

From 'Fans' to 'Fan'-tastic Writers:  
A Closer Look into Fanfiction and Legitimizing Female Authorship through Fanfiction Writing

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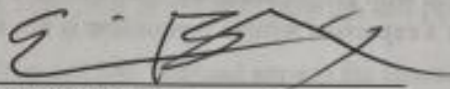
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BA, Valdosta State University, 2021

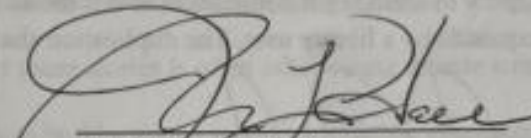
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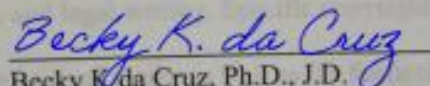
  
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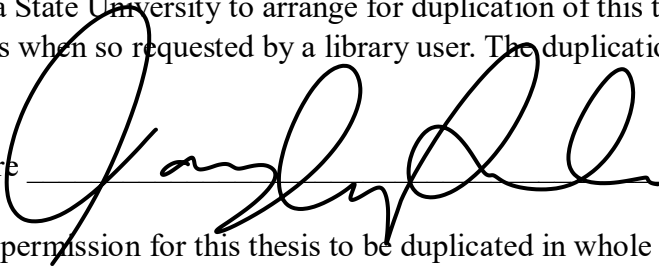
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## ABSTRACT

The increase in technology use remains constant and transforms how we interact, work, and access information in the digital age. As fanfiction grows in popularity, self-publishing platforms such as Archive of Our Own, Fanfiction.net, and Wattpad attracts the attention of big-name publishing houses. Fanfiction writing is a common way for young writers to experiment with writing at their own pace and advance into more difficult genres with a supportive community behind them. The audience for these stories is often other young female writers and readers, so this gives them the opportunity to build a strong rapport with other young readers who can relate to and engage with the narratives. Fan writing is important for young female writers and allows them to challenge gender norms, explore their sexuality, and can even be a gateway to professional writing. Most fanfiction writers included in this thesis concluded that writing fanfiction helped their writing tremendously and boosted their confidence in writing.

Fanfiction writing has led young writers into and through their careers as respected authors as well as careers involving academic and legal writing. Specific copyright laws and procedures have been put in place to protect the original works as well as the fanfiction writers and as long as proper protocol is followed, fan writers can avoid legal trouble and copyright issues. Further, fanfiction empowers young female writers by providing a creative outlet for expression, developing creative and critical writing skills, encouraging support through fan communities, and encouraging critical engagement through narratives and society.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Ann Moody, my nanny. I can't thank you enough for genuinely being excited to hear my first fanfiction story chapter by chapter no matter how silly and ridiculous they were. At a time when I was just trying to figure out who I was and what I liked to do, you were there every step of the way. Without your constant encouragement during those younger fanfiction writing years, I would have never become the person that I am today, writing a master's thesis over fanfiction being an empowering tool for young women.



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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Self-publishing fanfiction writing on online platforms is constantly increasing in popularity. Young fan writers use platforms such as Wattpad, Archive of Our Own, and Fanfiction.net to post their fan writing online for their audiences to enjoy. Similar to TikTok, fan stories can go viral on these platforms gaining readers and popularity, and even catching the eye of well-known publishing houses. These platforms remain a frequent online community for writers to get noticed by publishers. Fanfiction is an easy place for young female writers to start where they are comfortable and provides these young women with tools to empower them while taking their writing to the next level. This modern writing of fiction is influenced by fan writers, fan communities, and digital media platforms. Fans take the plots, characters, and settings of the canons into account when writing their own versions or alternate endings and for women, fanfiction supplies a world where young girls can experiment, explore their sexuality in a safe space, and challenge gender norms through their writing as well as gain insight into the real world of professional writing and publishing. Some female authors who started out writing fanfiction at a young age such as E.L. James, Anna Todd, Beth Reekles, and Claudia Tan have even gotten the opportunity to publish their writing and have successful full-time careers as a result. In reality, these platforms are a creative outlet that allows young female writers and readers to connect and grow individually as well as in supportive fan-based communities. The role of the fanfiction community and reader feedback is crucial for the development of writing narratives. Being a part of these fan communities on these platforms allows the writer to develop writing skills and encourages critical thinking and literacy skills through reader feedback and editing.

As a fan, most of the time when we leave or finish a story, there are some parts of us who almost always want more. Fanfiction gives its fans and community an opportunity to get more, allowing us to put ourselves into that world and discourse to satisfy our needs. As a piece of amateur writing based upon popular narratives, shows, movies, or games, scholars have debated if fanfiction is appropriate and mature for young female writers. Fanfiction as a tool, empowers young female writers to creatively express themselves, develop their critical thinking and writing skills through reader feedback, and gain a deeper sense of identity through their writing and career aspirations.

### **Fanfiction and its History**

Fanfiction is a subgenre of fiction written by fans for fans, predominantly women. For the past few years, the numbers regarding male and female fiction authors have been mostly equal. According to Fanfiction.net and Wattpad statistics, nearly 80 percent of fanfiction stories are written and posted by females. Among many ongoing discussions and definitions of fanfiction, one constant aspect is encouraging creativity and expression among fans. Fan writing showcases a writer's talents, regardless of age, by expanding or rewriting narratives originally created by others. For women, fanfiction can encourage them to use their voices and challenge societal norms. It serves as a battlefield for challenging marginalizations and a safe space for young female writers to speak up or explore their sexuality. This often comes with dismissal from critics; however, the loyal fan community remains ready to support and validate these young fans. These fan writers were either craving more from a narrative or displeased with the ending given and wished to change it into something that satisfies them and the fandom. These fanfiction stories don't just stem from books, they can extend to TV shows, movies, and even video games. Actually, "Many of today's successful female authors initially cut their teeth

writing fanfiction before graduating to creating worlds and characters of their own” such as Anna Todd (author of the *After* series) and E.L. James (author of the *Fifty Shades* trilogy) (Lipton 438).

Flegel and Roth describe fanfiction as “fiction written by fans that use the same characters and often settings of their favorite show, movie, etc.” (254). Rebecca Black states that “Fan fiction is a genre that lends itself to critical engagement with media texts as fans repurpose popular media to design their own narratives” (Black 75). Writing is fun but for anyone, creating your own world around someone else’s is even more intriguing. These writers “generally extend, challenge, and redesign the plotlines and characterizations offered by the media” (Black 77). Modern fanfiction stories can continue the original work while other stories simply add to the narratives and explain the future of the characters. Another version of fanfiction can stem from intertwining characters from different universes into one. Fanfiction writing can be seen as a “mass literature movement within the devoted readers” and these writers are generally inspired by the narratives and wish to add more to their favorite stories and plots. (Morozova & Pozharytska 80). Fans can read and bond over these narratives and use them to develop their own stories and create more ideas for their own stories. With the increase in computer technology, reading digitally has become more appealing.

Many fan writers posting fanfiction aren’t looking for publicity or profit. They simply want to write to satisfy their own needs as well as their fellow peers in similar fandoms. Critics of fanfiction treat the writing as second-hand literature, but “Fanfics not only develop the original text or give it another angle of vision but also display skepticism to the canon story, subjectivism or relativism as to the events described” (Morozova & Pozharytska 80). This means that this style of writing can be a productive field for the development of literature and its writers by how creatively the writers rewrite or add onto the narratives. With this, fanfiction should be

respected and encouraged as a starting ground for young writers and “as a place for fans to express their fondness for, and emotional investment in, the original works” (Lipton 429). There are numerous types of fanfictions and Morozova and Pozharytska note that:

Though organized around one and the same plot, fanfics differ in the way of textual representation and fall into a number of easily recognized subtypes. For instance, angst refers to a genre of stories with a prevalent physical or, mainly, emotional torment of characters. Challenge refers to stories built on somebody else’s idea, badfic—to those written in a deliberately horrible manner, as a special type of parody story. Crackfic presupposes stories in which completely ridiculous, unbelievable, or insane things take place. Continuation develops the canon with an open ending, and so forth. (84)

Some of the more popular types of fanfictions are crossover, alternative universe, and POV (point of view). These types of fanfictions have evolved, reflecting the dynamic history of fanfiction.

To understand fanfiction, it is important to understand its history. Fanfiction has been used and dates to the 60s. Lipton believes this stemmed from a *Star Trek* fandom magazine *Spockanalia* (fanzine) in the 1960s (428). The *Star Trek* premiere in 1966 “led to *Spockanalia*, a *Star Trek* fanzine, a magazine created by fans, featuring critical analysis of the show as well as fan fiction” (Zukauskas). This led to conventions where fans would meet up and share fanfiction. *Spockanalia* was edited by Devra Langsam and Sherna Comerford, two female fans. These fanzines were written, printed, and mailed to other fans or dispersed, sold, or traded at science fiction conventions. Even then, women seemed to dominate the fanfiction community and authored 83 percent of the *Star Trek* fanfiction by 1970. This percentage increased to 90 percent by 1973.

These online websites and communities such as Fanfiction.net, Archive of Our Own, and Wattpad allowed fans to share, comment on, and interact with the authors of other fanfictions. These platforms provide a space where thousands post their stories and even though these simple fanfiction stories can lead to much greater novels/series and even TV shows and movies, they are not taken as serious publishing platforms. As the first and largest fan archive platform for posting fanfiction stories, Fanfiction.net (FFN) launched in 1998 and houses “more than a million fan-authored texts that span thousands of media categories” where fans could upload their work and connect with other fans (Black 77). Federico Pianzola and colleagues supply us with the fact that “More than 70 million people use it every month, 90% are either Generation Z or Millennial, i.e. younger than 35 years old” (13). FFN offers nine main categories, including Anime/Manga, Books, Cartoons, Games, Comics, Movies, Plays/Musicals, Television Shows, and Miscellaneous. These platforms don’t just house YA romance genres, but “also provide access to [more] diverse audiences” (Lammers et al. 193). Approximately 40,000 fan texts are based on topics such as the *Final Fantasy* video game and the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* anime series, and even more based on the *Harry Potter* series.

Wattpad is another popular publishing platform of user-generated content that was created in 2006. Many aspiring female writers, young and old, use Wattpad as a platform to self-publish their writing and fan writing. Since Wattpad is the most used fan site “for publishers and literary agents, it is a hotbed of literary talent, where gatekeepers, such as publishers or agents, can scout the next Anna Todd or Beth Reekles” (Ramdarshan Bold 120). As a place where writers of any age can post or self-publish their work, Wattpad “aspires to recognize and reflect diverse voices by taking Wattpad stories to published books and onto bookshelves around the world” (Wattpad). Many publishers use these platforms to scout new talent. Along with

publishing opportunities, Black's journal suggests that these platforms allow female writers to use their writing "to reconfigure gender identities" by including female fan fiction heroines "that are traditionally occupied by men in popular media" (76). With this, "They were able to draw from available resources to create fictions that gave voice to themes and issues from their daily lives and relationships" (Black 76). As a result, this creativity on the feminine side leads them to write more appropriate stories targeting an older audience, which better prepares them for the adult and publishing world.

Fanfictions growing popularity results in changes in the concept of digital literature and publishing. With the support of these self-publishing websites and platforms, fans can post their stories, change their stories and content, and interact and comment on other stories in return strengthening their writing skills and fan communities overall. Having a supportive community is important for young female writers to navigate through their creative journeys and find their voices. After all, having this support leads fans to find their identities through writing and develop their writing skills.

## Chapter II

### Fanfiction as a Creative Outlet and the Fan Community

Female writers can gain a sense of identity and empowerment by telling their stories through narrative writing. Self-publishing platforms allow great spaces for fan communities to connect, explore, and write in a supportive community. Flegel and Roth mention that “A central feature of fanfiction as a genre and a source of community building and sharing is that of pleasing others by meeting their needs as readers and as fellow community members” (259). Along with rewriting fanfiction for personal enjoyment, the fan communities allow young women to creatively tackle heavy emotional concepts and provide an opportunity for them to work through real personal issues through the veil of fiction. This process encourages creativity and self-expression for these writers and strengthens the fan communities encompassing the writing. No matter the reason, fanfiction remains a viable part of young female writers’ lives that serves as a valuable outlet for creativity.

The online world can be lethal for anyone. However, in the literary world, the internet is an especially toxic environment with harsh reader comments and tough criticism. This online fan fictional world more so provides more support within the fan communities. Women make up more than half of the population of writers and Wattpad statistics “indicate that 80% of the site’s users are under the age of 25 and mostly female” (Hedrick 694). Female authors and young women in these communities need and receive the most support. This support empowers and encourages them to build their confidence and provides a safe space to do so. In some cases, these erotic online fan communities also allow young female writers to explore their sexualities without backlash or shame and develop sexual literacies.

Fanfiction writing can help young female writers express themselves through more difficult topics such as sexual assault, providing a creative outlet for dealing with their traumas. Sexual assault narratives can be seen as a YA subgenre of fiction and have been increasing since the #MeToo movement in 2006. The #MeToo movement against sexual violence gave young female writers the courage and empowerment they needed to break their silence and receive validation and support with their writing. Amber Moore states that these narratives “create new spaces for representations of embodied, lived experiences with witnessing of and resistance(s) against sexual trauma” (171). These narratives further created awareness and inspired other young writers to speak out about sexual violence with their writing.

*Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher is a novel made into a series on *Netflix* about a young sexual assault victim named Hannah Baker who committed suicide. *Thirteen Reasons Why* is one of many examples of narratives where fans became inspired to share their own stories through fanfiction and experiences. Fans began to write fanfiction regarding these narratives of sexual assault and other harsh topics on platforms such as Archive of Our Own and Fanfiction.net. Moore further explains that “Exploring such stories through fanfiction significantly allows for asking questions about rape culture and providing creative possibilities; fanfiction can offer unique insights into how rape culture discourses are being negotiated through fannish rewritings of YA literature” (170). In short, fanfiction writing allows fans another outlet to explore their trauma and encourages its readers and writers to consider how narratives shape their opinions and attitudes toward consent, victimization, and being survivors. Some fans ignore this completely and alter their writing to include a happier and more appropriate ending with romantic tones. Even in cases such as these, rewriting or continuing a text still requires a high level of creative vision. The archives of fanfiction can illustrate the evolution of rape culture by



comparing older narratives with new ones. All in all, fanfiction writing can ease the burden of speaking on difficult topics that are tough or awkward to bring out into the open and supply fans with the supportive environment they need.

Many fan writers included sexual (smut) scenes in their romance narratives for their personal enjoyment and to further develop their own sexual literacies. Ashley Hedrick discusses a few fan writers who are over eighteen years old and began writing popular One Direction fanfiction between the ages of twelve and sixteen. These fan writers have upwards of 23.3 million reads. These young female writers were particularly good at writing sexual scenes for the huge audience of fan readers of One Direction and even got scouted for publishing deals. Hedrick states that “The main reason why these authors included sexual content in their writing had to do with the high demand for it among their readers” and the want expressed within their comments (699). Most fan writers tailored their stories toward this idea of smut due to the number of comments and views they would receive for including it. Their stories would be that much more popular. Hedrick noted that once most of her subject’s “readers provided positive feedback on their smut, they felt more comfortable writing it” leading them to grow in the fan community and develop more detailed writing skills (699).

Along with writing fanfiction for personal and fun purposes, speaking out about these difficult topics can permit therapeutic and necessary benefits for young readers and writers of fanfiction. During her time writing and publishing fanfiction, Ludi Price concluded that writing develops from a mode of self-expression and can be seen as a mode to manage emotional stress and promote self-worth. For most young female writers, this is important and crucial. Price elaborates on her younger years stating, “During my teenage years, dreams of publication promised a symbolic as well as actual means of surmounting the loneliness and inner turmoil I

often felt growing up. Indeed, I would turn to writing often during mental health crises in later years” (7). Writing fanfiction can also be a way for young females to cope with anxiety and stress. Much like other fans, Price discovered the fanfiction world online and finally felt like her voice was being heard. She entered a community where like-minded fans appreciated her work. From this, she gained “recognition, reassurance, confidence, and a measure of self-worth” from a supportive community (Price 7). Price writes about Jessica Pressman, who believes that fan writers see themselves in these stories. Pressman states, “We are interpellated into becoming selves and subjects when we write them too, and when we print them when we hold and look at them, it is into the mirror of self that we peer” (Price 18). This can be important for young female writers to see this grown-up, perfected version of themselves in print. This allows women to explore empowered versions of themselves which builds their self-confidence and ability to overcome challenges. They can look and read as many times as they want while feeling confident that it is published on these platforms for others, like them, to read as well. While the creation and negotiation of the idealized self through writing can be an unstable process, these practices are undoubtedly valuable for young female writers.

On a more positive note, Michael Schneider, a subject in Flegel and Roth’s article, has expressed great appreciation for the communal support they received throughout their fanfiction writing career. Schneider planned to write for a few weeks to stray from reality but quickly noticed that her popularity was growing. Her first fanfiction went on to become a top story which are stories that include popular genres such as romance, YA fiction, and fanfiction and have gained views and popularity. Flegel and Roth note that “For Schneider, the discovery that she loved writing, along with the positive reinforcement, contributed to her perception of herself as an author” (261). Her experience has allowed her to view her writing as serious and professional

rather than amateurish. She would've never pursued her writing career if she hadn't taken the first step in writing her own fanfiction and received grateful feedback and positive encouragement from the fan community. Michael Schneider is now a paid Goodreads author with three published novels. Many subjects of Flegel and Roth's research "noted that they would not have moved into professional writing without online support" (263). Nonetheless, these female authors still face complexities when moving from the fan writing community to more traditional writing and publishing. This change may require a different writing style, transforming fanfiction into something the companies want to publish, and transitioning into a professional writer.

All the writers that Hedrick interviewed also described the fan community as positive and beneficial to their writing and helped them develop their writing skills. They also made lifelong friends in the community and received "positive sex education and experienced decreased feelings of stigma and fear regarding sex" with more difficult topics (Hedrick 705). Regardless of the reason for writing fanfiction, these female writers are encouraged and greeted with support "through audience reception and constructive criticism" from their fan communities (Flegel and Roth 265). These online spaces continue to be a valuable and crucial place for young women to express themselves through fan writing.

### Chapter III

#### Developing Writing Skills and Literary Analysis Through Audience Feedback in Fanfiction

Female fanfiction authors who started young have matured within the online self-publishing platforms which are provided opportunities for learning and growth. Reader comments and audience feedback allow the writer to educate themselves on how to improve their writing creatively and academically. This can expose writers to deep critical thinking skills such as analyzing and critiquing source material, identifying motifs and themes, and recognizing different writing styles and techniques. With endless character images, fanfiction is also a valuable tool for young women to use when discussing vigorous and toxic relationships. With these ideas of critique and constructive feedback, writers “are able to put their own twists on the characters to enhance their storytelling” and further develop plots and characters, as well as academically edit and fix technical mistakes such as grammar and punctuation (Morozova & Pozharytska 91).

With audience interaction and critical feedback, these writers can learn or re-educate themselves on writing topics such as story pacing, character development, and reader responses. One writer in Flegel and Roth’s study noted that due to the confidence boost she received from her reader’s comments, she felt inspired to improve her writing techniques. The fan writer stated, “This confidence boost, particularly for new writers or for writers whose careers have been interrupted, as many women’s careers are, may be brought about by positive criticism, but such criticism might be essential for many women” (Flegel and Roth 266). Getting access to and understanding how to positively accept criticism is a skill that even most adults do not possess and a great way for young adults to make a debut in the literary world as well as academia.

The comment features of most online platforms allow a public aspect of fanfiction writing. Comment features allow writers to read and utilize reader feedback and improve as they continue to write the story. Writing these contemporary stories in an online environment:

Requires a flexible skill set that includes navigating new technologies; using digital tools to communicate, form relationships, and collaborate across contexts; designing and sharing information via digital texts; locating, analyzing, and synthesizing electronic information; and recognizing the complex ethical dimensions of online environments.

(Black 75)

Magnifico and colleagues conducted a linguistic analysis of FanFiction.net (FFN) and Figment.com to analyze “comments and suggestions that readers make and establish the content as well as the linguistic and social functions of these remarks” (Magnifico et al. 159). They note that FFN “includes a ‘reviews’ page for reader reactions and Figment includes space for both ‘reviews’ and ‘comments’” (Magnifico et al. 163). Fan reactions on these platforms include more positive, supportive reactions versus negative, critical ones, but both fan writing platforms allow readers “to locate specific issues with the story, such as places where the writer needed to add, correct, delete, reorganize, substitute or clarify content” (Magnifico et al. 163). Figment allows its users to differentiate between reviews and comments which can “encourage readers to provide these kinds of details in their responses to the work” (Magnifico et al. 163). They also comment that “Reviewing is a common practice in fanfiction communities, and constructive comments are often highly valued” (Magnifico et al. 159). Young writers become motivated to participate in these fan sites “as they develop relationships with their readers, reviewers and collaborators” (Magnifico et al. 158). These critical reviews, author’s notes, and “feedback have been shown to be a critical component of writers’ processes” (Magnifico et al. 159). These writers view this

critical commentary as helpful as it closely relates to the common practices of peer-reviewing and workshopping in the academic classroom. This process encourages writers to understand and accept constructive feedback and keeps their minds on track for academia. Not only do these writers get experience in taking and applying this critical feedback, but it gives them the tools they need to also participate in providing critical feedback to others.

When students participate in peer review in the classroom, they operate under a different set of objectives set by the teacher than when they read strictly for personal enjoyment. In an academic setting, students may look for grammatical and structural errors versus looking for errors with plot or character development, dialogue, and places where the story can be improved in a creative setting. In a classroom setting, students are limited and “required to complete certain assignments in certain ways,” but when writing on self-publishing platforms, they have more creative freedom during their writing process which can allow them to step outside of their comfort zone and let go of the rules of writing (Lammers et al. 195). They can discover more and connect with others with similar interests: for example, FFN gave Alexa, a young fan writer, “the freedom to pursue the plots and characters in which she was most interested whenever she wanted to write” while “the mandated, time-limited, rubric-driven nature of classroom writing, necessarily hindered the ability to adopt a writerly way of being” (Lammers et al. 198). Without the looming idea of being graded for assignments, students can write at their own pace and experiment with writing for themselves. This also makes writing more interesting and appealing to students. In each scenario, “Writers are encouraged to engage with and respond to feedback from their audience” supporting that audience interaction matters in writing (Lammers et al. 197-8).

Readers and writers outside of school can explore their own writing and narratives and use this audience feedback to “set new goals for themselves and provide motivation to reconcile their ideas with their readers’ reactions” (Lammers et al. 189). Fans are known to draw inspiration from current events, celebrities, and popular culture, so unlike the limited audience of teachers at school, fans interact with their online audiences who respond and connect back “by providing reviews and formative feedback” in turn motivating them to continue writing (Lammers et al. 193). The author’s note feature of FFN gives fans the opportunity to log notes and ideas, “respond to readers’ previous chapter reviews, anticipate readers’ reactions to the current chapter, express appreciation to certain reviewers, and address any possible issues with [the] writing, such as proofreading issues or writer’s block” (Lammers et al. 194). During her time writing fanfiction, Alexa was reached out to by Hope, an active beta reader who was interested in becoming a beta for Alexa. In the fanfiction world, betas are proofreaders. Before posting, Alexa would send her chapters to Hope and she would edit and comment changes and corrections to sentence structure, grammar, and punctuational problems among other technical things. The role of a beta encourages young writers to take leadership roles on these platforms and builds critical editing skills. Proofreading and editing fan writing is also a helpful skill and further supports the idea of learning how to utilize critical feedback.

In regard to receiving critical commentary, Flegel and Roth’s study highlighted a writer named Autumn Markus who “found in fandom a source of traditional literary criticism; feedback that helped her improve” (265). Markus noticed that mature readers gave her thoughtful feedback and critiques which only became more thoughtful and layered as her writing skills developed. This observation “suggests that fandom employs a complex form of criticism: one that can be generous to the new writer, but which can offer more” and “even though fandom can be a source

of cheerleading, this does not mean that thoughtful writers cannot distinguish between support and useful critique” (Flegel and Roth 265). These comments and feedback can lead writers to further develop their writing skills and enhance their storytelling abilities.

Specifically, young writers use this feedback to further analyze and study these popular characters and how they were originally written to enhance the characters for their own writing. Morozova and Pozharytska studied speech and sentence structure within *Harry Potter* fanfiction stories and concluded that in some cases, minor characters normally stayed the same whereas the main characters (Harry) changed in the fanfics (91). It is stated that this conclusion is also compatible with Harry Style’s characters in One Direction fanfics. In their study, they note that in most fanfics, Ron and Hermione display the same features as the canon, but Harry’s character has different features such as “he stops asking questions (a typical trait of a dependent personality) and starts giving orders (demonstrating his capability to be an informal leader)” (Morozova & Pozharytska 91). These changes to the main characters’ features and images reflect “the fanfic writers’ personal understanding or correction of the original text’s image as they see or would like to see it” (Morozova & Pozharytska 91). The comments the fans receive during the writing process allow them to explore and expand their writing skills by creating their ideal image of the main character to fit their story. Along with the positive character traits that include passion, assertiveness, or wit, fans also take these comments and tailor them to more destructive traits such as arrogance or violence.

Including sexual content in fanfiction not only stems from the writer’s traumatic past but can come from the desire of the readers. Ashley Hedrick conducted a study regarding Wattpad’s popular One Direction fanfics featuring Harry Styles that challenged the “conceptualization of youth fanfiction spaces by observing negative themes about romantic and sexual relationships on



the site” (696). It is stated that most male characters are portrayed as arrogant, violent, or sexually dominant, and female characters are naive, childish, or submissive. These character features can be seen as negative but challenge the writers to deepen their storytelling and character development skills. Adding to the popularity of the “bad boy” in fanfiction, Hedrick explains that:

Actions that qualify a character as a bad boy include narcissism, sexual and/or physical aggression, persistence in pursuing sex, overbearing jealousy, difficulty trusting the women with whom they are in romantic relationships, emotionally manipulating these women, infidelity, power and/or wealth, breaking the law or rules in general. (700-1)

Normally, when an author’s fanfics are on the darker side, they include “‘authors’ notes’ to readers accompanying real person fictions sometimes provided content disclaimers, warning readers that the author does not endorse characters’ behaviors” (Hedrick 696). Many of these writers began their writing journey on these platforms during adolescence, so Hedrick believes that the “unique experience of being an adolescent shapes sexual script development and the expression of these scripts online” (695). It is common for young writers to include “smut” sections in their fanfics, which are typically fantasy or sexual scenes. Writing sexual content into their stories is a common way for young female writers to explore their own desires as well as increase their views and popularity. In other words, women can explore their feminine sexuality and desire by using creative writing skills to rewrite and reimagine the original canon relationships and turn them into something more diverse. In doing this these fans can explore their fantasies and desires more explicitly through their characters. In their writing, they can even experiment with different relationships such as same-sex or polyamorous relationships that challenge the societal norms of romance. This can also be reflecting, empowering, and influential

in finding out who they really are inside. Hedrick asked a subject in her study why she included a smut section in her story, and she commented that her viewers would ask for it. Instead of writing what she wanted, smut was so popular that it was hard to turn down. Most female writers included smut because “they perceived the inclusion of smut to be a normal element of real person fiction that might boost their stories’ popularity” (Hedrick 698). Learning how to write sexual content not only enhances the writer’s skills but also provides valuable practice that most young female writers are not typically taught in school.

Another stereotypical fanfiction trope that attracts young female writers is the bad boy redemption arc and despite their negative traits, the mainstream “bad boy” and “asshole” characters have ample potential for redeeming qualities and character development. These qualities make for a good character arch and story climax and further test the limits for young writers. It is also important to note that these “bad boy” characters can also train the young female mind to stray away from these types of toxic relationships and learn lessons through reading and writing about such topics. The redemption character arches in turn can be healthy for young minds to teach them that people can change. Stories involving bad boy characters allow writers to explore multiple themes, some including “sexual aggression and patriarchal gender roles in the story” (Hedrick 701). The process of writing these characters includes creating complex backstories and plot development which can “create surprises” as the female characters “learn new aspects of their pasts” (Hedrick 701). Most bad boy plotlines involve the bad boy evolving into something desirable for the female protagonist due to her being his motivation to change which “clearly resonate[s] with existing literature on romance novels and other dramas” (Hedrick 701). Further, fanfiction serves as an effective means for young women when discussing dynamic and toxic relationships.

Aside from male roles, these young writers also use their narratives to bend and reshape the identities of female protagonists into the hero roles that are more formally taken up by men. Reading and writing characters in these heroine roles empower the youth to showcase intelligence and assertiveness. Regarding women authors, Hélène Cixous wishes that more women would write “and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs” (876). Cixous believes that “Writing has been ruined by a cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that’s frightening” (879). It is high time the literary industry moved past calling only established classics, socially accepted works, and popular names as real literature. At the time, talented female writers like the Bronte sisters chose male pseudonyms when publishing their work to avoid discrimination from the publishing industry. Even J.K. Rowling, whose actual name is Joanne Rowling, was advised during her early writing with the beloved *Harry Potter* series to use a gender-neutral author-writer name to avoid publishing industry discrimination, and this was in the 1990s. Considering the history behind female-written works and the negativity faced by female authors over the centuries, it is only natural that female-written fanfiction might be discriminated against until its value can be established long-term, and that requires giving talented fanfiction writers credit.

With these self-publishing platforms, the practice of engaging with different audiences through comments provides a supportive environment for young female writers to develop both their writing skills and critical literacy. Further, including these dynamic characters teaches young writers about character progression, turning points in narratives, and gender roles and

allows them to recognize and explore new writing styles and implement them into their own versions of the story. Having a respect for editing and practices of accepting criticism can directly connect to the revision and polishing aspects that are taught in the classroom environment. These practices only enhance the aspect of media literacy and serve as a useful resource in academic learning.

Although a creative outlet, fanfiction can be seen as a training ground for young writers and even a gateway to legitimate writing and professional careers. With audience feedback, fan writers can gauge what their audience wants out of their stories and what the publishers look for when scouting. Pleasing the fans' audience leads to more views and the possibility of being scouted, which is what most fans want. The more viral a fanfiction story is, the more chance the writer must get a traditional publishing deal to the built-in audience. Audience interaction continues to be a valuable steppingstone in demonstrating growth and writing abilities.

## Chapter IV

### The Legality of Fanfiction in the Literary World

By distinguishing between publishing and posting their creative work, fans can more clearly navigate the transition from the fan community to the publishing world. As fanfiction is becoming more accepted in the literary world, more publishing opportunities continue to exist for fanfiction writers. Along with traditional publishers, fans have the option to self-publish or publish with literary magazines or journals. Self-publishing companies such as Amazon's Kindle Worlds and Lulu have made their debut to help writers self-publish their fanfiction. Well-known publishers are known to scout fanfiction platforms for the newest talent and publishers have made publishing platforms specifically for fanfiction. Big-time publishers such as Simon & Schuster have even opened their houses to publish fanfiction. Even Jennifer Bergstrom, the vice president of Gallery Books, commented that "Fanfiction has absolutely become part of the fiber of what we publish." With these big-name publishers on board, there remain enemies of fanfiction with concerns regarding whether fanfiction is legitimate and publishable. Due to this, there is still a process to publish fanfiction writing and making sure copyright infringement is avoided.

While copyright infringement is a legitimate cause for concern in any creative field, progressive actions with self-publishing handles like Amazon's Kindle Worlds program credit new writers and the original work inspiring their fanfiction. After all, writing is labor. On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013, Amazon's publishing program launched Kindle Worlds, which published fanfiction stories. According to Flegel and Roth, "Amazon's Kindle Worlds was created so fanfiction authors could write in particular genres under the auspices of the original author's license" (255). Lipton noted that "Amazon obtained licenses from copyright holders of works with large

fandoms to allow the fans to commercialize their creative endeavors and sell them directly to consumers” (430). The program allows the author to gain some profits while Amazon sets the sale price and owns the license of the works. Flegel and Roth note that published authors “receive a small payment when someone purchases their work (at present, ca. \$0.99–\$3.99)” (255). Lipton adds that “The program also restricts what fanfiction authors can do in their secondary works: for example, crossover characters are not generally allowed under Kindle Worlds licenses, while they are not uncommon in traditional fanfiction” (430). In August of 2018, Amazon shut down the Kindle Worlds program to explore new opportunities regarding storytelling. The possibility of self-publishing not only offers upcoming fanfiction writers the opportunity to expand their brand past typical fanfiction stereotypes and into their own original series inspired by their fan work but grants the affordability to do so.

While fan writing offers great opportunities for feedback and editing, many writers, regardless of genre, may find issues affording a private editor or proofreading work from a publishing agency. When scouted by a big-name publisher, the author can rely on the publisher to cover all publishing expenses. The author doesn’t pay anything but gets paid in return. If a writer is unable to sign with a publisher, another route is self-publishing, where the writer pays to publish. It is important to note that some publishers may be more interested in seeking out narratives that have a big following or have “gone viral” and will pay big money to publish them if they know that they would turn a big profit.

While most authors would probably prefer to be traditionally published void of costs, many will turn to self-publishing if they cannot find anyone to publish their works. However, choosing self-publishing is still a valid way to publish. Self-publishing requires the writer to do the majority of the work: write, design, and distribute the book versus a traditional route that the

press assists with. The cost of book production substantially decreased during the 2000s when print-on-demand (POD) became more accessible, but writers still had to produce a decent amount of cash upfront to publish. Nowadays, the cost to self-publish a creative work can range from \$399 to upwards of \$2,000. “Self-publishing houses such as AuthorHouse and Xlibris” offered a cheaper alternative route for writers who wished to publish their work (Price 9). Other publishing platforms such as Amazon and Lulu observed this trend and began their own programs for self-publishing for anyone who could upload and print their manuscripts. Again, with these prices in mind, the majority of the self-publishing platforms still require the writer to do the total of the work, paying a flat rate for the platform to simply print the work. In addition to all the above considerations, self-publishing allows writers to gauge their audience, market to them, and continue to build somewhat of an audience base for future creative works. If they establish readers, even if it is a small amount, it could provide reasoning to gain credibility and possibly publish under bigger publishing house names in the future. Writing creatively requires heavy audience understanding to keep your writing interesting, and many fanfiction writers have been writing for audiences on platforms from early teenage years in some cases. As mentioned above, fanfiction writers already appeal largely to young female readers, and they likely already have an established audience following from previous writing platforms, giving them a head start in the process compared to those publishing work who do not yet have a fanbase or audience. With this, Price notes that some female fans’ intentions with self-publishing revolve around having a physical copy for them to hold and keep, rather than sell for profit. Platforms such as Lulu and Amazon can give writers opportunities to properly self-publish their work and in return, satisfy this need of having a physical copy for personal enjoyment.

Whether they are a fanfiction writer, comics writer, academic writer, or poet—success requires expert knowledge of language and writing. So, regardless of the genre or type of writer, writing alone should still be considered a form of labor. Even for those who excel at writing generally, creative writing requires an ability to engage readers with descriptive language, establish a connection with the audience, and understand what the audience needs. Subjects in Flegel and Roth’s study elaborate on writers of any type deserving publishing deals: “I don’t understand how a writer who starts in fan-fiction verses [sic] a writer who went the traditional route of submitting a manuscript to an agent or publishing house is any different. They both work just as hard creating their original work” (268). With that said, the world of fanfiction can be seen as less stressful than having a full-time career as a traditional fiction writer. Many confident female writers can handle the criticism and rejection that comes with publishing their personal narratives. As a professional writer who got her start writing fanfiction, “Camille Bacon-Smith comments that ‘media fan writing became a haven for some professional women writers’” but the nervousness around publishing still existed (Flegel and Roth 256). The *Twilight* series, among other popular fanfictions, gave young female fan writers the courage and push they needed “to own their fan work and be taken seriously—and even, perhaps, to make a living writing the stories they love most” (Romano). Some publishing houses that helped women carve out this niche for themselves were Malfunction Erotica, Mayhem Publishing, Omnific Publishing, and The Writers Coffeeshop.

On the contrary, some female writers are self-conscious and “struggle to find their voice in traditional publishing, simply because ‘there is a cultural expectation that women will be more diffident about their abilities than men’” (Flegel and Roth 260). Unlike the publishing world, the non-competitive aspects of fanfiction writing tend to ease female writers’ minds regarding



writing and sharing their personal work. Aja Romano writes in an article in 2014 that “the publishing industry is now learning how to content with fanfiction” after most of the female fans began to write, publish, and sell the fan works they loved. Still, as more fanfiction writers wish to publish their work, critics are prepared to criticize.

Aside from self-publishing submission guidelines and advancements that protect and award original authors when fanfiction is published, recognition for established writers who begin their projects as fanfiction pieces of popular canons can transform those fan-fictional pieces into original works and series. In short, as long as these writers follow the correct steps in self-publishing, they can avoid plagiarism claims and copyright from the original authors and critics. Bringing us around to the topic of copyright laws, Romano writes that “under current U.S. copyright law, if the argument can successfully be made that a work of fanfiction “transforms” the original work, then it’s perfectly legal to sell it and profit from it.” In this case, transform means that the narrative is an alternate universe of fanfiction where the original characters and settings are largely removed. It should be noted that this process can be vague and subjective depending on the jury. Meaning, that some people may interpret the laws of copyright differently than others. For example, a writer who is trying to get their *Twilight* fanfiction published enters a jury of people who are unaware of the copyright laws and have the support of Stephanie Meyers, they might approve the fanfiction to be published versus a fan writer who gets a tough group of jurors more acquainted with copyright laws and doesn’t have the support of the original author. According to Abrahamson, “Transformative has become a defensible word for fanfiction and derivative works, by which such genres as parody and satire are legal (genres that most people will agree are necessary aspects of popular culture and free speech)” (59). In general, publishers require replacing identical names and settings from fanfiction with those of

the original source to transform them into original works. Romano adds that “Authors often acted with the illicit partnership of agents and editors who would quietly seek out fandom authors whose writing they admired to ask them to submit works that could be easily adapted to an original setting.”

Critics of fanfiction remain quick to point out the potential for copyright infringement. This is especially true because the author-base skews younger and female with 80 percent of fanfiction writers noted as women and over half the users of online platforms being under the age of 25 (Hedrick 694). In a dominantly male industry, many feel that young women won’t be given the respect of knowing how the law works, so it’s easy to dismiss and take advantage of them in these cases. According to Zukauskas, “Most fan fiction is posted free online, so the majority of stories fall under the fair use doctrine, meaning that the fan fiction authors do not need permission to use an established author’s characters or world.” The fanfiction copyright laws “led to fandom’s most binding ethical code: As long as fanfiction remains strictly not for profit, it can reasonably be deemed fair use under the protection of current U.S. copyright law” (Romano). It is also noted that any breach of this code results in harsh criticism and legal action. Flegel and Roth note that “When authors fail to please by ‘breaking the code,’ they find themselves outside the system that once nurtured them” (259). In other words, it is understood in the fan world that most fan writing is primarily for hobby rather than profit. When the proper steps have been taken to publish fanfiction with proper permissions, they are met with support, but when these lines are blurred, the critics get involved. As self-publishing became more accessible, some *Twilight* fans registered the characters and titles of their fanfictions with the U.S. copyright office, which Romano notes “is perfectly legal if you own the copyright to your own work.” In 2010, a few *Twilight* fanfiction writers formed a new publishing company for

fanfiction named Omnific Publishing. These writers were reported earlier to Fanfiction.net for violating its terms of service for registering their characters and stories with the copyright office. Romano adds, “Among these were the authors of *The Office*, which would later be revised and published as the instant bestseller *Beautiful Bastards*.” When we continue to properly acknowledge female writers such as these, regardless of whether they are published with big-name publishers, we can celebrate their accomplishments and recognize their contributions to the literary world.

Establishing female credibility requires a realistic publishing process. Publishing work for the public eye to purchase establishes the title shift from writer to author. Having published work on the market grants female authors opportunities to be taken seriously, granting them the ability to reach wider audiences to enjoy their work. The notion that fanfiction is published on online writing platforms should not shake its credibility. Many fanfiction works do not branch out from fellow fan-fiction readers through digital storytelling platforms like Wattpad. Much fanfiction does not even get the same treatment and considerations as other literature simply because of implications that come with the genre, but lack of official publishing truly separates those works from well-known books. Once properly reviewed and published, a fanfiction piece is just as credible as other popular young adult novels and series. Credibility used to be determined by a select few professional publishers, but now with the internet, more people have the chance to have their voices heard. Realistically, with the ability to simply “trend” on writing platforms and apps such as TikTok with a simple hashtag, there is a wider result of the definition of credible. The broader definition of credibility has generated debates among critics regarding the legitimate and artistic importance of fanfiction writing. These conversations have brought light and recognition to the idea of fan writing.

Although there are many critics of fanfiction, “the strongest opponents tend to be the authors of the original text” (Abrahamson 61). Some authors such as *Interview with a Vampire* author, Anne Rice, don’t allow fanfiction on their websites versus E.L. James and Sylvian Reynard who “respectively made fortunes publishing books derived from their fanfiction based on Stephenie Meyer’s best-selling *Twilight* series” (Lipton 427). On the contrary, most of the readers and writers of fanfiction have no issues with writers beginning with fanfiction as long as the proper protocols are being made. According to Zukauskas, “*Outlander* novelist Diana Gabaldon, felt that fan fiction authors are stealing their audiences and have specifically asked their fans not to write fan fiction based on their work.” When fans make changes to certain aspects of the pre-existing works, it can be seen as disrespectful to the original creator’s vision. However, Scheider also speaks on the fact that some authors wouldn’t even recognize fanfiction stories that were based on their works. These ideas have led to the “fix it” genre of fanfiction “in which fans who are dissatisfied with some aspect of the canon of their source text compose their fiction to change or ‘fix’ what they perceived as ‘wrong’ in the canon narrative, either in defiance of the canon itself or striving to be compliant with it if the original authors are not consistent” (Abrahamson 62-3). The majority of the “fix it” genre is to elaborate on the inconsistent storylines among other things in the canon.

Among my research is J.R.R. Tolkien, author of *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*, who majorly disapproved of fanfiction. Interestingly enough, Abrahamson notes that Tolkien’s works can be seen as “improving upon certain medieval ‘texts’ he felt needed ‘fixing” (63). An example of this view is “the *Rohirrim*” which “might be an improvement on the (at least fictional, poetic, from medieval literature) Anglo-Saxons’ reluctance to have anything militarily to do with horses” (Abrahamson 63). In this aspect, “Tolkien even admits that the author of his

beloved *Beowulf* is a fanfiction author without any sign of reproach” (Abrahamson 69).

Considering the popularity of works like Tolkien’s, it is safe to say that fanfiction, though unofficially, has been at the heart of well-established writing for a very long time. There is no writing over the centuries that exists without some inspiration, guidance, or borrowing from previous works. The only difference is how the narrative is transformed.

In *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, a letter was included from Tolkien that had never been sent out. In the letter, Tolkien comments that he remains “puzzled, and indeed sometimes irritated, by many of the guesses at the ‘sources’ of the nomenclature, and theories or fancies concerning hidden meanings” (Tolkien 379). Tolkien adds that these ideas are ignorant and “valueless for the elucidation or interpretation” of his books and that if they were published, he would object to them for being unauthentic (Tolkien 379-80). It seems Tolkien was more upset by fans not considering his notes and appendices and “defiance of the given information on his nomenclature” (Abrahamson 61).

Unlike Tolkien, some authors have changed their attitudes toward fanfiction writing with time. Orson Scott Card, best known for *Ender’s Game*, “sent letters from [his] lawyers asking fan fiction authors to stop using [his] characters” (Zukauskas). It is later noted that Card later began viewing fanfictions of his works as free advertising. Realistically, “Fanfiction may attract more eyes to a given fandom and increase sales of, or interest in, the original works” (Lipton 434). Through his own experience, author of the *Wool* series, Hugh Howey, concludes that “Many writers who have made the transition, or who happily co-exist between fan writing and published work, already know: fanfiction is a different kind of work” (Flegel and Roth 257).

With this idea of intertextuality in mind, Lipton states,

Most readers and authors have no objection to a writer starting with fanfiction before turning to professional writing, provided that the professional writing is “original” and they do not repurpose their fanfiction as professional work without paying royalties, and providing appropriate attribution, to the copyright owner of the original work (438).

J.K. Rowling and Stephenie Meyer are a few known authors who support fan fiction. Meyer appreciates fanfiction but has mixed feelings on the legal aspects of the matter. She believes that the writers might be using up their creative knowledge of fanfictions that they will be unable to publish on their own. Interestingly enough, Meyer is aware of the *Fifty Shades* trilogy (which started as a Twilight fanfiction) but isn't concerned with copyright infringement of the stories. Meyer hasn't even read the trilogy because she claims it isn't her type of genre. J.K. Rowling, on the other hand, gave her fans her blessing to write fanfiction about the *Harry Potter* series. Overall, she was flattered that her series had such an impact on her fans. Rowling only requested that the fanfics remain non-profit and clear of sexual content. According to *Forbes Magazine*, another professional author, Celia Tan, who is a multi-genre erotica writer, was previously published with Big Five Houses, “anticipated that readers would write fanfiction based on her work” and encouraged fans to “get a piece of the action.” Tan understands that fan writing happens, and authors should be more prepared for it. E. L. James remains a prime and successful example of a fanfiction writer who wrote fanfiction of Stephanie Meyers' extremely successful *Twilight* saga and turned it into an entirely new series, *The Fifty Shades* series, that resonated with their own audience. Given E. L. James' individual success and audience base, though it began as a fanfiction, now qualifies as an entirely separate genre as a romance novel.

Regarding fanfiction, Flegel and Roth conclude that “at the end of the day, the product is still a novel” (268). Writing fanfiction supplies female writers with creative abilities, leadership,

and professional opportunities, and one fan in Flegel and Roth's study noted that the fanfiction community "showed a world where women dominate the marketplace" (262). This fan felt that this "led to imagining a 'marketplace' that not only treated women as legitimate writers but also where they could 'dominate'" (Flegel and Roth 262). This supports that the online fan community is crucial to writing as well as indicates that this community is a safe space for women writers "in contrast to the male-dominated world of published writing" (262). This fan also commented that fanfiction "introduced [her] to the connections that led to [her] getting published" (Flegel and Roth 263). Although fanfiction is still relatively new compared to other forms of fiction/writing, certain fanfiction authors have already experienced great success and established credibility as fiction writers.

## Chapter V

### Popular Examples of Fanfiction

Well-known series such as *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* have given young fan writers the courage to pursue their passion for writing and powerful female authors such as E.L. James, Anna Todd, and Cassandra Clare among others have turned their fanfiction writing into successful full-time careers. By taking heavy inspiration from popular YA series, these fan writers have found success just by changing their characters' names and identifying characteristics of the characters and were able to sell their books to publishers for major profits, skyrocketing their careers. In cases such as these, fanfiction was a gateway to professional writing for young females.

The *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* universes continue to be a popular topic within fanfiction writing and a way that young fanfiction writers can influence their creative talents to explore themes such as romance in ways that resonate with their readers. With women leading the way, Cuccinello notes that “There are over 759,000 *Harry Potter*-related fanfics on Fanfiction.net, the most on the site. (*Twilight* is second with over 219,000 works).” For instance, though the *Harry Potter* franchise contains only slight instances of romance, it is not the overarching focus of the series. Still, many fanfiction writers have adapted the universe in a way that explores romantic elements more heavily than the original—it provides an otherworldly setting for these writers to explore romantic intimacy, one of humanity’s most notable traits. With this in mind, the most common genre of fanfiction tends to be romance, written and read predominantly by women. *Forbes Magazine* notes that “Fanfiction.net reported in 2010 that 78% of their new users identified as female, and the Romance Writers Association (RWA) estimates 84% of romance book buyers are female” (Cuccinello). According to Cuccinello, “The romance industry reaped



\$1.08 billion, 34% of the U.S. fiction market, in 2013. Despite the buying power of female readers, romance novels command less respect, whether they are posted on Archive of Our Own or published by Random House.” Building on these popular themes and series, these young female writers have not only found creative expression but also opportunities for professional success by transforming their fanfiction into original works.

### ***Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James**

Paving the way for young female writers, Erika Mitchell wrote a *Twilight* fanfiction in 2009 titled *Master of the Universe (MOTU)* and posted it to Fanfiction.net under the username Snowqueens IceDragon (Icy). In *MOTU*, Bella Swan begins her journey with an interview with a rich businessman named Edward Cullen. In 2010, she moved *MOTU* from fanfiction.net to her personal website, 50shades.com. Icy’s fanfiction was later picked up by an Australian publisher, the Writer’s Coffee Shop, and published in 2011. During this process, *MOTU* was renamed *Fifty Shades of Grey* and Icy took the pen name E.L. James. *Fifty Shades* was published as an eBook and print-on-demand editions. Zukauskas notes that for *MOTU*, “the character’s names and other characteristics are altered so that the work [could] be published” which is a process known as filing off the serial numbers. Due to Goodreads fans spreading the word, Hollywood Studios took notice and began emailing James about the film rights. Deahl notes that “Once the studios came calling, James sought out Valerie Hoskins—she has an eponymous agency in London—who took her on as a client and remains her agent.” *Fifty Shades* was then republished by Vintage Books in 2012 when James signed a seven-figure deal with Random House. The novel spawned two sequels and a successful film adaptation for the trilogy making James “the most commercially successful fanfiction author of all time” (Cuccinello).

Rachel Deahl also comments on James' publishing process in her article. She explains that James still needed the traditional publisher, Vintage, to really reach her audience. Due to James' success, "The Writer's Coffee Shop could not handle the distribution demands" so Vintage Books stepped in (Deahl). Cuccinello notes in her article that "James has sold over 70 million copies worldwide, including print, e-books and audiobooks." E.L. James was named the highest-paid author by Forbes in 2013 "with \$95 million in earnings" (Cuccinello). All in all, James set the tone for the fanfiction world and encouraged countless young women to start writing fanfiction.

### ***After* by Anna Todd**

Anna Todd, a popular author who turned her Wattpad fanfiction into a best seller, was among many who were influenced by the *Fifty Shades* trilogy. Anna Todd started writing *After* in April of 2013 in her mid-twenties under the name Imaginator1D. *After* started as a fanfiction starring the one and only, Harry Styles, and a young college student, Tessa Young, who is attending her first year. The fanfiction was originally published on Wattpad, but soon turned into a series after her readership skyrocketed. The first book would be published a year later in 2014 by Simon & Schuster's Gallery Books "in a mid-six figure deal that included world and audio rights" (Reid). At that time Todd had acquired over 800 million reads. If you view the original story on Wattpad, the characters' names are members of One Direction even though they have changed the names for her published novel. According to Hedrick, "After garnering 647 million 'reads' on Wattpad, author Anna Todd secured publishing and movie deals with Simon & Schuster and Aviron Pictures, changing Harry Styles's name to Hardin Scott for copyright purposes" (693). The *After* series "became the site's most-viewed story of 2018 with over 1.5 billion hits" and "the books sold more than 15 million copies worldwide" (Nicolaou). It is

mentioned in Ramdarshan Bold's article that during the transition from Wattpad to hardcover, editors cut 582 pages as well as fixed grammar mistakes. Editors also removed side characters, changed names, and added more sex scenes. Originally, Todd was unsure about changing the names of her characters, but "before long, Harry became Hardin. Zayn was Zed, Louis was Logan, Niall was Nate and Liam was Landon, and they were just college friends, not bandmates. The only other copyright-concerned change was the tattoo on the stomach of Harry Styles." (Contrera).

In an interview with *Refinery26* Magazine, Todd was asked if she was writing to satisfy her fans, to which she commented, "It's just for myself. If I try to write for them what I knew they wanted, I feel like they'd be bored" (Nicolaou). Todd's narratives weren't based on her relationship with her husband, she just wrote for escapism and to satisfy her imagination, much like other young fanfiction writers. The *After* series was soon to be made into a movie franchise produced by Paramount Pictures in 2019 spawning a film series with five total movies. Considering Todd's success and personal drive behind her writing, fanfiction like hers potentially resonates with readers in ways that other works cannot. Most young fanfiction writers simply start writing to satisfy their own needs with a narrative they are interested in, so Todd's commentary proves that fanfiction, while always based on heavy outside inspiration from outside works, depends just as heavily on inspiration from the self. Todd continues to write and inspire other young female writers to explore the world of fanfiction and publishing. Since the *After* series, she has published multiple books and will release book three of *The Brightest Stars* series, *The Infinite Light of Dust* on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

***The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones* by Cassandra Clare**

Judith Lewis originally wrote *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* fan fiction under the pen name Cassandra Clare in her late twenties. Clare was working on the *Draco* Trilogy from 2000-2006 which highlighted a romance between Ginny Weasley and Draco Malfoy. The trilogy transitioned into her own successful series. She was the most popular author to come from the *Harry Potter* fanfictions and her novel, *City of Bones*, was picked up and published by Simon & Schuster in 2007. After a plagiarism scandal, *Forbes* Magazine comments, “Clare spent three years on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and in 2012, she signed a three-book deal reportedly in the high seven figures” (Cuccinello). Clare’s *City of Bones* book was adapted into a movie in 2013 and her *Mortal Instruments* novels were adapted into a TV drama series in 2016 called the *Shadowhunters* on Freeform. Cuccinello notes that the *City of Bones* film “was a bust at the box office, grossing only \$95.4 million on a production budget of \$60 million.” There were three seasons of *Shadowhunters* which averaged 2.2 million viewers.

### **Other Female Fans Turned Authors**

Another popular *Twilight* fanfiction turned novel was *The Beautiful Bastard* series by Christina Lauren. This was originally published in 2009 as an erotic romance titled *The Office* written by Christina Hobbs and Lauren Billings. This series was published in 2013 by Simon & Schuster after revisions and was made into a romantic comedy film by Constantin Film that same year. The two continued to write and in a 2018 interview, revealed that another novel they had been working on, *Roomies*, would be adapted into a TV series. Cuccinello notes that “The duo now has 20 books and 14 consecutive *New York Times* bestsellers under their belt.” In fact, many might be shocked at just how well fanfiction translates to the big screen, in some senses, just as well as their literary canon equals.

Some other professional female authors who started out as young fanfiction writers include Beth Reekles who first published *The Kissing Booth* on *Wattpad* in 2010 at 15 and Claudia Tan who published *Perfect Addiction* at 17. Tan's novel was published with W by *Wattpad Books* in 2022 and is now a part of the *Perfect* series. *Perfect Addiction* was later made into a film directed by Castille Landon and released in 2023. *The Kissing Booth* focused on best friends Elle and Lee, and Lee's older brother Noah. Reekles continuously posted chapters weekly on *Wattpad* for her readers. Alani Vargas wrote that Reekles, "shared on *TikTok* that she found young adult novels lacking in 2011 when it came to regular high school love triangles, so she wrote this to fill that void at 15/16 years old" (Vargas). *The Kissing Booth* won a *Wattpad* award for 2011 Most Popular Teen Fiction and when it surpassed 20 million views/reads, it was picked up and published by Random House in 2012. The series was later made into a popular 3-part movie on *Netflix*. Another writer-turned-author, Rainbow Rowell, started out writing *Harry Potter* fanfiction. Zukauskas notes that "One of [Rowell's] novels, *Fangirl*, tells the story of a fan fiction writer who pens tales about a young magician who is strikingly similar to J. K. Rowling's beloved wizard." Robinne Lee wrote *The Idea of You* in 2014 which was slightly inspired by One Direction's Harry Styles and is now a film set to release on Amazon Prime in 2024. A few other popular titles from *Wattpad* include *The Supervillain and Me* written by Danielle Banas, a fanfiction turned published novel, the *Demon's Lexicon* trilogy written by Sarah Rees Brennan, a *Harry Potter* fanfiction, and Deanna Cameron's *What Happened That Night* which is a published novel soon to be a movie (Tripathi). These stories all started on publishing platforms from young female writers testing the limits of fiction writing. Each of them turned into their own popular novels and have now become successful well-known novels and film series.

Sara Wolf began writing fanfiction when she was 11 years old. Wolf comments that it took her exactly two pages of reading someone else's fanfic to start drafting her own. She writes that she "explored all the contemplated feelings inside [her] through fanfiction and the world responded, and [her] love for writing books bloomed then and there" (Wolf). Like Wolf, Racheline Maltese wrote fanfiction at a young age in high school before starting her career as a professional romance author. Like most authors who started writing fanfiction at a young age, Maltese writes that she owes much of her success to her fanfiction writing days. According to *Forbes Magazine*, "Maltese landed her first book deal by responding to a Craigslist posting asking for writers to work on a *Harry Potter* trivia book" (Cuccinello).

Writers like Celia Tan dove into fanfiction after a career of being a published multi-genre erotica author. Tan was published "with the Big Five houses, including HarperCollins and Macmillan, before writing fanfiction" (Cuccinello). Tan notes that she discovered a supportive community of readers and a creative home through writing fanfiction. When Tan began writing romance fanfiction, she still saw herself as a multi-genre erotica writer, but soon realized that she could also write romance. Tan's *Magic University* series was inspired by her time writing *Harry Potter* fanfiction. Regarding her four-book *Magic University* series, "Tan also convinced the publisher to release a collection of erotic short stories based on *Magic University's* secondary characters, but she also wanted to let other authors 'write in her universe,' including fanfiction scribes" (Cuccinello).

It is not a shock that most fan writers take inspiration from other popular writers and interestingly enough, some well-known professional novelists have done this as well. This inspiration comes from people such as Jane Austen and William Shakespeare. Zukauskas notes, "The characters from Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* have been featured in everything from

murder mysteries, such as P. D. James's *Death Comes to Pemberley*, to horror stories, like Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*." Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet* were the base for some modern-day musicals such as *Kiss Me, Kate* and *West Side Story*.

Unbeknownst to many literary critics, fanfiction writing transcends the romance genre, frequently breaking into other popular sectors like science-fiction, action and crime fiction, fantasy, etc. In fact, a notable group of professional authors got their start with their own fanfiction works. Science-fiction writers, Lois McMaster Bujold (the Vorkosigan Saga) and Diane Duane (numerous *Star Trek* novels) wrote fanfictions, some of which were highlighted in the *Star Trek* fanzines. Hayley Cuccinello mentions other authors who started writing fanfiction such as "*Darkover* author Marion Zimmer Bradley" who "not only allowed fan works but published a few of them in official *Darkover* anthologies." She even includes a TV producer named Stephen Moffat, who was "a former *Doctor Who* showrunner and current showrunner for *Sherlock*" (Cuccinello). Contrera comments on crime writers in her article. "English crime writer P.D. James's Austen-inspired- book *Death Comes to Pemberley* became a BBC TV movie," which airs on PBS, and "Scottish crime writer Val McDermid's take on *Northanger Abbey* was published in April" of 2014 (Contrera).

These examples of successful female authors bring up the conversation of intertextuality and what role it plays in fanfiction. Intertextuality is the relationships between texts and plays a role in fanfiction writing by borrowing characters and settings, creatively transforming original works, and engaging in fan cultures. This writing allows fans to explore these narratives and characters, use their critiques to form new ideas and themes with their storytelling, and even transform these canons into different perspectives and genres. Fanfiction work also offers authors

a way to dig back into their love of writing. Published fanfiction is often quite different from the works that inspire them, and in many ways, is no different than literary canon authors that are celebrated as influential parts of society. All in all, writing fanfiction across genres not only led these female writers to publishing deals and successful careers but immersed them into a supportive community of fellow fan writers. Authors such as E.L. James and Anna Todd continue to inspire young female writers to pursue their passion for writing, often turning it into a career, thereby reinforcing the idea that fanfiction writing is a gateway to professional writing.



## Chapter VI

### Conclusion

Fanfiction writing offers young female writers a platform to creatively express themselves within a supportive and accepting community. It encourages them to share their voices and stories, which inspires confidence and skill development especially in an industry traditionally dominated by men. These platforms also provide a safe environment for these writers to explore personal identities and allow reflection of personal experiences through storytelling, enabling them to draw from their emotions to create compelling storylines.

Fan writing is influenced by fan writers, fan communities, digital media platforms as well as social media apps. Inside these self-publishing platforms such as Wattpad, Archive of Our Own, and Fanfiction.net, readers and writers can post helpful and encouraging comments enabling the writers to develop their own writing, critical thinking, and literacy skills. In fact, many writers use these platforms to build a fanbase for their work, connect with other writers, and establish an audience. All these factors only benefit a fanfiction writer who takes their story from a writing platform to bookshelves. Most fanfiction writers included in this thesis concluded that writing fanfiction helped their writing tremendously and boosted their confidence in writing.

Against critic's views, fanfiction has made a positive contribution to the literary world. Without it, we wouldn't have great series such as *After*, *Beautiful Bastard*, or even *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Regardless of the copyright laws affecting fanfiction, there are self-publishing platforms that provide paths for posting and self-publishing communities for young fan writers to continue their passions for writing. Along with the possibility of being recognized and published, many talented fan writers continued to write for pure enjoyment. In Contrera's article, the author of *Mr. and Mrs. Darcy Mysteries*, Carrie Bebris, comments that "the books we love the most are the

ones where you close the book and you're still thinking about those characters." Bebris' book features the main characters of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* who essentially solve mysteries together. Fans just want to be drawn into the narratives of their favorite canons "because [they] didn't get enough the first time," what is the harm in that (Contrera)?

Cassandra Clare's plagiarism scandal leads us to dive deeper into the difference between fanfiction and plagiarism. Although briefly similar, there is a distinct line between plagiarism and fanfiction involving proper credit and non-commercial intent. Plagiarism is more so about dishonesty and involves using or stealing someone else's ideas or work and using it as your own while fanfiction involves creatively reimagining and reworking the canons with respect to the original authors. When publishing fanfiction, writers ensure they have proper attributions and acknowledgements. When Cassandra Clare was accused by fans on Fanfiction.net of plagiarizing and cyberbullying members of the community, her work was removed in 2001, and she was banned from Fanfiction.net after a user accused Clare of plagiarizing *The Hidden Land*. Clare's plagiarism scandal can serve as a cautionary tale that shows how these fan fictional legal issues can lead to interpersonal pursuits between the authors and writers. Again, as long as fanfiction remains non-profit and is properly credited or labeled as fanfiction, no legal case should be made against them.

This thesis supports the idea that Fanfiction should be respected as its own subgenre of Fiction. Most critics obsess over copyright infringement surrounding fan writing when in reality, its significance is minimal if the proper protocol is followed. Fan writing should prioritize the creative passion and expression of writers versus copyright infringement issues. We should encourage young female writers to explore and appreciate fanfiction rather than criticize them. Authors should acknowledge and appreciate the contributions fan writers bring to their universes

and find inspiration in their work. In conclusion, although some opinions of fanfiction writing revolve around immature content and amateur writing, these stories should be taken seriously as a creative and legitimate form of writing that builds confidence and writing skills within young women. Embracing fanfiction writing as a valuable creative outlet helps enrich storytelling and contributes to literary history. In other words, we should not be ashamed of fan writing and instead continue to “draw [our stories] into history” (Cixous 881).

### **Future Extension**

The process of writing a thesis has been difficult, to say the least. There were certain topics that I couldn't fully research such as fan writers who have been sued, what that process looks like specifically, and maybe even using fanfiction writing as a creative writing workshop in schools. If presented with the opportunity to extend my research, I would delve deeper into the specific copyright laws associated with fan writing and see if there were any other fan writers, such as Cassandra Clare, who have had legal cases drawn against them for plagiarism, what those entailed, and how reputations were damaged or could be repaired. During my research, I came across Celia Tan, a multi-genre erotica author who reversed the typical process of fanfiction before professional writing. Essentially, Tan used fanfiction as a tool to get back into the groove and reignite her writing during a time of writer's block. Looking further into this idea and the use of fanfiction as a tool in this situation would be an interesting and helpful twist to my argument.

Regarding fanfiction used for educational purposes, I could also dive deeper into fanfiction as an academic tool. Something that was briefly mentioned in earlier chapters is the fact that these creative writing techniques fans use in fanfiction writing could be used in the

academic setting for creative writing workshops. This twist could sway members of academia into truly understanding fanfiction as a tool for developing creative writing skills.

### **Ending Remarks**

As a writer who also started out writing fanfiction at the young age of fourteen, I have noticed exponential growth in my writing. Most of my writing knowledge came from these early years of writing fanfiction and my courage came from the support of the fan communities. My innocent and naive mind just wanted to write about some boys that I liked from a dancing group and share each two-page chapter that I wrote with my nanny. I found so much joy and excitement in writing myself into these boys' lives. An imaginary place on paper where I had all the control. I imagined myself being friends with them, having relationships with them, and what it would be like to live in a world where I was the main character. The teenage version of myself solely wrote every day to keep up with my imagination. I wanted to take my daydreaming to a new level and have something I could re-read repeatedly. I wanted to create a version of myself that I was happy with, living the life I dreamed of. Similarly, a story that other young girls like me could also read and relate to, putting themselves in my shoes. Looking back, that feeling was empowering.

When I first made my Wattpad account, Harry Styles and Draco Malfoy were popular boys to write about. I read numerous fanfictions about One Direction and Hogwarts, which inspired me to write my own versions of them. It wasn't until I came back to writing a few years later that I discovered some Wattpad authors, like me, had gotten published and even gotten movie deals from their stories. This set things into motion for me. I felt encouraged and inspired that something that I loved doing could grant me an opportunity to branch out and share my stories with other young female writers like me. I realized I too could make a living out of doing

something that I loved. I could reach a larger audience and connect with more people like me as well as further develop my writing skills and earn money for it. To me, fanfiction remains a great way to show creativity and imagination in female minds, especially at a young age. Writing fanfiction has not only made me a better writer but highlighted what I want to do as a career.

I'd like to leave you with a quote from the great Hélène Cixous, "Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man; not the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the crafty, obsequious relayers of imperatives handed down by an economy that works against us and off our backs" (877).

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