

Novel in the Time of the Internet: A Closer Look at the Fanfiction Phenomenon

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DIPLOMSKI RAD

Novel in the Time of the Internet: A Closer Look at the
Fanfiction Phenomenon

(Smjer: američka književnost i kultura)

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INTRODUCTION

The fanfiction phenomenon can be described as a result of mainly two factors: the development of reader communities around literary texts and the rapid rise of the Internet. From “Janeites” who banded together over their shared enthusiasm for the works of Jane Austen and “Sherlockians” who held the demonstrations to bring back Sherlock Holmes, to the birth of the Internet age, all these elements came together to form fanfiction as it is known today. In the nineteenth century, many countries including United Kingdom, Prussia, and the northern part of United States of America introduced compulsory education. Many of them also passed laws that reduced working hours. More people than ever were able to read, and, even more importantly, they had the time to do so. Reading became a pastime and people started to get deeply invested in the works of their favorite authors. The sense of community among those people whose enthusiasm for their favorite literary works exceeded that of the casual readers only grew, and soon enough fan clubs were formed. People started to meet up and discuss their favorite novels. They started to theorize what was going to happen next, they grew attached to characters, and they started to share their theories and analyses. The introduction of the Internet into the sphere of everyday life brought such people closer than ever before. Fan communities (often referred to as fandoms) from all across the globe, which before the widespread use of the Internet relied mostly on pen-pal communication and fan conventions, suddenly had a way to share and discuss their interests without the hassle of traveling. Publication of fan-made content moved from fanzines to the websites, and the content itself became widely accessible. In turn, the increased accessibility of fan-made content influenced even more people to join the communities and contribute their own. Fan clubs that were formerly locally bound now had a way to globally expand. Fan-written stories about various cultural texts, more commonly referred to

as fanfics, began to flourish in particular. No longer did their distribution depend on various external factors such as the ability to print out fanzines and ship them to other fans. Advent of the Internet made it easier than ever to both read and share your own fanfiction. Websites such as *FanFiction.net* and later *Archive of Our Own* (AO3) were made to specifically host fanfiction. Fan works themselves were usually categorized by the relationships they depicted, genres to which they belonged, and tropes they employed. Some of these tropes were lifted directly from the field of traditionally published original literature, but others were constructed directly in the fan communities on the Internet. Soon enough, fanfiction and original pieces of fiction formed a two-way street; fanfiction borrowed its characters, worlds, and storylines from original fiction, and in return, original fiction began heavily incorporating tropes popularized and created by fanfiction. Specific sites were created to store only fan-written stories. *FanFiction.net* and *Archive of Our Own* (AO3) along with *Wattpad* all together host more than 35 million fan works. They cultivated their ecosystems with distinct mechanics, rules, and readerships. The rapid growth of the fan communities due to the Internet resulted in a more mainstream recognition of the fandom subculture and introduced the concept of fanfiction into the fields of literary and cultural studies. This master's thesis will discuss how original fiction and fanfiction seep into each other. The first part of the thesis will serve as an introduction to the world of fanfiction, going over its background, common terminology, and history. The second part of the thesis will place fanfiction into the broader cultural context and analyze the symbiotic relationship between original fiction and fan-written content through the ages.

FANFICTION 101

SETTING THE STAGE: FANFICTION AND CANON

In his work "What Is Fanfiction and Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things about It?" Thomas Bronwen offers this description of the concept of fanfiction: "The term fanfiction

(sometimes abbreviated as fanfic) refers to stories produced by fans based on plot lines and characters from either a single source text or else a 'canon' of works; these fan-created narratives often take the pre-existing story world in a new, sometimes bizarre, direction." (1) Bronwen defines fanfiction as something that needs another work to function; something which can be fully understood solely in symbiosis with the source text. He introduces the word canon into the mix, using it to signify the source text itself, something pre-existing and used as a reference from which the fans derive the characters, storylines, and even entire worlds. In his other text "Canons and Fanons: Literary Fanfiction Online" he further elaborates on the term in the context of fanfiction, describing it as something that is known by all the readers of the fanfictions, that is taken as a source (1-2). The reader is expected to be familiar with canon when reading fanfiction, to be able to recognize analogies between the source text and fanfic, and to already know particular story bits and character arcs. Traits and physical appearance, even the dynamics between the characters are already established, and fanfiction does not need to introduce its characters or spend time getting the reader to fall in love with them. Canon already serves that function well enough, otherwise people would not be interested in fanfic involving those particular characters. Fanfiction simply needs canon in order to exist; they coexist in symbiosis, and fanfiction feeds on canon interactions while securing a continuous interest in original work. It is a conversation between the community and the original text, deeply interwoven with the source text and yet open and accessible, simultaneously rigid and playful. Fanfiction transforms the source text, adding something new to the table, offering a new perspective, a missing scene squeezed between the canon interactions or a glimpse into the alternate world. Along with forms such as fan videos and graphics, it falls under the umbrella of transformative works; works that build upon already established material in such a way that copyrighted is not infringed. They parody, reference, criticize, and all in all, take the source material in the new

direction. In her work "Intimate Intertextuality and Performative Fragments in Media Fanfiction", Kristina Busse names fragmentation, intertextuality, performativity and intimacy as four core characteristics of such works and applies them directly to fanfiction;

There exist four interrelated aspects that are not restricted to fanfiction but that tend to be more pronounced in amateur transformative works written within a specific community: (1) fragmentation, the way fanfiction often tends to be part of an ongoing conversation; (2) intertextuality, a given story's dependence on community and fan text; (3) performativity, the conversational, community interaction component of many stories; and (4) intimacy, the emotional and often sexual openness and vulnerability readers and writers exhibit in the stories and surrounding interaction.

(45)

She touches upon fanfiction's connection to the original text, but also upon its connection to the widely used fandom tropes. In her understanding of that relation she relies on the concept of intertextuality first coined by the Bulgarian literary theorist Julia Kristeva. Kristeva explains the term using the idea of a mosaic pattern: "...any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another." (37) She comments on the work of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, discussing his conception of the "literary word", which is a dynamic dialogue between the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context, rather than a point with fixed meaning. She develops his ideas even further, defining the word's status as something simultaneously horizontal (belonging to both writing subject and addressee) and vertical (oriented towards the literary corpus). According to her, every form of discourse is influenced by both the other discourses the reader is familiar with and the broader cultural context. Discourse does not exist in isolation, it is shaped by a myriad of other meaningful texts that came before it and existing simultaneously as it. Although Kristeva's notion of intertextuality is inherent to all texts and also encompasses

their relationship to the cultural context as a whole, in the discussion of fanfiction, intertextually mainly pertains to the relationship between the source text, the fanfiction of the said text and other fanfictions. Inside those relationship parameters, fanfiction functions both horizontally and vertically; it is an interaction between the reader and the author, but also between the work itself and the entire fanfiction corpus. It serves as a hypertext, a text which transforms and references the original text, to the canon text, transforming and referencing it while also adhering to Gerard Genette's notion of architext. The term architext is best explained by Richard Macksey in his foreword to Gerard Genette's *Paratexts*: "The most abstract and implicit of the transcendent categories, the relationship of inclusion linking each text to the various kinds of discourse of which it is a representative." (18) Fanfiction is best understood when reader is familiar with the various texts and contexts surrounding it. For example, chatfics, fanfics written in the format of online chats, heavily rely on the popular culture and even memes of the time when it was written. Without the full context, chatfics are hard to navigate, and reader can soon get lost. A single fanfiction work is intrinsically linked to other works and to fanfiction as a whole. It is inherently intertextual. Intertextuality in fanfiction comes from both the source text and other stories in fandom, from both axes mentioned. The fanfiction reader is also expected to know the popular fandom terminology and storylines. Fanfiction authors offer their readers short summaries of their stories, and readers need to be aware of what they are choosing to read based on a couple of the common terms the fanfiction author chose to employ. Knowing all the keywords and being familiar with the source material helps to improve the experience; understanding the context of the fanfic and common fanfiction tropes the author plays straight, subverts, or deconstructs helps the reader truly appreciate the work. Seeing which gaps in the source text fanfiction author decided to fill in, which character to explore, and then juxtaposing the canon version with fandom one makes the reader understand the fanfic more. Aside from intertextuality, another important quality of transformative works Busse lists is performativity.

Fan works build upon an already established intellectual property, and fans do not own the characters they write about or the worlds they mention. In its rawest form, fanfiction is not profitable in traditional monetary sense. It is something made by fans and for fans, and authors are "paid" for their hard work in engagement, likes, and comments. Some of these authors go on to become quite famous in their fandoms; their works are always on top of recommendation lists other fans make, others are inspired by them to make fanart, their work has the most likes and comments. Fandoms run their own economy; sometimes authors threaten to withhold future chapters until they get enough comments on a chapter, sometimes fanfiction authors become such big figures that fans follow them in their ventures even when they start to publish original fiction (the case of Cassandra Clare who started her career as a popular fanfiction writer in *Harry Potter* fandom). Some fanfiction subgenres are simply more popular at the given moment; they generate more likes. Long fanfics also tend to fare better. Using already established characters and story bits helps authors with engagement and feedback. They can jump right into the thick of it, they can start *in medias res* without risking the general confusion and the lack of feedback. Engagement is also often secured by the common practice of posting one chapter at a time. Simply by looking at the works hosted on a fanfiction site such as *Archive of Our Own*, it is possible to tell that a large number of fanfics are currently unfinished. Some of those are works in progress that are still being actively updated. Others are simply abandoned and discontinued. Readers in the comments under those works often beg the authors to either update faster or continue writing, to neatly tie the whole story together. Busse addresses that fragmentation, that openness and the roughness of the story discussing the fact that sometimes even the author does not know where the story is going or what they want to do with the characters after the first chapter. They are in an open conversation with their readers in the comments, but also with the original work itself. In various corners of the Internet, the analogy often used to describe the relationship between fanfiction and canon is the child playing in somebody else's

sandbox. The author creates canon, the source material, and fans create fanfiction. They provide all the tools necessary; the sandbox and the toys, and fans create their own sandcastles.

THE BACKSTORY

Before discussing the concept of fanfiction further, it is important to establish its history. Works of fanfiction rely heavily on the context, and the notion of fanfiction itself is no different. It is simply best understood within its historical framework, keeping in mind various factors that helped to shape it into what it is today. Taking into account only the broadest definition of fanfiction and looking at the phenomena only through the lens of intertextuality, it is tempting to discuss its history in the context of such works as Dante's *Inferno* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Postmodernist works such as *The Hours* by Michael Cunningham and *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood also fit the bill quite a bit. Using the already mentioned definition of fanfiction Thomas Bronwen had offered, it is possible to reduce every work that employs intertextuality to a single common denominator and sort them all neatly under the fanfiction umbrella. That train of thought naturally leads to the conclusion that the history of fanfiction begins at the same time authors started to engage with other work in their text. However, bearing in mind Busse's elaboration upon the concept introduced in the paragraph above, it is also clear that fanfiction depends heavily on the community. The phenomenon of fanfiction does not only encompass the intertextuality and transformation of the given source material, it is a cultural practice involving the whole community. In other words, while Dante's *Inferno* heavily employs intertextuality, intertextuality alone is not enough to consider something fanfiction. The fanfiction phenomenon itself did not take shape as we know it until the middle of the 20th century. The idea of the author's figure changed over time as the concept of intellectual property was invented. Oral tradition gave way to print, and the author became a prominent figure. At

first, the term fanfiction was used exclusively in science fiction communities and it had widely different connotations; “Rather, it was either fiction written by fans and published in fanzines (as opposed to that by professional writers published in professional magazines) or fiction about fans and fandom, written as a joke for the people who were made gentle fun of.” (Sawyer). It was a term that referred to stories written by fans of the science fiction genre who were not writers by profession and who wrote more as a hobby. In addition, it was also used to refer to the stories written about the other fans in a sort of metafictional and joking way. Even in its infancy, the term fanfiction was interwoven with the idea of community. Fans wrote about the fandom, the other fans, and also about themselves. They published their stories in fanzines, publications run exclusively by fans and enthusiasts alike, and they poked fun at the community. Even though the term fanfiction meant something entirely different back then, it still encompassed the idea of communal spirit. With time, the concept of fanfiction began to evolve into the form that we recognize today. The notion of amateur written, fan stories was deeply entangled with the science fiction community, so it came as no surprise that the fanfiction phenomenon as we know it today formed right in the *Star Trek* fandom. Although it is worth mentioning that the *Star Trek* fandom was not the first one to create and share works that further explored the characters, plots, and relationships from already published material, it was the first one where such stories hit it big: “But *Star Trek* was the first fandom where fanfiction became so central it could sustain multiple fanzines devoted exclusively to fic. With *Star Trek*, fanfiction becomes a true collective . . . enterprise, the kind of super-social community affair it is today.” (Sawyer) Most of those fanfictions explored the relationship between James T. Kirk, the captain of the starship *USS Enterprise*, and Spock, the science officer and Kirk’s second in command who is half human and half alien, using the abbreviation K/S. At first, fans characterized their relationship as a purely heterosexual one and wrote about their strong friendship.

As time moved on, more and more fans began to embrace the possibility of a romantic relationship between the two, even going so far as to write erotic scenes featuring them. Most of these fans were female, such as Jennifer Guttridge who wrote possibly the first erotic fanfiction featuring Kirk and Spock titled *The Ring of Soshern*, and Audrey Baker who wrote *Green Plague*, the first K/S story to be published in a British fanzine. As Andy Sawyer elaborates even further in the study “I Am Woman, Read My Fic”, it was a perfect storm of widely accessible technologies of reproduction, TV shows with mass appeal, and even the sexual revolution that led to the flourishing of fanfiction fanzines. While the 70s saw the height of such magazines, with the dawn of the Internet age in the 80s and 90s, fanfiction began to move into the digital sphere which helped to spread it even further. The Internet helped to overcome the limitations of the fanzines which cost money to print and erased the last obstacles fanfiction faced before entering the mainstream culture:

In addition to speed, the internet brought anonymity. No more mailing addresses or phone numbers were needed to receive fandom news. At first, emails and IDs (anonymous or pseudonymous) sufficed, and then fan boards sprang up—many requiring no registration. Fanfiction became free, open, and public. Readers were free to lurk. Writers remained as anonymous as they wished—even to those who ran the websites. (Sawyer)

With the introduction of the Internet, fanfiction truly became widely accessible. No longer did fans have to depend on their geographical locations and conventions, or had to wait to get their hands on the latest fanzine. Fan writers did not have to attach their names to their fanfictions, they were free to write whatever they wanted under their chosen usernames. Even though *Star Trek* was widely popular, writing stories about it was still considered a niche geek thing and people attending science fiction conventions were assigned the pejorative title of nerds. The Internet simply provided people with the opportunity to live double lives; a chance to indulge

in their interests without the fear of being judged. Under the veil of anonymity, they were free to discuss everything they liked about their favorite shows or, rather, disliked. That anonymity coupled with the wide accessibility opened the door to the increased fan discourse, to the even more extensive analyses and to even more fan-created media. Such things were no longer reserved for “nerd” shows like *Star Trek*, large fandoms now began to form around the shows with more mass appeal which downright invited people to fill in the gaps in canon, to reshape the controversial storylines to their own liking. More and more people began to write and shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The X-files* exponentially grew in their online popularity. While those shows amassed large followings, with the advent of 1990s, the first mega fandom formed around the *Harry Potter* book series. It grew to such a size that some of the fanfiction writers became big names in their own right, gaining sizeable followings online, such as Cassandra Claire who later wrote her own book series titled *The Mortal Instruments*. *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer soon followed *Harry Potter*’s footsteps, slowly but surely allowing fanfiction to enter the mainstream culture. While Cassandra Claire gained fame in *Harry Potter* fandom and published her original fiction, E. L. James gained fame by publishing her *Twilight* fanfiction, *Fifty Shades of Grey*. With the publication of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, a book that began its life as fanfiction, fanfiction as a whole truly became a widely known phenomenon, leaving its status as nothing more than a niche hobby.

ENTER FANON

Although canon is what inspires fanfiction in the first place, it is not treated as something that is set in stone. Fans often create their own interpretations, picking and choosing what to focus on, interweaving their specific characterizations of the canon characters into their fan works. They each have their own ideas of how characters should act. Their ideas sometimes

get adopted by the entire fan communities, as Francesca Coppa writes: "And, in literature as in fanfiction, some interpretations or elaborations of the source are so great they become what fans call 'fanon,' that is, a take on canon so convincing or fun that it's adopted by other fans wholesale." (5). In contrast to canon, fanon is created wholly in the community, shared and passed around, constantly evolving and transforming. One of the most interesting examples of the fanon construct is the subsection of the Harry Potter fandom called the Marauders Era. Marauders Era focuses on the time when Harry's parents Lily and James were attending Hogwarts. The nickname Marauders is first mentioned in the book *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, referring to the group of friends consisting of Remus Lupin, Peter Pettigrew, Sirius Black, and James Potter who all attended Hogwarts together from 1971 to 1978. The four of them are given bits of characterization in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* and the subsequent books, and some storylines do indeed explore a tiny portion of their life at Hogwarts, but most of their schoolyears remain a mystery. Those schoolyears are often the central theme of the Marauders Era fanfiction along with the First Wizarding War in which all four of them fought. What is especially interesting about those fanfics are the other characters that appear beside the core four. While their characterization is greatly expanded in those fanfics, other characters get built almost from scratch. Regulus Black, the younger brother of Sirius Black whose canon characterization consists of a few lines about his defection from Voldemort, is given a sarcastic personality and a complex relationship with his brother. Some of his actions from the canon material get completely recontextualized, excused, and sometimes flat-out ignored. Fanon paints him as a tragic, misunderstood character. Other characters like Marlene McKinnon and Dorcas Meadows who are mentioned in canon even less than Regulus and whose official characterization can be boiled down to one line are regularly characterized all across the fandom and often paired up together. They have real hobbies, skills, and relationships. Some characters who appear in the Marauders

Era fanfiction do not even exist in the canon. They are completely fan-created. Grant Champman, a character who was created by an Archive of Our user MsKingBean89 and made popular by her Marauders era fanfiction *All the Young Dudes*, currently appears in more than two hundred works on *Archive of Our Own*. It is also interesting to note that the fanon is subject to constant change. In *All the Young Dudes* which was written in the period from 2017 to 2018, Regulus Black is openly bigoted and prejudiced. In many fanfics from that era, he is aloof at best and cruel at worst. He reached the status of tragic, misunderstood, and yet beloved character only recently. Thomas Bronwen comments on the fluidity of fanon in his paper "Canons and Fanons: Literary Fanfiction Online":

The fanon is something that is collaboratively achieved and subject to constant revision and updating. It is rarely prescriptive in the same sense that the canon can be, although usually fanonical material draws on rather than runs contrary to the canon, as fans pour over the minutiae of eye color, genealogy, etc. in the source texts. (2)

He juxtaposes fanon's fluidity with canon's rigidity. Fanon is playful and everchanging, and above all, a conversation. Fans create the rules but also break them constantly. Author's original intentions are not taken all that seriously. Looking at the fanfiction phenomena through the lens of the Marauders Era fandom, it truly appears that fanfiction took the power from the author and gave it to the fans. To further the sandbox analogy, fans have also started making their own tools. The author as a figure is long forgotten, their original intentions are truly irrelevant. As Bussen and Hellekson discuss it in *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*:

The interpretive power shifted away from the author and even the text. Instead, it resides in the process of reading and interpretation. Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" (1977) and Michel Foucault's "What Is an Author?" (1977) theorized a literature in which meaning always exceeded the author's intent; often meaning was

coproduced between author and reader. In a way, fan fiction might be read as a fictional embodiment of this collaborative reading process, although it is also a creative text in its own right. From its inception, fan fiction has always been multiple: entertainment, and analysis, original and derivative. (19-20)

"The Death of the Author" discusses how the text takes the power from the author and gives it to the reader; readers produce the meaning and play with it. The author's intentions get interwoven with the reader's interpretation, actively and simultaneously producing both the meaning and its analysis. The importance is placed on what the reader sees in the work, not on what the author meant to say. In a similar fashion, in "What Is an Author", Michael Foucault reviews the concept he calls "author function" or what constitutes the author. He questions the notion of the author as a singular entity and examines how it limits our understanding of the text. Instead of conforming to the idea of the single author, his ingenuity, and one true meaning, he argues in favor of various interpretations and cacophony of different voices. Fanfiction works in a similar way. Power is given to the fans and they form the meaning of the text. However they choose to interpret the text, they are not wrong. As Bussen and Hellekson mention, it is both a collaborative reading process and a creative text. It is both an interpretation of the canon and a creation of fanon.

INTO THE ALTERNATE UNIVERSE

A step further from fanon, there is the alternate universe. The term itself is often shortened simply to the acronym AU, and currently, on *Archive of Our Own*, there are more than 2,569,487 works under the Alternate Universe tag. While fanon usually represents an interpretation of the canon commonly accepted by fans, the concept of alternate universe is not strictly tied to canon. It still borrows the characters and derives some of the elements from its source

material, but it functions on a completely separate plane of existence. The term itself encompasses everything from changing an important plot point from the canon to completely displacing characters from their canon setting. It simultaneously serves as an umbrella for term mayor canon deviances, a sign of canon transformation, and an indicator of all the possibilities and realities in which the author could put the characters. Natalia Samutina takes a closer look at the alternate universe phenomena using *Harry Potter* fanfiction written in the Russian language as an example:

The 'alternativeness' of fan fiction universes varies from slight shifts in a series of related events, often made due to the desire to save some character from death or rotate the view on various characters and events, to the complete 'plowing' of the whole picture of the world, when even the laws of its existence change. (439)

Many of the fanfictions she analyzes are set in a non-magical reality, often substituting magic with science or sometimes even downright ignoring that aspect of *Harry Potter* canon. As an example, she mentions the fanfiction called *Shadow of the Barbed Wire* written by the user PurpleMall. *Shadow of the Barbed Wire* is set during World War II and focuses on the characters of Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy. Draco's father Lucius is the overseer at the concentration camp Dachau while Harry Potter is the prisoner. It is a historical piece of fiction and the only thing it shares with the Harry Potter canon are the characters and some transformed story bits. Characters themselves are molded to fit their new circumstances, and their personalities are changed slightly. Although the world itself is as different as it can be from the fantastical world of *Harry Potter*, there are certain parallels to the canon material. Death eaters, the evil pure-blood cult whose mission is to exterminate all those who were not born into magical families, are cast into the roles of Nazis in the story. Their canon role is well preserved, demonstrating all the creativity and thoughtfulness that went into creating that particular alternate universe. By clicking further on the Harry Potter fandom tag on *Archive of Our Own* it is also possible to

see tags such as high school AU, coffee shop AU, mafia AU, and even soulmate AU. The community itself creates those alternate universes and agrees on them, in the same way, it agrees on the fanon interpretations. Common rules and themes are set in place, such as coffee shop AU being a synonym for a relaxing fic without angst and soulmate AUs playing with the concept of predestined love, but fans are completely free to deconstruct and subvert those ideas. For example, some fans turn the idea of having a predestined match into a dystopian world where characters are denied a choice in who they can be with and other fans use the lens of coffee shop AU to talk about workers' rights and minimum wage. Especially interesting are types of alternate universes which use other pieces of media as their basis. Natalia Samutina mentions a few in her paper, such as the fic where Severus Snape from Harry Potter fulfills the role of Prospero from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and Peter Pettigrew acts as Caliban. Some other popular alternate worlds include the setting lifted from *The Hunger Games* book series, *Avatar the Last Airbender* animated series and even the Harry Potter books themselves. On the other end of the spectrum, we have the alternate universes completely created by fans from scratch. One of the most popular ones is omegaverse or A/B/O, an alternate universe completely inspired by “wolf power pack dynamics”. In her paper "Pon Farr, Mpreg, Bonds, and the Rise of the Omegaverse" Kristina Busse explains those dynamics:

Many A/B/O stories posit societies where biological imperatives divide people based on wolf pack hierarchies into sexual dominants (alphas), sexual submissives (omegas), and everyone else (betas). Beyond the biologically determined hierarchy, these wolf-like humans often have other wolf-like traits: they may scent their partners or imprint on first sight and often mate for life. Sometimes the alphas and omegas are rare, sometimes they are only males, sometimes they have altered sex organs. Often omegas go into heat and release pheromones that drive alphas wild.

(288)

In omegaverse fanfiction, characters are given secondary genders, depending on the author's understanding of their sexual dominance. Alpha status is usually given to the characters who are perceived to be more masculine, but it is not a hard-written rule. Characters that the fandom sees as meek and motherly are often assigned omega status, and in most cases, they can carry children regardless of their primary gender. Beta status is reserved for everyone else who falls in between. Sometimes authors play with readers' expectations or choose to look at the characters from another angle. Some of the authors are aware of the inherent patriarchy of the system and incorporate the critique of it into their fanfics while others play it straight. Characters can angst over the lack of omega rights, ponder their insignificance as betas, or try to resist their urges as alphas. At the time of writing of this thesis, there have been 198,916 works on *Archive of Our Own* tagged Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics with various approaches to the subject. Although, as Busse states, the idea of mating cycles could be traced to episodes of *Star Trek* and other elements of this particular universe can be found separately in other pieces of media, the concept of omegaverse was truly codified and coined on the Internet. It was simply brewed in a perfect storm and all the ingredients such as heat and wolf hierarchies blended together. The birth of the omegaverse is often credited to the fan community surrounding the American TV show *Supernatural*. The show, which features two brothers who hunt demons and supernatural entities, quickly exploded on social media sites in the early 2010s. The show's popularity on sites such as Tumblr which are geared specifically towards young people helped to spread the concept even further. Nowadays, it is common to find fanfics tagged Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics in most of the fandoms. Those fanfics generally follow the same framework that was introduced and shaped in *Supernatural* fandom, retaining such elements as heat, scent, and marking, while authors offer their own spin on it. Readers are expected to be familiar with the concept of omegaverse when clicking on a fanfic tagged as such and authors need to have at least a basic understanding of how the universe works when writing about it. No time is spent

on the world-building because fans should already be familiar with such concepts. This knowledge is shared across the communities in a similar way folk tales do. Francesca Coppa even alludes to this comparison in the title of her book, equating fanfiction to the digital age folk tales. They both rely completely on the community which constructs them and passes them down. Coppa stresses how fans are familiar with all the fandom terminology: "Fans have never had any trouble explaining themselves to themselves, or their work to each other, in essays written for zines or on websites like The Fanfic Symposium, or Metafandom, or Fanhackers, or Fanlore." (9) It is not something fans study extensively before entering the fandom or something that is a requisite knowledge before reading fanfiction, it is simply communally acquired. They simply become familiar with the terms and spread them even further.

ONLY ONE BED: TROPES, SHIPPING AND FEMALE SEXUALITY

Another piece of communally acquired knowledge are the common fanfiction tropes. On sites like *Archive of Our Own* which use an extensive tagging system, fanfiction is broken down in a very structuralist way. Authors tag the characters that appear in their fanfiction, romantic pairings of the said characters, trigger warnings, and tropes. Most of the common tropes are romantic in nature, emphasizing the dynamics between the pairing. Tags such as enemies to lovers, friends to lovers, and even strangers to lovers are often used to summarize the dynamics between the characters. Other tagged tropes often summarize the plot points present in that fanfiction, such as fake/pretend relationships, only one bed, and arranged marriage. They also rely on communal sharing in the same way alternate universes and fanon do. As Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse discuss in *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*: "Ideas and tropes are shared and disseminated, and fans share a common base of canon, fan texts, and context, with images and storylines that can be referenced at will." (196). Tropes also get reconstructed,

played with, and subverted. Fans pass them from fandom to fandom as they change their interests, bringing all the acquired knowledge with them. Plot points repeat. Tropes repeat. There is only one bed that characters have to share, characters who pretended to be in a relationship end up falling for each other, and bitter enemies find common ground and realize they are not so different, etc. It is interesting to note that fanfiction does share many tropes with traditionally published romance novels but unlike the Harlequin romances of the past and chick-lit literature of the early 2000s, it chooses to focus mostly on queer relationships. The most popular relationships, or ships for short, depicted on *Archive of Our Own*, are romantic pairings of two men. Fans often refer to the fanfiction which portrays that dynamic as slash fiction, and it is more often than not sexual in nature. It does not matter if they are friends, enemies or complete strangers in canon material only thing that matters is that the fans see a potential spark. Diana Floegel discusses queer fanfiction in her paper:

Fan-created queer content can transform narratives to provide satisfying stories within predominantly heteronormative mainstream media (Ng, 2008). Slash fanfiction can also demonstrate ways in which individuals with marginalized genders and sexualities redefine and resist patriarchal spaces (Hoad, 2017) and engage in social activism by opposing practices such as "queerbaiting" (Hofmann, 2018). (3)

Slash fanfiction serves as an answer to the patriarchal society of today. It is a form of escape and resistance to the mainstream media and heteronormativity. A lot of queer content in mainstream media is only found in subtext and requires a detailed analysis. Fans simply choose to bring that subtext to light and transform it into something more explicit. They put on their detective hats and try to decipher complex cultural coding. As Stuart Hall states in his influential cultural studies essay "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse", messages in media get encoded and it is up to the audience to actively try to decode them based on their own

social context. Various people can decode various messages in different ways. Fanfiction writers analyze the subtext, those encoded messages and often dissect the perceived queer-coding of the characters. Fan-created queer content simply acts as a representation of the people patriarchal society leaves behind. Sometimes when media creators become aware of their queer fanbase, they purposely up the amount of subtext without confirming or denying anything, baiting the fans into further engagement. Eve Ng comments on those practices in her paper:

I use the term queerbaiting to refer to situations where those officially associated with a media text court viewers interested in LGBT narratives—or become aware of such viewers—and encourage their interest in the media text without the text ever definitively confirming the nonheterosexuality of the relevant characters. (1.2.).

She references tv shows *Sherlock* and *Supernatural* as prime examples of the queerbaiting. Both shows had many romantic textual elements between their male characters which just invited fans to pair them up in their fanfictions. Although it is worth noting that one of those often paired-up characters in *Supernatural* admits he is in love with the lead in the penultimate episode of the show, he gets immediately killed in a true bury your gays and angsty unrequited love fashion. Fanfiction strives to correct those harmful tropes and engage in social activism, although it is worth noting that such activism is often limited to online spaces. Young women popularized the concept of fanfiction back in the 70s, writing *Star Trek slash* fiction which then got published in fanzines. They became active participants in creating the story they wanted to see, and not just passive readers. A lot of female fans write queer fanfiction, even those who are heterosexual. Joanna Russ takes a closer look at this phenomenon in her 1985 essay "Pornography by Women, For Women, With Love". She examines the romantic pairing of Kirk and Spock from *Star Trek* and through the lenses of that particular fandom she discusses the female fans who write slash fanfiction. She concludes that the motive for that behavior is rooted in the

patriarchal structure of society; young women project themselves onto the characters and become equal to the men, someone that a man could respect, and not treat as subservient to him. They do not see themselves as someone competent enough to save the world, they are insecure in their own bodies and sexuality, and they do not feel like they are enough. Fictional characters are simply there to fulfill the roles young women are unable to. Fanfiction is often openly sexual and explicit, offering a safe space to fans. As Russ writes: "The writers and readers of these fantasies can do what most of us can't do in reality (certainly not heterosexual reality), that is they can act sexually at their own pace and under conditions they themselves have chosen." (90). Fanfiction, in a way, represents the escape from a dominant patriarchal ideology. However, in giving fans an open space to freely express themselves and chose their own conditions, fans are also free explore thing that are far from progressive. One such example is the already mentioned concept of the omegaverse, which is rooted in biological determinism. Although fanfiction aims to give power to young women, it is also symptomatic of today's society and its capitalistic logic in which "anything goes."

FANFICTION AND YOU: THE BROADER CULTURAL CONTEXT

LAW AND ORDER: SPECIAL FANFICTION UNIT

One of the biggest discourses in the fanfiction world concerns the problem of intellectual property. Although fanfiction authors are often hailed for their creativity and the new ways in which they handle the already-written material, the fact remains that they write about intellectual property they do not own. It is, after all, someone else's sandbox. Some popular writers such as George R.R. Martin, the author of *A Song of Ice and Fire* book series, vehemently

oppose the concept of fanfiction. In his blog post from 2010 titled “A Few More Last Words”, he likens his characters to his children:

But let’s turn it on its head, and look at things from the writer’s perspective. As much as the fans may love our characters, we love them more. And suddenly we are confronted with stories in which other people are doing all sorts of things with our children... things we never envisioned, never authorized, and may even find stupid and/ or repugnant.

He calls upon the author’s original vision and discusses how the fanfiction stains the author’s intent, disliking how fanfiction authors put characters in different scenarios. He focuses on himself and his authority regarding his writing; after all, his characters are his intellectual property, his creations. They are, for all purposes, his children, and people are wrong for messing around with them and violating his vision. This stance, which hails the author as the central figure and worships his vision of characters, stands in opposition with the previously discussed "The Death of the Author" by Roland Barthes which celebrates the reader. It is important to note that the figure of the author with all its attached importance is a fairly modern invention that Barthes directly calls “the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology”. Capitalism as an ideology celebrates individualism and private ownership, so it is only natural that the figure of the author, a sole genius, the owner, is put on the pedestal in today’s society. It also appears natural to juxtapose the figure of the author with the fanfiction community, the individual with communal spirit, but dwelling further into it, that dichotomy appears more and more false. Although this paper so far has discussed the somewhat positive characteristics of fanfiction, equating it with folk tales and discussing how community creates ideas, characters, and even entire universes, how it popularizes tropes and builds upon romance novels, in recent years there has been a sharp turn in interest towards capitalism. It is unfair to paint authors such as Martin as wrong and fanfiction writers as right in this whole discussion, especially when fanfiction is starting to

lose its communal spirit. One example of such a case is a court drama reported in *The New York Times* article “A Feud in Wolf-Kink Erotica Raises a Deep Legal Question” written by Alexandra Alter. The article chronologizes the legal dispute between two authors; Addison Cain and an anonymous writer who prefers to go under the pen name Zoey Ellis. Both authors capitalized upon similar dark romance tropes; Cain published a book called *Born to Be Bound* which was an adaptation of her Batman fanfiction and Ellis, in a similar fashion, wrote a book called *Crave to Conquer*. At first glance, both books appear to be quite similar. *Born to be Bound* takes place in a dystopian future in which most of humanity died from a plague and the remained humans live under a dome. Society is divided into strict categories of Alphas, Betas, and Omegas. Shepard, a powerful, stereotypical Alpha takes captive an Omega woman named Claire. What follows is a large amount of aggressive wolf-like sex. In a similar fashion, *Crave to Conquer* follows a brutish Alpha emperor Drocco in his quest to capture the rarest of the rare; an Omega whose species is rumored to have died out one hundred years ago. Juxtaposed to him is Cailyn, a historian and an undercover Omega spy bent on protecting Omega secrets. Predictably, their paths cross out, and that results in a copious amount of roguish wolf-like sex. Similarities do not end there as Alexandra Alter elaborates:

In both books, Alpha men are overpowered by the scent of Omega heroines and take them hostage. In both books, the women try and fail to suppress their pheromones and give in to the urge to mate. In both books, the couples sniff, purr, and growl; nest in den-like enclosures; neck-bite to leave “claim” marks; and experience something called “knotting,” involving a peculiar feature of the wolf phallus.

On the surface level, those two works, produced independently of one another, share quite a similar world-building, and did not take long for Addison Cain herself to notice those similarities and to accuse Ellis of plagiarism. Following the accusation, most outlets such as the fabled Barnes and Noble pulled *Crave to Conquer* from their circulation. On book review sites such

as Goodreads, Cain's loyal readers began to flunk *Crave to Conquer*'s rating and leave comments attacking Ellis. Soon enough, Ellis' publishing company took Cain to court over the defamation claims while Cain persisted in her claims that Ellis' plagiarized her. In the rest of the article, Alter proceeds to draw attention to the fact that both authors borrowed their world-building from fanfiction. Taking a step back, it is possible to see many similarities with the already mentioned concept of omegaverse; from using the strict wolf pack hierarchies and tropes such as heats, pheromones, and mating claims. Alter also interviewed professor Kristina Busse for her article who offered her insight:

“They are not very original, either one of them,” said Kristina Busse, the author of “Framing Fan Fiction,” who has written academic essays about the Omegaverse and submitted expert witness testimony for the case on Ms. Ellis's behalf. “They both stole from fandom or existing tropes in the wild.”

Busse refers to the fact that the whole concept of omegaverse was created in the fandom; the whole omegaverse genre seeped into original literature right from the fanfiction. Both Addison Cain and Zoey Ellis borrowed heavily from fandom and although Cain tried to claim ownership of the notion, the fact remains that the omegaverse existed in the fandom spaces long before she published her book. It was communally shared knowledge, in the way all fanfiction tropes are, and writers such as Cain and Ellies simply applied it to original literature. They both profited out of something created by the fanfiction community, and Cain even tried to restrict others from using the same tropes as her. They are not the only ones who monetize a fanfiction trend. Omegaverse now constitutes a whole genre of dark romance literature, boasting, at the time of writing, 8,411 works tagged as such on Goodreads. The whole legal dispute serves as an evidence of fanfiction crossing into the sphere of original works, coining and defining the whole romance novel genre. It is no longer fans writing omegaverse fanfiction for other fans, now it

is authors writing omegaverse fiction for monetary profit. Fuelled by the need for profit, fanfiction is starting to seep into original literature and the previous one-way street is truly becoming a two-way hyper highway.

FROM ROMANCE NOVELS TO FANFICTION; ROMANCE THROUGH 1900S AND 2000S

Considering the target audience and the tropes and plots employed, it is possible to explicitly link romance novels with the concept of fanfiction. They simply tap into the same market, and it did not take long for publishers to notice that. Enter Stephanie Mayer and *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the book which began its life as an erotic *Twilight* fanfiction titled *Master of the Universe* and was traditionally published in 2011. *Fifty Shades of Grey* is often credited as the romance book that broke BDSM into the mainstream, and while the publisher tried to downplay its fanfiction origins at first, claiming that it is mostly an original work, that claim was soon disproven by various sources (in his study about fan labor and profit, Bethan Jones mentions that plagiarism software found *Master of the Universe* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* 89% similar). The author, under the pseudonym E.L. James, simply renamed Bella Swan Anastasia Steele and turned Edward Cullen into Christian Grey. Converting *Master of the Universe* into was also made slightly easier by the fact that *Master of the Universe* was conceived as an alternate universe fic; it is set in modern times, in the world where vampires do not exist and Edward is the multimillionaire CEO of his company. Soon after publication, *Fifty Shades of Grey* exploded in popularity and sold over 150 million copies worldwide. Although this paper has so far focused on the queer aspect of fanfiction and tried to answer why young women write such stories, it is also interesting to notice that the book which has brought the mainstream attention to the field of fanfiction is in its core a heterosexual “love” story. The structure and revised characters of *Fifty Shades of Grey* share many similarities with the traditional Harlequin romance novels

of the 1930s and 1940s which follow a rigid formula. Tania Modleski offers a detailed write-up of those Harlequin dynamics:

... the formula rarely varies: a young, inexperienced, poor to moderately well-to-do woman encounters and becomes involved with a handsome, strong, experienced, wealthy man, older than herself by ten to fifteen years. The heroine is confused by the hero's behavior since, though he is obviously interested in her, he is mocking, cynical, contemptuous, often hostile, and even somewhat brutal. By the end, however, all misunderstandings are cleared away and the hero reveals his love for the heroine; she, of course, reciprocates. (437)

Edward/Christian is older than Bella/Anastasia by six years and he is in a position of power. She is thrown into his confusing world, and while he is obviously interested in her, he treats their relationship as purely transactional, at least at first. Later, just like the hero, he starts to open up and show his vulnerability. Even though *Fifty Shades of Grey* contains copious amounts of kinky sex, it is still rather traditional in its relationship dynamics. By looking at *Fifty Shades of Grey* from both angles, keeping in mind that it simultaneously exists as both a fanfiction and a popular romance novel, it is possible to consider fanfiction as a natural evolution of the romance novels of the past. Fanfiction retains elements of what made romance novels popular in the first place while adding a contemporary spin to it. Comparing the two, Harlequin novels of the past with *Fifty Shades of Grey* it is also obvious that *Fifty Shades of Grey* is a lot more sexual. The crux of both the *Master of the Universe* fanfiction and its revamped version is BDSM kink – bondage and sadomasochism. Although the interplay of sex and violence is not exactly something new in the romance novel sphere, the 70s and 80s, in particular, had their fair share of so-called bodice rippers; gothic romances that featured explicit sex scenes, and violence, the Internet has made it easier than ever to discuss such matters. On social media sites such as TikTok, on which users film themselves and share skits, commentaries, and their own

opinions without the veil of anonymity, communities have been formed to discuss literature. Content creators who participate in that particular subsection of TikTok, which is often referred to as *BookTok*, regularly publicly discuss sex scenes and ask each other what is the “spice” level of various books. There is an interesting contrast to be drawn between the open and unashamed sexuality of such books and the traditional patriarchal dynamics they portray: this is also apparent in the already discussed genre of omegaverse which follows a rigid set of social norms. Even though fanfiction is often celebrated for its sexual openness, it is still in some measure symptomatic of today’s society. Considering all this, a new question arises. How does the slash fiction fit in all of this? Undoubtedly, slash makes up a large part of fanfiction as a whole. On AO3, out of 13,168,260 works published before writing this thesis, 6,336,663 contained slash fiction. While *Fifty Shades of Grey* fits the standards set by Harlequin novels, the same cannot be said about slash fanfiction. As Deborah Kaplan argues in “Why would any woman want to read such stories?: The Distinctions Between Genre Romances and Slash Fiction” a lot gets lost by flipping the gender of the romance novel protagonist. The power and gender dynamics are not so front and center in slash fiction as they are in romance novels nor is the emotional component as prominent as in good old Harlequin novels, Kaplan concludes. However, both romance novels and slash fiction share a similar role; they are female wish fulfilments and a tool of escape. As discussed in the section “Only one bed: tropes, shipping and female sexuality” of this thesis, women project themselves onto characters in a gay relationship because the power balance between the characters is not as drastic as in traditional romance novels. But in spite of that, even though fanfiction often serves as a form of escape from the heteronormativity of today’s world, slash omegaverse fanfiction which reverts the power dynamics back to the patriarchy is still insanely popular. It appears that it is impossible to completely escape reality and the dominant ideologies, even in fanfiction. Nonetheless, when stripped down to bare essentials,

slash fiction and romance novels share the same purpose as Catherine Salmon and Don Symons discuss:

In sum, perhaps the main lesson to be learned from analyzing slash is the rather banal one that the more things seem to change in the domain of human mating psychology, the more they actually remain the same. Romances mainstream novels and slash stories alike—are in essence female fantasies about overcoming obstacles to achieve the perfect mateship. (98)

Sometimes the obstacles are mundane things that result in a comedy of errors, sometimes the obstacles are as dire as different social statuses. It all needs to be faced and overcome, the perfect partner must be found. This core similarity helps to slot slash fiction and fanfiction as a whole into the wide history of the romance novels genre. They are both fantasies, mostly written by women and mostly aimed towards other women and queer people.

AMAZON AND MARKETABILITY; THE PITFALLS OF FAST-FOOD NOVELS AND THE CASE AGAINST FANFICTION

The foundations of the case against fanfiction have already been built in the previous parts of this thesis and they concern two critical points: authors' disapproval of using their intellectual property as a basis for something else and the mass commercialization and commodification of fanfiction. As Mel Stanfill puts it in her work “The Fan Fiction Gold Rush, Generational Turnover, and The Battle for Fandom’s Soul” fanfiction used to function on a gift-based economy. This economy still had its rules, some authors still rose to the top and reaped the benefits, but money was not involved in the traditional sense. Fans shared what they wrote with the community and expected the community to give back not in the form of monetary compen-

sation, but in feedback. With the massive success of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the fanfiction landscape has irrevocably changed. Publishers decided they wanted their share of the market and as Stanfill further writes: “Amazon.com entered the market with its 2013 announcement of the Kindle Worlds platform, which would allow authors to sell fanfiction e-books for certain intellectual properties for which Amazon had negotiated license.” (77). With that announcement, fanfiction became something that now could be sold. Other authors also changed a couple of things in their fanfiction and tried to replicate the success of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Some succeeded, such as Anna Todd the author of *After*, a fanfiction pairing up her own original character Tessa Young with former member of *One Direction* boyband Harry Styles. Other people started binding, printing, and selling fanfiction on sites such as Etsy, profiting from someone else’s intellectual property. Some, such as Addison Cain and Zoey Ellis started a legal battle over perceived shared property. Sense of gift-giving community is slowly getting lost in, as Stanill calls it, a fandom gold rush: “It is, rather, the result of capital—in this case, book publishers—seeing something that could have value extracted, but isn’t being extracted currently, and extending extraction to it.” (81) All that is not to say that *Fifty Shades of Grey* is solely responsible for fanfiction taking a strong turn towards the capitalism; it merely served as a catalyst. In 2002 and 2012, the popular fanfiction site *FanFiction.net* deleted all stories that featured adult content in order to make them more advertiser-friendly. *Wattpad*, another popular fanfiction site also heavily features ads. Out of all fanfiction giants, only AO3 sustains itself exclusively on donations. Still, even AO3 benefits the market economy as Abigail De Kosnik discusses in her web exclusive essay:

... there is yet another way in which active consumption, or production by consumers, benefits the larger market economy: consumers who “freely” (with no constraints and for no pay) express their opinions, their likes and dislikes, about various

mass products on various websites, provide marketers and manufacturers with key information on their customer base.

Through the fanfiction world, book publishers can learn what their target demographic likes and dislikes. They can visit fanfiction sites and see what is popular at the moment and try to replicate that. Those sites are a source of invaluable information in today's world. While capitalism continues to slowly seep into the sphere of fanfiction through fanfiction's connection with romance novels, romance novels begin to face the problem arising from fanfiction; reducing books solely to the tropes they employ. It is easy to find what is popular, what tropes get clicked on and what is not, which fanfiction characters are popular, and which setting readers prefer. On Goodreads, a popular book reviewing site, popular tropes such as enemies to lovers constitute as a new genre. Already mentioned tropes such as only one bed and fake/pretend relationships are used to describe books. On the *BookTok* side of TikTok, authors such as Alex Aster have based their entire marketing campaigns on advertising their books based on the tropes which they contain. One of her more popular videos, which at the time of writing this thesis has 145 thousand likes, is titled *Convincing You to read my book solely based on its tropes*. TikTok is a platform built upon short videos, and paradoxically, aspiring writers need to break their work into as few words as possible in order to cater to TikTok's algorithm and viewers' short attention spans. Just like fanfiction published on AO3 which is broken down into tags in order to be more accessible and attract readers easier, romance books are getting broken down into tropes in order to achieve higher marketability. Fanfiction did not invent all the tropes its authors frequently employ, but AO3 did put tagging tropes in its front and center. Considering that the target demographics for both fanfiction and romance novels are mostly the same, and the recent bloom and mainstream acceptance of fanfiction, it is not a stretch to link the two. Especially if we consider fanfiction as an element in the evolution of romance novels, placed right in the middle of growing Internet use and late-stage capitalism. Even if there is no strict

cause-and-result relation between the two, but are the symptom of today's society which prefers to have its literature easily digestible. Fanfiction also serves as a massive source of key information for book publishers and authors who can easily search what is popular, easy to consume, and most importantly, what sells, effectively churning out novels in quite a similar way as fast food. Everyone is speeding up on the metaphorical hyper highway, chasing profits and crashing into each other.

CONCLUSION

The core element of fanfiction is community. Looking at its inception, Sherlock Holmes fan clubs, and *Star Trek* conventions, that much is evident. The community takes the already existing intellectual property, plays with it, and deconstructs and reconstructs it. It creates fanon, builds an alternative universe, and popularizes tropes and dynamics. It tries to deal with the problems of today's world in the best way it can; trying to answer gender and sexuality struggles, to combat the patriarchal system through writing. The focus is not on the figure of the author, but rather on the collective, on fluidity rather than rigor, in a similar manner as it is in folk tales. At least, that is how it was at first. In the last fifteen years, there has been a sharp turn toward the monetization of fanfiction. With the popularity of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, fanfiction has officially entered mainstream culture and it now functions as another link in the evolution of the romance novel genre. Conceptually, fanfiction is moving from the form of folk tales to the form of proper novels, with an increased focus on author and marketability. Paradoxically, original intellectual properties are becoming more and more like fanfiction, relying on tropes popularized by fandoms. This brings us back to the title of this master thesis which references the novel in the time of the Internet. To conclude, it is only fit to say that in the time of the Internet, fanfiction and novels are rapidly seeping into each other under the influence of capitalism. Fanfiction is becoming the novel of the Internet age.

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ABSTRACT:

This master thesis provides an in-depth analysis of the fanfiction phenomenon in relation to both the Internet and fan communities while touching upon the connection between novels and fanfiction, and how they shape each other. The first section of the thesis describes what fanfiction is and the main criteria for something to be considered fanfiction. It delves into the historical development of fanfiction, tracing its roots and discussing the role of the Internet in its popularization, while also taking a look at common fan practices that surround it. Furthermore, it examines the way knowledge and tropes are communally shared in the context of fanfiction, how alternative universes are constructed, and the core differences between the terms canon and fanon. In addition, the first section of the thesis also touches upon the topic of female sexuality and how young women express themselves through fanfiction. The second section of the thesis takes a more critical approach towards fanfiction, bringing to light the problems of intellectual property and the capitalist context in which fanfiction is produced. Moreover, this section places fanfiction into a cultural context of today, connecting it with the romance novels of the past. Furthermore, it examines the implication of commodification in fan communities through the lens of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the book that started its life as *Twilight* fanfiction and then became a global phenomenon. In addition to that, using the concept of *BookTok* as a source, this section also takes a look at how the publishers and authors are starting to market their original novels in the same way fanfiction authors describe their fanfiction. The thesis concludes on a note that fanfiction is conceptually moving more and more towards the form of proper novels while novels are taking sharp turns towards presenting themselves in a similar way as fanfiction does.

KEYWORDS: FANFICTION, FANDOM, INTERNET