vain that all criticism is ignored, distrusted, thrown back in the criticizer's face… (Ifeelbetterer).[23]

Of course, not every fan creates specifically from this space of almost-anger, from this need to correct the original source. In *The Democratic Genre*, Pugh identifies two main

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[22] Gaps for fans do not necessarily indicate a flaw. Often fans *want* texts to have gaps so that they can fill them in, both for the entertainment aspects and out of fear that original writer(s) will fill them "incorrectly" (Pugh, "The Erotic Space").

[23] For a similar—though less hostile—view, see glitterarygetsit's articulation of why, for her, "fandom is primary, and canon is secondary" (glitterarygetsit).

types of fic: those that give the reader *more of* the original text (such as a *Once Upon a Time* fic, which fans praise for how much it reads like the canon) and fics that give the reader *more from* the original text (such as an *OUAT* fic that pairs Aurora with Mulan, which fans view as a much needed queer relationship within the popular show. OUAT hinted at romance between the two but never followed through with it) (Bricker). It is the combination of both these types that give fic its diversity and it is only because of its communal nature that fic is able to sustain both types at all. A single author, no matter how talented, is not capable of writing a story that caters to every reader's expectations, desires, or longing for representation. However, an entire community can.

Indeed, most readers would not want that from a single author, even if such an achievement were possible. Every fan who reads or writes fic does so because they want some kind of *more* from the story, but there is a distinct difference between the desire to know more *about* a character or a world and the desire to read a well-crafted tale. Imagine, for example, if Tolkien's original trilogy contained all the information found in the *Silmarillion*[24]. No matter how much fans may want that information, most would agree that they do not want it *there*, where it would interrupt the flow of action and bog down the story with extraneous detail. *Lord of the Rings* fans are lucky in that Tolkien provided them with both an excellent trilogy and multiple, additional texts, but for the majority of fandoms that desire for *more* must be tackled by the fans alone—and it must be achieved in small, easy-to-swallow doses. It is no surprise then that fanfiction is primarily serialized; posted one chapter at a time. Beyond attracting attention through cliffhangers and allowing a

[24] A posthumous novel published by Tolkien's son, Christopher. It collects a number of Tolkien's works relating to the worlds contained within *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings.*

writer the space to respond to her readers' comments, serialization condenses all that extra information in small amounts and spreads it out over months, or sometimes even years. The individual chapters of a fic slowly builds on itself, just as on a much larger scale the individual fans of a fandom slowly build on an existing canon, creating something massive, paradoxical[25], and highly serviceable (Executhix 266). Joss Whedon, author of numerous beloved works such as *Firefly, The Avengers,* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, once said that it is the role of an author not to "give people what they want, [but to] give them what they need" (Anthonyletizia). With fanfiction's never-ending selection of texts, a reader is fully capable of having both.

Beyond providing readers with anything and everything they may be looking for in a story, the communal nature of fic allows for other literary benefits. It is true that numerous writers will abandon their fics without contracts in place that ensure an ending, or without the allure of a paycheck, highlighting what is perhaps the genre's greatest flaw. At the same time, however, that lack of legal formality allows for other authors to step in if need be. If mainstream writers are unable or unwilling to finish their series then they may make arrangements for another author to finish in their stead—as was the case with Robert Jordan's fantasy epic *The Wheel of Time* when fantasy author Brandon Sanderson finished the series after Jordan's death in 2007. This is comparatively rare though (instilling fear in all *The Song of Ice and Fire* fans) and not nearly as infrequent in fic. Without the threat of legal repercussions, fans can pick up a fic after a simple, "Go ahead!" from the author[26] or

[25] Given the number of fics available for any one fandom, readers expect to consume a great deal of contradictory information. However, "human beings have the capacity to hold multiple, even contradictory meanings simultaneously" (Chander 624).

[26] Fans also frequently write fics inspired by other fics, complicating what exactly the "canon" is and what stories are taking inspiration from what sources. As Pugh correctly

write additional stories within a verse with their consent. Although such permission is not needed, fans ask for it regardless, both because a respectful attitude helps a communal environment such as this to sustain itself, and simply because most authors like to know when readers love their work enough to write inspired texts. Among fic authors, imitation is indeed the highest form of flattery. Fans have even gone so far as to finish fic first written within a canon. When *Supernatural* introduced its own fangirl, Becky, in season five and gave the viewers a taste of the fic she was writing, real life fan Samlicker81 (using Becky's fictional username) jumped at the chance to complete the story that was glimpsed within the episode. She published "Burning Desires" soon after the episode aired (Jamison 313). However, this sort of transformation would not be possible if fic writers didn't already view their work as complicatedly co-authored and if ideas themselves weren't seen as free for the taking.

Indeed, community-driven writing allows for ideas to pass among writers just as easily as incomplete texts are. Back in 1997, the much beloved author Neil Gaiman wrote a brief essay titled, "Where Do You Get Your Ideas?" In it he claims that,

> Every published writer has had it—the people who come up to you and tell you that they've Got An Idea. And boy, is it a Doozy. It's such a Doozy that they want to Cut You In On It. The proposal is always the same—they'll tell you the Idea (the hard bit), you write it down and turn it into a novel (the easy bit), the two of you can split the money fifty-fifty.

Overlooking the monetary aspect—which beyond P2Ps is not generally a part of fic culture—the assumption about ideas is still a familiar one: authors simply don't have the

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notes, "The extent to which canon controls fanfic writing varies wildly, even within individual fandoms" (37).

time or the desire to write what other people think of as "good ideas." In contrast, fic authors have devoted entire archives to prompts and requests[27]. Not only is it acceptable to appropriate ideas from one another but this communal sharing also allows for a more complex engagement between the reader and the writer. In fic, the reader has a comparatively large amount of say in what the writer is producing, to an extent that is not seen in any other genre. Often times popular fic writers will allow their audience to dictate what they write next, or they'll produce a sequel entirely by request.[28] There are writers who work almost solely by prompt after establishing a verse—the equivalent of J. K. Rowling writing all the *Harry Potter* stories people still want to read, solely at her fans' request. At its core the purpose of fanfiction is to ask "what if…?" of the original text, to propose elements of the narrative that haven't happened, but could still (Booth 374). However, there's no reason why this questioning should cease with the fic itself. When readers enjoy a fic they say the same thing to the author that the author said to the canon: "I really enjoyed this. Now what would happen if I did *this* instead…?"

[27] Tumblr, as a social blogging site, is well known for sharing prompts. LiveJournal houses numerous kink memes and AO3 often hosts holiday gift exchanges, in which each participant gets to request a fic and write one themselves based on another fan's prompt.
[28] See for example thekaidonovskys' A/N: "… this fic is open to suggestions/prompts for any particular things you may want to see… if there is something that you'd like to see [Hermann and Newt] work through, or perhaps something about their dynamic I haven't addressed that you think I should have, drop a review or shoot me a message on Tumblr" (Thekaidonovskys).

**Bobby on Set**

The easiest way to demonstrate the overlap of knowledge within fic is to turn to the OUAT fandom.[29] More specifically, to look at the cinematic history of Robert Carlyle, the actor who plays Rumpelstiltskin on *Once Upon a Time*.

Back in 1999 Carlyle starred with Johnny Lee Miller in an action/adventure flick titled *Plunkett & Macleane.* His character, the aforementioned Plunkette, is distinguished by his schemes, wit, and inability to catch a break. The critics only gave the film a 25% approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes, though the viewers bestowed a more positive 68%.

By 2009 Carlyle had taken on numerous projects since his role as an 18th century thief. That year he starred in two more enjoyable but critical failures: *The Tournament* and *Stargate Universe*, a spinoff of the 1990's wildly popular *Stargate.* In each case Carlyle plays a particularly troubled character, alcoholic Joseph Macavoy in the former and the immoral Dr. Nicholas Rush in the latter. Fans cite both performances as enjoyable viewing for any enthusiasts of OUAT/Robert Carlyle.

Then, in 2011, Carlyle took up the mantel of Rumplestiltskin in *Once Upon a Time* and continues to play the part as of this writing. Obviously every actor on the show has a prior body of work, but Carlyle's is particularly noteworthy considering its influence on the fandom. Slowly but surely, fans have combined Carlyle's performances with the OUAT universe, either by placing his past characters into the Enchanted Forest, or by taking Belle out of her universe and adding her to one of Carlyle's past character's.

[29] The rumbelle (Rumpelstiltskin/Belle) side of the OUAT fandom is so massive and so complex that fans have "The Thing" that they send to new members. "The Thing" is a greeting that includes numerous rec lists, info on fic exchanges, and an explanation of the T.E.A. awards (Straggle).

**Anyelle: Any Bobby + Belle**

In order to understand how fans merge OUAT with Carlyle's past cinematography, one must first understand 'rumbelle.' Rumplestiltskin/Belle is one of the most popular pairings among OUAT fans, due in large part to an enduring love for *Beauty and the Beast* as well as the pairing's canonical status. Rumbelle—their ship name—remains at the top of the list on AO3 and FFN when sorted by relationship, their RPF pairing (Real Person Fic that ships the actors together) dominates as well, and they are two of the most vocally supported characters in OUAT's fanbase[30]. However, if fans were to head to websites that are not constrained by categorization and filters—such as tumblr—and search pairings involving Belle, the rumbelle ship becomes a bit more complex:

> *Anyelle:* (pronunciation: N-E-L)
>
> 1. *n.* The ship name for couples featuring Belle and a character played by Robert Carlyle from other creative properties.
>
> 2. *n.* Any relationship featuring a character played by Emilie de Ravin, or Robert Carlyle. Sometimes Emilie and Emilie (*Emilie Squared*) or Bobby and Bobby (*Bobby Squared*). This definition is also called *Anyem* (Co-Authored).

The number of possibilities this includes is staggering. Anyelle—the only instance I know of in which the *concept* of multiple ships has its own ship name—includes the pairing of Belle with any character Robert Carlyle has ever played. It includes any *alternate universe* Belle paired with characters of Robert Carlyle's (making the pairing possibilities quite vast[31]), it

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[30] Some of the more recent activity includes fans spamming the writers on twitter in an attempt to show their support (and thus garner Rumplestiltskin and Belle more screen time), as well as a petition for a rumbelle spinoff.

[31] Fans manage this immensity primarily through a few ships gaining popularity over the others. All pairings, however, are recognized by their "—elle" ending. Nicholas Rush/Belle becomes "Rushbelle," Plunkette and Belle is "Plunkelle," Joseph MaCavoy becomes "Macelle," while Nosty from *Safe* is "Nostelle."

accounts for any number of polyamorous relationships (including versions of Rum/Rum/Belle and Belle/Belle/Rum… though whether fans consider those to be self-incestuous is up for debate) and finally, Anyelle includes any RPF pairings, which might mean a hypothetically "real" Emilie and Bobby finding love together, or a "real" Bobby and a fictional Belle beginning to date, or any combination thereof. Over the last four years, rumbelle shippers have combined various fandoms, universes, and reality in a manner previously unheard of within fic communities.

What this means is that the amount of knowledge a shipper must possess in order to write Anyelle is staggering; a knowledge of shared canon as thorough as "a bible-reading or classically educated audience once [had]" (Pugh 219).[32] Yet, at the same time almost no new knowledge is needed at all. The appeal of utilizing Carlyle's cinematic history lies in his typecasting, how similar his characters are to one another. All of them are men who have fallen on hard times; they're isolated, and running from a past and the consequences of their choices. Each in his own way believes that no one could ever love him… just as Rumplestiltskin proclaims in rumbelle's premier episode, "Skin Deep." Thus, to know Rumplestiltskin is to in some manner know the rest of Carlyle's characters. Once a fan achieves that knowledge, she simply needs to learn the details: Rush is antagonistic, Joseph is a drunken priest, Nosty lives on the streets, etc. Each of these characteristics is simple enough that any writer of rumbelle (or reader) can come to a macelle or a nostelle fic and understand it with ease[33]. More importantly, however, these characteristics open up an

[32] For more on the skill needed to become proficient in "threading"—keeping track of multiple narratives, characters, and details—see Johnson's *Everything Bad is Good For You.*
[33] This accessibility often encourages readers to go back and view the original source, such as one fan who commented that she wants to watch *Stargate Universe* after reading Bad-

endless number of creative possibilities. In the same manner that fic writers pull from one another's ideas more generally, rumbelle writers also pull from Carlyle's canons, leading to some fascinating questions. What if Joseph had someone like Belle to watch over him? What if science-obsessed Rush encountered a girl hailing from a world of magic? What if Belle lost Rumplestiltskin only to encounter another man with his face? The resulting fic might be devastatingly realistic, highly meta, or anything in between.

**Queen of the Communal: Bad-Faery Fanfiction**

Bad-Faery is one of the most popular authors working within the rumbelle fandom today, in part because she has greatly utilized fic's shared knowledge and the overlapping of canons that her peers have established. To date she has written over three hundred stories, all of which intersect in numerous ways. To demonstrate this, one need only look at her author's notes, such as the following from "A Wild Prayer":

> Remix of "A Prayer to the Wild" (which is a beast!remix of chapter five of And Again)—instead of MaCavoy getting hit with a beast-altering dart, Belle is. If you like the beginning, thank Straggle; she wrote it (Bad Faery).

To put that in chronological order then: First there was rumbelle. Then came macelle, the pairing of Belle and Joseph MaCavoy. Working with the recognized characteristics of this relationship—that are built on numerous fan theories and writings—Bad-Faery wrote *And Again* in the summer of 2012, a story in which canonical Belle loses Rumplestiltskin only to discover a Rumplestiltskin-look-alike—Joseph—within OUAT's established "real world"

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Faery's fic "Starting Over." This manner of encountering new texts may be a good defense against those who claim that fanfiction steals readers away from the original canon.

universe… which obviously raises numerous questions for Belle. Grieving for the man she lost and torn about whether she's projecting or falling in love with his twin, these questions were enough to sustain the fic for twenty-one chapters and inspire twenty side stories[34]. Out of this fic—specifically out of chapter five—came a remix, a new version, in which Joseph succumbs to poison and becomes animalistic; beast-like in his primal desires (a very popular trope within fanfiction). Bad-Faery titled this remix "A Prayer to the Wild" and watched as it gained popularity. Then, finally, in 2014 she published "A Wild Prayer," another remix in which *Belle* is the one poisoned. Whether or not Bad-Faery will continue this creative thread any further remains to be seen. However, the usefulness of the author's note here cannot be understated. As Alexandra Herzog writes in her article on the author's note as a claim to power, they are used in part to "show where the fan author places the fan fiction in the textual archive of the fandom." Without a note stating where in this infinite mess a particular fic resides, a reader may end up becoming quite lost.

Even without an author's note though, the language of fic allows for fans to theoretically categorize "A Wild Prayer." One *could* say that this is a remix of a remix and that the first remix emerged out of a kind of crossover/fusion AU fic, of a type that only exists within the OUAT fandom. That, however, already sounds remarkably complicated (and it does not truly encompass the many layers that "A Wild Prayer" has built atop it). So, instead, fans say simply that this story is a part of a "verse"—Bad-Faery's *And Again* verse. This allows writers and readers to condense a staggering number of variations into a single phrase. Anyone referring to the *And Again* verse knows that they're actually referring to

[34] Fans prompted the majority of these stories, along with perhaps a third of the fics in Bad-Faery's masterlist. In the case of this author and many others, stories simply wouldn't exist unless the readers were willing to "give" ideas and the authors were willing to "steal" them. Within fanfiction, the concept of singular originality does not exist.

OUAT, *The Tournament*, rumbelle, macelle, numerous Bad-Faery works, and a slew of other fics, headcanons[35], and fanon all wrapped up into one neat package. Fans *must* condense their overlapping knowledge verbally if anyone hopes to hold a conversation about it. Furthermore, it is worth noting that this verse also includes Straggle's work, another popular rumbelle and anyelle writer. To blithely say, "Someone else wrote the beginning"—as Bad-Faery does in her author's note—speaks to fans' collaborative efforts as well as their trust. Many readers will skip the author's note entirely, diving straight into the fic. In this case anyone who does so will assume Bad-Faery wrote *everything.* However, this is an assumption that both authors are willing to tolerate. After all, few would dare to enforce ownership when even the words they literally and undoubtedly wrote only came about through a collective consciousness.

The rest of Bad-Faery's fics are equally reflective of this collectivity. As mentioned previously, fans draw on Robert Carlyle's cinematography in part because of how similar his characters are—they allow for easy crossovers. Bad-Faery takes advantage of these similarities in order to carefully merge her fic's universe with OUAT's, crafting stories that join the various canons together in a nearly seamless manner. This work touches on fans' desire to recognize details; like inside jokes or Easter eggs. In "Blind Date" when Bad-Faery writes that, "Belle didn't need to be saved" fans know that she is referencing Emilie de Ravin's line, "No one decides my fate but me" from the episode "Skin Deep." This is a subtle reference to the canon. In the same fic though, the Rumplestiltskin-Tom Monroe character (from the TV movie *Class of '76*) believes he has no chance with Belle because, "no woman could ever tolerate coming second to the job…" In this verse the "job" is literally his work as

[35] A fan's personal interpretation of canon that is not necessarily supported by evidence.

a detective, but to the reader it can also figuratively stand in for Rumplestiltskin's love of power, drawing on an endless debate among fans about which comes first to him—Belle or his magic. This, in turn, is a reference to the fandom. Some fics warp OUAT's inherent fantasy elements—such as "Blood and Wings" that imagines Joseph as a vampire—while others invert defining details—such as "Malleable" that imagines Belle as an alien with "pale green skin." Rumplestiltskin is known on the show for his green/gold, glittery skin, so by giving Belle that same coloring, Bad-Faery both invokes a tidbit of shared knowledge while also inverting it in a new and entertaining manner.

Indeed, this is one of the most useful aspects of communal knowledge: the ability to surprise readers by refusing to conform to their expectations. Just as a reader might experience surprise if she finished a Jane Austen novel that *didn't* end in marriage, a reader of fic *may* be pleasantly surprised if an author undermines their established knowledge of the canon/fanon. This could include a story that unexpectedly veers away from the canon, a romance that doesn't end with a happily-ever-after, or even a small, traditional detail that the author chooses to rework (such as Rumplestiltskin's green/gold skin). In every way imaginable, fic is dependent on previous knowledge—the canon, or the adaptations, or the most popular fan theories of the time (Mayer-Schonberger). Fanfiction generally tackles the "how" rather than the "what"; readers know *what* will happen in the end—that Sherlock Holmes will solve the case or that Emma will save the day—so the interesting question becomes *how* that ending occurs (LaChev). Sometimes, however, it is fun to read about Sherlock Holmes getting it wrong or Regina having to come to the rescue instead, and these changes have all the more impact because they are unexpected. Indeed, this foundation of knowledge and expectation is the only reason that the AU subgenre exists.

The fun in reading an alternate universe is in the ability to compare it to the previous universe; to see what changes the author has made and for what reasons. Though all fic by definition differs from the canon, some of the best are the ones that are firmly grounded in the familiar and then proceed to take the reader somewhere new.[36]

This is a very fine line to walk though. Fans often want a fic to be different enough from the canon to hold their interest, but not so different that it is unrecognizable as fanfiction. The characters should reflect the fic author's own writing style, but still sound like the characters fans are familiar with; or, as one fan concisely states, "This just in: Contrary to popular belief, 'AU' does not mean 'Stupid excuse to be OOC'" (Fabraychang). Ultimately, readers want authors to subvert their expectations… except when they don't.[37] Almost always, it comes down to reader preference. One fan isn't interested in dialogue unless she can imagine it on the show, while another doesn't want to read a carbon copy of what's already established in canon. The majority of readers seem to want something in between. None of these options would be available, however, unless the readers have a shared source of knowledge to collectively work from.

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[36] Veerle Van Steenhuyse in "Jane Austen Fan Fiction and the Situated Fantext" quotes Pugh in arguing that, "[any] missing scene becomes an alternate universe story the moment it seems illogical that later canonical action follows it." By this definition then, nearly *every* fic is an AU (outliers may be time travel stories that work to fit within later canonical action despite the changes). This raises questions about what distinguishes the AU subgenre from the rest of fanfiction.

[37] It can be argued that *all* fanfiction is subversive in one manner or another, that at the very least it is a subversion of the canon itself. However, in recent years scholars have begun to challenge this notion. Meredith Aquila notes that Jenkins in particular "ignores… the fact that the possibility/increased ease of subversion and change does not guarantee any degree of subversion and change," while Berit Åström argues that in the case of slash, fics that attempt to subvert heteronormativity by making one man pregnant (known as Mpreg) often end up reinforcing heteronormative structures.

**The Road So Far**

Regardless of how one may define it, at its core fanfiction is reliant on communal authorship. This process begins with the poaching of characters, settings, and ideas from various canons but it continues on through the poaching of other fics as well. Fic authors not only allow this exchanging of information, but they also encourage it—often by using prompts as starting points for their stories or by allowing others to write in their verse. Very rarely does a fic author claim that something is solely "theirs," and when that does occur, they are generally treated with derision by the rest of the fandom; a threat to the community as it currently runs. However, for most this sharing will ultimately lead to fanfiction that—as a whole—is collectively "better" than the canon, for the simple reason that thousands or even millions of stories can cover possibilities that one author could never tackle alone.

The OUAT fandom in particular has taken advantage of this collectivity in a manner few fandoms have ever done before—if any. All fandoms contain crossover fics, but rumbellers have noted the similarities in Robert Carlyle's cinematography and used that as a starting point for an infinite number of stories. For them, shared knowledge includes the blending of multiple canons at once, of relying on requests from readers, and even of invoking characteristics of the real-life Bobby and Emilie to add another "realistic" level to their fics. Anyelle is by no means a simple aspect of fandom. Like most collaborative efforts, it has its established rules, but ultimately it could produce any and every type of story. The possibilities are only constrained by a million or so heads.

## Chapter Two
## Spell It Out For Me: Language and Interactive Media

*"ao3 mcu a:aou abo bdsm ot3 hs au pwp"*
*- Tumblr user bootcap describing a fic*

*"dude" – me expressing disbelief, anger, sympathy or shock*
- *Tumblr user Morgan*

Just a few pages into her groundbreaking text *Enterprising Women*, Camille Bacon-Smith describes the difficulty in forming fan communities, saying that, "For the outsider, finding the fan-run media convention circuit presents a challenge." Back in the 1960's when Bacon-Smith was conducting research, if newbies did have interest in joining up, they had to discover the communities for themselves by word of mouth (15). It used to be that activities like coming up with metas and fanfic were even more communal than they are now, for the simple reason that access to the primary source relied on the goodwill of others. One lucky fan would succeed in recording an episode of a favorite TV show and, if another fan was equally lucky,[38] she'd take the time to make a copy for her. Other times there would be a set date in which numerous fans would converge in one living room to watch, discuss, rewind, debate, and—later—write about what they had seen. To an extent, fanfiction was even more difficult to break into than this type of fannish interaction, given that participation relied on access to the primary source, a mailing list to receive guidelines, funds for compiling the writing into fanzines, and funds to buy the fanzines themselves (as generally only contributors received free copies). Due to this process, fic writing of the 20th century was more precarious in terms of legality. The development of

[38] Luck is indeed part of fic and fandom more generally, largely unexplored by scholarship: the chance of getting one's hands on a piece of merchandise, whether one's schedule allows for watching a canon live, the sometimes arbitrary ways in which fic and metas become popular… 'luck' (or what is seen as luck) plays a major part in the development of fandom.

fanzines had to be somewhat circular in order to avoid problems with the copyright. Compilers shelled out money to get the first few issues into print. They then hoped that sales would help to make up some of that loss. If they did, that money went right back into publishing new fanzines. For most, however, fic writing remained an incredibly expensive hobby.

These are just a few of the challenges that fic and fandom faced before the Internet became a household tool in the late 1990's. Along with helping to eliminate that direct link between writer and monetary gain—fic authors can now donate to websites that simply *host* their stories, rather than directly paying for the publications themselves—the world wide web has dramatically changed the look and the reception of fanfiction.[39] Here I argue that the fic of 2015 is in many ways unrecognizable from the fic of the decades before.

**Accessibility, Speed, and Big-Ass Rec Lists**

One of the more obvious benefits of digitizing fanfiction is accessibility. Scholars in the field of Digital Humanities has been working to make available a wealth of books—admittedly at a slow rate—but even the invention of something as commonplace as forums have had a major impact on the ways in which fans interact with their fandoms (Michel). About fourteen years ago my fandom of choice was *Phantom of the Opera,* and I spent a great deal of my time exploring the still evolving online forums. It was here that I came across a mention of another text: *Phantom* by Susan Kay, a prequel to Gaston Leroux's novel. Sadly, however, the story was out of print at the time, and I was a ten-year-old with

[39] Of course, the link between fan and income is never severed completely. Fic archives are now the ones paying for bandwidth, fans often donate to help with said bills, and the fans as individuals must pay for their Internet access.

no easy way of tracking down used books. I ended up bemoaning the situation on said forum, and what resulted was a nearly year long relationship with another fan in which she painstakingly typed out the novel and posted it for me, chapter by lengthy chapter (the newly reissued paperback is nearly five-hundred pages long). It was no small favor for me at the time, and her act demonstrates not only the usefulness of the Internet, but also the kindness that can be found within fandom.

As the Internet's popularity grew, so did its uses for fic. Though there are still fans that publish fanzines the majority of fic is now posted online, connecting the genre to the digital divide where those with Internet access are the ones both writing and reading fanfiction.[40] And "Internet access" is truly the only requirement—fic can be, and is, read on laptops, iPads, and iPhones, ensuring that fans can consume it nearly anywhere there's an Internet connection. Unlike the majority of digitized profic—stories that authors often publish in paperback *and* on devices such as the Kindle—fanfiction rarely has a physical form outside of a screen. This is a unique change within fandom, as prior to the 2000's outsiders defined fans primarily by their *material* identity, characterized by books, DVDs, posters, action figures, and the like (Woo). Though fic writers do possess these artifacts as well—as they are fans in a variety of ways—they are the only variety of fans who don't *have* to. This loss of materiality means that the ways in which readers interact with fanfiction has changed alongside its accessibility. More people are reading and writing fic now, but they way they are reading and writing has fundamentally altered. To give a simple example, something as central as collecting has now been transformed. Where once fans

[40] Some fans have charged digitization with what they see as the downward slide of fic's overall quality. Whereas most fanzines had editors and chose their inclusions with care, online archives mean that anyone with Internet access can publish a fic—whether it's of "good" quality or not.

had to purchase, borrow, or trade fanzines between them, amassing fic is now as easy as pressing the "favorite" or the "bookmark" button...which arguably has replaced the collecting of fic itself. In response, fans have developed new art forms to counteract that excitement that they have, in some manner, lost. One such compensation is the rec list, where fans can recommend their favorite fics to friends and strangers alike:

Canon universe

- Ink Stains Kirk gets drunk and wakes up with Spock's name tattooed on his ass.
- ☆ Kirk's Tramp Stamp A Betazoid gives Kirk a tattoo of a representation of what he loves most in the world. Down there, *everywhere.*
- Kings and Pawns Spock is being sent a chess piece each day.
- Limits Sequel to Kings and Pawns. Spock learns the subtle nuances of gift giving, and Kirk has fun wrapping up his present. Light consensual bondage.
- This is How You Remind Me Jim brings Spock to his high school reunion for moral support.
- ☆ Asymptote Spock and Kirk are on a planet where they are not allowed to touch. Spock realizes how much the Captain touches him.
- ☆ Piqued Spock Prime is entertained by his young self and Kirk skirting around each other. (Really sweet mentions of Kirk Prime.)
- ★ Illuminated Jim wishes he had what his counterpart had.
- Montgomery Scott: Engineer and Matchmaker Scotty creates a matchmaking program that pairs up the most compatible people on the ship, and Kirk and Spock are number one on that list.
- ☆ Abstract Sometimes, Jim feels like Cinderella- only with a dick and sarcastic repartee.
- The Five Times Spock Sent Kirk Running - And The One He Didn't Kirk tries to court Spock.
- ★ Endgame Witty banter, and Spock stealth-marries Kirk.

Accidental bond/ bond in line of duty/ bond for convenience

- ☆ Don't Pick Our Destiny series AU in which the Vulcans conquered Earth and Kirk and Spock became outlaws, after breaking out of prison by bonding to each other. (I know it says the series is a WIP, but the individual fics are complete, and it really looks like it could finish where it did. It hasn't updated since 2009, so I don't really think it'll continue. But please read it!)
- ☆ Through the Looking Glass series Mirror! Kirk forces Mirror!Spock to bond them, but they have their own version of intimacy.
- What Happens in Vegas Jim and Spock wake up in Vegas, married.

Domestic/shmoop

- ☆ Entering Orbit Spock and Jim stay in the Kirk house in Iowa to escape media frenzy.
- ☆ Canadian Winter Spock and Jim spend Christmas together in a snowy cabin.
- Lazy Rainy Sunday Spock and Kirk in their San Francisco apartment, being shmoopy and cuddly.
- ☆ His Favourite Color Green is Kirk's favourite color.

The above is an excerpt of a "Big-Ass" rec list for Kirk/Spock slash stories that the fan has organized further by genre and trope: fics that situate themselves within the canon, AUs, bonding, High School, de-aged, and bodyswap (USenterpancakes). A rec list such as

this can include everything from sexual humor—"Kirk gets drunk and wakes up with Spock's name tattooed on his ass"—to long, complex romances—"AU in which the Vulcans conquered Earth and Kirk and Spock became outlaws"—all while still fitting under the umbrella term of "Kirk/Spock fic." Alongside their personal categorization system, reccers generally provide the title, author, the author's summary, a link to the fic, and a review of their own. In the case of this list, the recommender has forgone written reviews and has instead set up a simple rating system, where white stars denote "highly recommended" fics and black stars are "MUST READS." Another Kirk/Spock rec list—and there are hundreds of thousands of them out there—will provide a different rating system with different categories, ensuring a wealth of fic combinations for fans to explore. Without the Internet, the hyperlinks and starred rating system would be impossible to duplicate. There would be no easy way of making a list accessible to other fans and the list itself would probably not exist due to the fics' own lack of accessibility—few fans want to hear about fifty stellar stories that they're then unable to find. Ultimately, fans developed this genre of writing in response to the change in fic's medium, a way of making up for the joy of collecting they'd lost when they abandoned print, while taking advantage of what is now possible online.

Genres like the rec list have also brought about a more powerful voice on behalf of the reader. Some fics published in fanzines encouraged readers to interact with the stories and add to them[41], but never before has a fan—*any* fan—been able to make judgments about the fanfiction she's reading and expect that thousands of others will hear her opinion. This ability for fans to hear individual voices comes not only in the form of rec

[41] One such series was *Star Trek's* Kraith Universe, originally begun by Jacqueline Lichtenberg and then added to by numerous fans over the decades. The entire collection can be read at http://www.simegen.com/fandom/startrek/kraith/.

lists, but also in the comments and kudos—or "likes"—left by readers on the fics themselves. Online posting allows fans to express their thoughts easily and immediately, encouraging conversation between the reader and the writer. In the 20th century, when fans confined their written conversations to letter columns in fanzines, this sort of communication is what "made fandom possible," and the next logical step has likewise proven to be true: that *more* communication has allowed for *more* fandom to be possible (Jamison 80). Alongside accessibility, the greatest benefit of increased communication is its speed. Responding quickly allows writers to adapt their work to suit their readers' tastes—whether it's by changing a story halfway through or by writing completely new stories based on readers' requests.[42] Any author can update their story, edit it, or rewrite it at any point after publication, allowing for a somewhat transient reading experience similar only, perhaps, to works like *Leaves of Grass* where authors such as Walt Whitman revise the text in numerous editions throughout their lifetime. As Anik LaChev states, fanfiction is one of the few genres of writing that "doesn't offer the kind of stable, finished product that a purchased book offers" (85). Rather fanfiction—both individually and as a genre—is continually evolving. The benefits of this evolution are community, self-aware writing, and a new type of originality (Pugh 225). The drawbacks are that, for all this communication between reader and writer, the Internet gives the author a massive amount of control over whether or not others actually read her work. Despite the adage that nothing within the digital age is ever lost, authors of fic can recall their stories in ways that profic authors

[42] This also applies to the marketing of fanfiction. In my own experience, a reader commented and asked that I provide a trigger warning in the tags of my fic, noting that the story contained ableist language. Posting online allowed the reader to contact me immediately and allowed me in turn to add the tag within seconds of receiving the request. This speed hopefully kept anyone else from reading the fic who may not have wished to.

cannot. Unless a fan archives a fic elsewhere or saves it to their personal computer—as I do with all my favorites—the author can take the fic down and it can potentially be deleted for good. Too often, those rec lists link to error pages and purged accounts.

**The Look of Fic**

Online posting has also dramatically changed the look of fanfiction, both in terms of how it compares to fanzine fic as well as profic. The saying, "Never judge a book by its cover" is fairly useless when applied to fanfiction, given that there are now rarely covers available. If there is a cover—often a piece of fanart made by an impressed reader—the author has control over how it's presented to other readers: embedded in the story, attached to some posts but not others, linked to in the author's notes, or not included at all. Unlike profic authors, fic authors write their own summaries and can change them just as easily as they change the text itself. It's not uncommon to return to a fic months after first reading it and find that phrases such as "now complete," "with updated chapter three," or "contains epilogue" have suddenly appeared in the summary.

The differences stack up. Lack of editing means that some authors present their fics without any paragraph breaks, making them difficult if not impossible to read. However, that same freedom allows for authors to play with formatting in ways that may not be easily sanctioned by mainstream publishers—such as writing incredibly short paragraphs or arranging text in ways comparable to concrete poetry. Similar to the informality of online writing in general, fic titles often forego capitalization—sometimes as a way of indicating that the author took the title from a song—but not always, as non-capitalized titles have become something of a norm. That same informality has likewise continued to

improve on the limitations of conveying emotion through the written word. Ong, restricted as he was by "professional" writing, didn't think it was possible to convey much emotion through text, saying that, "In text punctuation can signal tone minimally: a question mark or a comma, for example, generally calls for the voice to be raised a bit" (143) Fans have achieved quite a lot though using extreme combinations of symbols and formatting to get their intended feelings across. One fan even went so far as to recommend typing with random letters italicized in order to indicate sarcasm: "*o*h *wow* l*oo*k h*o*w *s*a*r*cas*t*ic t*h*at l*oo*ks" (Wikatiepedia). There are no longer any page numbers in fanfiction (not even the percentages found on Kindles), and authors fill their writing with characters that can only be easily written using a keyboard. The questions surrounding Fair Use and its ability to support fanfiction means that, unlike profic, fic authors emphasize their disclaimers at the start of the story (sometimes written humorously as a bit of entertainment before the fic itself), while the emphasis on community means that one story might include over fifty tags, denoting not only pairings and genres but also trigger warnings and character deaths, for those who would rather avoid such things[43]. All of this means that Internet fanfiction of 2015 is not merely able to provide the reader with more information, but it also has a new, overall "feel" to it. Sometimes that feeling is one of confidence about what the reader is about to read, other times it's enjoyment about how a fic is presented, often it's relief that this information allowed a reader to bypass a fic she wouldn't want to read, as is the case with trigger warnings. Nearly every new feeling fans have, however, is positive.

[43] Multiple tags in fanfiction are incredibly useful because, as Jamison notes, it allows an author to "easily classify a story into many categories at once without insisting on a hierarchy among them" (55).

Going even further, Archives like AO3 sometimes sport visual cues that can provide the reader with information at a glance. This is achieved through fic readers learning keys that utilize symbols, color, and placement in order to convey details about the fic. The symbols employed by AO3:

in clockwise order convey the intended audience (Teen and Up), the relationships/pairings/orientations (female/male), the content warning (here the author has chosen not to warn for content), and whether the fic is complete (the checkmark states that it is). Indeed, many of the changes to fic's formatting depend on what archive is hosting it. FFN does not utilize the same visual cues as AO3 and that, alongside numerous other differences (such as AO3's simpler editing tools and their free-for-all tagging system), have lead to many fans declaring AO3 to be the superior archive.[44] That is not to say, however, that those same fans don't push for AO3 to convey further information in specific, concise formats. Just recently, there was a request that AO3 establish more categories, specifically a section that signifies a "primary" pairing within the fic vs. pairings that are "incidental" to the plot (Saathi1013).

Even beyond accessibility, speed, and information, online fanfiction has allowed readers to draw connections between different fics, as well as between fics and other, seemingly random webpages. Fanfiction has never existed within a vacuum, but now

[44] Over the years fans have also moved away from FFN because of their numerous content purges. Notably, FFN now bans songfics and anything rated above NC-17 (Apollo).

readers have an even larger wealth of tags connected to these stories, each of which links them instantly to other fics that somehow relate to the one they just read. The Internet provides numerous techniques for tracking down previously hard to find fanfiction, writers of fic now have access to online tools such as custom dictionaries, and writers even use hyperlinks to play fic-related jokes on other fans. One such post promotes an "extremely NSFW Guardians of the Galaxy fanfic," and then links to an AO3 story that is nothing but a repetition of "I am Groot" (with the joke being that the fic *could* be sexually explicit but it's possible to know given that the character narrating can only say/think, "I am Groot."[45])(Castiel-knight-of-hell, Corseque, Colm). This same connectivity is also seen within the fics themselves. In her *Pacific Rim* fic "i choose my own way to burn," reptilianraven describes Hermann as having a "weird ass kinetic stick sculpture spinny thing" sitting on the side of his desk (Reptilianraven). The slight color variation and the underlining informs the reader that this phrase links to a "Swinging Sticks Kinetic Energy Sculpture" sold on Amazon (Amazon). Another author, SouvenirsFamiliers, likewise fills her Valentine themed fic with links, including the meme, video, and card that Newt presents to Hermann for the holiday (SouvenirsFamiliers).[46] Some might view these additions as evidence that fic is a form of "lazy" writing. After all, authors no longer need to

[45] In a reverse bit of fun, fans also enjoy providing descriptions that they know others will expect to be a joke… only to *actually* provide a link to what they've described. An example is a popular post wherein a fan claims that, "this is the cutest gif i have ever seen in my life but it also features a gay orgy so proceed with caution" and, sure enough, the text links to a GIF of a gay orgy. Another GIF of a man claiming, "I don't know what I expected" accurately sums up fans' reactions (Kerin).

[46] It is also worth noting *what* the author chooses to provide links for. In this case SouvenirsFamiliers links to popular jokes and puns—memes that readers are likely to have encountered—but does *not* link to an explanation of what the Riemann hypothesis is—mentioned earlier in the fic by Hermann and which is less likely to be something that fans recognize. This indicates that the emotional impact of the fic (cute gifts and romance) is more important than the mathematical background.

find ways to describe things when they can simply link to images of them. However, the links themselves are still embedded *within* a description. Rather than limiting artistry, posting fic online gives the reader more options. She can choose to trust in the author's explanation, make use of the link, or—as is common—do both. Just as there is joy in imagining a scene in a book *and* seeing a director's view of it in a film, many fic readers enjoy trusting in the author's descriptions as well as getting the chance to see what inspired their words.

**Speaking Klingon and Sindarin**

As the medium of fic became more accessible and more reliant on the Internet, the language surrounding fanfiction underwent a similar evolution, some of which I've already mentioned: the increase in terms related to categorization, likewise the number of text signs and symbols used, and as the speed of "speaking" across the Internet grew, so did the number of acronyms—a condensed set of terminology for generations of fans who had a lot to say and who wanted to say it quickly.[47] This is not to imply, of course, that fan vocabulary didn't exist before the Internet. Bacon-Smith freely admits that she "barely [understood] the language spoken around me" when she attended her first con (a convention) back in 1980, and it was largely because of this communication barrier that she did not find the gathering to be a "particularly enjoyable experience" (82). Fans still retain their own terminology; it's just that now there are different terms to learn. The key difference, however, once again lies in accessibility. Where before a newbie like Bacon-

[47] The desire to condense information is crucial to fans given the extent and breadth of their interests. As seen in the previous chapter, a word such as "anyelle" may require a fan to know far more than a simple definition.

Smith relied on others to explain fandom culture to her, now fans can Google whatever terms they're unsure of—or in the case of a text such as this, scroll to the end where there's a lexicon waiting.

It *is* crucial that new fans learn the vocabulary that belongs to their fandom, otherwise interaction with the community may be difficult if not outright impossible. I would argue that the vocabulary surrounding popular culture falls broadly into three categories: those terms that require outside context, those that have a context surrounding them, and those that have none. An example of the first might be a word like, "dragon." If a fan encounters the word "dragon" in a book, she may not yet know what this specific author means by a "dragon," but she does have a larger context to draw from—the entire Fantasy genre specifically and, if not that, mythology—in order to start building a reliable foundation for a definition. If this author suddenly claims that a "dragon" breaths ice instead of fire, the reader knows how to change her definition so that this "dragon" fits somewhere amongst all the other kinds of dragons found in media. Without that larger context though, "dragon" as a term has little meaning and the author's changes to the concept have no real impact.

Moving on to the second category, this collection might include a word like "phasers." Unlike "dragon," "phaser" has a much smaller context pool to draw from. Unless the fan is specifically familiar with the Sci Fi genre, she's unlikely to have even a rudimentary understanding of the word and its meaning. However, also unlike "dragon," words like "phaser" often have their context presented alongside them. The reader may not know what a "phaser" is exactly but she reads the actions associated with it and is able to understand those indictors, actions such as drawing, aiming, shooting, and holstering. A

"phaser" then is a weapon, similar to a gun, except that the projectile isn't a bullet and it appears to do far more damage. The details may still be murky but a reader is still capable of teasing out the overall definition.

Finally, the third category is one of pure immersion, a form of storytelling that Steven Johnson describes as fast-paced, subtle, and as requiring a great deal more mental labor to decipher. Using medical dramas as his example, Johnson examines the increased ratio of "medical jargon" to "arrows" (81). That is, the amount of field-specific knowledge vs. the number of simplified plot explanations presented to a viewer. It's the difference between saying, "She's jaundiced!" and, "Her skin is yellow, doctor, her liver is failing!" except that twenty-first century popular culture is likely to present a viewer with far more of the first then they are of the second. The result is that fans work to be quicker at picking out the few "arrows" they hear, or they need to be willing to learn some of that field-specific vocabulary along the way. Returning to fic fans then, the difficulty lies in that fandom vocabulary is largely a part of this third category. Fans and outsiders alike know what "dragons" and "phasers" are, but few outsiders know what "spirk," "schmoop," or "OTP" means and they're unlikely to discover the meanings based on context or prior knowledge.[48] The only real option then is to go searching for a definition.

Fandom has a long history of both rejecting mainstream culture as well as having outsiders deride them for these interests (Jenkins). Because of this, the creation of a lexicon serves multiple functions. It is a natural result of finding ways to discuss complex subjects

[48] The exception to this is fan phrases that derive from mainstream popular culture. "There's a SPN GIF for that" (referring to the joke that *Supernatural* has a reaction GIF for every occasion) evolved out of the Apple iPhone trademark, "There's an app for that." Both of these phrases together lead to the saying, "There's a fic for that." There are also some terms that are becoming mainstream. Just last year Oxford dictionary added "ship" to their lexicon ("Oxford Dictionaries Update May 2014").

among numerous individuals, it is an act of resistance against the vocabulary already established by authors, corporations, and other groups associated with a canon, and it acts as an identifying marker of who the "true" fans are.[49] Admittedly, this resistance steers dangerously into the territory of prejudice within fandom—such as misogynist men claiming that women are "fake gamer girls"—but the fact remains that being a fan requires a certain amount of respect for what predecessors have established.[50] Numerous fans want more people to accept the culture they're establishing… but not at the price of ignoring what they've *already* established. One of the easiest ways to become involved in a fandom, while demonstrating a respect for its history, is to immerse oneself within that third category and learn the language that fans are currently speaking.

**Frankenwords: The Portmanteau**

In thinking about immersion, I would like to turn now to one of the most popular—and one of the most complex—examples of fandom terminology. Snarry, Spirk, Mystrade, Rumbelle, Destiel, Dramione… these are not debilitating diseases, but rather representations of love. They are portmanteaus, acting as representations for entire pairings.

Admittedly, they do sound a bit like the sort of made up words one would find in a creepy children's tale—and with good reason. Charles Dodgson, more commonly known

[49] Language also acts as a marker of status within the fandom itself. Rebecca Black writes on the use of Japanese by native speakers as a means of establishing fandom identity, insider status, and cultural authenticity among their peers (Black).
[50] Of course a great deal of fan language (like "fake gamer girls") is inherently problematic. Many fans require newcomers to learn certain terms, only for those newcomers to find out later that the term is actually frowned upon. As with any language, fan terminology is constantly evolving.

among his fans as Lewis Carroll, has been quite accurately praised for his wit in wordplay, particularly within his beloved *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel *Through the Looking Glass*. Indeed, perhaps one of his most complex exploitations of the English language's idiosyncrasies takes place when young Alice, hopelessly befuddled by the Jabberwocky's poem, seeks the aid of Humpty Dumpty:

> …said Alice: "and '*slithy*'?"
>
> "Well, '*slithy*' means 'lithe and slimy.' 'Lithe' is the same as 'active.' You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word."
>
> "I see it now," Alice remarked thoughtfully (Carroll, 58).

Portmanteaus. It's far from the only word Carroll coined, though it is arguably the most widely used today (with other creations including 'frabjous,' 'galumph,' 'chortle,' and of course, 'jabberwocky'). The original French portemanteau—containing an extra 'e'—referred to a traveling case that opened into two equal sections. Given that specificity, it reads as natural for Carroll to use the term to describe two words that not only combine their linguistics, but also their meanings as well. Fast forward roughly a century and fans would utilize portmanteaus to describe their collaborative work (as in "fanon," a combining of "fannish" and "canon") and, indeed, their favorite pairings.

Snarry—Snape paired sexually with Harry, Spirk—Kirk paired with Spock, Mystrade—Mycroft and Lestrade, Rumbelle—Rumplestiltskin and Belle, Destiel—Dean and Castiel, Dramione—Draco and Hermione. Fans use portmanteaus to describe two parts—two individuals[51]—specified only through their most common name— be it first or last—coming together (or "smooshed") to form one (romantic) whole. Already that's a

[51] There are also portmanteaus involving three characters, such as "McSpirk": the pairing of Kirk, Spock, and McCoy.

complicated expression. Yet these terms do far more within fan communities than simply act as identifiers. While fans use portmanteaus for categorization purposes, i.e. "This is a Johnlock fic [John/Sherlock of BBC's *Sherlock*]. Don't like, don't read," portmanteaus also act as a remarkably diverse, creative outlet that allows fans to express a wealth of information through a single word. For example, fans preface the majority of the ships from *Harry Potter* with "the HMS," as in, "the HMS Harmony" for Harry/Hermione. This particular portmanteau thus requires a bit of knowledge about the British navy, specifically that each ship has the letters HMS painted on it for "Her Majesty's Ship." The fact that a fandom ship is referencing a *literal* ship is the kind of humorous connection that many fans love to draw. This information goes far beyond the characters that simply make up the ship itself and, perhaps more importantly, portmanteaus allow fans to present said information while having a bit of fun in the process.

One of fic's most distinctive characteristics is its ability to blend the creative with the practical.[52] To compare, simply examine the numerous other forms of categorization used within English literature and scholarship: our lists of accepted literary genres, a school's areas of faculty specialization, or the various terms employed when attempting to situate a text—'rhetoric,' 'composition,' 'deconstruction,' and the like. This vocabulary, while both necessary and to varying degrees successful, is nevertheless somewhat dry. It expresses the knowledge that it holds and does little else beyond that, no humor, no inside jokes. Not so with a fandom's portmanteaus. Witty and informative, silly and remarkably

[52] Similarly, new shipping terms have recently developed that demonstrate this combination of affective play and pertinent information. One fan recommends the term "ghost ship" for a pairing where both members die in canon—"It may be sunk, but it's still sailing"—while another fan asks if they can call a ship involving two professors a "scholarship" (Emma, Torashii).

complex, fans have warped Carroll's creation into a single, representative example of fic's attempts to blur the boundaries between what is pleasurable and what is instructive, between the story and the practical paratext. There is to my knowledge no fandom that has not come up with at least one portmanteau, even if it's only for the most popular pairing, even if it's considered ridiculous by the fans themselves, or even if it's rarely used at all. The practice seems to be universal. Portmanteaus are a staple of romantic fic—and therefore the majority of fic produced—that until now has largely gone unacknowledged by scholars, despite their pervasiveness. To better understand fanfiction's attempts to blur these lines, one need look no further than the story's tags.

**Smooshing It Together**

In considering the practical aspects of portmanteaus—that "boring" information dump—brevity once again reigns. Fic lives within that Internet culture that thrives on speed: a tweet in just a hundred and forty characters or a blog post composed in less than two hundred words. Online readers of the twenty-first century demand a conciseness that can be difficult to obtain, though it is certainly necessary, as multiple studies have shown that people are simply unwilling to read the majority of what's put up on a webpage (Nielsen). While it's true that fanfiction does not always conform to these stringent rules,[53] many fans find the brevity in *finding* fic useful, which portmanteaus provide in spades. When fans go fic diving (a term used to describe a reader browsing through archives aimlessly, rather than following a trail of reviews or recommendations) they rely on

[53] A great deal of fanfiction is far from concise, tallying hundreds of thousands of words. The longest fic currently known is "The Subspace Emissary's Worlds Conquest" by AuraChannelerChris, coming in at 4,024,038 words (AuraChannelerChris).

writers to provide a concise explanation of their fics, in the hopes that it will entice the reader. Given the purpose of the fic's summary, it may seem obvious to look there for an account of the plot or themes, but the tags can provide just as much information, if not more. As stated previously, the formatting of tags works to avoid placing them within a hierarchy, but that does not mean that readers don't create ranking systems of their own. And no piece of information is more important to a potential reader than which characters are going to end up in bed together.

Thus, portmanteaus literally take the two most important words—the characters names'—removes their linking symbol—such as the forward slash in "John/Sherlock"—and reformulates it all into one word—"johnlock." While this may appear to be a nearly insignificant difference in how much space is taken up on a webpage, it does provide the writer with a bit more room for adding tags and the reader with one less word to actually read. When one is wading through thousands upon thousands of fics, that brevity may be appreciated. Furthermore, the ease with which fans can now type symbols like the forward slash is becoming a superfluous skill, as many websites do not support these symbols in their search engines, making their inclusion in the tags an irrelevant issue. This is especially true of many non-fandom specific sites that nevertheless host fandom creations. Despite the long history surrounding the forward slash[54] it may someday go entirely out of style, leaving only the name "slash" behind as a reminder.

However, the portmanteau's brevity is not what demonstrates its true usefulness. Rather, the significance lies in the brevity of its size in comparison to its quantity of information. As mentioned previously, any one portmanteau communicates far more than

[54] See Constance Penley's work for more information or, for an abbreviated history, Fanlore's account of the forward slash and its namesake's genre ("Slash").

simply, "Character A is in love with Character B." In using a portmanteau, fans express their own love of the pairing while citing its entire history from conception to current fic. The majority of fandom portmanteaus are also OTPs—a fan's "One True Pairing;" the ship that, like a captain, a fan is willing to stand with no matter the cost—and that sense of romantic perfection, that these two characters are simply *meant* for each other, is evident in the ship name. By taking two characters' names and combining them into one, fans convey their desire to view two beings as a singular entity. This is a reworking of the idea behind soul mates. They are not merely John *and* Sherlock, or even John *in love with* Sherlock, they are johnlock: two people so obviously joined that nothing can separate them, not even the simple act of referring to them in a series of tags.[55]

This devotion is also a way in which fans help to perpetuate their own history. For many fans, their favorite pairings are not acknowledged within their canonical sources. Kirk has never had sexual relations with Spock, Doyle never had Watson wooing Holmes, the writers of *Supernatural* have yet to pair Dean and Cas in an interspecies relationship—despite continued pressure to do so (Angel Winchester). Thus, this certainty, that one's OTP is *the* OTP, relies heavily on fan creations and shared knowledge. Many may argue that these pairings have an abundance of supporting evidence within their canons, but it often takes fandom metas[56] to tease such information out. Despite what shippers believe, this "evidence" is not always obvious to other fans, especially when one throws certain socio-political issues into the mix, such as whether a homophobic viewer could ever "see" the pairing of Kirk/Spock. Thus, it's these fan analyses, combined with the fanart, the

[55] Fans now apply this same sort of work to celebrity couples. For example, Kim Kardashian and Kanye West are often dubbed "Kimye" by the tabloids.
[56] Essay-like analyses of the canon.

comments, recommendations, headcanons, fanvids, GIFs, jokes, predictions, rants, kinks, blog posts, and the fanfiction that builds a true argument for the pairing and allows it to solidify within the fandom's mind until it becomes an OTP. The basis for the relationship does not (definitively) exist within the canon, so it must therefore exist within the fanon. By writing a term like "johnlock," a fan not only invokes the passion behind the pairing but also the history that allowed for its creation. One cannot read a term such as "spirk" (Kirk/Spock) without acknowledging over fifty years of fan creativity, from *Star Trek's* first episode back in 1966 all the way through to the current fic a fan uploads to AO3. Portmanteaus, far from merely acting as isolated labels, become time capsules for a fandom's development.

I should also note that portmanteaus play a small part in helping to foster inter-fandom community by inhabiting a crucial space within fandom argot. Just as most non-fans would need "mystrade" unpacked, those involved in one fandom will not necessarily be well versed in the vocabulary of another. Rather then making fans feel isolated (for they are already "true" fans of another sort) it makes those who *are* within the fandom feel like they're a part of something unique, that they're connected to others through a particular foundation of knowledge. There is satisfaction in fic diving, coming across what appears to be gibberish, and thinking, "Yes, I know exactly what this means and everything that it implies." Often times there is nearly as much pleasure in deciphering a fic's vocabulary as there is in reading the fic itself.

**I'm Bored, Entertain Me**

Beyond providing information, the other side of the portmanteau is its entertaining aspects. While it may serve as both an indicator of a fan's preferred pairing as well as a historical signpost, portmanteaus are more consciously used as a way for fans to just have a lot of fun. A large number of fans actively work to provide themselves and their community with a useful vocabulary, one that, like any language, accurately represents their interests. However, those same fans are often just as interested in how they can entertain their peers as they are with how they can provide them with information.

The creation of portmanteaus is as much a game as it is a cultural necessity. Media fans attempt to be as creative as possible when selecting a name for their favorite pairings. It's certainly not an easy task, given that more often than not the characters fit together far better than their names do. In many cases, such as with the portmanteaus already mentioned—johnlock, destiel, snarry—simply joining the names into a pronounceable term is the best that fans can do, and the portmanteaus achieve little beyond the work discussed above. The next level of complexity are those portmanteaus that contain favored inside jokes.[57] San-San, for example, is the ship of Sandor/Sansa from George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series. Obviously, names containing the same prefix prove difficult to combine, though in this particular case fans decided against an idiosyncratic name (discussed below) in favor of keeping the odd one they have due to its humorous implications: the joke being that Sandor—one of Martin's harshest characters; heavily scared and morally ambiguous—and Sansa—a girl who continues to grow more calculating

[57] Some jokes are unintentional, such as double-coding terms that can "easily be mistaken for something more mundane, unless you know the subtle signs" (Jamison 368).

as the series goes on—should have a portmanteau as cutesy and innocent sounding as "San-San." A far older example of these inside jokes is Kirk and Spock, who fans have long called not only "spirk" but also "kock"—the sort of crude combination that really doesn't need explanation, especially when the two characters involved are both male and one of them has an alien biology ripe for inventive imaginings.

A handful of portmanteaus go even further in their presentation of inside information. Generally referred to as idiosyncratic ship names,[58] these are the portmanteaus whose jokes, references, and sheer creativity take center stage. This inventiveness often comes about when two names simply won't fit together and, unlike in the case of Sandor/Sansa, fans decide that there's little to be gained in forcing the two together. Instead, a game begins in which fans attempt to come up with the most culturally infused portmanteau possible. The various pairings involving Emma from *Once Upon a Time* are excellent examples. Rather than trying to force "Emma" to fit with a variety of other names, fans instead took her surname and attached it to a trait of her lover: "Swan Queen" for Emma/Queen Regina, "Mad Swan" for Emma/the Mad Hatter, or "Captain Swan" for Emma/Captain Hook. These portmanteaus work around a logistical difficulty while also referencing a notable characteristic of the ship itself, such as the fact that some fans see "Mad Swan" as an odd ship even by fandom standards, or how "Captain Swan" touches on Emma's dominance over Hook— as she is both the "swan" and the "captain" of that particular ship. Other portmanteaus give similar forms of commentary. "Pepperony," while partly meant as just a silly name, is nevertheless also viewed as an appropriate term for the

[58] A type of idiosyncratic ship names that do not engage in this kind of play are those dealing with incest. The tradition there is to take the last name of the characters involved and add the suffix –cest, such as "wincest"—Dean/Sam Winchester, or Holmcest—Sherlock/Mycroft Holmes ("Idiosyncratic Ship Naming").

pairing of Pepper Potts/Tony Stark given Robert Downey Jr.'s portrayal of Stark as an immature, wannabe frat boy ("Portmanteau"). Fans favor "Newmann," even though it's not a true idiosyncratic ship, because it references that OTP bond found in the Newt/Hermann pairing: each becomes a "new man" upon entering a relationship with the other. Another Marvel pairing, the Clint/Bruce ship, abandoned names entirely in favor of the term "Angry Birds," due to Clint's alter ego as Hawkeye and Bruce's ability to transform into the perpetually enraged Hulk. Although the ship existed well before 2009, the release of the Apple iOS game *Angry Birds* only furthered the chosen name's popularity and added another, otherwise unrelated layer of meaning to the portmanteau. In short, the more associations that fans can draw, the more references they can make, and the more insider information they can pack into one portmanteau, the more pleasure they will draw from the name itself.

**Fanon or Canon?**

All of this is not to say that every fan engages in this particular type of creative play. Some may consider the names silly and the game itself to be a waste of time. In contrast, others seem to take the creation of a ship name as seriously as the ship itself and find great relief in having a unified language to refer back to. Still others succeed in inhabiting an in-between space, in which they can both appreciate and mock their peers' enthusiasm. Few represent this space better than David Grae, a writer and producer for ABC's crime drama *Castle.* When the show first aired in 2009, it wasn't difficult for fans to settle on a name for the leading pair, Kate Beckett (Stana Katic) and Richard Castle (Nathan Fillion). With one solving murders and the other writing mysteries, their ship could only be called "Caskett."

This was, in many ways, a perfect storm. The portmanteau contains no idiosyncrasies, it includes both names, yet there is still creativity, and the name itself perfectly sums up the show as well as the type of environment these two characters found love in. In fact, the name was so perfect that Grae felt the need to poke fun with a shout-out in season four's "Murder, He Wrote."

> **Castle:** Eh, why do people care about Brangelina?
> **Beckett:** Oh, so we're Brangelina now?
> **Castle:** No, no, no. We're… Rick-Kate. No, we're Kate-ick.
> **Beckett:** Mm.
> **Castle:** Caskett?
> **Beckett:** Ooh.
> **Castle:** Ooh, that's good, 'cause of the whole murder thing. Caskett.
> **Beckett:** Mm-hmm ("Murder, He Wrote").

Whether Grae heard the name and decided to incorporate it into the show or whether he thought it up himself is unclear, but either way, the result is a dialogue between the writers of the canonical source and the writers of its fic. Grae's incorporation of a fandom term into the show adds further depth to the portmanteau, in that it is now both canon and fanon, a meta-term that highlights that intricate overlap between commercial and fan writings. Furthermore, if Grae indeed knew about fans' portmanteaus, then his nod treats this intermingling with great respect. Unlike other shows—such as *Supernatural* and *Sherlock*—that incorporate fan language with the intention of mocking the fans themselves,[59] Grae fully acknowledges the appropriateness and creativeness of the Castle/Beckett portmanteau by having both characters respond to it positively. He also merges fan creation with the canon seamlessly through a focus on characterization. Castle, known for his child-like antics and love of popular culture is the only character within *Castle*'s canon

[59] It should be noted that *after* writing this, *Supernatural* redeemed itself somewhat in fans' eyes by airing the episode "Fan Fiction" which treated fictional fans with a great deal more respect.

who would conceivably come up with a name like "Caskett," and Castle is a character who fans can count on to treat the term with respect. It is appropriate for Grae to use Castle as a vehicle for incorporating fan language because Castle is, himself, very much a fan.

While it may never be clear whether Grae stumbled upon the term "Caskett" prior to writing it into his episode or whether he made it up himself, every once in a while there are canons that develop their own portmanteaus independently from fandom… and they still end up being remarkably similar. One might argue that this is simply a matter of probability (there are only so many ways to combine two names, even idiosyncratic names). However, I would argue that there is a similar type of creativity going on in both canon and fanon circles, even when the purpose behind creating the portmanteau may differ. An instance of this occurred in the late 1980's and early 90's when Toei Animation adapted Akira Toriyama's phenomenally popular manga, *Dragon Ball Z.* Following the adventures of a powerful alien named Goku and his martial artist friends, the series did, and still does, provide material for a number of pairings, many of which are interspecies relationships. The pairing of half-human, half-saiyan boys Goten and Trunks became known as "Gotenks," while fans referred to the pairing of saiyan protagonists Goku and Vegeta as either "Gogeta" or "Vegito." However, by the time the series had reached its ninth season a new fighting technique had emerged, the "Fusion Dance," in which two characters can literally combine bodies in order to also combine their power levels. For many it was a shipper's dream. For others it was a linguistic nightmare.

Within the narrative, one of the first pairs to successfully complete this technique was Goten and Trunks, who thus created a new character: Gotenks. The fusion of Goku and Vegeta created Gogeta, while a different type of fusion later on in the series created Vegito.

Suddenly, the names that fans had created to describe these romantic relationships now also described canonical characters who were, despite many hopes, definitely *not* romantically involved. The result was a movement away from portmanteaus within the DBZ fandom. To this day, most fans refer to the majority of pairings using the forward slash or even just an "x" so as to avoid any confusion with their platonic counterparts. Despite these practical difficulties, however, there are fascinating implications in Akira Toriyama's and Toei Animation's engagement in a process that is quite similar to their fans'. They may not have shipped these characters in a sexual manner, but they did decide who would engage in the Fusion Dance with whom. Goten and Trunks, whether in love or not, have an established bond within the canon, as do Goku and Vegeta. Toriyama presumably recognized this and chose to give these characters the chance to become one—literally—while fans continue their attempts metaphorically. The fact that Toriyama also created portmanteaus of his own—the same ones fans spent time creating—speaks to a need to linguistically connect characters, to whittle a relationship down to a single, complex whole, and this need is not confined solely to fandom. Equally important, there are scenes in which the DBZ characters work through various name combinations before deciding on "Gotenks." Those scenes reflect the same, collaborative process that fans go through whenever they create their ship names.

**The Road so Far**

Adding onto shared knowledge, changes in formatting due to the increased popularity of the Internet, and the unique language that fans have developed over the decades both work to characterize contemporary fanfiction. Specifically, accessibility,

speed, transient storytelling, and the ability to insert hyperlinks within the text all combine to create fanfiction that differs remarkably from the fanzine fics of the 20th century. As if knowledge of this technology weren't enough to create distance between fans and non-fans, the utilization of a lexicon that is nearly impossible to learn outside of a fan context further distances those "in the know" from those who are unwilling to immerse themselves within the culture that fans have established. This vocabulary also acts as a marker of status, a way for fans to demonstrate their insider knowledge to other peers. The portmanteau in particular is a remarkable example of fans' ability to combine the need for a practical, identifying set of terminology with their never-ending love of entertainment. Though short and seemingly simple, the portmanteau packs fic summary information, history, fan preferences, and numerous inside jokes into a single, seemingly humble word.

## Chapter Three
## Redeeming Qualities: "Bad" Writing in Fanfiction

*"i feel like reading fanfic has kind of broken my desire*
*to read published stories bc theyre so bland tbh like. where*
*the hell am i gonna get queer android romance in a bookstore.*
*who writes about past assassins working together in a coffeeshop.*
*all i see are straight white people making out like really like*
*REALLY"*

- *Lucyliuism*

*"[It's] the unfortunate fact that a terrible lot of fan-fic*
*is outright cringe-worthy and ought to be suppressed*
*on purely aesthetic grounds."*

*- Diana Gabaldon*

### What's So Bad About It?

Another remarkable characteristic of contemporary fanfiction is its supposedly "bad" writing. I use quotation marks here because "bad" is, of course, subjective. In her essay titled "The Erotic Space," Pugh states decisively that "the only two genres of writing that really matter are good and bad"—but who gets to decide what characterizes each of these and what happens when there's disagreement? I'm more inclined to agree with the fan who, in responding to the elitism found in managing archives, says that she is "wary of the idea that there can be self-evident parameters of taste" (Brobeck 259). Indeed, literature that appears as self-evident trash to one may well be another's great novel.[60] Even the "trash," though, is often treasured by fans due to a short supply of fics in a given fandom, or because an individual has already read everything "good," or simply because sharing fics through the Internet is so easy; deciding to rec a fic is not necessarily dependent on its hypothetical, literary value (Jamison 196). Fans share "badly" written

[60] Twilight is an excellent example of this. Despite mediocre films and a series with poor writing, fans still find the story itself "great, amazing and captivating" (Jamison 178).

works because even a story with poor grammar and an awful plot can provide entertainment, particularly through characterization. The same can be said of incomplete works that are nevertheless praised for what the author has already posted (Black). More often than not, fans prize the emotional content of a fic more highly than any "good writing," as evidenced by comments such as "I keep being repetitive and telling you how nice it makes me feel" that focus on the reader's emotional reaction, rather than on the author's technical skills (Thekaidonovskys). That emotional component is also not *dependent* on good writing because fans already have a wealth of knowledge about the characters; a reader doesn't need the author to spell everything out, just to provide enough of an outline so that imagination can fill in the blanks (LaChev). It is also worth noting that taste can vary greatly with the times. As fans love pointing out, Shakespeare and Dickens were both the popular writers of their times but now, going on hundreds of years, their writing is supposedly meant for the elite (Johnson 135).[61] Thus, non-fans can respond to fanfiction with,

> Fan fiction is to writing what cake mix is to gourmet cooking. Fan fiction is an Elvis impersonator who thinks he is original. Fan fiction is Paint-By-Number art (Hobb).

Whereas fans claim,

> The most amazing, creative, engaging stories I've ever read have almost all been fanfiction… Next to that, most mainstream fiction starts tasting like Wonder Bread, you know? (SouvenirsFamiliers).

It's a rather wide range to be sure, as is the case with most literature. However, fanfic differs in that much of what mainstream readers consider "bad" is—while not necessarily

[61] One fan's tweet highlights this view, reimagining the beloved *Ulysses* as a fanfic: "'Ulysses' posted by user james_joyce in the odyssey fandom, tagged under 'dublin au'" (Deirdre).

"good"—at least acceptable to fans, and details that mainstream readers might pass over indifferently can send fic readers cringing. For example, fans will often snub a fic that they believe misrepresents a character, regardless of how lovely the prose may be or how intricate the plot. It's for this reason that many fans have a difficult time reading tie-in novels. Despite the fact that these novels go through publishing channels and are therefore supposedly "well written"—no typos, no grammatical mistakes, the story sustains a plot, it reaches a certain length, it is complete, etc.—if a fan deems that the author has warped a character's identity, then all these other points are moot. One of the many examples of a failed tie-in novel is Trevor Baxendale's *The Undertaker's Gift* for the *Doctor Who* spinoff *Torchwood.* Many fans consider his characterization of Jack to be deplorable, especially when it comes to his interactions with Ianto—these two make up the fandom's most popular ship—and this mistake, in fans' eyes, makes the book as a whole unreadable. One Amazon review states, "The plot may have been interesting but the whole dynamic between the characters was so unrealistic it ruined the integrity of the book itself" (Writer's Page). For fans, without realistic character dynamics, there might as well be no story at all.

"True fans of a particular fiction feel the pain of poorly written but well-intentioned fanfiction…" (Mackey). True, but in the world of fandom, so long as the characterization is decent—or the author has good reasons for changing a character's personality—"well-intentioned" can go a *very* long way (Mackey). Given the importance of community in fic writing, negativity is often viewed as a good check on ego and individualism (Jamison 246). The fan who writes a repetitive fic filled with grammatical errors is still generally catering to what her readers want and she is thus serving the community well; the fan who works to

produce something overly "original"—presumably with the hope of becoming a BNF (Big Name Fan)—is sometimes seen as trying too hard; too desperate for attention. An author's originality can be viewed by fans as her sacrificing the core characterization of the fandom for a (slim) chance at popularity. Yet, even as fans supposedly reject "originality" for repetitive traditions, it can also be said that these fics are highly individual, as they are one fan's perspective on the same story— be it the canon as a whole or a specific sub-genre, such as the coffee shop AU[62]. Contemporary fic writing is a very fine balance between producing something new and giving readers the familiarity that they've turned to fic for in the first place.

In thinking about these differences, I would like to closely examine two aspects of fic's "bad" writing here: its repetitiveness and the prevalence of the Mary Sue. Each of these characteristics produce sneers when presented to a mainstream reader (as well as many fans), but within the realm of fanfiction as a whole, there is much that these clichés have to offer a reader.

**Repetition, Repetition**

Beginning with the repetitiveness of fanfiction, there has long been a game that fans play in which they kindly mock their own predictability in writing:

[62] This is by far one of the most popular subgenres in fic. Its popularity may be due in large part to the complexity inherent in taking characters that belong to fantasy or Sci Fi universes and placing them in the "real world." Negotiating how, say, James Kirk remains *James Kirk* without his ship or career in space exploration is a challenge many writers are eager to take on.

> It's not a fanfic until the dress hugs her curves perfectly, his eyes scan the crowd and finds her and their tongues battle for dominance… or, if m/m, the jeans hug his ass perfectly (Hometomoma).

And:

> They tasted like [insert food/beverage here], and [insert spice/flavor here], and something so distinctly [*insert lover's name here in italics*].
>
> - Every romance fanfiction writer ever (Icycy).

These examples—common phrases about style, intimacy, and a specific way of describing a character's scent—are notable clichés within romantic fanfiction. Many genres contain numerous clichés of course (pick up any Young Adult or High Fantasy novel published within the last decade) but fic readers and writers embrace the cliché in a manner generally unheard of in mainstream fiction.[63] Back in 2011, John Scalzi gave a review of the third best Sci-Fi novel of the decade (according to readers' polls), Patrick Rothfuss' *The Name of the Wind.* His first reaction to the story reads,

> … and there, on page four—of a book that started on page three, mind you, were five bowls of stew. Oh, crap, I thought. Not a "hearty stew" fantasy! Stew being the most cliché of all fantasy world meals, as duly noted in Diana Wynne Jones's entirely merciless tour of fantasy clichés, *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*… Honestly, if on

[63] This is not to say that fanfiction doesn't have a hierarchy of "good" and "bad" writing. Pugh hypothesizes that older fandoms produce "better" fic because the writers themselves are older (with more experience), the fandoms are darker (more emotion), and the low budgets of television in the 60's through the 90's ensures that there are numerous "gaps" for fans to fill (Pugh 207).

> the second page of the story you're already trotting out the stew, what possible hope does the rest of the book have? … I almost stopped reading *Wind* right there (Scalzi).

Though Scalzi admits to coming to love the book despite its rocky start, his initial assessment demonstrates the overall mindset of mainstream readers: clichés are bad; give the reader something new to read. In contrast, fans—though sometimes wanting something new—just as often conflate clichés with conventions, looking for stories with the same structure, tropes, and endings as they've read a thousand times before. This is particularly prevalent with happy endings, since fic often works to "correct" the mistakes in a canon, like character deaths and unsatisfactory finales (Leavenworth). It's the "more of" concept applied to the genre itself. Author FelineFemme takes advantage of this repetitiveness to compose a crack, slash *Sherlock* fic that "[attempts] to tackle as many *Sherlock* fanfic clichés as possible within the confines of Let's Write Sherlock's Challenge #4" (FelineFemme).[64] This story includes John and Sherlock "laughing, gasping against the stairway" after a case, sharing their first kiss in large part because of the adrenaline rush, John discovering that Sherlock is "all sharp angles and lean muscle," Sherlock comparing their love-making to an experiment, and both of them dealing with a great deal of awkwardness in the morning. FelineFemme then moves on to describe another scenario in which they have sex because Sherlock is bored, and still another where they room together after a wedding reception. Two more possible First Times follow, each accompanied by a phrase, "Actually, it happens like this" or, "Oh please, it happens like this." In truth, *every* scenario happens "like this" and every scenario does not. Though writing sarcastically,

[64] This writing falls within the "badfic" genre, wherein an author writes deliberately bad fanfiction with the purpose of critiquing it or getting a laugh out of the reader. However, amusement relies entirely on the reader already knowing about these tropes and clichés.

FelineFemme acknowledges fans' repetitiveness—in plot, in descriptors, in consequences—but also their ability to provide just enough difference for the story to remain interesting. Her explanation of the wedding scenario begins,

> They are attending Mycroft and Greg's wedding. Or is it Molly and Lestrade's wedding? Perhaps it's Irene and Molly's wedding… they're pretending to be together for the sake of John's family. Or is it Sherlock's? It's most likely Sherlock's.

Sarcasm aside, FelineFemme describes at least six different wedding/family pairings, each of which will produce a distinct fanfic structure for the author to play with. As one fan neatly sums up, "So many stories, the same but different… [it's] like a new structure of fiction" (Jamison 182).

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the formatting of fanfiction has gone a long way towards encouraging this repetitiveness. Structures such as drabbles and 5 and 1's severely limit the freedom of the writer, often producing "stale" and repetitive fanfiction. The structures remain popular, however, because while some writers view them as an enjoyable challenge to their creativity, others take comfort in the knowledge that no matter what they produce, even if it's similar to what others have already written—*especially* if it's similar—the fans will likely love it.[65] Fans are also far more lenient towards "bad" writing because they are not in competition with one another and they know that details become clichés far more quickly on the Internet than in mainstream publishing. Even if fans did possess the same concept of "originality" as other writers, attempting to always create

[65] This concept of re-reading may be similar to that of re-watching. Johnson argues that contemporary television is more complex than its predecessors, as evidenced by viewers' ability to watch the same episodes multiple times without getting bored (159). I would argue that fanfiction is similarly complex, in that these tropes and clichés are themselves intricate enough to continually sustain a reader's attention.

something new when millions of fans are posting instantaneously would be an impossible task.[66] Rather than attempting it, fans have embraced clichés as something so "bad" it's good. As opposed to being an indicator of lazy or unoriginal writing, the use of clichés denotes tradition and a deep knowledge of fan culture.

**Mary and Gary Stu**

Even more cringe worthy than the cliché is the Mary Sue. But what exactly is a Mary Sue? Fan Ladyloveandjustice sums up the concept nicely by explaining,

> So, there's this girl. She's tragically orphaned and richer than anyone on the planet. Every guy she meets falls in love with her, but in between torrid romances she rejects them all because she [is] dedicated to what is Pure and Good. She has a genius level intellect, Olympic-athlete level athletic ability and incredible good looks. She is consumed by terrible angst, but this only makes guys want her more… Everyone is obsessed with her, even her enemies are attracted to her. She can plan ahead for anything and she's generally right with any conclusion she makes. People who defy her are inevitably wrong (Ladyloveandjustice).

This doesn't much sound like a character people would enjoy reading about. In short, a Mary Sue is an extreme wish fulfillment, a character so perfect that she inspires disgust rather than empathy. The difficulty, however, is that this passage—as Ladyloveandjustice points out—describes *Batman*, one of the most beloved characters in Western history. Yet

[66] For more on fanfiction and originality, see Inkandcayenne's response to the question, "As a professor, may I ask you what you think about fanfiction?"

few readers are turning their noses up at him, raising questions about what is really so "bad" about the Mary Sue.

Supposedly, no archetype represents fanfiction's "bad" writing as well as the Mary Sue. Yet at the same time, the Mary Sue is one of the clearest indicators of the changes fanfiction has undergone in the last decade or so. The term was first coined in 1973 when fan Paula Smith wrote a *Star Trek* parody titled, "A Trekkie's Tale." Even at only four paragraphs, her story easily captures the fandom's universal disgust for these overly perfect characters:

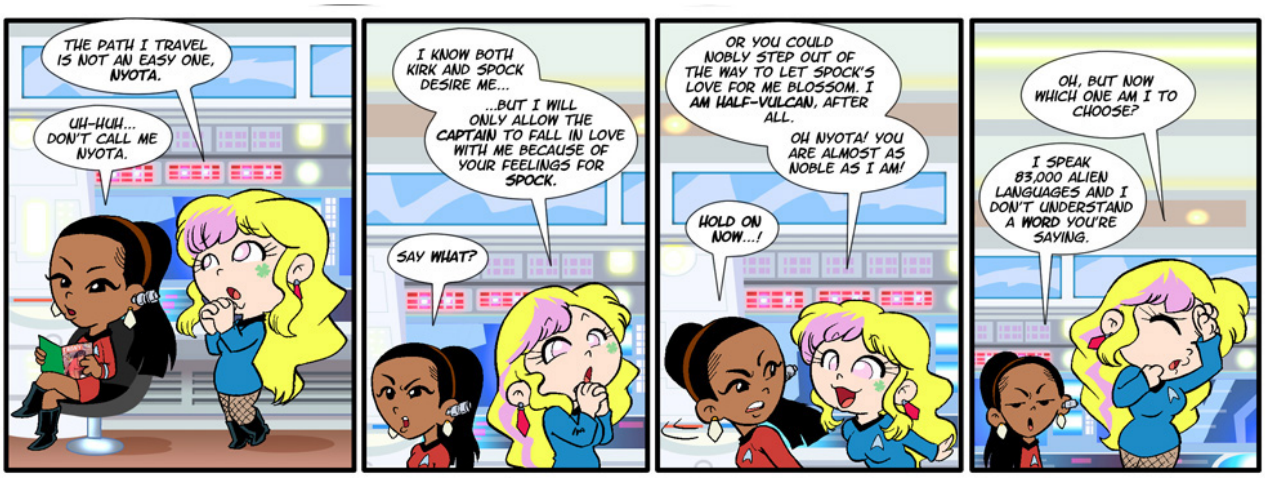
> "Gee, golly, gosh, gloriosky," thought Mary Sue as she stepped on the bridge of the Enterprise. "Here I am, the youngest lieutenant in the fleet - only fifteen and a half years old." Captain Kirk came up to her. "Oh, Lieutenant, I love you madly. Will you come to bed with me?" "Captain! I am not that kind of girl!" "You're right, and I respect you for it. Here, take over the ship for a minute while I go get some coffee for us." Mr. Spock came onto the bridge. "What are you doing in the command seat, Lieutenant?" "The Captain told me to." "Flawlessly logical. I admire your mind."
>
> Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy and Mr. Scott beamed down with Lt. Mary Sue to Rigel XXXVII. They were attacked by green androids and thrown into prison. In a moment of weakness Lt. Mary Sue revealed to Mr. Spock that she too was half Vulcan. Recovering quickly, she sprung the lock with her hairpin and they all got away back to the ship.
>
> But back on board, Dr. McCoy and Lt. Mary Sue found out that the men who had

> beamed down were seriously stricken by the jumping cold robbies, Mary Sue less so. While the four officers languished in Sick Bay, Lt. Mary Sue ran the ship, and ran it so well she received the Nobel Peace Prize, the Vulcan Order of Gallantry and the Tralfamadorian Order of Good Guyhood.
>
> However the disease finally got to her and she fell fatally ill. In the Sick Bay as she breathed her last, she was surrounded by Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy, and Mr. Scott, all weeping unashamedly at the loss of her beautiful youth and youthful beauty, intelligence, capability and all around niceness. Even to this day her birthday is a national holiday of the Enterprise (Smith).

Here Smith covers nearly every characteristic that makes the Mary Sue "bad"—and what therefore makes her an indicator of a "bad" fanfic. The author defines her by her innocence[67] ("Gee, golly, gosh, glorisky"), yet she is paradoxically sexualized ("Oh, Lieutenant… Will you come to bed with me?") and demonstrates virtue by refusing these advances ("Captain! I am not that kind of girl!"). The Mary Sue is unrealistically successful ("Here, take over the ship"), often achieves this success at a very young age ("only fifteen and a half"), her origins are unique ("she too was half Vulcan"), and her skills are likewise idealistic ("she sprung the lock with her hairpin"). Ultimately the Mary Sue is universally adored ("her birthday is a national holiday") but faces a tragic end at the hands of the

[67] As described in Chapter Five, James portrays Ana in *Fifty Shades* as overly innocent in a similar manner. This characterization, combined with her easy enchantment of Christian, the handsome billionaire (who is supposedly "out of her league"), has earned Ana the title of Mary Sue for many fans.

author ("the disease finally got to her and she fell fatally ill").[68] These (again, repetitive) endings are meant to inspire sympathy in the reader but more often than not produce dissatisfaction, if not outright hate. Since the mid 60's, the only acceptable way to utilize the Mary Sue was, as Smith does, in a parody. More recently, Interrobang Studies produced a webcomic called *Ensign Sue Must Die!* wherein the crew of J.J. Abrams' rebooted *Star Trek* get stuck with a Mary Sue on their ship:




Forty years later, this Mary Sue possesses the same characteristics that Paula Smith first laid out. In this particular comic, Mary Sue reveals how her life has not been an "easy one," she proclaims that both Kirk and Spock desire her, reveals her half-Vulcan heritage, and concludes with the dramatic question, "Oh, but now which one am I to choose?" (Bolk). The difference is that, unlike Smith's parody, contemporary parodies of the Mary Sue more overtly criticizes how "bad" she is. Rather than writing the parody and relying on fans to simply know that Mary Sue is a badly written character—as Smith does— Interrobang Studies *inverts* all the defining traits of the characters around the Mary Sue. Rather than desiring her, the men hate her. Instead of buying into her tragic story, they're skeptical, and

[68] The only common characteristic Paula Smith missed was that the Mary Sue often has a rival, a female character who despises her for the attention she receives from the men.

instead of falling into the trope of jealous rival, here Uhura claims, "I speak 83,000 alien languages and I don't understand a word you're saying." *Ensign Sue Must Die!* equates the rest of the Enterprise crew with the fan reading the comic; every time they express confusion or revulsion at Mary Sue's presence, the reader is meant to see herself in them. *Ensign Sue Must Die!* teaches readers that anyone with a knowledge of the English language and even a pinch of taste should sneer openly at the Mary Sue.[69]

Yet recently, feminist fans in particular have called for an explanation as to why Batman is a beloved Gary Stu (the male equivalent) but the female Mary Sues of fic culture are universally despised—a reason, that is, beyond sexism. Theoretically, Batman proves that a perfect character is highly entertaining, provided that the other elements of the story—plot, universe, minor characters, writing style—are done well. Going further, there is now an outcry for fans to reclaim the Mary Sue as a feminist symbol, to proclaim their right for female-centric wish fulfillment fantasies. This is particularly important for younger women who are still attempting to form their identities. One fan boldly claims that all women need Mary Sues in their prepubescent and teenage years because,

> I was a fuckup. And sometimes a fuckup needs to feel like a Mary Sue. As an adult, these characters felt a little thin because they lacked the real world knowledge I, as an adult, had learned and earned. But that's the thing… these books weren't FOR this current version of myself. Who I am now doesn't need a flawless hero because I'm comfortable with the idea that valuable people are also flawed" (Unwinona).

[69] During those forty years, Mary Sues were so hated that fans developed numerous tests for writers to see if they'd written a Mary Sue—and presumably encourage them not to post these stories (Dr. Merlin).

Pugh argues that the Mary Sue "acts as a mirror rather than a window," showing female readers how they'd like to see themselves if they had the benefit of residing in an enabling, fantasy universe (85). If one of the purposes of literature is to provide examples of what readers *could* grow to be like, the Mary Sue provides women with an extreme but ultimately positive template—like Batman is to men. Viewing an extreme example through this lens, I would like to turn briefly to what fans often term the worst piece of fanfiction ever written, *Harry Potter's* "My Immortal" by Tara Gillesbie.

Written sometime before 2010 and posted to FFN, "My Immortal" follows a Mary Sue, Ebony Dark'ness Dementia Raven Way, as she completes her seventh year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, falls in love with Harry Potter, and undergoes time travel in an attempt to fix all that is wrong with the world. No one is sure who Tara Gillesbie is or, given the story's extremely "bad" writing, whether it was meant as satire or a serious work of literature (Riesman). The first chapter begins:

> Hi my name is Ebony Dark'ness Dementia Raven Way and I have long ebony black hair (that's how I got my name) with purple streaks and red tips that reaches my mid-back and icy blue eyes… I'm a vampire but my teeth are straight and white… I'm also a witch… I'm a goth (in case you couldn't tell)… I was walking outside Hogwarts… A lot of preps stared at me. I put up my middle finger (Gillesbie).

Though it's impossible to say either way, there's a chance that this was a serious fic written by a *Harry Potter* fan, with no intention of satire or parody. If so, one can ask then, what is *really* so bad about this Mary Sue? Ebony possesses a unique name that relates directly to a physical attribute that she treasures (her "long ebony black hair"), she is otherwise implied to be quite pretty ("icy blue eyes"), she is a vampire—a powerful, mythical creature—but

does not possess the usual shortcomings of such creatures (she is not evil, her teeth are "straight and white"), she's a witch and a goth (both of which are also portrayed positively) and when other people judge her for her looks, Ebony confidently flips them off. Read as a feminist icon, Ebony is many girls' dream: conventionally pretty but also unique, powerful, mysterious, and multifaceted in personality, different enough to draw attention but confident enough to defend her choices. What then is the complaint against Ebony? That she's too interesting? Too self-assured? Fans like Unwinona argue that writers should look towards improving their style (is the repetition of "ebony black" necessary? Probably not) and ensuring that their characters still possess realistic flaws, but that the concept of the Mary Sue itself is not the problem; it may even be a solution for many women, particularly when it comes to self-confidence. Regardless of the social benefits, however, this reclamation of the Mary Sue demonstrates just how much fic has changed—and is still changing—in comparison to the fic that came before it.[70]

**The Road So Far**

There are numerous characteristics of contemporary fanfiction that a reader might equate with "bad" writing: unedited prose, predictable plots, sexual encounters that read as a naive teenage girl's fantasy. Despite all this, much of what mainstream readers might see as "bad" does not coincide with how fans judge their own work. In particular, fans continue to favor the repetitiveness of fanfiction, viewing it as a feature deserving of praise, as well as characterization—if a fic reads well in terms of character personality, fans often judge it

[70] Alongside the empowerment that the Mary Sue provides, some scholars suggest that it may help fans in their fair use defense. Chander in particular argues this point in "Everyone's a Superhero: A Cultural Theory of 'Mary Sue.'"

as readable overall. The most shocking change in contemporary fanfiction, however, is the reclamation of the Mary Sue. Where once this trope was universally hated, now feminists uphold the archetype as a powerful, even necessary, example for women of all ages, but particularly for young girls. If fans are now embracing the most reviled trope in all of fanfic history as something potentially "good," it is difficult to see how readers could consider *any* aspect of fanfiction's writing to be inherently "bad."

## Chapter Four
## A Different Kind of Crossover: The Creative and the Critical

*"there is literally no difference between academic scholars discussing their interpretations of a text and a bunch of people yelling YOUR HEADCANON IS WRONG at each other"*

*- durendals*

*"There is no such thing as fiction.*
*Just non-fiction written in the wrong parallel universe."*

- *Welcome to Night Vale*

Today, in 2015, fanfiction is a well-known part of media and literary culture, and it is becoming a far more accepted part as well. Discussion of the genre has been popping up not only in blogs and on twitter, but in respected newspapers as well[71]. Back in 2013, Amazon launched their Kindle Worlds, a platform designed specifically for the publication of "fanfic" in a limited number of licensed, open canons.[72] Toping off this notoriety, E.L. James has set the record for the best selling paperback in history with her wildly popular *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy that began as *Twilight* fanfic (Singh). Fans no longer need to fear embarrassment about writing, reading, or studying fic as they once did and though this movement towards mainstream acceptance is of great importance, there is an equally important movement occurring in academic and educational circles that scholars have largely ignored. Here I would like to examine the recent incorporation of fanfiction into the classroom and how that move has reinforced a problematic interpretation of contemporary

[71] See for example *The New York Time*'s "Web Fiction, Serialized and Social" or *The Wall Street Journal*'s "The Weird World of Fan Fiction."
[72] Here I put "fanfic" in quotation marks because I want to reiterate this distinction between the type of fic published by influential corporations such as Amazon for monetary gain, and the type of gift-driven fic I am attempting to characterize in this thesis.

fanfiction as a "bridge" towards mainstream writing, thus downplaying the importance of fic as a genre all its own. Here I also discuss fanfiction's strong ties to metas within fandom and I argue that fanfiction as a genre contains numerous elements of non-fiction, primarily theses about the canonical source that are interwoven throughout the story. This blending of classifications—the academic essay, more generalized analysis, and fictional storytelling—have merged to create a genre that is quite distinct from all three and one that scholars would do well to study as such.

**Keep Your Training Wheels On**

The intersections among fic and non-fiction projects are nearly as varied as the subgenres of fic itself. Since its beginning, fic has acted as a vehicle for assessment as well as creativity, with the original Science Fiction zines focusing almost solely on non-fiction topics. These topics included theories about the canonical source or interviews with authors and cast members, and this remained the preference before fanfiction became popularized in media zines beginning in the mid 1960's (Jamison). This shift towards fanfiction occurred primarily through the immense popularity of *Star Trek*, with viewers wanting to continue the stories of Kirk, Spock, and the starship Enterprise. During this move mainstream artists, including those involved in the making of *Star Trek*, kept an eye on zines as "valuable source[s] of insight into fan taste and concerns," reworking these stories into commercial tools even as they remained primarily a form of entertainment (Pugh 85).

Much more recently, fic has moved on to become an instrument for teaching too, with teachers finding a space for it in the classroom due to the belief that it is an excellent

tool for understanding literature and for the practice of creative writing. Elementary and high school teachers have begun assigning fic as writing prompts in the hope that combining digital and textual media, as well as including already beloved stories, will engage their students in ways that writing "original" works may not. Indeed, many have already found that "students are motivated by and connect with lessons that involve media they appreciate" (Kell). Teachers have latched onto the fact that fic is never written in a vacuum, using it as a means of introducing their students to criticism that, "bridges age, race, gender, and educational status" (Kell).[73] Writing and sharing fic has shown to encourage critical feedback due to the use of anonymous usernames, it can be a vehicle for understanding contemporary story-telling, or as a way of emphasizing that one must have tried their hand at writing literature in order to fully understand its construction[74] (Kell, Mackey, Mayers). Research has also shown that both the reading and the writing of fic, especially the two in combination, can provide a number of valuable writing lessons, including, but not limited to, "a healthy respect for all the characters in a story and their underlying motivations" (Jamison 110). Far from the weird, pitiable, and often over sexualized hobby it was once seen as, fic is now viewed as a convenient "bridge to writing original fiction," a change that is due in no small part to the commercial success of E.L. James and others like her (Dangerlove).

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[73] For a text that discusses the importance of this diversity see Mike Rose and Glynda Hull's "'This Wooden Shake Place': The Logic of an Unconventional Reading."

[74] Tim Mayers, paraphrasing J. D. McClatchy argued that, "literary scholars, while skilled at theoretical exegeses of poems, have no real idea of how poems get written and therefore need to be reeducated" (X). I would argue that the same can be said of any form, not just poetry. Writing fic may be one way of fixing this disparity. Simply put, "one way… to learn about certain kinds of texts is to attempt to write similar ones" (19).

Fanfiction is indeed an excellent tool for those who are learning to write, as well as for those who are striving to improve. Rebecca Black and Leanne Stendell discuss the educational benefits of fanficiton[75] and countless fic authors have written about their literary development, citing fanfiction as one of the near constant, unifying themes in their journeys towards becoming "real" writers: that seemingly inevitable move away from fanfiction and towards the mainstream market, where readers can judge the worth of the writing through how much money it earns and what a group of, presumably, authoritative reviewers think of the story. Without the stamp of approval implied by a publisher's name that's attached to the work, evidence of readers' willingness to buy it, and others' acknowledgment of the writing through traditional networks like lit magazines and bestseller lists, a story is often considered to be less "real" (read: noteworthy) than the texts that *do* move through these channels.[76] One author, after giving a detailed account of the years worth of work she put into her fanfiction—as well as the immense popularity it gained—ends her essay with the problematic assertion that it was only when she'd landed an agent for mainstream writing that, "I [could] now officially call myself a writer" (Jamison 148). Despite the increased acceptance that I describe above, fic is still very much considered the training wheels of creative writing, which continues to have a negative impact on its place within literature, the classroom, and academia. Regardless of what many authors believe, including the infamous Anne Rice, there are many benefits to writing fic that outweigh the championing of writing "your own original stories with your own

[75] For additional information on how education might help fic in a fair use defense, see Van Steenhuyse.

[76] There are of course varying hierarchies of "realness" and worth among literary styles and genres, but any text on the shelf of a bookstore—even the "trashy" romances—automatically has a higher status in the public eye than a piece published online, with only the author's word that it's worth reading.

characters" (Anne Rice).[77] The most obvious benefit is the author's ability to experiment with a very specific element of literature, focusing on, for example, the limits and potentials of dialogue, since another author has already established that foundation of characterization and world building. Fic writers have access to immediate, diverse feedback on a global scale (a sharp contrast to the romanticized ideal of an author working in solitude, or the continued problem of one teacher attempting to comment on a plethora of student writings). Fic is additionally in a unique position to archive a writer's ongoing improvement. Given that fic need not go through publishing channels—that supposedly turn away anything "bad"—writers are able to post their work when *they* believe it is worth reading and they accumulate a personal canon that other fans continually comment on and engaged with[78], repeatedly drawing attention to the author's progress. And of course, there is the mere *act* of writing. For all its perceived faults, fanfiction is a highly prolific form of literature that can help writers to improve simply through the act of practicing writing.

Thus, it is due to these benefits (and numerous others) that fans and non-fans alike should not view fic as merely a "bridge" to real fiction—"a crash course in learning to write" (Jamison 144). When these arguments fail to persuade, connections are often made between fic and mainstream fiction as a way of justifying the fanfic, with scholars loving to point out that those who were writing fic back in the early 2000s are now on the *New York*

[77] Diana Gabaldon is another author vehemently against fic, going so far as to compare others taking her characters to "someone selling your children into white slavery" (Aja)
[78] This is not to say that every fic reader agrees with the assumption that they are responsible for giving the writer constructive criticism. One reader who runs an archive insists that she is merely a collector of stories, not an "educational institution" (Brobeck).

*Times* bestseller list[79]. While certainly a laudable feat, this sort of rationalization once again positions fic not as writing but as a tool to *achieve* writing, an "unofficial education" rather than a craft worthy of analysis on its own (Jamison 140). Yet fic remains "real" by most definitions available, with its own language, rules, and clichés. This thesis works to characterize the *type* of writing that fanfiction has become and thus depends greatly on the reader's belief that it is indeed "real." Proving as much is not my primary concern. However, if any doubt still remains, one should consider how he or she personally defines "writing"—perhaps even more importantly, how they define "quality writing"—and ask themselves if a *Harry Potter* fic trilogy that (currently) surpasses the combined length of Rowling's books by over 300,000 words counts within their definition of "real," or even their definition of "good"? (Aspeninthesunlight). Or, if one is considering length, what about a fic that is thirteen times as long as Ulysses? (AuraChannelerChris ). Does a fic with a readership in the hundreds of thousands? (Emmagrant01). What about a fic that readers have given numerous awards to? (Ysar). Furthermore, it is worth noting that these are merely the cream of the crop, the equivalent of saying only Shakespeare, Faulkner, and Joyce have written "real" stories. To claim that fic is the training wheels of fiction is ultimately unproductive as it does not acknowledge that fanfiction, on its own, is already an established form of literature that readers are capable of enjoying and scholars are capable of analyzing.

Daphne Dangerlove, she who views fic as this "bridge" between the amateur and the professional, wrote two books that in her mind teach the reader about writing fanfiction:

[79] It is also worth noting that by using the NYT's bestseller list as an indicator of a book's worth that logic should then apply to the value of fic too. If popularity is in any way equal to literary value then the fact that fics often have "readership that dwarf[s] most New York Times bestsellers" is a solid argument for fic as a "real" form of writing (Jamison 181).

*How to Write Fan Fiction That People Want to Read* and *Write Better, Right Now! A Fan Fiction Writer's Guide to Avoiding Embarrassing Errors.* Yet neither of these texts treat fic as its own genre, one distinct from other forms of writing, with its own rules and conventions that writers must learn before composing fic. Just as when someone wants to write detective mysteries or flash fiction or an epistolary novel, there are expectations tied to the form, most of which writers must be learn before they can break them. Indeed, two instructors who tried their hand at writing fic were "surprised to learn how difficult it is to write competent fan fictions… Even the class members who initially felt that writing fan fiction would not be as 'creative' as making up a fictional world oneself were quite taken aback by how difficult they found writing within a known fictional world…" (Mackey). Teachers may be making educational progress by incorporating fic into their classrooms[80], but they should also keep in mind that they are not teaching some broad, nebulous thing called "creative writing." Rather, they are teaching a particular genre of writing and attempting to use it as a tool to help students understand other, potentially similar genres.

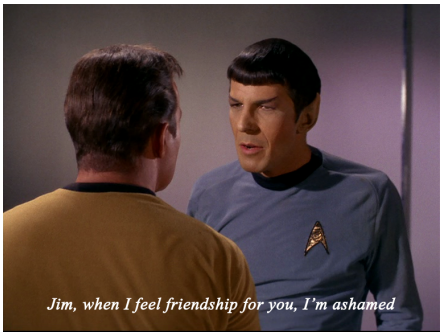
**Fans on Fandom**

With these thoughts in mind—fic's current popularity, its use in the classroom, and its uncertain status as a form of "real" writing—I move now to the intersections between fic

[80] On the other hand, however, many fans despise any attempts at studying "their" culture. I use quotation marks because just weeks before submitting this piece there was a serious backlash against an undergrad who crafted a course on fanfiction and encouraged her peers to leave "critical" reviews on the fics they were reading for class. Though the initial complaint was against the tone of these comments—"tone-deaf, condescending, rude…completely out of step and touch with all fannish norms"—and the course's potentially inappropriate assignments, the complaints quickly morphed into an outcry against all "outsiders" studying fandom. What many of these commenters fail to realize is that the majority of scholars examining fandom are *themselves* fans. For more on this evolving issue, see Waldorph's "So Your Fic is Required Reading: Hahahanope."

and non-fiction, particularly the tradition of combining fiction and close, critical reading. Fanfic, at its core, is not merely a story. It is rather a particular type of story that is responding to a text (or texts) to a staggeringly detailed degree. This means that the majority of fics have embedded within them what I would term theses, arguments about the canonical work(s) that are akin to those found in academic papers. The primary difference between the two is that these writers present theories to the reader through another fictional text rather than through a series of formally collected evidence. Benjamin Woo is one of the few scholars who touches on this intersection. In his essay, "A Pragmatics of Things: Materiality and Constraint in Fan Practices" he notes that fandom in general, not just fic, is "deeply informed by a very similar [to academic] scholastic point of view that privileges abstract thinking." Kylie Lee in "Confronting Enterprise Slash Fan Fiction" agues that slash as a subgenre is to its canon what some critical theory is to literature, a "subversive rereading dependent on subtext." In discussing the legality of fanfiction, Henry Jenkins makes a case for it falling under the fair use defense, originating in the Copyright Act of 1976 and wherein a copyrighted work may be allowable if, for example, it is for the purposes of "criticism" or "comment" ("Copyright Law of the United States…"). Jenkins argues that "all or at least most fan fiction… [involves] some form of criticism of the original texts upon which it is based—criticism as in interpretation and commentary not… negative statements" (Jenkins, 2006). In other words, fans are not merely writing *more* of the stories they desire, they are creating works that also make informed arguments about their sources, the "more from" rather than the "more of" distinction that Pugh makes. To give an example, Kirk and Spock are arguably romantically attracted to one another and fans will prove as such by rewriting canonical scenes in ways that emphasizes the men's desire so

that it becomes easier for others to see. Or, fans argue their point by creating new (but still canonically realistic) scenarios in which an outside entity forces either character to confess to the other. Or, the author may accomplish any of this by simply writing from one of the men's perspectives, spinning possibilities that, while perhaps not based as firmly in evidence, are also not easily refuted. This type of "more from" work isn't limited to written storytelling either. Fans can accomplish the same kind of work through images:




Here, technically the poster has made no changes to the story itself: she took the images and Spock's dialogue—"Jim, when I feel friendship for you, I'm ashamed"—directly from the episode "The Naked Time." However, underneath these screencaps the poster has

added the comment, "friendly reminder that this is **angry kissing**" (Superwholockianism). Here, Superwholockiansim is both creating aesthetic entertainment and making an argument about the text itself. On the surface her screencaps are just that, images designed to elicit pleasure from the viewer. With the comment added, however, Superwholockianism argues that Kirk and Spock are romantically attracted to one another. She draws on the viewers' knowledge of the *Star Trek* universe as a whole, specifically the canonical fact that Vulcans kiss with their hands, as established in the episode "Journey to Babel" and later reinforced in "The Enterprise Incident":

(Captain Ignaz Wisdom)

By adding written commentary, Superwholockianism adds "more to" the story. On its own these are simply images from the canon, but in applying fan knowledge about how Vulcans use their hands, Superwholockianism has also provided evidence for a Kirk/Spock relationship. [81]

It should be noted that this type of work is distinct from the ways in which fic is popularly categorized as "subversive," especially when it comes to slash (Jenkins). Though

[81] The *Original Series* film *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* references this detail about Vulcan kisses again when Kirk, thinking that he'd lost Spock, spends a good minute fervently clasping his hand. This moment has become so famous within the fandom that fans refer to it simply as "the sickbay scene."

many fans do write a pairing like Kirk/Spock because of a desire to see more homosexual representation in popular television, the majority of fans write because it is a relationship that they see as *already being there.* The act of using evidence in the text to reveal a "truth" about the work changes the fic in question from merely a subversive story to one that is subversive as well as analytical.[82] As one fan states, "Fanfiction makes all that theory very, very apparent, and makes those theorists appear a bit redundant" (Jamison 14).

All of this is not to say that fic writers don't also engage in more traditional analysis, or that this analysis is purely confined to slash. Fans, whether involved in academia or not, often provide arguments and evidence in formats more familiar to the scholar, on topics that range from a character's sexual orientation all the way to details about why they decided to stand on one side of the room instead of the other (Just-sort-of-happened). These essays, varying in length from short paragraphs to muti-chaptered works spanning hundreds of pages, are generally referred to as "metas" and they cover all the topics that one would find on a classroom curriculum: character development, questions of gender, sexuality, race, culture, class, whether or not that particular costume choice is at all significant, and much, much more. An excellent example of this somewhat more formalized analysis is hazel-jotc's "Ramblings about MS (Pacific Rim Hermann Gottlieb headcanons)." Posted in September of 2013, hazel-jotc's essay makes a case for *Pacific Rim's* Hermann (played by Burn Gorman) as having Multiple Sclerosis. One of the most praised aspects of *Pacific Rim* is its treatment of mentally and physically disabled individuals—in that the film shows these differences without unduly commenting on them. This means, however, that

[82] In recent years, however, scholars have challenged Jenkins' arguments that fic is inherently subversive. Hahn Aquila in particular claims that scholars "assume too much when they associate new media with change and fans with subversion."

viewers see Hermann using a cane for the entirety of the film but are never allowed to learn his diagnosis. This is the sort of fertile ground from which metas spring.

Hazel-jotc's own meta is unique, in part because she creates the foundation of her argument out of evidence as well as personal experience. She chooses to give a detailed account of her husband's own struggle with MS and the symptoms he has dealt with, arguing that a fan may apply these same symptoms to Gorman's portrayal of Hermann. Much of this evidence also builds upon the work of other fans':

> Somebody posted a neat gif set of Hermann and Newt walking through a puddle. Hermann's foot is turned out. If you have weakness in your foot, the front of your foot can droop when you walk. Then you risk tripping over your own toe. People accommodate this almost unconsciously by turning the foot outward. It will look like the foot is being dragged forward by the ankle. So the scene matches MS quite well. (This is not unique to MS though).

In one short paragraph hazel-jotc has built on another fan's creation ("Somebody posted a neat gif set"), made an argument about Hermann ("the scene matches MS quiet well"), based her argument on both personal and scientific evidence ("If you have weakness in your foot, the front of your foot can droop while you walk…") all without invalidating any fans that wish to argue *against* Hermann having MS ("This is not unique to MS though"). hazel-jotc goes on to provide numerous other examples from the film:

> Like Hermann, A [her husband] sometimes limps, sometimes uses a cane… Like Hermann, he can run short distances or get down on hand and knees without much difficulty. Like Hermann, he wouldn't be able to handle the prolonged exertion

required to track down Hannibal Chau. (Did anyone else wonder why Newt got this assignment given how much he was shaking after that first drift?)

Hazel-jotc even argues against a potential counterpoint—"The only thing that doesn't match A's experience is climbing up a ladder to write on a chalkboard. However, MS is highly variable."—thus developing and arguing a thesis that, while not formatted as a traditional, scholarly paper, nevertheless contains its most crucial elements. It should also be noted that these elements remain despite hazel-jotc terming her work as both a "rambling" and a "headcanon." I find both these labels to be inaccurate as her analysis is too structured to truly be a "rambling" and headcanons, though strictly defined as an idea or belief that is not canonical, are generally not based on a firm analysis of the text. That is, claiming that Hermann is "more fond of tea than coffee" when we don't see him drinking either in the film would be a headcanon. As opposed to an assertion such as, "Hermann suffers from MS" which, as shown, is a claim that fans can support or argue against in detail.

Though I have been terming hazel-jotc's post as a type of essay, her work actually showcases an intersecting of genres that is prevalent among fandom. Her text could be both a class paper and a blog post, straddling the line between recreation and academia; it has elements of the personal narrative, a history in biology, a lecture on MS, it is largely an exploration of a film but it is likewise, fascinatingly, a plug for other fan works. Beyond the GIF-set mentioned as a resource of visual evidence, hazel-jotc begins her post with links to two fanfics, "Spiral Down, Come Together" by Pookaseraph and "In the Hour After Zero" by Amuly, both of which likewise characterize Hermann as having MS. By citing these fics right at the start, hazel-jotc asserts that these fictional texts are as persuasive as her more conventional, non-fiction text. Despite their fictional status, they act as a form of support to

her thesis. If someone wishes to read an argument about Hermann suffering from MS they can find that evidence within a fic characterization just as easily as they can find it in a meta. Indeed, "Spiral Down, Come Together" cites many of the symptoms hazel-jotc mentions in her essay, beginning immediately with the line, "An eye exam that yielded the necessity of an MRI that in turn demanded a lumbar puncture did not usually end in a clean bill of health" which situates the reader within the world of a character who is experiencing a common symptom of MS (blurred and graying vision). Similarly, Amuly concludes her story "In the Hour After Zero" with an author's note that claims, "The idea for Hermann having MS came from many fic discussions with Pookaseraph," which emphasizes both fic's communal nature and this common movement from non-fiction metas to fictional stories that make the same arguments. Hazel-jotc also admits that her purpose behind writing this post is multifaceted, "If this helps inspire fiction for this wonderful fandom, that's great. And since MS is actually pretty common, if it helps anyone who needs to know for RL [real life], even better." Hazel-jotc demonstrates her understanding that metas and fics both serve numerous, similar purposes: entertainment, education, and quite often close, detailed analysis.

**Where No Fan Has Gone Before**

Having examined the more formalized essays, here I turn to a fic that deliberately works to make obvious these connections among fanfiction, essays, fiction, and metas. Brittany Diamond began her fic, "The Commentary on TOS for KS" back in 2009 where she posted exclusively to FFN. Within the last five years the fic has amassed an impressive 46 chapters, 1,066 favorites, 834 followers, and nearly 3,000 individual reviews. Though even

these numbers are admittedly small compared to some other multi-chaptered fics, within the *Star Trek* fandom on FFN Diamond's story has garnered the most favorites, beating out the next story by some six hundred usernames, easily making her a BNF (Big Name Fan) within the community. Despite the fame, however, Diamond describes herself only briefly on her tumblr as, "26. Female. Bisexual. Novelist." The last identifier—"Novelist"—is of particular importance as Diamond has indeed recently published her first novel, *Veridia* (the first in a trilogy). Yet despite having achieved this particular form of success (reminiscent of the fic author who defined success as landing an agent) Diamond remains devoted to writing her fic, chief among them "The Commentary." This implies both that she considers fic to be as "real" as her litfic novels and also that she recognizes the "The Commentary" as a significant, potentially original project that's well worth finishing.

The fic itself is harder to label than the author. In an extensive note at the beginning titled, "Everything You Need to Know Before Reading On" Diamond describes her fic as a "project," with its purpose being to

> [go] through every episode of [*Star Trek: The Original Series*] top to bottom… looking for evidence that supports K/S[83] [the romantic pairing of Kirk and Spock] and also discussing the arguments against it. Serious about the arguments, ridiculous about everything else. M for language. Yay 60s.

In many ways it should be obvious why I've chosen Diamond's work as an example of the interplay between fic and non-fiction writing. If anything, her text appears to be more essay

[83] Diamond also has a related project, "The Ship's Closet," in which she records videos of herself discussing all of *The Original Series*' canon (TV, films, posters) and the evidence for K/S that she sees within them. The similarities between "The Ship's Closet" and "The Commentary" suggest the possibility that fans can regard the videos as a type of visual fanfiction, one in which the medium but not the content changes.

than story, with there being a thesis (that the Kirk/Spock relationship is canonical) and over 260,000 words of evidence. This includes sections that, as the author's note points out, deliberately challenge the more well known counterarguments against the pairing. Given that K/S has been *the* pairing of *Star Trek* since Diane Marchant published the first slash fic, "A Fragment Out of Time" back in 1974, there has been ample time for non-K/S shippers to formulate persuasive arguments against it, giving Diamond a wealth of critical analysis to respond to. On its surface then, "The Commentary" appears to be a strictly non-fictional text rather than a "fanfic."

However, Diamond addresses this issue straight out. In her introduction she claims in bold caps that, "I CAN, IN FACT POST STUFF LIKE THIS… Just because it's not your traditional fic, doesn't mean I can be shut down. The truth is in the analyzation [sic], the humor is in the commentary" (Diamond). Here, though Diamond does not say so explicitly, I would argue that the "traditional" fic she mentions is one in which the fictional creativity is more evident than the analysis, as is the case in the previously mentioned *Pacific Rim* fics. There, the emphasis is on a *story* about Hermann (that just happens to provide evidence for him having MS), in contrast to the metas that focus on critical insights about his *characterization* (and just happen to provide details for potential stories along the way). Here then, Diamond is reversing this tradition so that she foregrounds analysis while deemphasizing the story itself—specifically the "humor" within the story, as she puts it. Or rather, it would be more accurate to say that though her focus is a critical one, Diamond succeeds in *balancing* entertainment and analysis in a manner that is rarely found in either scholarship or "traditional" fanfiction. It is a skill that is more attributable to fandom in general, as fans have often strived to make the critical fun and the fun more critical. Thus,

for every piece of evidence that Diamond provides there is a witty joke alongside it and for every comment there is a cited fact. Such as in the latest chapter, "The Gamesters of Triskelion," where Diamond moves from describing a "sparkly skimpy silver outfit made out of fetishes and absurdity" straight into explaining who the writers of the episode were and what sort of themes they tended to emphasize—a balance between humor and history (Diamond). Even Diamond's motivations are dual. She asks, "Why am I analyzing and commenting on every episode of The Original Series?" because she, "find[s] it fun" but also because she is, "a very firm believer in Kirk/Spock and I believe that there is more than enough evidence to support this" (Diamond). As a writer, Diamond's enjoyment and her responsibility to report "truth," as she terms it, are not separated and neither does she believe there should be a separation for the reader, who is both meant to read "The Commentary" as a persuasive text while keeping in mind that, "Oh yeah…this is meant to be fun" (Diamond).

Diamond also makes sure to address another issue that is common to both academics and fans: the accusation that a writer is "reading too much" into a text. She claims,

> NO, I will not be twisting events in TOS to suit my case of Kirk/Spock. I've found that a lot of people do this, and it hurts our case more than it helps it. I will not look at a perfectly normal scene between the two and scream "SEE, RIGHT THERE, THAT WAS TOTALLY A MOMENT OF HOTNESS OMG LULZ." There's enough real evidence that supports K/S that I don't have to make any up. **I don't like the idea of Kirk and Spock and make up evidence, I like the idea of Kirk and Spock *because* of the evidence.**

There is a great deal to unpack in this declaration. To start, Diamond situates herself within a very specific group of fans. Unlike hazel-jotc who writes a purely non-fictional meta and chooses to label it a "headcanon"—implying that she may view her analysis as focusing more on her desires than textual evidence—Diamond insists that there will be no "twisting" of events here. Her project is one of compiling perceived evidence, as any good academic would, and she deliberately distances herself from the fans who find more joy in reading "normal scenes" inaccurately. Diamond makes clear through her use of bolding that her primary role here is one of a scholar, revealing hidden interpretations that just happen to also line up with her preferences, as expressed by, "I like the idea of Kirk and Spock *because* of the evidence." However, the way in which Diamond chooses to distinguish herself from these other fans is nearly as crucial as the distinction itself. Rather than simply stating that this type of fantasy play is not her goal, she chooses to take on the voice of these fans in an act of parody: "SEE, RIGHT THERE. THAT WAS TOTALLY A MOMENT OF HOTNESS OMG LULZ." This moment takes the reader out of Diamond's more formalized language and reintroduces the vocabulary of fandom—"omg," "lulz," and "hotness"[84]—succeeding in reminding the reader that they are still reading a *fic* and that Diamond, for all her scholarly work, is still a fan herself. Furthermore, by mocking these fans in an exaggerated fashion, Diamond likewise introduces a spot of humor that would not normally be found in such an announcement. This becomes a further reminder that fans can find a story within the analysis, one that is meant to entertain as well as educate.

[84] Other examples of Diamond's informal yet purposeful language include scoring games (in which she playfully tracks characters' repetitive—and thus defining—actions like a sports event) and her "yay 60s!" which she uses to draw attention to *Star Trek's* awful special effects but which also acts as an advertising catchphrase for "The Commentary."

What this combination creates then is a piece of fanfiction that sits comfortably between the style of academic scholarship and the style of traditional fic, though that is not to say that it reads like either of those things. Brittney has combined the vocabulary of academia, fanfiction, fandom, as well as the instruments provided by an online medium, in order to craft a text that is unique in its methodology. As is apparent in even the short excerpts I've given above, "The Commentary" utilizes a number of grammatical tools including caps, italics, bolding, exclamation points, asterisks, and parenthesis, in excessive or even outright incorrect ways so as to better convey emotion in a medium where tone, body language, and other non-verbal indicators are notably absent. The fact that neither traditional scholarship nor traditional fic takes full advantage of these resources—implying through norms that it is wrong to do so—does not deter Diamond. She is more than willing to follow a detailed description of a scene with "((( XD )))" in order to convey her amusement and pleasure at the proceedings *alongside* her analysis of them. The blending of traditional fic with academic writing, and analysis with entertainment, allows for a work that could potentially reach a far broader audience. Overlooking for a moment the continued niche culture of fanfiction, anyone can read "The Commentary" and other fics like it, regardless of their interests. Fiction is under no obligation to be factually accurate, merely engaging, while academic texts are under no obligation to be compelling in areas beyond their topic, even those books and collections that strive to reach a wider audience. Fans can read "The Commentary," however, purely for the humor or purely for the analysis, or, ideally, both. Diamond succeeds in bridging a gap that all fic is working to close. Her fic merely touches on this gap in a far more overt manner.

**The Road so Far**

As a genre, fanfiction has always refused to conform to boundaries: it weaves between canons, between the canonical and the original, it breaks down walls between writer and reader, and, as shown, it also merges the fictional with the non-fictional, or simply the "work" with the "play." Fandom as a whole is invested in analysis, creating numerous metas like hazel-jotc's "Ramblings about MS," but fanfiction in particular concerns itself with expressing those critical arguments through a fictional means, by moving the analysis into a story. Brittany Diamond's "The Commentary of K/S for TOS" makes this blurring of boundaries explicit and demonstrates why fic writers might want to break down such limitations in the first place. It is, primarily, a concern with accessibility. The entertaining aspects of a story ensures that more fans will want to read it, while the movement away from an academic format and language ensures that more fans will be *able* to read it. That is not to say, however, that this blurring is always a conscious choice. Fic's ties with its canonical source makes this merging inevitable. Those fans only looking for fiction will nevertheless expose themselves to analysis because those writers concerned only with storytelling will still be crafting arguments, for the simple reason that they are engaging with and making choices about another text. One can no more separate fic from non-fiction than one could separate fic from the canon itself.

Though this characteristic becomes more overt as fic moves its way into the classroom, teachers may benefit from being wary of the ways in which they utilize fic as a creative, fictional, or non-fiction tool. Recently, scholars and fans alike have placed emphasis on fic as a "bridge" between amateur and "real" (read: mainstream) writing, but this view denies fic its status as a unique genre and severely limits the ways in which

instructors use it in the classroom. Teachers have at their disposal a genre that merges the types of primary sources students are reading with the analysis they are learning to write, a genre distinct from the often personal nature of creative nonfiction. Additionally, writing stories within the world of their assigned texts may help students to discover the features they are most concerned with, thus highlighting the arguments they may want to develop later. Crafting a similar story may help these students understand the text's construction, while having a large, anonymous group to critique the work may provide a wealth of diverse insight. None of this is to say that fanfiction is a replacement for academic formats such as the five-paragraph essay—both forms are unique and writers must practice both separately—but fanfiction is a tool that readers can use to help them understand some of these genres' overlapping characteristics.

## Chapter Five
## Shades of Fanfiction: The Fifty Shades of Grey Phenomenon

*"A woman must have money and a room*
*of her own if she is to write fiction."*
- *A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf*

*"thou shalt not profit from fan works"*
- *A common fan saying*

### A Brief History of Fifty Shades of Grey

Starting in 2009 a fan by the name of Snowqueens Icedragon began publishing a BSDM all-human AU[85] *Twilight* fic on Twilighted.net and FFN. She titled it *Master of the Universe.* Like many all-human fics that reached novel-length proportions at the time, *Master* gained a great deal of popularity within the *Twilight* fandom. Though it's hard now to gauge just how popular it was, fans estimate that *Master* garnered at least 37,000 reviews—and reviews generally represent only a fraction of the actual readership (James 2012). The story, simply put, was huge.

Then, sometime in 2010, Snowqueens Icedragon decided that she wanted to try making money off of the stories she'd written. After FFN removed *Master* due to a violation of their explicit content rules, Icedragon began republishing her fic in installments on her personal website, 50Shades.com (Boog). Around this time Icedragon also began changing the names of the characters, the title of the fic itself, as well as some minor details—all with the help of her readership—and by 2011 Icedragon was self-publishing installments of *Fifty Shades of Grey* through The Writers' Coffee Shop under her new pen name, E.L. James.

[85] An alternate universe fic where fans take characters that are canonically non-human and reimagine them as fully human—such as reimagining a vampire as an average human. Though seen in most fantasy/supernatural fandoms, all-human AUs are particularly prevalent within the *Twilight* fandom (Jamison 178). For a detailed explanation of all-human prevalence in *Twilight*, see Hurricangst's post (Ahhidk).

James' readers followed her work wherever it went, and in 2012 she sold Vintage Books the publishing rights for a seven-figure paycheck. Since then, the *Fifty Shades* trilogy has sold over one-hundred million copies, set the UK record for fastest-selling paperback of all time, Universal Pictures just released the first of three film adaptations to enormous financial success, and the books have garnered a whole slew of negative reception, both by fans and non-fans alike (Bentley).

**Hand it Over: Gift Culture and Plagiarism in Fandom**

In order to understand fans' dislike of *Fifty Shades of Grey* as a mainstream novel, one must first understand fandom's gift culture. A gift culture, sometimes referred to as a gift economy, is a system where fans give each other works freely without any expectation of formal compensation. Most notably, this includes money. In her article, "Should Fan Fiction Be Free?" De Kosnik argues that the goal of fanfiction is never to gain something from others but rather to always give; if there is an exchange, both parties present their offerings as gifts without any strings attached (121-2). Fans take issue with *Fifty Shades* both because James appears to take advantage of the gifts that *Twilight* fans gave one another, including what was given to her, and because she produced a trilogy that is attached to numerous "strings"—notably, money and immense fame.

Of course, a gift economy is the ideal situation. In reality fans are always compensated for their work, it's simply rare that this compensation resembles monetary value.[86] Rather, fans are rewarded through different types of positive, social interactions:

[86] It's no secret that women make up a large chunk of fandom and that they dominate fanfiction nearly in its entirety. Bacon-Smith—admittedly writing in the eighty's—

kudos, reviews, personal messages, and other fanworks, all of which can help to increase the fan's status within the community, a reward in and of itself. It may not seem much to an outsider, but to a fan these social rewards far outweigh the potential disadvantages of creating fanworks—such as long hours, personal financial expense, and the threat of others disliking the work.[87] From personal experience, I've had a beta (an amateur editor) correct, without my knowledge, a published fic and post her improvements in a very respectful comment. When I quite happily made the changes and thanked her for the free labor, she in turn thanked *me* for choosing to apply her efforts to my fic. The joy of seeing a work improved—a work she wasn't even affiliated with—was reward enough for wading through 30,000 words. Indeed, acceptance is both the greatest threat and the greatest benefit to fandom, as it ties directly into fans' love of shared knowledge. Fans gift fic, vids, and art to one another in the hope that other fans will like it well enough to build upon it or transform it into something new. The greatest reward of gifting fanworks is use. As Turk argues in "Fan Work: Labor, Worth, and Participation in Fandom's Gift Economy," use is the clearest sign that a fan has both accepted and enjoyed a gift (Turk). Thus, a gift economy helps to create a community in which creativity through use thrives. Without the

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nevertheless proposed that in comparison to men, women are more willing to work for free because they are already at a monetary disadvantage in society ("Spock Among the Women").

[87] A more pressing disadvantage is the potential for corporations to take advantage of fan labor, such as when fans build detailed websites that rival the owner's own for free. This was the case when Steven Vander built a detailed *Harry Potter* lexicon that J.K. Rowling admitted to using frequently. Yet, when he wanted to publish print copies, Rowling sued (Mayer-Schonberger). However, Bertha Chin makes a strong argument against this worry, claiming that the benefits to fans still outweigh the concerns. Attention from authors and owners can also lead to other perks for fans, such as interviews and invitations to events they may otherwise not have access to.

complication of money, fans are better able to create works because they *want* to create them and because other fans want to consume them.

The other obvious benefit of a gift economy is a feeling of (potential) safety. Without the exchange of money, many fans believe that they are safe—or at least *safer*—from the copyright owner who may want nothing more than to bring them to court. It is still up for debate whether or not creating for free truly helps fans fall within a fair use defense—for lack of payment alone isn't enough legal justification for the work's existence—but it certainly can't hurt, as many authors care less for their characters' 'reputation' than they do the money that their characters' earn them (Leanne, McCardle). So long as their income isn't challenged, some authors are indifferent or even favorable towards fanfiction. At the other end, however, there are those like Morrissey who argue that outsiders will exploit fans' openness, likely sooner rather than later, so fans should start finding ways to monetize their work before someone else does. De Kosnik equates the current situation to the exploitation of hip-hop by those who were not a part of the culture itself, calling it the "Sugarhill moment," that moment when "an outsider takes up a subculture's invention and commodifies it for the mainstream before insiders do" (119-20). Morrissey agrees and claims that, "media industries today are strategically positioning fans and fandom to suit their own ends," so fans should commodify their work before someone else makes the attempt (Morrissey).

It's a hard argument to refute, especially given the launch of FanLib back in 2007—a commercially-owned fic archive that was quickly shut down in 2008—and more recently the launch of Kindle Worlds in 2013. This latest commercial endeavor allows fans to publish their stories within specific, licensed canons, provided that they follow the

restrictions, which includes forfeiting their rights to the fanfiction and making sure not to include "pornography" or "offensive content," neither of which is explicitly defined ("Kindle Worlds"). What Morrissey, De Kosnik, and Amazon seem to ignore, though, is that a large chunk of fandom, specifically fic writers, are violently against earning money for their fan work on principle, as it goes against the spirit of a gift economy and outright threatens the culture of fic as it currently stands.

Even worse, publishing brings to the forefront the complicated issue of plagiarism. Most fic authors do not consider their acts as plagiarizing (copyright infringement is another matter entirely),[88] but once a fan starts earning money for their hard work, it raises questions about whether fans' concept of originality coincides with mainstream readers' or the court's. Back in 2001, Cassandra Claire shocked much of the *Harry Potter* fandom by committing what most would consider plagiarism. Over a period of six years she posted her phenomenally popular *Draco* trilogy to FFN, including *Draco Dormiens, Draco Sinister,* and *Draco Veritas.* However, as her fame grew, Claire developed a "game" that she played with her readers: pulling narrative structure and whole chunks of text from various other works, incorporating them into her writing, and then seeing if her readers could identify them. Claire pulled a great deal from Pamela Dean's *The Secret Country* trilogy, *Black Adder, Red Dwarf, Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* and numerous other texts. More damningly, she did not acknowledge what was her own writing and what was not, and In

[88] Beyond issues of fic itself violating copyright, in recent years some fans have grown nervous over the number of sarcastic disclaimers attached to fics, as well as the number of fics with no disclaimers at all. Daphne Dangerlove provides an example of a useful disclaimer that, frankly, almost no fan emulates anymore: "This story was written for entertainment purposes only and no money was made. The characters contained within belong to (state entity to which characters belong...). All other characters are my own invention" (Dangerlove).

2001 FFN found Claire guilty of plagiarism, proceeding to delete her account and remove the stories from their archives (Avacado).

These events might have remained an internal conflict among fans if six year later Claire hadn't begun publishing her equally popular *Mortal Instruments* series. Some fans have leveled accusations that the *Instruments* books bear similarities to the plagiarized *Draco* stories, others question whether someone who plagiarized before can ever write an 'original' story, while still others take issue with Claire's use of her fandom name to publicize her profic (removing only the "i" in "Claire") (Avacado). In short, Claire's plagiarism was an affront to fandom's gift economy, but her choice to publish mainstream—in a manner that ties so closely to her fanfiction—threatens it further. Just as fans expect newbies to adhere to the language and culture of fandom, so they also expect that they'll work to keep all fans safe from legal prosecution. As Bacon-Smith says, fic is a community of women who are "open to anyone willing to participate, but closed to anyone who might jeer, or worse, blow the whistle" (3).

There is far from a consensus among fans about whether one should publish fic or not. There are numerous scenarios that already skew the ethical and the legal line,[89] but many fans consider selling fanfiction to be one of the greatest betrayals to which a fic writer can stoop to, regardless of any legal standing. Thus, it should be easy to see why fans across fandoms have scorned *Fifty Shades of Grey.*

[89] Fandom does have a history of exchanging money, just not through morally cut and dry scenarios. Most fans are willing to get involved with charities, such as the Fandom Gives Back Auction that sold select fics and raised $147,537 for ALSF in less than a week (Jamison 223). Other scenarios, however—like down on their luck fans selling fanfiction, or fans donating for an author to buy a new laptop to continue writing—are more ambiguous.

**Fifty Shades of Abuse**

Before I continue, it should be noted that any hatred of *Fifty* is directly tied up in problematic elements that go far beyond its origins as fanfic. Since its publication there have been a slew of outcries against the "romance" of Ana and Christian's relationship. Readers have accused James of perpetuating domestic abuse, giving an inaccurate portrayal of BDSM that is also indicative of abuse, glorifying eating disorders, and crafting characters who are as misogynistic as they are wooden.[90] Many readers are so insulted by the books that they have gone further in their analysis, noting problematic elements that were obviously unintentional on James' part, such as naming two of her characters "Ana" and "Mia"—shortened pet names used by people who are pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia (Trout). As with so many things, there is no easy distinction among fans' opinions; those who take issue with James going profic may have anger that stems from the above concerns, and vice versa. To say that fans are "just" upset over James publishing fanfiction would be a highly inaccurate simplification of events.

Keeping this complexity in mind, I hope to nevertheless utilize *Fifty* as a case study in the rest of this chapter, exploring how its move from fic to profic highlights some of fanfiction's defining features. There is a great deal to be angry about regarding *Fifty Shades of Grey*, but *some* of the details critics cite as evidence of James' bad writing or immorality are, in fact, more indicative of James continuing to write for a fan audience, rather than a mainstream one.

[90] For details about all these arguments, see Katje, Danny, and Emma's masterlist of abuse in *Fifty Shades* (Katje).

**A Fifty Shades Case Study**

The characteristic of shared knowledge is easily the feature that best showcases why *Fifty* is better understood as a fic rather than a profic. Not only does James' work reference numerous canon and fanon details that readers need to learn in order to fully appreciate the text, but James herself rejects this shared knowledge, ensuring that many fans who do not have a problem with her based on her publishing choices *do* have a problem based on her attitude towards fan culture.

As explained in Chapter One, fans build on each others' ideas and texts to such an extent that it is almost unheard of for a work to be created by a single author. This is the environment that James wrote *Master of the Universe* in and, furthermore, other fans established the genres of the work itself—all human, BDSM, world-building AUs—long before James came on the scene, thus greatly influencing the ways in which she crafted *Master.* Genre specific details aside, however, there are numerous "plot holes" throughout *Fifty* that are easily explained so long as a reader views the work as a piece of fanfiction.

Take, for example, the description given of Ana, the protagonist: she's a "pale, brown-haired girl with blue eyes too big for her face" and that's all that's said about her, physically (James 3). Admittedly, this isn't the worst description—not the greatest either, of course—but plenty of other authors give sparse accounts of what their characters look like, or no account at all, if they deem that as what the story needs. The difference is that fans can say with some confidence that this was not a choice made by James for the benefit of her story, but for the simple reason that this is what *all* fic writers do. After all, what is the purpose of describing a character which your readers already have a mental image of? Unless the fic author is making some sort of change, re-describing a character doesn't "add

to" the story, and I would argue that when fans want "more of" the story, most aren't looking for more of the same descriptors. Simply put, everyone knows what Harry Potter looks like, everyone has a mental image of Sherlock Holmes, and the same can be said of all the characters in *Twilight.* Jenny Trout puts it nicely in her rereading of *Fifty Shades*,

> Whether or not you read *Twilight* or have watched the movies doesn't matter. If you live in the Western world, you know what the cast of *Twilight* looks like. You know this, because the commercials are everywhere. Their pictures are in magazines. They're on the side of your Burger King cup. Whether or not you are consciously aware of them, you know what the characters of *Twilight* look like… The fact that James does little in *Fifty Shades* to describe any character… beyond "They had blonde hair and looked mean/nice" is because she knew that *Twilight* and your knowledge of *Twilight,* willing or unwilling that it might be, would mean that you both knew exactly who she was talking about. Because these aren't characters of her own invention. They belong to another writer (Trout).

This knowledge that Jenny references is prevalent in all of fanfiction. As said, authors rarely waste time describing characters that they *know* their readers can already picture clearly and thus, this has become a characteristic of fic as a genre. The problems arise when fic is rewritten as profic, like *Fifty Shades* was, and the author doesn't take into account how mainstream writing and fanfiction differ. A writer can't "just" publish a fic because it is already wrapped up in a canon and a fanon that mainstream readers may not be privy to (Pugh 35)[91]. In this instance, fic readers fully expect the author not to give them

[91] One fic author's readers encouraged her to publish mainstream because they felt that her work "deviated so far from the original text as to be original fiction." Her response was,

descriptions of the characters in the story, but mainstream readers *do*. Thus, in James' case, some of that "bad writing" isn't so much an issue of style as it is an issue of not writing for the correct audience. Similarly, many fans argue that the relationship between Ana and Christian isn't believable since it evolves at an unnaturally fast pace. Simply put, they argue that James is still relying on the knowledge fans possess, that Bella and Edward are *already* together, canonically, so James doesn't need to work on convincing the reader of their love (Thea K). A more problematic example arises when, in *Fifty Shades Darker,* a former sub of Christian's, Leila, stalks and threatens Ana. Many readers might scratch their head about why, after Leila breaks into their apartment and threatens Ana with a gun, Christian still refuses to call the police. Within *Fifty Shades* James provides no real explanation for this odd behavior (a desire for privacy is briefly mentioned), but reading *Master*, fans knew that this was a *Twilight* fic, and in *Twilight,* Edward quite obviously never calls the police because their conflicts revolve around werewolves and vampires. Even in an all-human AU where the author removes the werewolves and the vampires from the story, readers still *know* that they were once there and praise the writer for her devotion to the canon and the characters' personalities—even if those things no longer make sense within the fic. Within the world of fandom, such discrepancies imply a knowledge and dedication to the canon, rather than simply "bad" writing. This is just one more change that James should have taken into account when she moved a *Twilight* story into the mainstream.

There are other examples of James' "bad writing" that can be explained through the move from fic to profic (though admittedly not all). Perhaps one of the most unrealistic details of *Fifty* is Ana's attitude towards sex. The shocking aspect isn't that she's a virgin—

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"they'd be dead wrong… [my fic] is tied so closely to the original work and to fandom dynamics that to separate them would render the text unreadable" (Jamison 207-8).

many college graduates are—but rather that she seems to possess little to no knowledge of sex overall. James presents Ana as a woman who has never masturbated, knows nothing about even the most common sex toys, and doesn't seem to have experienced sexual attraction prior to meeting Christian. Throughout her sexual encounters Ana is incapable of referring to her own body in a mature manner, using phrases like, "Christian leisurely traces his fingertips down my cheek, and I feel it all the way down *there*" rather than saying "vagina" or any similar term (James 333, original emphasis). Furthermore, through the entire series—not just prior to losing her virginity— James characterizes Ana as naïve and incredibly child-like:

> I squirm; he's made me feel like an errant child (James 13).
>
> I am all gushing and breathy—like a child, not a grown woman who can vote and drink legally in the state of Washington (35).
>
> I examine the list, and my inner goddess bounces up and down like a small child waiting for ice cream (257).
>
> And like a small child, I briefly entertain the thought that if I can't see him, then he can't see me (270).

This characterization of both general and sexual innocence may have made sense if the narrative presented Ana as asexual or demisexual, but she is not. One could explain this away as internalized misogyny on James' part, an unintentional portrayal of the male wish-fulfillment fantasy: a woman who is virginal in every sense of the word—in her body, mind, and manner. Though I agree with this analysis, I would also argue that James presents Ana this way because she is a version of Bella, and *Bella* is presented this way because *Twilight* author Stephenie Meyer is a Mormon whose work greatly reflects her upbringing (Aleiss). When Bella/Ana resided in *Master,* readers understood the links between James' characters, Meyer's characterization, and her Mormon beliefs. Read as a profic, however,

that connection is lost and readers of *Fifty* are left scratching their heads over how a twenty-one year old goes from entirely sex repressed to sex obsessed in the span of a few chapters.[92]

In terms of James' attitude towards fandom, it's clear that she wants little to do with the *Twilight* community now that she's discovered her own success. After the publication of *Fifty Shades*, James and her publishers removed as many copies of *Master* as possible from the Internet, outright denying her fans what she had originally given them for free through fic's gift culture. This act also unintentionally implied that *Fifty* is not quite as distinct from *Master* as James might like readers to believe—otherwise, why not allow fans to have both?[93] More worryingly, James has blocked fans on Twitter who have criticized *Fifty* and there is at least one instance of her banning a fan from her site after she called James' knowledge of BDSM into question (Jamison 254). This refusal to allow discussion and criticism of her text goes against everything that fic stands for and showcases James'—failed—attempts to remove *Fifty* from its fic origins. Far from encouraging readers to view the trilogy as a fully "original" work, James' attacks have only angered fans who still view *Fifty* as a work of fanfiction or, at the very least, demand acknowledgement of the communal aspects of *Fifty's* "rough draft," *Master of the Universe.* This is a far from an

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[92] This being said, how a twenty-one year old college graduate doesn't own a laptop, rarely uses the Internet, and never had an email address prior to meeting Christian Grey… those are things that fic can't explain (James 148, 178).

[93] There is a long history of fans turning fic into profic, and many times the author leaves the fic up even after they've published the profic. This acknowledges that the two are radically different pieces, as they should be. Reversing the process, some authors change the names of the characters in their original fiction and publish the work as fic to garner first impressions. This practice is equally despised for these "so-called fic writers" imply that there is no art inherent in writing fanfiction by attempting to pass their profic off as fic (Jamison 148). For a list of *Twilight* fics that fans have published mainstream, see TwiFanfictionRecs' masterlist ("Published Fics").

unreasonable view given that, as a fandom grows, it becomes harder to separate what content the original canon inspired, what the fic author thought up herself, and what has developed out of communal growth (Jamison 209). What James sees as "her" work, others see as the work of an entire community.

What is even more shocking—and indicative of James' rejection of the fandom—is her hostility towards fic and spinoffs of *Fifty Shades.* There is no category on AO3 for the trilogy or the recently released film, though there *is* a category on FFN (because copyright and the author's wishes have never stopped fans before).[94] Back in 2012, the French publishers of *Fifty* were "cracking the whip" at spin-offs and dubbed a number of them "parasitical," completely ignoring the fact that *Fifty Shades* is itself "parasitical" of both *Twilight* and the *Twilight* fandom as a whole (The Telegraph). James even goes so far as to try and gloss over her fic origins on official spaces like her website. Though she admits that *Fifty* was originally fic under the question, "Was Fifty Shades of Grey originally self-published as an eBook?" in an earlier question—"Is Christian Grey based on anyone real? Where do I find him?"—she says only, "Now that would be telling…" Her cryptic response flat-out refuses to acknowledge that Christian Grey is, in fact, a version of Stephanie Meyer's Edward Cullen (E.L. James). That is where he can be "found." In fact, there is little to "find" in *Fifty* that doesn't stem directly from *Master* and thus, by extension, from *Twilight.* After *Fifty's* publication, fans sprinted back to the source—*Master of the Universe*—in order to see just how much "originality" there was in the new text. Using three

[94] The fact that FFN—infamous for limiting what kinds of fic fans are allowed to post—has over two-thousand *Fifty* fics, while the more lenient AO3 does not, may speak to the individual site's cultures. Those frequenting AO3 tend to also be those who speak out against *Fifty Shade's* abusive and misogynistic aspects. Thus, they are some of the least likely to write fic on the series.

comparison engines, Yoshikoder, Diff Doc, and Turnitin, there's now a number to sum up this research: 89%.[95] Eighty-nine percent of *Master* is nearly identical to *Fifty Shades of Grey.* Or, as one fan bluntly states, "a few cosmetic changes of this nature don't really constitute a substantially different version" (Jamison 225). Overall, many view James as a better marketer than fan or author, with her fic beta, Angst Goddess, coming forward about their differing views on fic during the writing of *Master*; she seeing fic as a "collective endeavor" that emphasizes gift culture, whereas "Icy saw herself as an author with readers" (Jamison 244). Much of this hits close to home with older fans who were around for the Cassandra Claire scandal. Like Jamison, Claire requested that fans take down any fic they'd written about her *Draco* trilogy, and when FFN deleted her work due to plagiarism, she attacked fanfic as a whole stating, "Did I ever even fucking say that DS [*Draco Sinister*] was fiction? It's not fiction, not literature, it's fanfiction, and it's a pastiche" (Jamison 239).

Further regarding James' relationship with her fans, I stated above that readers take issue with James' work for reasons that go beyond fic, but the truth is that the representation of BDSM and abuse are also matters of fic as a genre. As Heinecken says, "fan fiction goes notably further in its excessive representation of sex and sexualized violence." Primarily, I would add, because fic allows for a freedom in writing that mainstream media does not. Excluding *Game of Thrones*, a viewer is unlikely to see topics like incest, pedophilia, necrophilia, extreme emotional/physical abuse, or other non-normative expressions of desire on their television set—in the same way that they're unlikely to see as many queer relationships, people of color, or non-cis individuals. This is in no way an attempt to equate minority representation with acts like necrophilia, rather, I

[95] For a more detailed comparison see Jane's article, "Master of the Universe verses Fifty Shades by E.L. James Comparison" (Jane).

am noting that fanfiction allows a near-equal acceptance of *all* stories: a fic writer may explore a queer relationship between Holmes and Watson, just as she may explore an incestuous one between Holmes and Mycroft. This means, then, that fic readers are largely more accepting of the "unacceptable." It also means that there's a silent acknowledgement to, "like what you like, ship what you ship." Fic writers trust their readers to understand that just because they're writing about an incestuous relationship doesn't mean that they would condone one in real life, and fic readers trust their peers to understand that just because they read that same fic doesn't mean they're any more forgiving of the real-life act than the author.[96]

The same can be said of abuse in fanfiction. Fic is positively filled with abuse, from characters-turned-children whose caretakers neglect them, to horrifying "romantic" relationships, to an entire genre—hurt/comfort—that fans have developed around one character enduring torture of some sort, often both physical and emotional. Fic writers *love* having a safe space to explore all manner of taboo subjects, but once these stories leave the fic community, many readers view them as having a stronger impact on society and believe that their problematic elements need to be accounted for. This occurred back in 2006 when *The L Word*, a popular TV drama, hosted a fic competition for an upcoming webisode and one entry included a flashback that involved child abuse (Walker). Though I have never read anything in *The L Word* fandom myself, I can say with some certainty, based on the nature of fanfiction alone, that there are likely fics in this fandom that include child abuse… and that their readers probably aren't up in arms about it. In contrast, this webisode entry started a massive flame war (Walker). Part of this anger stemmed from the fact that it was

[96] There are, of course, many exceptions to the rule. Fandom is rife with fans who attempt to shame others for their reading interests, particularly when it comes to kinks.

a heterosexual man writing about a lesbian's abuse (keep in mind that fic is primarily a female space), while others expressed shock that child abuse was included at all, regardless of who had written it. The point is that, had the author uploaded this fic to FFN or AO3, readers would have bypassed it if they weren't interested, or read it if they were—either way, fans would have gone on their way without comment. When the fic is presented to a mainstream audience, however, suddenly the morality of the content is taken into account and some readers believe that the author should be begin asking the question, "What kind of message am I sending to my audience?"

This same sort of transformation is currently taking place with *Fifty Shades of Grey.* As *Master of the Universe*, fans could care less about whether or not Anna and Christian's relationship is healthy—after all, one can make a solid argument that their counterparts, Bella and Edward, are just as problematic, so in that manner the fic is quite canonical (McMillan). However, once James published *Fifty* and worked to pass it off as an "original" piece, readers grew concerned over James' portrayal of a dysfunctional relationship as "romantic." Admittedly, authors fill literature as a whole with dysfunction. The difference, however, is that James has refused to acknowledge that readers—particularly survivors of domestic violence—may view her books *as* abusive, saying that, "Nothing freaks me out more than people who say this is about domestic abuse," and going so far as to block those on Twitter who try to present her with their own interpretations (Books & Review, Kody). Even more troubling, readers can no long write *Fifty Shades* off as "just fiction."[97] With the

[97] The term "just fiction" is problematic all on its own, as Jenny Trout points out in her post "Get Over It! How Not to Respond to Critics of 50 Shades of Grey." In this post she discusses "The Jaws Effect" (among other examples), wherein the film *Jaws* was so influential in painting great whites as villains that it, "directly caused humans to seek out and kill sharks, causing widespread population drops in shark species across the board."

explosion of "mommy porn," advertising for the series has gone on to include everything from *Fifty Shades* sex toys to articles detailing how readers can land their own Christian Grey (Ford, Taylor). Far from being "just a story," *Fifty Shades* has become a relationship instruction manual that has fans demanding that James draw a line between fiction and a real life, healthy romance. The fans are simply asking James to make a distinction between the two… but the request has fallen on deaf ears. Had *Fifty* remained fic, however, readers wouldn't need this distinction at all. It's built right into the genre.

**The End of the Road**

*Fifty Shades of Grey* is in many ways the perfect example of how contemporary fanfiction differs drastically from other, published genres. Had James thought through what sort of shared knowledge she'd built her fic around and acknowledged that mainstream readers view taboo subjects differently outside of fic communities, she may have succeeded in writing a series that didn't stir up quite so much controversy. Other characteristics of fic are equally present in *Fifty Shades*, though they're not discussed in detail above: readers of the mainstream market view James' simplistic and repetitive writing as insulting to literature, but fans often would—and did— forgive the writing in a fic community where story is often prized over style. One could also argue that *Fifty* makes arguments in turn about the characters of Bella and Edward (such as James' heightening of Bella/Ana's sexual innocence), highlighting fans' love of combining the creative with the critical. Those characteristics of fic that James' work don't touch on are absent primarily due to practicality: one rarely finds instances of fan language within the fic itself—as the vocabulary is a tool for paratexts, promotion, and dialogue—and there is obviously little to

be said about medium, given that James moved her story out of the online archives and into the mainstream paperback. Nevertheless, comparing *Fifty Shades of Grey* alongside *Master of the Universe* shows that for all their 89% similarity, they also possess a number of crucial differences.

**Where to Now?**

The question that remains then is, where do scholars of fanfic and fan studies go from here? The purpose of this thesis was to examine some of the more prominent and influential characteristics of fanfiction as a *literary genre*. Despite the multimedia origins of fic—books, films, television, videogames, podcasts—and despite its newfound technological hypertexuality—embedded links, associated fanvids, fanart, accessibility through the Internet—fanfiction still remains a primarily *literary* art form. One might wonder then why more literary scholars aren't examining fanfiction, or why there's still such a focus on the sociology, especially given the amount of fic out there, its breadth, and the myriad of ways in which it is redefining the "reader" and the "writer." The lack of scholarship in this regard is due in part to the continued belief that fandom is an impenetrable niche culture, the continued elitism within academic, the still relative newness of the Internet as a space for fandom, but also, I would argue, because scholars are only just beginning to understand how and where fanfiction fits within the rest of literature. Fanfiction remains primarily an art expressed through words, yet it utilizes multimedia, complicating who should study it and what skills those scholars should utilize. In short, fanfiction lies complicatedly between the book and the screen, the author and the reader, the hobby and the profession. Thus, scholars might begin by asking: where *exactly*

does fanfiction fit within the Humanities? (Or does it not?) How can we analyze fic as we do other genres? (Or should we not?) How can we examine fic as short stories, novels, and vignettes? Should we teach it in schools? Should we teach students how to write it? Should we be doing any of this at all? In short, what *more* can fanfiction offer us? Not just as a cultural phenomenon, but as a *text*?

**Five Favorite Things About Fic**

**gimme either your top five favorite fics ever or your top five favorite things about fic**

 lollard

marbleflan:

> fave things about fic:
>
> 1) community production/distribution
>
> 2) shared vocabularies/tropes that exist outside of (and often at odds with in delightful ways) mainstream literary fiction
>
> 3) queer desire often foregrounded/easy to locate
>
> 4) ditto neuroatypical protagonists/themes
>
> 5) represents the most innovative use of electronic media for literary production/distribution. when ppl want to talk to me about how print culture is changing with the widespread use of computers and such, I feel like you can't have that conversation without talking about fanfic.

- Marble Flan describing her "top five favorite things about fic"

**Old Spice Commercial Parody**

"HELLO FAN, LOOK AT YOUR SHOW, NOW BACK TO THAT FIC, NOW BACK AT YOUR SHOW, NOW BACK TO THAT FIC. SADLY, THAT FIC ISN'T YOU'RE SHOW, BUT IF IT STOPPED USING MISOGYNY, RACISM, AND HOMOPHOBIA, YOUR SHOW COULD BE AWESOME LIKE THAT FIC.

LOOK DOWN, BACK UP, WHERE ARE YOU? YOU'RE ON TUMBLR WITH A MANIP THAT YOUR SHOW COULD LOOK LIKE.

WHAT'S ON YOUR SCREEN? BACK AT YOUR SHOW. AO3 HAS IT, IT'S A FULLY-COMPLETED, 50 CHAPTER, IN-CHARACTER FIC OF THAT PAIRING YOU LOVE. LOOK AGAIN, THAT FIC IS NOW AN AU SET IN YOUR FAVORITE GENRE.

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE WHEN YOU GET YOUR ENTERTAINMENT FROM FANDOM AND NOT THE SHOW.

I'M ON A BLOG."

- A fan's parody of the Old Spice commercials (Revolos55)

## Appendix: A Fan Studies Lexicon

**Aca-fan** – Popularized by Matt Hills in *Fan Cultures*, this term describes a person who is both a scholar and a fan. "Aca-fans" are generally seen as primarily academic while "fan scholars" are viewed as primarily fannish.

**AMV** – Anime Music Video. These vids combine popular songs with shots from anime(s), often working to make some sort of commentary about the text (such as providing evidence for a particular pairing).

**A/N** – Short for "Author's note."

**Angst** – A genre of fanfiction characterized by depressed, angry, and brooding characters; contains relationship problems and lots of miscommunication. Often paired with H/C (Hurt/Comfort).

**Anon** – Short for "anonymous." Anonymity is a useful tool in fanfiction and fans use it predominantly to leave comments or suggest prompts.

**AO3 -** An abbreviation of "Archive of Our Own," currently one of the most popular fic archives available. AO3 is located at: http://archiveofourown.org.

**Asdfghjkl** – A representation of literally smashing your keyboard. Used to articulate frustration or an overall inability to otherwise express an emotion.

**ATG** – "Any Two Guys/Gals." A negative way of describing a slash story, implying that the author could swap the main characters out with any other men/women and the story wouldn't change.

**AU** – Short for "Alternate Universe." This is an incredibly broad term that can refer to almost any fic, from characters living in a literal new universe (such as *Star Trek* characters in the *Sherlock Holmes* universe) to the author simply changing an event in the canon (such a keeping a character alive who originally died).

**Avatar** – The icon used by fans alongside their username to represent themselves online. It can also refer to a fan's character within a video game.

**BAMF** – "Bad-Ass Motherfucker." Used to describe an awesome character or event.

**Bara** – Manga and fan pornographic male/male art that characterizes men in an overly masculine fashion; making them "bear-like."

**BDSM** – "Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism." Fics involving any or all of these kinks are incredibly popular.

**Because of reasons** – A phrase used to ambiguously describe your reasons for wanting something. Someone might use this phrase because they're too excited to articulate why they want something, or because they're unwilling to admit why they want it at all. Fans attribute the phrase to a comic by Ryan Pequin.

**Beta** – A fan who proofreads and edits fanfiction.

**Canon** – Any sort of official text. This could be the original source, a beloved adaptation, or even a comment made by an author outside of their work.

**Chanslash** – A genre of fanfiction in which an adult man has sexual relations with an underage boy.

**Character rape** – This term doesn't refer to literal rape within a fic but rather a story in which a character is so OOC—so inaccurately portrayed—that it's the equivalent of the author "raping" the character.

**Collab** – Short for "collaboration," this is when one or more fic authors work together on the same story/verse. The term is also used for fanart, fanvids, etc.

**Con** – Short for "convention," this is an event where fans gather together to discuss their interests. The topic of the convention can be as broad as "television" or as specific as "*Star Trek,* Kirk/Spock."

**Cookie** – A cookie is a small reward for writing a good fic, similar to kudos, though fans are more likely to use the term sarcastically. Fic writers will also use the term as a hypothetical reward *for* leaving reviews/kudos, i.e. "Comment and I'll give you cookies!"

**Cosplay** – Literally "costume play," this is when fans dress up as their favorite fictional character generally for the purpose of attending cons. The term is both a noun and a verb, with the noun describing the costume itself and the verb describing the act of buying/creating the costume, dressing up, taking on the character's persona, and often taking pictures.

**Crack** – A genre of fic that is deliberately written to be silly and/or offensive. Characteristics include deliberate OOC-ness, implausible to impossible plot lines, no plot at all, and often sexually crude humor. Crack draws on fandom knowledge to make fun of the canon/fanon in a satirical or simply insulting manner.

**Crossover** – A genre of fic that blends two or more fandoms. This could mean anything from characters in distinct fandoms meeting one another, to characters from one fandom existing/growing up in the world of another (also sometimes known as a "fusion" fic).

**Doujinshi** – A form of Japanese self-publication that is similar in many ways to fic. Often fans will publish doujnishi online of their favorite manga series: amateur art and writing

that attempts to continue the story or fill in gaps in the manga, just as fanfiction does. Also like a lot of fic, most doujinshi is pornographic.

**Drabble** – A drabble is a piece of fiction that is exactly 100 words, though fans will use the term to describe any piece that is extremely short (anywhere from 50 to 1,000 words). Drabbles became popular within British science fiction fandom in the 1980's and though they are not used exclusively by fans, drabbles are a popular form among fic writers.

**Dub-con** – Short for "dubious consent" in which a fic contains a situation that is not necessarily noncon (nonconsensual) but isn't strictly consensual either. This warning applies largely in sci fi fics where characters can have their memories altered or may be under the influence of alien technology.

**Easter egg** – Refers to a hidden item or message in a movie, television show, or video game. As creators of visual media spend more time developing these hidden extras, fans have created more hype around the act of finding and analyzing them.

**Ero-manga** – Short for "erotic-manga," also known as "hentai," it refers to manga that includes bizarre or perverse sexual acts. However, fans also use the term to describe any type of manga-based pornography.

**F/F –** Standing for "female/female," fans use the acronym to indicate femslash fic in which two women engage in a sexual and/or romantic relationship.

**Fan** - A broad term used to describe any person devoted (in varying amounts) to a particular subject; be it sports, art, music, celebrities, games, books, TV shows, or films, to name just a few. Media fans—including those who write fanfiction—are often characterized by having an *active* devotion, a desire to engage critically with their preferred text(s). This can occur through production (creating fic, vids, fanart) analysis (through metas or vlogs) and activism (such as drawing up petitions to demand better representation from a particular series).

**Fanart** – Art of any form drawn by fans that uses the characters, settings, and/or ideas of another fictional universe.

**Fanboy** – A term used to describe a male who is passionate about fan culture, often referring specifically to an interest in gaming, anime, or sports. Though fans *can* use the term to describe any male interested in fandom (particularly to distinguish someone who is active in a traditionally all-female genre, such as fanfiction) more often than not the term carries a negative connotation. The implication of "fanboy" is that this is a man who allows passion to override his social graces, making him arrogant, cruel, and misogynistic.

**Fandom** – The community that surrounds any popular form of media, be it books, television, video games, films, comics, etc. Fandoms vary in everything from size to activities, ranging from those who only discuss a canon online to those who hold cons multiple times a year.

**Fanfic/Fic** – Short for "fanfiction." For a more detailed description, please see the above thesis.

**Fangirl** – A term used to describe a female interested in and active in fandom. Like "fanboy," however, the term can have negative implications. "Fangirl" is often used to describe someone who others consider to be *overly* invested in a fandom: they are characterized as obsessive, ditzy, shallow, brimming with annoying energy, and unable to distinguish reality from fiction.

**Fannish** – An adjective used to describe any number of things relating to a fan or fandom.

**Fanon** – The "second canon" of a fandom. Fans use the term to describe ideas that are incredibly popular among a community of fans and are generally agreed upon, even if they aren't explicitly canonical. Fans use the fanon extensively in fanfiction, to the extent that some fans actually expect to find those ideas in the canon.

**Fan service** – A scene within the canon intended to (sexually) excite the fans. This could be anything from a character dressed in scantily clad clothing for no good reason to two characters—that the writers know form a popular pairing—sharing a hug. Though fan service is often greeted with great enthusiasm by fans, it can just as quickly become viewed as objectification or queer baiting.

**Fanvid/vidding** – A video incorporating rearranged scenes from a canon, sometimes including other canons, often overlapped with a song. "Vidding" refers to the act of making these fanvids.

**Fanzine** – A combination of "fan" and "zine" (maga*zine*). Fans coined the term in the 1940's to describe amateur science fiction publications and distinguish them from the "prozines" (professional magazines). Fanzines can contain information and art about any aspect of fandom, though many of them exclusively publish fanfiction.

**Femlock** – A subgenre of *Sherlock* fanfiction in which both John and Sherlock are genderbent (generally as cis females rather than MtF transgendered) and are in a romantic and/or sexual relationship with each other.

**FFN** – Short for "Fanfiction.net," one of the oldest and largest fanfiction archives currently running.

**Fic diving** – The act of looking for good fics aimlessly in large archives such as FFN and AO3, rather than examining a rec list or following a trail of bookmarks, recs, or awards. The phrase evokes images of taking a deep breath and diving into what is bound to be a lot of awful writing.

**Ficlet** – A very short piece of fanfiction, generally under 1,000 words. "Ficlet" is often preferred over "drabble" if the fic isn't exactly 100 words.

**Filing off the serial numbers** – The act of taking a fic and erasing the details that tie it to the canonical source. If done well this will involve a great deal of work and will result in an entirely different story that the author can then publish through mainstream channels. More often than not, however, this simply means taking an AU fic and giving the characters new names.

**Filk** – Described broadly as "science fiction folk music," filk encompasses both the music communities within fandoms as well as songs written specifically about fandoms. The term supposedly derives from a mistyping of "folk" in a 1950 essay by Lee Jacobs.

**First time** – A genre of fanfiction in which the characters go through their first time having sex together (though this can also include a character's or characters' first time having sex at all).

**Fit tab A into slot B** – A negative phrase used to describe an explicit fic, claiming that the written sex lacks any emotional impact. That act itself is there—"tab a into slot b" referring broadly to penetration—but there's no real investment on the part of the reader.

**Fix-it fic** – A genre of fic that works to change something that fans were unhappy about in the canon. More often than not this means finding ways that a character need not die. There are also fix-it fics for other works of fanfiction (sometimes known as response fics).

**Flame** – A comment left online—often on a fic—that is only meant to insult the reader. If a comment includes constructive criticism, even if it's harsh, this is generally not considered a flame.

**Fluff** – A genre of fic characterized by its happy scenarios and ending. Often there is very little plot to speak of, just cute, humorous, and/or romantic content.

**FOC** – Stands for a "fan of color." This is often used to describe someone who is actively working for more representation in media.

**Fuck or die** – A fanfiction trope in which the author places characters in a situation that forces sexual intimacy. Fans attribute the trope to Spock's Pon Farr in *Star Trek* and it is particularly popular in Sci Fi fic where characters can easily encounter alien aphrodisiacs or other types of "sex pollen." Though the situation almost always includes dubcon, the fic often ends with an admission that the forced intimacy was something the characters wanted all along.

**Gary Stu** – The male version of a Mary Sue, used to describe a male character who is so perfect they're annoying. Also sometimes called a "Marty Stu."

**Gateway fic** – The fic that either introduced you to a fandom or the one that got you hooked.

**Gen** – Short for "general," a genre of fic in which romantic and/or sexual pairings are not the main focus (though they can exist in the background).

**Genderbend** – The act of changing a character's canonical gender and/or sex. This could be a complete reworking of the universe (in which the character was always cis male or cis female), a semi-canonical story in which the character's sex remains the same but they identify as a different gender, or a semi-canonical story that includes transgender characters. Genderbend can also sometimes include non-binary characters.

**GIF** – Short for "Graphics Interchange Format," GIFs are compressed image files that play on loops. Fans often GIF their favorite TV shows and films for later analysis, or just for aesthetics. There is an ongoing debate about the pronunciation of "GIF." Though the creators insist that the correct pronunciation includes a soft 'g' (like "JIF") most fans insist on an alternate pronunciation with a hard 'g.'

**H/C** – Short for "Hurt/Comfort," a genre of fic defined by a character enduring physical injury and/or emotional distress and then another character comforting them, often as a love interest. It is the comfort and the traditional happy ending that distinguishes a H/C fic from an angst one.

**Headcanon** – A headcanon is a fan's personal interpretation of canon that is generally—but not always—unsupported. A headcanon can be anything from a detail hinted at but never explicitly stated in canon, to a completely idiosyncratic interpretation of a character. If headcanons become popular enough fans may incorporate them into the fanon or (very rarely) authors may adopt them and included them in the canon.

**Het** – Short for "heterosexual," a genre of fic characterized by a male/female pairing.

**Holmesian** – A term used to describe a British fan of all things Sherlock Holmes (as distinguished by the term "Sherlockian" for American fans). However, some use "Holmesian" simply to describe a more devoted, sometimes more scholarly fan.

**Hottness –** The state or the quality of being hot, sexy, and/or desirable. Fans apply the term to both characters and situations.

**IC** – Short for "in character," it can refer to a fic that accurately reflects how the canon/fanon portrays a character, or it can refer to roleplaying/cosplaying as a way of indicating that you are now pretending to be a certain character rather than yourself.

**I can't even** – A phrase used primarily on tumblr that is deliberately not a sentence so that it can, theoretically, cover *every* sentence. By saying, "I can't even" fans imply any and everything from, "I can't even understand that" to "I can't even express how excited I am" to "I can't even care anymore." The phrase is a way of expressing extreme excitement, frustration, or simply a way of claiming that you are unable to express yourself.

**IMO** – Short for "in my opinion."

**IMHO** – Short for "in my humble opinion." The same as IMO except that IMHO implies the likelihood of an inflammatory comment to follow.

**Jossed** – A term derived from the author and producer Joss Whedon. "Jossed" most often refers to when fic writers, and fandom more generally, come up with ideas about the canon (such as a backstory or future plotlines) only to have those ideas contradicted in later, canonical works. This occurred frequently during the airing of Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slyer.* "Jossed" can also refer to when a character has been unnecessarily harmed or killed, something that Whedon enjoys doing frequently.

**Kerfluffle** A messy argument, generally taking place online. Fans give "Kerfluffle" more respect than "wank," with the implication being that a "kerfluffle" is a debate in which all sides have an arguable stance that they're attempting to work through, while "wank" forgoes logic in favor of whining and personal attacks.

**Kidfic** – A genre of fic that revolves around children in some way. The most popular versions include characters either adopting children or characters who are turned into children themselves (de-aging) through scientific, magical, or unexplained means. In de-aging fics the character may either retain their adult memories or revert completely to when they were a child, both emotionally and physically.

**Kink** – A personal preference involving sex, often something non-normative such as a fetishism or bondage. Entire genres of fic build up around kinks, with many fandoms becoming well known for writing certain ones. The largest fandoms also make use of kinkmemes.

**Kinkmeme** – Kinkmemes are forums in which fans post anonymous comments about fics they want to read and writers "adopt" these prompts, sometimes posting their stories anonymously as well, sometimes not. As the term "*kink*meme" suggests, most of the prompts involve sexual acts of some sort, oftentimes non-normative ones (hence the anonymity) but kinkememes can also contain gen prompts as well.

**Kripked** – The opposite of "jossed," when a fic writer or a fandom's ideas about a canon are validated later on. The term originated from *Supernatural* creator Eric Kripke who, after ten seasons, has included a number of fan theories on the show. Some details were even specifically taken from the *Supernatural* fandom, such as calling the character Sam "moose" and Dean "squirrel."

**Lemon/lemon-scented/lemonade** – An older term used almost exclusively within anime fandoms to designate a fic with erotic content. Generally these fics were pure PWPs. The term itself derives from a collection of highly pornographic anime stories titled *Cream Lemon.*

**Lime –** "Lime" is a version of "lemon" that is not quite so explicitly sexual. Lime fics are generally characterized by fade-to-blacks.

**Lurker** – A fan who consumes fan media such as fanfiction and metas but does not actively contribute to the fandom herself.

**Machete beta** – A beta that provides a harsher, more honest critique than others, particularly if your normal beta is a close friend or colleague.

**Manip** – Short for "manipulation," this term is most often applied to images that fans change in Photoshop to show characters in non-canonical situations.

**Mary Sue** – A highly negative term for an OC in fanfiction who fans consider to be far, *far* too perfect. Mary Sues are almost universally viewed as "self-insert" characters, in that they're meant to represent the author and her desire to be the best of the best. As a bare basic checklist: every male character adores/sexually pursues her, she inspires envy in all the female characters, she is gorgeous, highly capable in every skill required of her, often she has a ludicrously unique name, and if she's *not* perfect, that imperfection only exists to produce sympathy (such as blindness or another physical impairment). However, despite the intense hatred of Mary Sues in fic it should be noted that a) what constitutes a Mary Sue is highly subjective and b) that these characteristics often exist in male characters without the same backlash (Batman, for example, is often considered a Gary Stu). Within the last few years there has been a movement among fans to reclaim the Mary Sue as an example of female empowerment. The term originated from Paula Smith's 1973 *Star Trek* parody "A Trekkie's Tale."

**Masterlist** – A masterlist is a complete collection of something within a fandom and unlike a rec list does not attempt to distinguish by quality or preference. These lists could include anything from all fanvids of a certain pairing to all fics written by a certain author.

**Meme** – Among fans a meme is an idea or joke that gains huge popularity across fandoms. Memes are particularly popular on tumblr, to the extent that fans joke about what the next meme will be (and keep track of each month's, with the expectation that there can only be one "true" meme going at a time). As of this writing, the January meme of 2015 was a collection of sarcastic lines from *A Very Brady Sequel* referencing Jan Brady's fictional boyfriend "George Glass," the February meme consisted of using the dancing shark from Katy Perry's Super Bowl performance in any humorous way possible, and the Internet as a whole exploded around the current meme: a dress that, due to lighting, sometimes appears black/blue and other times appears white/gold.

**Meta** – Meta can refer to any kind of discussion about fanworks but more often refers to essays of varying sizes, analyzing canons, fandoms, or fans themselves.

**Metafic** – A genre of fanfiction in which the characters may interact with the author, break the fourth wall, or otherwise become aware that they are fictional characters. Metafic is often used to make fun of fic clichés or note issues with the canon itself. Works that already contain meta storytelling—such as *Supernatural* and the Deadpool comics—are particular favorites for metafic.

**Missing scene** – A genre of fanfiction that attempts to fill in lost time within the canon. This could be anything from what one character was doing while the narrative followed another, to describing a previously "fade to black" sex scene. Missing scenes are also used to explain away plot holes or pairings that the canon hasn't developed enough for their relationship to seem convincing to fans.

**MST sites/MSTing** – Deriving from Mystery Science Theater, MSTing is a genre of fanfiction that exists solely to mock other (presumably bad) works of fanfiction. In this second fic the author creates an original character who is then forced to read the first fic, leading to lots of humorous and cruel commentary about how awful it is.

**Mundanes** – A term for someone who is not a part of the fannish community. Many consider the term derogatory and prefer "non-fan" instead.

**Mpreg** – Short for "male pregnancy," Mpreg is a plot device in fanfiction where the man becomes pregnant. More often than not this man is in a slash relationship and he is cis (with the pregnancy occurring through magic, alien biology, futuristic technology, and the like).

**Neophyte** – Someone new to something within fandom. Slightly more derogative than "newbie" but not quite as insulting as "noob."

**Newbie** – Someone new to something within fandom. The term is generally used in a patronizing manner but ultimately anyone with a heart will help out the "newbie."

**Non-con** – Short for "non-consensual." Unlike dub-con, non-con specifically denotes sexual assault/rape. However, some fans do distinguish between "non-con" and "rape." Specifically, rape refers to legality while non-con refers to the character's emotional state. A character may be in a non-con situation but still enjoy it, such as in forced marriages, sex pollen fics, offering oneself for sex under morally ambiguous situations (blackmail, payment, etc.), and in underage relationships. The rule of thumb is that non-con *may* be erotic while rape never, ever is.

**Noob/n00b** – Someone new to something within fandom. This is one of the more insulting terms for a newcomer. Fans use the term to refer to someone who is not only new to the activity but is unwilling to learn the ropes and outright disrespects those who have more experience. Fans generally consider noobs to be arrogant babies unworthy of your time.

**NSFW** – Acronym for "not safe for work." As the term suggests, fans attach "NSFW" to any fanwork—but particularly art—that would get you in trouble if someone were to see it in a public/professional space. Most NSFW is erotic fanart.

**OC** – Short for "original character," these are characters in a fic that the fic author has created herself.

**OFC** – Short for "original female character."

**OMC** – Short for "original male character."

**Omega verse** – A shortened term for Alpha/Beta/Omega (also known as "ABO verse"), this is a highly complex kink trope in which the characters in a fic universe are bound to a hierarchical system based on biological sex drive. Alphas are at the top of the social ladder, dominant and able to impregnate omegas. Betas are subordinate to the alphas and *may* be able to impregnate omegas. Omegas are the lowest within the hierarchy and therefore the most submissive, though in many verses they are seen as rare and are prized by the others. Characteristics of an A/B/O fic include animal behavior, possessiveness, knotting, Mpreg, supernatural creatures, mating cycles, and bonding. These fics are often long and highly detailed AUs that work to explore how a society structured in such a manner would impact a canon's characters and their relationships to one another.

**Oneshot** – A standalone fic that is complete in and of itself. However, some oneshots may fit within larger verses.

**OOC** – Short for "out of character," this is a negative term used to describe a character that in no way reflects their canon or fanon counterpart.

**Origfic** – Short for "original fiction," this is any piece of writing that is *not* considered fanfiction (though distinguishing between the two can get complicated). Also known as "profic" or "litfic."

**Ose** – Deriving from "morose," fans apply this term to anything fannish that is angsty or emotionally exhausting. However, it's most often used in filking to describe a depressing filksong.

**OTP** – Acronym for "one true pairing." Fans define an OTP as either the only pairing that interests someone within a fandom or the one they prefer above all others. This is the pairing that a fan will read fic for almost exclusively, look at art for, discuss, etc. OTPs often lead to a lot of fandom animosity, with fans getting into ship wars about which pairings are "better" and which are "obviously" going to end up being canonical. Your OTP is in every way the opposite of your NOTP.

**OT3** – A spin off "OTP" standing for "one true threesome." Similar terms—though not nearly as popular—include OT4 ("one true foursome"), OT5 ("one true five-some") and OT6 ("one true six-some"). After that the term becomes OTE (with the "E" standing for "everyone") and is generally applied to fandoms with large groups of characters who are all close and who could, potentially, be in a polyamorous relationship. The most popular fandom for OTE is currently *The Avengers.*

**Pastiche** – A term that describes professional writing that uses characters and worlds that have come out of copyright. Fans largely use "pastiche" to refer to Sherlock Holmes novels not written by Sr. Arthur Conan Doyle.

**PDP** – Short for "porn driven plot," this acronym is similar to a PWP except that the sex somehow forwards the narrative. Examples might include a forced marriage fic where there are numerous sex scenes but each allows for the couple's relationship to grow, or a fic where sex has consequences that affect the rest of the plotline.

**Plotbunny** – A term for an idea that pops (or "hops") into an author's head. The "bunny" part derives from the fact that these ideas are often viewed as energetic (they won't leave the author alone), they have a tendency to multiply, and if need be the author might put them up for adoption.

**Podfic** – A fic that fans read aloud and then record. Fans create podfic both to allow for dramatic readings of stories as well as to make fic more accessible to those with disabilities, such as blindness.

**POV** – Short for "point of view," in fic it refers to the character(s) who are telling the story.

**PPC** – Acronym for "protectors of the plot continuum," this is a community dedicated to eliminating badfic. These fans rewrite fics that they consider bad by inserting themselves as characters called "Agents," who then fix things like Mary Sues, OOC-ness, and sloppy writing. The PPC primarily worked within the *Lord of the Rings* fandom.

**Pre-slash** – Used to describe a fic in which there is a great deal of UST between characters. "Pre-slash" indicates that the author ships two (or more) characters together but that they won't be getting together in this fic. Pre-slash fics are often precursors to later slash fics. However, some authors deceptively label gen fics as "pre-slash" in the hopes of attracting more readers.

**Profic** – Short for "professionally published fiction," it can refer to any work that the fan doesn't consider fic. However, some fans use "profic" only to describe tie-in novels. Also known as "origfic" and "litfic."

**PWP** – Standing for "porn without plot" or the more humorous, "Plot? What plot?" PWPs are highly erotic fics that, as the name suggests, contain almost nothing but sex. However, what constitutes plot is subjective. Someone may label a fic a PWP if the plot simply revolves around the sex (such as in a PDP) and some PWPs may not have action but do contain character growth. Also known as smut.

**P2P** – Short for "pull to publish," P2P refers to a fic that the author reworks (to varying degrees) for the mainstream market. Also known as "filing off the serial numbers." "Pull to publish" should not be confused with the other P2P, "peer-to-peer" (file sharing).

**R&R** – Short for "read and review," this acronym is placed in the summaries and author's notes of a fic as a way of asking for feedback. Some fans greatly dislike the term, arguing that anyone involved with fic knows to read and review if they're interested, having the

author say as much comes across as needy or arrogant. Some even consider it a sure sign of a newbie writer. Not to be confused with "rest and relaxation."

**Rec** – Short for "recommendation," this is a positive endorsement for reading a certain fic, watching a vid, etc. Multiple recs are generally referred to as a "rec list."

**Rec list** – A collection of recs pertaining to fanfic, fanvids, etc. Fans my divide their rec lists by genre, pairing, trope, or numerous other categories. Some fans become quite well known for their rec lists and their recommendations can greatly increase a fic's notoriety.

**Remix** – A remix is a fic that is a different version of another fic, often written by the same author. As an example, this might involve taking a fic where one character is a vampire in love with a human and reversing their roles, with the purpose being to explore how this change affects the romantic dynamic. Many fans engage in remix challenges but some consider the activity boring and unoriginal.

**Retcon/retconning** – A portmanteau of "retroactive continuity," a retcon is when authors replace a canonical fact with a different canon. This might include a character waking up and realizing that a part of their life was just a dream, or even just writers accidentally contradicting their own characters' backstory (as is often the case in comics and long running TV-shows). Fans become easily frustrated with retconning and utilize fic as a way of fixing it.

**Roleplaying/RP** – Though used most frequently in discussing video games, roleplaying can also refer to fans who pretend to be characters, either at cons or online. It is often paired with cosplying and fans will ask their community for roleplaying partners, e.g. "I'd like to roleplay Dean. Does anyone want to be Sam?" Roleplaying groups can also spring up, particularly in fandoms that already have established groups, such as *Torchwood* or *The Avengers.*

**Round robin** – An older fic activity where fans sent writing to one another, building on what the previous fan wrote. This eventually lead to a finished fic authored by multiple fans. Though not as common anymore, versions of round robins have become increasingly easy with the Internet, and co-authored fics in general are now prevalent.

**RPF** – Short for "real person fic," these are fics written about actual people, rather than the characters of a book, movie, TV-show, etc. Often these fics revolve around historical figures, the actors who portray characters, or popular boy bands. RPF has gotten a great deal of criticism over the years and has only recently become well-known within fandom. Supporters of RPF often argue that they are not truly writing about "real" people but rather about the personas put on by celebrities and their own, fictional idea about what these people might be like.

**RPS** – Short for "real person slash," this is a popular subcategory of RPF where fans pair two "real" men together in a romantic and/or sexual relationship.

**Rule 34** – The fannish rule that states, "If something exists, there's porn of it on the Internet." Within fic it implies that fans have probably written about *any* pairing, no matter how strange. If they haven't, there's always Rule 35.

**Rule 35 –** An addendum to Rule 34: "If there's not porn of it yet, there will be."

**Rule 63 -** The fannish rule that states, "For every male character there is a female version of that character." This is a more general term for genderbending.

**Scanlations/scanlators** – A portmanteau of "scan" and "translations," scanlations are manga chapters or whole volumes that fans scan (often illegally), post online, and sometimes translate into English. Many fans rely on scanlators if they want to keep up with a manga as it comes out, otherwise they would wait months—or even years—before a whole volume came out in English.

**Schmoop** – A term used to describe a fic that contains a huge amount of sweet romance between two characters. This is often considered fluffier than "fluff."

**Schnoogle** – One of the "houses" in Fiction Alley—an incredibly popular *Harry Potter* fic archive—that housed the novel-length fics in all genres. This is where Cassandra Claire's *Draco* trilogy was stored.

**Screenshot/cap** – "Screencap" is a shortened version of "screencapture," it refers to a still image taken from a computer, TV show, movie, or video game. Fans use screenshots extensively for various fanworks and analysis.

**Sex pollen** – A trope in Sci Fi fic where an alien aphrodisiac, often some kind of plant, forces two characters into sexual relations. This results in dub-con/non-con sex but often leads to a happy ending with the resolution of the characters' UST. This trope is particularly popular within the *Star Trek* fandom.

**Sex swap** – A recent term used to provide a more accurate understanding of sex/gender within fic and to distinguish changing sex from genderbending. Whereas fans use genderbending to describe any fic that changes the sex and/or gender of the characters (almost indiscriminately), fans are beginning to require that "sex swap" refer to fics that change the biology of a character and "genderbending" denote a change in the canonical (or the perceived canonical) gender of a character.

**Sherlockian** – A term used to describe an American fan of all things Sherlock Holmes (as distinguished by the term "Holmesian" for British fans). However, with the release of BBC's *Sherlock* series in 2010, many fans of the show have claimed the term as their own. Some now view "Sherlockian" as specific to *Sherlock* while others use "Sherlockian" to refer to young or new fans, while "Holmesian" applies to older, long established fans.

**Shout-out** – A line of dialogue or a detail in fic that hails something outside of the canon, such as an actor's name or a joke mentioned in an interview. Authors include shout-outs for die-hard fans, yet they are innocuous enough that casual fans can overlook them.

**Ship/shipping** – "Ship" is both a noun and a verb, referring to a pairing within a fandom ("They're a popular ship") as well as the act of supporting the pairing ("I ship them"). The term originated in the X-Files fandom when fans who wanted to see Mulder and Scully together were dubbed "relationshippers" and then eventually just "shippers." The common use of "ship" has lead to a number of popular puns such as, "I will go down with this ship" and "I don't have a ship, I have an armada" (as a way of claiming that you ship a large number of different pairings). Shipping often results in OTPs and the creation of ship names (a portmanteau of both partners' names).

**Shipwars** – Heated debates and wank amongst fans about which ships are the best, which are canonical, and which are problematic. One of the most famous shipwars occurred in the *Harry Potter* fandom between Harry/Hermione shippers and Ron/Hermione shippers.

**Slash** – A term that technically refers to two or more characters of the same sex or gender pursuing a sexual and/or romantic relationship, but more often than not "slash" denotes a male/male pairing (with "femslash" used for female/female). Fans believe that the term originated in the *Star Trek* fandom when readers needed a way to distinguish fics that portrayed Kirk and Spock as friends and those that portrayed them as lovers. Fanzines had long been using the & symbol (Kirk&Spock) to show that they were the featured characters of a fic, so fans simply replaced the "&" with "/" to signal a romantic relationship. The use of the forward slash eventually became just "slash."

**Smarm** – A term referring to a type of fluff in fic that is completely gen. It is emotionally very warm and the characters demonstrate a great deal of love for one another but there is no sexual content (or even the potential for sexual content).

**Smooshed/smooshing** – The act of combining two names together to form one word, a portmanteau. Fans use the term primarily when referring to ship names, such as smooshing "Kirk and Spock" to get "spirk."

**Smut** – A term for a fic that contains a great deal of sex. However, fans may describe a fic as having "smutty" scenes without necessarily being a PWP.

**Songfic** – A type of fic wherein song lyrics (often ones the author associates with a pairing) are interposed throughout the writing. Or, more rarely, the term refers to a fic where the characters sing lyrics from a particular song (often to each other). Fans have a long history of mocking songfic, as it's often associated with newbies who haven't figured out their style of writing yet. However, the form remains popular among certain fandoms. FFN banned songfics due to copyright issues but other archives like AO3 still allow them.

**Sporking** – The practice of mocking bad fanfiction. It derives from the expression, "It was so bad I wanted to gouge my eyes out with a spork."

**Squick** – A term used to describe a deep-seated turn-off for the reader. Fic authors will sometimes warn that something within the fic may be "squicky" or readers will ask that others not recommend certain things because that's a "squick" for them. Over the years the term has died down in use but recently fans, particularly on tumblr, have advocated for bringing it back, so as to distinguish dislikes from "triggers." A trigger is likely to cause a reader panic attacks and other emotional trauma, whereas a "squick" is something that a fan just really, really doesn't want to read.

**The powers that be** – A term used to describe those who have canonical and/or legal control over a work. This could be anyone from a corporate owner to a showrunner to a prominent writer. The term is often used in an insulting manner. For example, "Those idiot TPTB decided to kill off Character X. What were they thinking?"

**Tl;dr** – Short for "too long; didn't read." This is a phrase attached to long blog posts with a shorter summary following, designed for those who just want to get the gist of an argument. Fans can also use it as a dismissive comment: "What did you think of this?" "tl;dr"

**TOU** – Short for "terms of use/service."

**Trekkie/trekker** – Terms used to describe fans of the series *Star Trek.* Some claim that "trekkie" is an outsider's way of describing a fan while fans use "trekker" to describe themselves (and therefore "trekker" is the more "serious" of the two). However, the real distinction—if there is one—seems to have been lost.

**Trigger warning** – A note or tag on a fanwork that warns fans about things that might cause a violently negative response. Common triggers include sexual assault, addiction, self-harm, abuse, and flashing lights (for epilepsy). Fans have made trigger warnings more prominent in recent years and many other fans have praised their fandoms for this, stating that they are more likely to know what they're getting out of a fanwork than they are when consuming mainstream media. Trigger warnings have helped to promote safer and more inclusive communities.

**Troll** – A term used to describe an individual who posts in online communities with the sole purpose of provoking negative responses. They might achieve this by flaming someone or asking questions that they know will rile fans up. Trolling has long been a hated aspect of fandom but recently the term has tempered somewhat by applying it to mischievous showrunners. In particular, Steven Moffat is often accused (both lightly and seriously) of trolling his fans when he drops inflammatory comments about upcoming works or deliberately makes statements about the canon that are later shown to be false.

**UST** – Acronym for "unresolved/unrequited sexual tension." These are both popular fic tropes in which a character is either pining for another in an angst fic (unrequited) or both characters are fighting their feelings for various reasons (unresolved). UST is prominent in all types of pairings and occurs in nearly every pre-slash fic.

**Verse** – Short for "universe." Though there are some canonical verses (such as the Mirror verse in *Star Trek*) the term is more often used to describe an AU created by fans. Verses will usually begin with a single fic that the original author and other fans will then expand on in the years following. Common genres of verses include coffee shop AUs and A/B/Os.

**WAFF** – Acronym for "warm and fluffy/fuzzy feelings," this is a term that's applied to fics that are particularly good feeling, romantic, and/or sensitive.

**Wank** – Within fandom "wank" refers to a loud online argument in which numerous fans squabble about anything from pairings to whether a certain fan "deserves" her popularity. Wank is not to be confused with a kerfluffle, where fans retain some measure of respectability and ultimately desire to reach a consensus. Fans consider wank to be one of the greatest disadvantages of participating in fandom.

**Whump/whumping** – A form of H/C in which there is a lot of emphasis on the "hurt." Whumping refers to seriously hurting a character with the express purpose of seeing what happens when they finally break and then getting to enjoy putting them back together again(often by a love interest). Whumping is not the same as "bashing," wherein a character's actual characterization is hurt due to the author's hatred of him/her. (It is generally a "her" as character bashing often arises out of internalized misogyny, e.g. hating a female character because she canonically interfers with your preferred male/male ship).

**Wingfic** – A popular genre of fic in which one or more characters possess wings. This could include a character with canonical wings (wherein the wingfic would focus on the treatment or even loss of the wings), an AU where characters naturally grow wings, one character gaining wings through magic, etc.

**WNGWJLEO** – Acronym for "we're not gay; we just love each other." This is an older term used to describe two straight, same-sex characters who end up together but who insist they aren't "really" gay because they *only* love each other. In recent years the general concept (if not the term itself) has come under heavy criticism for its dismissal of bisexuality, pansexuality, and demisexaulity.

**Woobie** – A term used to describe a beloved character (generally male) who fans want to comfort endlessly. The woobie is characterized by seriously bad lots in life, a rather pathetic appearance, and the tendency to cry and/or look defeated. Basically if you feel sorry for them and want to wrap them in blankets, they're probably a woobie.

**Yaoi** – An older term used by Western anime and manga fans to describe a fanwork with homoerotic elements. Many Yaoi fics fall under the PWP category.

**Yuri** – The female version of "yaoi" in which female characters from an anime/manga engage in a sexual relationship.

**Zine** – Short for "fanzine/magazine," zines are collections of amateur writings and artwork that are then bound together and self-published. Science Fiction zines began in the 1930's and by the 1960's the popularity of *Star Trek* lead to the first fic-only zines. However, with the arrival of the Internet, zine production steadily decreased and though fans can still purchase older issues, very few fandoms are publishing new ones.

**5 and 1** – A popular fic format characterized by "five times ____ and one time ____." Common examples include, "Five times X and Y didn't kiss and one time they did," "Five times character X saved character Y and one time Y saved X," and "Five times X almost died and one time he did."

**5eva** – A play on the word "forever" (4eva). 5eva basically means "forever" but it's better because it's *5eva*. This has become a popular line to use in fic, with OTPs claiming that they will love one another "5eva."

**!** – The exclamation point is a common tool in characterizing fics. It is used to denote a character trait that is important to the fic itself. If, for example, someone wrote an OUAT fic with a particularly angsty Rumpelstiltskin, the author might label it as a "woobie!Rumple" fic. The exclamation mark (sometimes called a "bang") is used by fans to signal careers ("priest!Rumple") or verses ("DarkOne!rumple") or even major plot points ("warning: death!fic").

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