Fanfiction As:

Searching for Significance in the Academic Realm

A Thesis by

Megan Friess

Chapman University

Orange, CA

Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

May 2021

Committee in charge:

Ian Barnard, Ph.D., Chair

Joanna Levin, Ph.D.

Justine Van Meter, Ph.D.

The thesis of Megan Friess is approved.

Ian Barnard
_____
Ian Barnard, Ph.D., Chair

Joanna Levin
_____
Joanna Levin, Ph.D.

_____
Justine Van Meter, Ph.D.

May 2021

Fanfiction As:

Searching for Significance in the Academic Realm

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my committee: Dr. Ian Barnard, Dr. Joanna Levin, and Dr. Justine Van Meter. Thank you for your active and enthusiastic support of my writing on popular culture and fanfiction, a topic that could have easily been dismissed as not being academically rigorous. Thank you for all of your guidance as I sought to prove that fanfiction is an underexplored reservoir of writing that deserves serious consideration.

Dr. Barnard, thank you for being my thesis advisor and supporting me through every step of this thesis process – from the first days of the Teaching Composition course, where the beginnings of a solid direction for my thesis started to form, to today where that initial curiosity has blossomed into a complete thesis. Your steadfast support and encouragement are what allowed me to gain confidence in my idea as something that was truly worth to be written about. I appreciate all of your feedback while I was writing and thank you for the various books and articles that you recommended to me, all of which were integral to my thesis and my development as a scholar. Through your support, I was able to branch out and explore a variety of aspects in Literature, Rhetoric and Composition – and even discovered the existence of Fan Studies.

Dr. Levin, you were the first person in an academic context to whom I ever said the word fanfiction. It was in one of your office hours while I was in your Literary Theory & Critical Practice class during my first semester as a graduate student. The idea of a thesis was intimidating to me, but you reassured me and offered advice even as I shyly brought up the idea of writing a thesis around something such as fanfiction. You did not hesitate to say that it would be an interesting idea. Thank you for all of your encouragement and advice.

Dr. Van Meter, your Fairy Tales & Cultural Theory class helped to shape my thinking around how stories change over time and are adapted by different people and cultures. This line of thinking was integral to my thesis work, especially thinking about how fanfiction can be viewed as a transformational activity that has real-world impacts. Thank you for listening to my excited babbling before and after class as I connected fairy tales to modern marketing to religious symbolism and more. Thank you for being open to my thesis when I first emailed you with my proposal and for encouraging me along the way.

To my family, thank you all for your love and enthusiastic support. None of you ever hesitated in telling me that my idea to write about fanfiction for my thesis was a great one. Not only did you not hesitate to support me, but you were extremely excited at the prospect of my thesis. Thank you for listening to me go on for way to long about how fanfiction connected to ideas around popular culture, elitism, dealt with issues such as copyright, and interacted with different forms of digital and non-digital technology. I am sure it was not quite as interesting to you as it was to me when I started getting deep into what an individual book had to say on the subject, but you let me talk anyway and even asked questions that lead to new avenues of thinking for me. To my Mom, my Dad, and my sisters, Jillian, Emily, Ella, and Kate, I love you and am so grateful for you. Thank you all so much.

ABSTRACT

Fanfiction As:

Searching for Significance in the Academic Realm

by Megan Friess

What is literature? What is art? And, just as importantly, what isn't? What criteria are you using to make this judgement call? As natural as we feel our views to be, they are not; they are culturally and socioeconomically based. How and when we live affects what we see as literature or art and what we deem not to be. While there was originally a large chasm in Western cultures between what was considered to be "proper" art and literature and what was considered lowbrow and for the uncultured masses, this divide has diminished over time. Instead of everyday people acting as simple consumers of mass media and popular culture, they are often a part of a participatory culture in which they react and contribute to larger conversations around different types of media and culture. A prime example of people moving beyond bland consumption into active participation is fan culture, especially activities such as writing fanfiction.

What is fanfiction? To give a broad definition, fanfiction is a work of fiction written by a fan that uses the characters, storyworld, or plot of an already existing form of media such as a book, TV show, or movie. But this is a deceptively simple definition for something that is rather complex in reality. Because fanfiction is derived from an already existing work, it is often derided as plagiaristic. However, this view misses the fundamental basis of fanfiction. Fanfiction authors are not merely copying, pasting, and then publishing the words of the source material. Fanfiction is these fans' reaction to the source work, grown out of love, frustration, anger, hope, and more.

Additionally, fanfiction brings together groups that are often on the margins of mainstream media, such as LBGTQ+ individuals, people of color, and people with mental or physical disabilities. It also serves as a community learning space where people are able to practice their writing and language skills in a low stakes, supportive environment. Fanfiction is an underexplored reservoir of writing that deserves serious consideration similar to other forms of literature.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Fanfiction as: The Popular vs the Elite

What is literature? What is art? And, just as important, what isn't? What criteria are you using to make this judgement call? As natural as we feel our views to be, they are not; they are culturally and socioeconomically based. How and when we live affects what we see as literature or art and what we deem not to be.

Traditionally in Western cultures, aristocrats and other upper-class persons were the ones to determine what was considered to be art and literature because they were the ones with the money to commission the creation of such works. As times have changed, writers and artists no longer need a patron in order to create and thus their work has multiplied exponentially in amount, subject, and form. Because this work is no longer regulated by an aristocratic patron's taste, work that does not fit the traditional desires became more common. Whereas there was originally a large chasm between what was considered to be "proper" art and literature and what was considered lowbrow and for the uncultured masses, this divide has diminished over time. With less power in the hands of an elite few in society, their status as the arbiters of what is good literature and art lessened as well.

As is to be expected, not everyone was willing to let this happen. There was plenty of fear of the seemly uncultured, uneducated masses that made up the majority of society's population. If the elite no longer defined what is proper and good when it comes to literature and art, then it would

devolve and become pedestrian or vulgar. Two of the largest proponents of this fear-filled view are Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

Adorno and Horkheimer, in their famous paper "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" present the idea that because of the rise of capitalism and mass or popular culture, there is a loss of individuality. They argue that mass culture causes everything to become the same, a low-quality mass-produced product. Their ideas arose due to their experiences around World War II and Nazism, and the fact that in the United States there was not much diversity in the ownership of technology or types of technology in general. Because of these monopoly-like structures among the entertainment industries, Adorno and Horkheimer claim that the products and culture derived from these industries discourage people's imaginations by doing their thinking for them. To participate in mass or popular culture is to surrender to and wholly adopt the producer's thoughts and opinions without critical reflection. While Adorno and Horkheimer are Marxists and consider themselves to be on the side of the working class instead of the elites, their argument that mass culture is low brow tends towards an elitist view. They assert and lament that mass culture products do not have a unique style, saying, "the inferior work has always relied on its similarity with others" (Adorno and Horkheimer 37).

Despite their alignment with Marxist philosophy, Adorno and Horkheimer operate from an elitist perspective that many other proponents of mass culture theory who are not Marxists share. Many of these people, such as F.R. Leavis, Q. D. Leavis, Dwight MacDonald, and Richard Hoggart, are opposite Adorno and Horkheimer, being deliberately classist and working from an elitist position of nostalgia. They argue that mass culture erodes traditional values of morality and intellectualism. They seem to long for a time when the working-class folk culture was pure,

happy, and content to be subjugated by their intellectual or otherwise 'betters.' This time is presented as a kind of utopia where people worked together and existed in harmony while the upper-class elites – the aristocracy and intellectuals – were the arbitrators of proper taste, art, and culture.

Adorno and Horkheimer, and other proponents of mass culture theory, see sameness and loss due to the rise of popular culture. But I do not agree with one of their base assumptions that this argument is built on - the idea that people mindlessly consume the culture that the entertainment industry is presenting to them. Instead of passive acceptance, I believe that people do not simply passively accept things, but actually have a broad range of reactions to the media that they consume. While Adorno and Horkheimer think mass culture leads to a monopoly, I argue that in the present day it has led to a widening of accessibility for many people to create and spread their ideas. Popular culture provides a space for wide and diverse thoughts and creative activities.

Instead of acting as simple consumers of mass media and popular culture, people are often a part of a participatory culture in which they react and contribute to larger conversations around different types of media and culture. Henry Jenkins, a prominent researcher of participatory culture, examines one of the most prime examples of people moving beyond bland consumption into active participation - fan culture. In his groundbreaking book, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, Jenkins uses his status as both an academic and as a fan to argue for an opening of people's minds when it comes to fan activities and culture. He defines the fan subculture as one that "cuts across traditional geographic and generational boundaries and is defined through its particular styles of consumption and forms of cultural preference" (1) which works against the common stereotype that casts fans as white, middle-age, antisocial men.

Though mostly focusing on the culture revolving around TV shows and movies such as *Star Trek*, he showcases how fan culture is much more diverse than the stereotype suggests. Jenkins' book highlights fans as "a group insistent on making meaning from materials others have characterized as trivial and worthless" (3).

Fans find media derived from popular culture to be more than trivial or worthless, that is why they are considered fans at all. They find passion in something and react to it in some fashion - the very definition of participatory culture and not at all the passive, mindless consumers that some mass culture theories, such as Adorno and Horkheimer, believe them to be. *Textual Poachers* sections fan culture and activity into five different, though highly connected, areas: "its relationship to a particular mode of reception; its role in encouraging viewer activism; its function as an interpretive community; its particular traditions of cultural production; its status as an alternative social community" (Jenkins 1-2).

One of the most common forms of fan activity is writing fanfiction. Fanfiction is a piece of writing where the author uses the plot, characters, or storyworld of a certain piece of already published work such as a book, TV show, movie, videogame, etc. to create their own stories. There is a variety of forms and styles in which fanfiction is written. Some common tropes of fanfiction include rewriting events that happen in the canon world of the published work such as changing the ending, or reviving a character that died, or creating an alternative universe in which the characters live, or a crossover. Crossover fanfiction happens when the characters of one movie/book/etc. are placed into the storyworld of another movie/book/etc. Another form of crossover merges the storyworlds of two or more works.

With roots going back centuries, fanfiction is not a new phenomenon. Reaching back to Greco-Roman times, there is a long literary tradition of borrowing, stealing, copying, and adapting parts of (or even whole) existing works and transforming them in a new work. Works of the Greeks and Romans, such as Homer, often "involve creative digression from and elaboration on an original fictional source" (Knudsen). Despite its ancient origins and traditions, fanfiction has boomed in recent decades, especially with the rise of the internet. This boom stems from a rise in dissemination and accessibility of popular culture through avenues of the internet. With sites such as YouTube and various streaming services, movies and more are at people's fingertips any time of the day. E-versions of books and online shopping sites such as Amazon allow books and other forms of media to be purchased and accessed with a click of a button. The internet has democratized publishing, in that anyone with a desire to publish a work is able to do. A novel no longer needs to go through a traditional publisher, be printed and bound, and then distributed to bookstores and libraries in order to reach an audience. Through the internet, anyone can reach an audience by simply pressing a few buttons. Self-publishing online circumvents the gatekeeping of traditional publishing while still allowing a work to be accessible to an audience. Most notably for fanfiction is the rise of fanfiction hosting websites such as Fanfiction.net and Archive of Our Own which exponentially expanded both access to fanfiction for readers, new audiences for authors, and a community for any interested fans.

Despite this rapid expansion and wider participation, fanfiction is still often denigrated, overlooked, and ignored. Fanfiction and other associated activities have often been dismissed as popular or lowbrow culture and as mere base entertainment for the masses. Working against the line of thinking that Adorno and Horkheimer's theory of mass culture has perpetuated, I argue that fanfiction has much to contribute to educational and academic fields such as literature,

composition, and creative writing. In this thesis, I examine fanfiction through a couple of lenses. Firstly, the view of fanfiction as plagiarism or theft is contrasted with the idea of fanfiction as transformative and creative. In the next chapter, fanfiction is positioned as a community space where marginalized people such as LGBTQ+ individuals, people of color, and people with mental or physical disabilities are able to find representation. In addition to fostering a community, fanfiction also functions as a learning space. Fanfiction writers and readers are able to practice their writing and language skills in a low-stakes, supportive environment. Finally, through the example of using fanfiction in my own first-year composition classroom, fanfiction is depicted as a valuable yet underexplored resource for the academic realm.

2 Fanfiction as: Plagiarism vs Transformation

Americans have an obsession with the idea of originality. This may not be immediately apparent at first glance but when we look at how the concept of originality interacts with the idea of the American Dream, specifically the idea of the self-made man, then the obsession becomes clearer. The self-made man ideal stems from the emphasis on individualism that American society is rooted in. A person works hard which eventually leads to financial or socioeconomic success. This image defines a successful life for many Americans; to do anything else is to fall short.

The self-made man is an independent individual. He does not rely on anyone else to achieve his goals; instead, he pulls himself up by his bootstraps, goes to work, and is rewarded for that work by future financial success that is the hallmark of capitalism. It is the self-made man's independence from others that breeds the obsession with originality. The ideal, the myth, implies that only the man's own hard work will be what leads to his future success. Therefore, to rely on others - to not achieve something solely through individuality and independence - is a possible threat to the reward of money and success.

The idea of the self-made man and his need for originality is so ingrained in American culture that it bleeds into other cultural myths. One example of this bleed-over is the Romantic myth of the genius author toiling away alone in his ivory tower to create his masterpieces. The mythical solitary author intersects with the self-made man through their isolation from others. Everything this author produces is from the vast, generative space of his imagination, thereby making sure

that the work that he produces is sui generis - one of a kind and wholly original. The author then reaps the fruits of his labor such as fame and fortune, markers of success that mirror the rewards of the self-made man.

For both of these cultural ideal myths (or possibly more accurately one ideal and its sub-manifestation), originality equals financial gain which equals success. The problem here lies in the implicit assumptions around the idea of originality within these myths. The self-made man and his artistic friend, the solitary genius author, are based on the idea of independence being a prerequisite to originality. These ideals operate within a vacuum where creation is spontaneous and without influence. This is impossible. No person can create without influence. Originality is not a lack of influence but the taking of any number of influences, ideas, and thoughts, and then mixing them all together to transform them. It is through this transformation that something new is created. Even pieces of art and literature that are held up as pinnacles of mastery and originality are not immune to influence. A long history of stealing, borrowing, and inspiration paves the road that leads to today's literary landscape.

2.1   The Classic

When thinking of great classic works of literature, Western cultures first turn to works from Ancient Greece and Rome. However, they may be disappointed because originality meant something very different to the people of that era. "The ancient Greeks, who believed that the muses were the source of all inspiration, actually had no terms corresponding to "to create" or "creator." The expression "poiein" ("to make") sufficed. They believed that the inspiration for originality came from the gods and even invented heavenly creatures - the Muses - as supervisors of human creativity" (Tanabe). To the ancient Greeks, originality in literature and art was not

something created by a human, but divinely given, therefore meaning that creation inherently involved inspiration and influence. Borrowing characters, plots, and more from oral legends and stories and repurposing them into new works was commonplace. The Greek rhetorician-philosophers "Gorgias, Alcidamas, and Antisthenes ... plac[ed] ... canonical tales and characters into a new context — making epic heroes into sophists of varying skill levels, with the resulting new versions of their personae and new ways of relating to each other" (Knudsen). Using characters and plots that would have been familiar to their audience was a way in which the ancient Greeks conveyed new knowledge and ideas.

The Romans were not so different. The *Aeneid*, one of Virgil's famous works and commonly assigned for students in high school and college to read, openly claims relation and inspiration from Homer's *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad.* Aeneas, a minor character from Homer's *Iliad* finds new life and adventure in Italy with some of his fellow Trojans after their loss in the war with the Greeks. A heroic saga not too unlike that of Odysseus's journey. This work is not dismissed or frowned upon today for its clear borrowings; instead, it is held up as a classic for modern students to read and learn from. Moving forward a couple of centuries, Dante's *Inferno* continues the tradition of borrowing and inspiration. Pulling the landscape of hell largely from Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante (as a character in his own work) is led through hell by the character version of Virgil. In his *Inferno*, Dante mashed together elements from not only the *Aeneid* but also the *Bible* and Greek Mythology. The use of these elements is seen by modern readers as something to be studied and dissected, not disparaged.

One of the most well-known plays of William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, is shameless in its copying from other, earlier works. And, in reality, there was nothing shameful about his actions

when Shakespeare was alive. "Shakespeare himself was an adapter, taking existing materials from various sources and crafting them into 'new' artistic creations" (Fischlin 1). Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is based on a poem from 1562 called "The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet" by English poet Arthur Brooke, who in turn, copied the story from French and Italian versions that were popular at the time. There were at least two popular Italian versions of what would come to be Romeo and Juliet written by Luigi da Porta and Matteo Bandello (with Bandello building off of Porta's work), and a French version written by Pierre Boaistuau who adapted Bandello's work. Similar to the ancient Greeks and Romans, people of Shakespeare's era did not view originality as being without influence, but the transformation and adaptation of the old and the familiar. To the audiences of his day, "Shakespeare's originality was as much a function of his skill at adapting pre-existing sources as it was about his vast knowledge of how to convey narrative effectively across a range of theatrical genres" (Fischlin).

What is John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* but a rewriting of the creation story in "Genesis" from the *Bible* in which Satan is portrayed as both protagonist and antagonist simultaneously? Milton adapted and changed the story of Satan's fall, Adam and Eve, and more to suit his purpose of exploring this book of the *Bible.* Perhaps the most interesting facet of Milton's adaptation is that he has Satan enter the Garden of Eden and take the form of the serpent that tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Contrary to this portrayal, in the King James version of the *Bible,* the serpent is not attributed as being Satan but simply a beast that inhabited the garden: "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (*King James Bible Online*). Milton changes the story of "Genesis" in a fundamental way. He altered the identity of the original story's antagonist which has resounding implications for the

story of Adam and Eve's fall from grace that are different from the original. Milton's creative changes in his poem broadens the possible interpretations of the original story. *Paradise Lost* is not a simple retelling of "Genesis," and does not shirk from the knowledge that it steals from the *Bible* and changes the stories. Instead of being accused of unoriginality and plagiarism, Milton's poem is a piece of high literary art in American culture and schooling.

All of the works mentioned above are considered classic pieces of western literature, a part of the literary canon. At the exact same time, based on the modern American conception of originality, all of these works can be considered to be fanfiction.

2.2   The Modern

The literary tradition of stealing, borrowing, and being inspired by older works experienced a shift around the 18th and 19th centuries. To write started to be profitable, a profession instead of something reserved primarily for the privileged and already wealthy upper classes. Writing as a money-making profession gave rise to the myth of the solitary author, creator of masterpieces. In order to protect their literary and financial livelihoods, the concepts of literary ownership and copyright began to form.

The change in the conception of originality and the rise of copyright is where fanfiction gets stuck in limbo. While fanfiction clearly follows the literary tradition of inspiration and borrowing, it tends to run afoul of modern copyright law. Negative reactions towards fanfiction by source authors tend to fall along a couple of lines: 1) viewing fanfiction as an infringement on the financial livelihood of the source author, 2) viewing fanfiction as something that will cause them to lose their copyright for their work, and 3) viewing fanfiction as an infringement on the source author's control over the interpretation of the work.

While not called 'copyright' in the United States Constitution, Article I, Section 8, Clause 8 states that Congress has the power "To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries" (*The Constitution of the United States of America*). Soon after, the Copyright Act of 1790 was created which described copyright as "An Act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, Charts, And books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned" (Copyright Act of 1790). These two early documents structure the purpose of copyright in the United States as something to promote creativity and innovation through public access to that knowledge. The way that copyright was enacted was that the author of a work was allowed the exclusive right to publish their work for a fourteen-year period. This temporary monopoly on the publication of their work enabled the author to make money. After the copyright on the work expired, anyone was allowed to print and sell a version or to build off of the work. The limited copyright was seen as a way to encourage creation and invention (through the creator being able to earn an income) and also to promote public knowledge and progress through allowing others to expand on the work once the copyright had expired. Copyright law at this time was intended to encourage creativity but that soon changed.

Copyright laws started to focus more on possession and potential profits of a work than on the promotion and proliferation of creative knowledge. The Copyright Act of 1976 extended the term of protection, the monopoly, to the life of the author plus fifty years. Moving fully away from the literary tradition of copying and inspiration, it codifies such things as derivative works:

A "derivative work" is a work based upon one or more preexisting works, such as a translation, musical arrangement, dramatization, fictionalization, motion picture version, sound recording, art reproduction, abridgment, condensation, or any other form in which a work may be recast, transformed, or adapted. (Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17) and Related Laws Contained in Title 17 of the United States Code 3)

Derivative works are then constrained because of their possible potential for financial gain which is seen as a threat to the copyright holder. What describes fanfiction more than 'derivative work?'

The allowance for use of copyrighted works without permission is called Fair Use. "[T]he fair use of a copyrighted work …[is] for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research, is not an infringement of copyright" (Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17) and Related Laws Contained in Title 17 of the United States Code 19). This exception is heavily regulated with a variety of factors used to determine whether or not the use of a copyrighted work falls under fair use or is considered an infringement on a source's authors rights:

> (1) the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes; (2) the nature of the copyrighted work; (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work. (Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17) and Related Laws Contained in Title 17 of the United States Code 19-20)

The Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 was created to extend the protections and control

of U.S. copyright laws to the wild expanses of the internet. Title V, Protection of Certain

Original Designs, of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act defines 'original' as "the result of the

designer's creative endeavor that provides a distinguishable variation over prior work pertaining

to similar articles which is more than merely trivial and has not been copied from another

source" (Digital Millennium Copyright Act 48). The language of the Digital Millennium

Copyright Act boils down to commerce and money. When talking about what can be protected

by copyright, the emphasis is on originality or usefulness that "makes the article attractive or

distinctive in appearance to the purchasing or using public" (Digital Millennium Copyright Act

48). Infringements to copyright focus on profit as well: "it shall be infringement of the exclusive

rights in a design protected under this chapter for any person, without the consent of the owner of

the design, within the United States and during the term of such protection, to … make, have

made, or import, for sale or for use in trade" and "sell or distribute for sale or for use in trade any

such infringing article" (Digital Millennium Copyright Act 50).

While some source authors feel that fanfiction is an act of theft and threatens their financial

livelihood, in reality, fanfiction is not a commercially significant activity. This means that

fanfiction does not generate money which the creators profit from. Looking at fanfiction from a

fair use standpoint on copyright reinforces the noncompetitive nature of fanfiction.

The first criteria of fair use focuses on the purpose of the use of a source author's material. In the

case of fanfiction, there is no "commercial nature." Fanfiction authors do not make money from

their writing. It is published online where anyone can access it for free. Another criterion

references how much of a source work is used in determining fair use. When it comes to

fanfiction, the answer is somewhat mixed on this criterion. The very nature of what fanfiction is means that it is a derivative work that requires a base knowledge of the source work in order to be fully understood and enjoyed. At the same time, fanfiction authors will take the base foundation from a work and put their own spin or commentary on it. Fanfiction authors are not merely copying, pasting, and then publishing the words of the source material. Fanfiction is these fans' reaction to the source work, grown out of love, frustration, anger, hope, and more.

Lastly, fair use depends on the "effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work" (Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17) and Related Laws Contained in Title 17 of the United States Code 19-20). As mentioned previously, there is no commercialization of fanfiction. It is written by fans for fans, for free. Fanfiction is a nonprofit activity that results from fans who form a community in which they share their passions and interact with one another. Since no money is made by fanfiction, it, therefore, cannot compete with the source work's market and is no financial threat to the source author's livelihood. If anything, fanfiction could be seen as a potential boon to a source material's market because of the possibility of a wider audience being introduced to the source work through fanfiction. This new audience could then become a paying audience to further boost the source author's influence and financial status.

Even when fanfiction does evolve and become traditionally published and start to generate money, it no longer resembles the source material in an identifiable, and therefore competitive, way. In order to be published through traditional means, a work of fanfiction must be modified so that it does not conflict with copyright laws and create a negative impact on the source work's market. At that point, the work can no longer be called fanfiction. One example of this evolution

from fanfiction to traditionally publishable work is the bestselling, and later box office hit, *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy. It is well established that the author of the trilogy, E. L. James, started the work as a *Twilight* fanfiction posted on fanfiction.net. However, by the time that the book series was published in print, there was no longer any Bella, Edward, vampires, werewolves, or Forks, Washington. The plotline of the fanfiction work had been kept, the interactions between the various characters still the same, but the names, descriptions, and anything else associated with the *Twilight* series was done away with. Another example of fanfiction evolving for a more traditional audience is the 2019 romantic-drama film *After.* This movie is based on a novel of the same name by Anna Todd but started out as a piece of fanfiction on Wattpad about Harry Styles from the band One Direction. Just like what happened to the fanfiction that is now *Fifty Shades of Grey*, all elements linked to One Direction were removed or changed before the work was published by Gallery Books.

Fanfiction is not a financial threat to the authors of the material that the fanfiction is based on. It is not theft in this way because fanfiction is not commercially significant. Even when fanfiction is traditionally published, the work has transformed so significantly that it no longer holds a connection with the source material and is no more financial threat to a source author than any other published work.

The view and fear of fanfiction as theft does not only apply in a financial sense. A persistent myth when it comes to copyright law is that the copyright holder must constantly defend their right or they risk losing their copyright. Many traditionally published authors who may otherwise have a neutral or positive reaction to fanfiction based on their works react negatively towards fanfiction because on this belief about needing to defend their copyright. They either believe

themselves or are advised by others such as their publishers, that if they do not denounce fanfiction and all other such derivative works, that they may lose the copyright to their own work. However, this myth is wrong.

In the United States, copyright over a work is automatic as soon as the work is "fixed in any tangible medium of expression" (Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17) and Related Laws Contained in Title 17 of the United States Code 8). What this section of copyright law is saying is that copyright is not something that one has to apply for or register with the government in order to get. As soon as someone writes their work on a piece of paper or types it into a computer then it is protected by copyright. Since this copyright does not have to be registered with the United States government in order to go into effect, this means that it cannot be revoked by inaction on the part of the copyright holder.

In fact, there are only three ways that an author may 'lose' their copyright over a work. The first is that the author sells or transfers their copyright, but this has to be done through writing in order to be legally binding. The second is that the author is hired under a contract which states that they do not own the copyright of the work they produce for that contract. And, once again, there needs to be a written and signed contract for this to be legal. Thirdly, and finally, the original copyright holder such as an author can die. Even in the case of the death of an author, the copyright does not expire for 70 years after their death. In all three of these cases, the author does not actually 'lose' their copyright in the literal sense. They either sold it, never had it, or died and therefore could no longer do anything with it.

This myth is so pervasive though that authors such as Orson Scott Card, author of the *Ender's Game* series, originally stated that he would sue if he came across any fanfiction online because

he was afraid of losing his copyright: "if I do NOT act vigorously to protect my copyright, I will lose that copyright ... I'd prefer simply to ignore it when it happens, but the way copyright law functions, I am told that I cannot ignore it" (Card and Patta). The myth that he could lose his copyright over his series caused Card to blanket ban fanfiction about his work and to actively work to have it removed if he came across it. He felt threatened by the existence of fanfiction. Despite his initial fear that fanfiction would have a negative impact on his copyright, Card has changed his view of fanfiction. In a 2012 article in *The Wall Street Journal*, Card stated that he was "planning to host a contest for "Ender's Game" fan fiction … Fans will be able to submit their work to his Web site. The winning stories will be published as an anthology that will become part of the official "canon" of the "Ender's Game" series" (Alter). This is a definite change and a clear indication that Card no longer feared fanfiction as a threat to his copyright or financial livelihood. Instead, he is using fanfiction to bolster the publicity of his work. The added attention benefits him because more attention paid to his work and a new publication related to the series results in a boost to his sales and therefore his financial livelihood. In this case, Card's opinion on fanfiction changed with the realization that it is not a threat to his copyright, but actually a possible boon to his work and sales.

Authors who are threatened by the existence of fanfiction, such as Card was initially, can rest easy because under U.S. copyright law 'losing' copyright over a work is impossible. Based on these facts, fanfiction is not the threat that some authors (or their publishers) fear it to be. It is the myth and the resulting fear that turns authors away from understanding what fanfiction is and how it actually works.

The third common objection to fanfiction by source authors is about the unauthorized

interpretations or changes to the characters, storyworld, or plotline of the source material. This

grievance seems to stem from a sense of ownership and control over the work. Authors with this

stance against fanfiction often object to the idea that their work may be viewed or interpreted by

an audience in a way that the author did not initially intend when creating the work.

Some traditionally published authors dislike, or even vehemently oppose, fanfiction based on this

feeling of ownership over all aspects of their work. For example, Sharon Lee, one of the co-

authors of the science-fiction novels and story collections in the Liaden Universe®, has a

statement on her author website opposing fanfiction. In response to a question from a fan about

fanfiction in the Liaden Universe, she writes:

> I don't want "other people interpreting" our characters. Interpreting our characters is
>
> what Steve and I do; it's our job. Nobody else is going to get it right. This may sound
>
> rude and elitist, but honestly, it's not easy for us to get it right sometimes, and we've been
>
> living with these characters. . .for a very long time... We built our universes, and our
>
> characters; they are our intellectual property; and they are not toys lying about some
>
> virtual sandbox for other kids to pick up and modify at their whim. Steve and I do not
>
> sanction fanfic written in our universes; any such work that exists, exists without our
>
> permission, and certainly without our support. (Lee)

Lee (and co-author Steve Miller too) make the claim that no one else has the right to 'interpret'

the characters in the stories. They expect their readers to accept what they as the authors decide

are the proper reactions to their work. There is a sense of a reaction or interpretation as being

either 'right' or 'wrong.' If the authors do not explicitly present it to their audience, then it is 'wrong' and therefore should not exist.

The problem inherent with the desire for control that some source authors have is the fact that it is impossible to enact in reality. Every audience member – reader, watcher, listener, etc. – creates their own interpretation of a work. Each will have their own individual reaction, opinions, thoughts, and desires that influence their interpretation. As Charles Bazerman points out in his essay, "Writing Expresses and Shares Meaning To Be Reconstructed By The Reader," in *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, "writers [source authors] may resist the idea that their texts convey to readers something different than what the writers intended" (22). Source authors never truly have complete control once a work enters the public realm. If they wanted to have total control over how their characters, plot, fictional world, etc. are interpreted by an audience, then that audience would have to consist of only one – the author themselves. The audience inherently has agency when it comes to interpreting meaning in a text because "meanings do not reside fully in the words of the text nor in the unarticulated minds but only in the dynamic relation of writer, reader, and text" (Bazerman 22). Despite any attempts on the source author's side to control how a text is interpreted by a public audience, there will always be space for interpretation. That interpretation will often lead to creativity, either only in the mind of the reader or in creative actions such as fanfiction.

Not all modern authors feel threatened by fanfiction; some actively embrace it and others proudly proclaim themselves to be fanfiction writers. For example, science-fiction author Larry Niven embraces fanfiction as a positive. In the dedication of *The Ringworld Engineers*, the sequel to his famous novel *Ringworld*, Niven thanks his fans for writing fanfiction about the

world he had created. Talking directly to his fans, he states, "You did all that work and wrote all those letters: be warned that this book would not exist without your unsolicited help. I hadn't the slightest intention of writing a sequel to Ringworld. I dedicate this book to you" (Niven). For Niven, seeing the passion that his fans put into fanfiction about his work served as inspiration for him to continue writing in this story universe. Without fanfiction, the sequel novel would not exist.

With the rise of the internet and the resulting rise in fanfiction being published online, there is a growing number of traditionally published authors that are fanfiction authors themselves. Cecilia Tan is one such author who is both a fanfiction writer and has traditionally published work. On her author website, Tan has a statement about her policy and view regarding fanfiction: "I view non-commercial fanworks as a natural extension of that inspiration. The only thing I can't support is anything that would damage my livelihood or reputation, hence keep the stuff non-commercial and label it as non-commercial fanfiction when disseminating/posting it" (Tan). This statement not only explicitly supports fanfiction in general, but also encourages fanfiction about her works. It even mentions her own forays into writing fanfiction both before and after she became a traditionally published author. Another author, Steven Brust, copied the basics of Tan's statement quoted above and put it on his own website.

One well-known author who is also a fanfiction writer is Neil Gaiman, the creator of works such as *Good Omens*, *American Gods*, the *Sandman* comic book series, and *Coraline*. Gaiman is a public proponent of fanfiction. On November 29th, 2017, Neil Gaiman, in reply to someone asking him whether or not he liked fanfiction, tweeted "I won the Hugo Award for a piece of Sherlock Holmes/H. P. Lovecraft fanfiction, so I'm in favour" (@neilhimself). The work that

Gaiman is referencing in this tweet is his short story "A Study in Emerald" which first appeared in *Shadows Over Baker Street*, an anthology dedicated to short stories that combined the world of Sherlock Holmes with that of H. P. Lovecraft. Sir Conan Doyle died in 1930 and Lovecraft died in 1937, so both of their copyrights had expired by the time that Gaiman decided to write his fanfiction. Similar to how writers in earlier centuries would borrow from other works and put their own spin on things while using the audience's familiarity with characters or settings as a hook to draw them in, Gaiman continues this literary tradition with this short (fanfiction) story.

Fanfiction follows the literary footsteps of a long tradition of borrowing, copying, stealing, using, and more. With the rise of copyright laws in the United States this tradition fell to the wayside. However, with the internet and online fanfiction, this tradition has seen a revival. Authors such as Cecilia Tan, Neil Gaiman, and others see fanfiction as a transformative work instead of seeing it as something plagiaristic, but fanfiction is not only a transformative action on the part of fans. Fanfiction also serves as a versatile community space.

3   Fanfiction as: Community Space

Dr. Blythe Rippon, in a blog post for Ylva Publishing, brings forward this point about traditional media and minority identities: "It's no secret to avid readers that we come to understand ourselves and our world through stories. Fiction changes us. But it also, on some level, must affirm us. If people turn to story for help comprehending our place in the world, and the most popular and canonical stories don't reflect some of us—people of color, LGBTQ+ people, youth—what then?" (Rippon). What results from this question? Fanfiction. Fanfiction creates community through a variety of means, the strongest being that fanfiction brings together groups that are often on the margins of mainstream media when it comes to representation, such as LBGTQ+ individuals, people of color, and people with mental and physical disabilities. This community is created both through these elements being present in the written fanfiction and through the fanfiction sites themselves.

Fanfiction spaces serve as an opportunity for representation that is not seen in traditional media. Adrienne Raw argues that "Fanfiction is a space profoundly connected to the creation, exploration, and communication of identity. Within this community, fans explore their own identities as well as identities that are not fully explored in the canon of a fandom" (186). The identities that are most often missing from mainstream media are ones that do not conform to the standard of white, cis-gendered, and able-bodied. Marginalized people whose identities do not conform to this standard seek a space where they see themselves represented and, at the same time, often create that representation. "By writing favorite characters as gay, trans, bisexual,

queer, or of a different race, individuals who consume media but fail to see themselves represented within it are able to create the scenarios that they most relate to" (Eden). In this way, fanfiction community spaces are created to counteract the lack of representation in traditional media. It brings marginalized people together by giving them a space where they "can connect to each other and share pieces of themselves that would otherwise be kept out of sight" (Guinan 17). That connection between participants is the foundation of the community which fanfiction enables.

3.1   LGBTQ+ Representation in Fans and Fanfiction

Explicitly portrayed LGBTQ+ people are not commonly seen in mainstream media, and when they are, there is a tendency for them to wind up dead. Queer baiting is a common tactic by mainstream media producers to gain the attention of LGBTQ+ audience members, but the desire for representation is left unfulfilled. "Members of the LGBT+ community in particular often criticize popular media for lacking compelling narratives surrounding LGBT+ themes, and when left unsatisfied, many fans turn to fanfiction to see themselves in the media they otherwise enjoy" (Eden). They reshape popular media to reflect their identities that are marginalized, ignored, or exploited by mainstream media. Fanfiction creates a space for the representation of a multitude of sexual orientations and gender identities.

The creation of a fanfiction-based community space for LGBTQ+ people is done through two avenues: 1) Within fanfiction stories, where characters are often changed to be part of the LGBTQ+ community, and 2) Authors of fanfiction are able to express their identities through communal spaces such as profile pages, author's notes, commenting/reviewing the work of others, and chat features.

When LGBTQ+ fans cannot see themselves in their favorite media, they often turn to fanfiction to create that representation. Through writing fanfiction, "women, LGBT+, and gender non-conforming individuals … remake their favorite media into something that reflects them or their interests" (Eden). LGBTQ+ fans are not willing to simply accept that they cannot find themselves in popular media; instead, they choose to take action. Fanfiction is a reaction to the lack of representation or the lack of positive portrayals of LGBTQ+ characters found in media. It becomes a "means of showing their struggles and needs by reinterpreting popular media. In this sense, television shows, movies, comics, video games, etc. all function as a shared symbolic language through which individuals can explore identities closed off to them in real life" (Guinan 2).

A common form of fanfiction that rejects the heteronormative nature of mainstream media is slash fanfiction. "Slash fan fiction explores but also challenges the performance of sexuality and gender in its characters by dismantling stereotypes and common assumptions (particularly regarding masculinity and femininity) and reconstructing them in original and challenging ways" (Hayes and Ball). Even though this subgenre of fanfiction is known to be primarily written by heterosexual women for a heterosexual female audience, there is still an increase in LGBTQ+ representation in fanfiction written by and for all gender identities and sexual orientations. It is not hard to find fanfiction featuring characters in various forms of polyamorous relationships or somewhere on the asexual or aromantic spectrum. Slash can also be written in response to queerbaiting. In her 2018 thesis, Diana Koehm found that "[t]here is a direct correlation between shows accused of queerbaiting by fans and shows that produce a high quantity of slash fiction, suggesting that the sheer amount of fanfiction is a response to representation being denied through queerbaiting" (34). In this way, slash fanfiction "empowers the reader and writer to play

with and renegotiate heteronormative depictions of the non-heterosexual as 'other'" (Hayes and Ball).

On the fanfiction hosting site, Archive of Our Own, fanfiction authors can use a tagging system to explicitly showcase identities, relationships, and other facets of the story, and many do so in order to showcase that the work of fanfiction includes characters that are rewritten as part of the LGBTQ+ community. To showcase the range of LGBTQ+ representation in fanfiction, I am going to use the fast-growing subsection of fanfiction based on the superhero anime (and manga) called "Boku No Hero Academia," or in English "My Hero Academia," to illustrate my argument. Looking at the romance pairings in fanfiction for this anime, the main character, a young man named Izuku Midoriya, is paired with another male character more often than not. Two of the characters he is most commonly paired with are Katsuki Bakugou (22,978 works of fanfiction) and Shouto Todoroki (17,582 works of fanfiction). In contrast, the heterosexual romance pairing that the anime is building towards, between Izuku and a girl named Ochako Uraraka, is only tagged in 5,482 fanfiction works. Unlike the world of traditional media where there is an assumption of heterosexuality, in the world of fanfiction queer is the common sexuality.

"Boku No Hero Academia" fanfiction also showcases a reservoir of LGBTQ+ representation beyond the characters being gay. Rewriting characters to be transgender is becoming increasingly common. The tags, "Trans Bakugou Katsuki" and "Trans Midoriya Izuku," are currently used in 767 works and 638 works respectively, and this number is continuing to increase. A search through the tags marking either Bakugou or Midoriya as asexual totals in over 200 works of fanfiction, and the two of them marked as aromantic results in over 50 works.

Searching for a combination of the tags "Polyamory" and "Izuku Midoriya" pops up with 1,622 works. In the vast majority of these stories, the romance relationship is not the main plot point, but instead just a part of everyday life as these characters move through the adventure of learning to be superheroes. In the realm of fanfiction, a reader can search for, and find, a work of fanfiction that features basically any sexual orientation or gender identity. Fanfiction both normalizes LGBTQ+ relationships and individuals and creates a community space where the dominant media script is flipped.

Producing fanfiction allows LGBTQ+ fans to rewrite the dominant culture script to be more inclusive of their identities and functions as a connective mechanism between marginalized peoples. Fans are able to connect with one another through fanfiction because they find representation in this community space. Fanfiction recreates the compelling narratives of popular media while also "producing media depicting complex, realistic LGBT+ individuals of all ages [which] can be a form of encouragement and support for otherwise marginalized groups" (Eden). If a fan is unable to see their gender or sexual identity in mainstream media, they almost certainly will be able to find representation in fanfiction. In the rare case that they do not find much, the fan is easily able to add their own perspective through writing fanfiction themselves. This combination of the freedom to write and read allows fanfiction to act as a community space for LGBTQ+ people.

Building off of the idea that LGBTQ+ people write fanfiction in order to create representation for themselves, the community space that is created through fanfiction is not limited to the boundaries of the fanfiction stories themselves. These marginalized fans craft a community through writing and reading fanfiction, but also express their own identities in the additional

space that the creating and posting of fanfiction stories necessitates. Fanfiction hosting websites are molded into community spaces by the fans through the creation of profiles and other communicative forms between fans.

There is not much broad quantitative research done on fanfiction communities, but in 2013, Archive of Our Own held an informal census survey. After receiving 10,005 responses, Archive of Our Own released the survey data to the public on Fanlore.org, a wiki created "to preserve the history of transformative works, as well as that of fans, and fandoms with a focus on people and their activities" (Fanlore). This survey revealed that people with marginalized identities are the majority participants in the fanfiction community. In the survey, when asked to choose a gender identity, "more respondents selected Genderqueer than Male," "Only 38% of respondents selected Heterosexual," and "54% of respondents identified as a gender, sexual, or romantic minority" (AO3 Census: Masterpost). In analyzing the data, it was revealed that "[t]here were four times as many non-binary people as men in the survey" and "[m]ore than 50% of survey respondents were women of sexualities other than heterosexual" (AO3 Census: Masterpost).

A community is fostered through activities around fanfiction and not just the writing and reading of it. "Fanfiction spaces are not immune to conflicts and disagreements, but the generally supportive and encouraging norms that both readers and writers subscribe to far outweigh that negativity. What further cements ties in the community is that more and more writers and readers are identifying as queer" (Koehm 23). These LGBTQ+ people are finding one another through reading and writing fanfiction and forging relationships in this space. Reading fanfiction as a fan or responding to readers as a fanfiction writer creates room for LGBTQ+ people to make connections with people experiencing a similar marginalized identity. "In some ways, fanfiction

28

can inform communities, and communities of fans can inform fanfiction. It garners community, especially with websites like Archive of Our Own and FanFiction.net, which encourages commenting and feedback" (Eden). The feedback aspect of fanfiction writing aids this sense of community by encouraging support through expressing admiration for a work of fanfiction. As Koehm notes, "Comments are a place not only where readers lavish praise on a piece, but often share their own personal connection to a work" (23). This encouragement and admiration can lead to friendships between creators and readers who may find that they are both part of a marginalized identity. "The anonymous nature of fanfiction, and therefore many members of fandom, allows opacity in the way that individuals express their gender and sexual identity" (Eden). Creating usernames and profiles for privacy gives fanfiction writers a sense of anonymity which can encourage a lowering of boundaries in this space that a marginalized person does not feel safe or comfortable doing so in their off-line life. It is in this online fanfiction community that these readers and writers feel a sense of kinship and representation.

3.2 Diverse Racial Representation in Fans and Fanfiction

Despite a general increase in awareness and attention to racially inclusive representation, popular media is still dominated by white characters. Fanfiction tropes such as racebending allow creators to flip this dynamic. Khaliah Petersen-Reed, in her article "Fanfiction as Performative Criticism: Harry Potter Racebending" in the *Journal of Creative Writing Studies*, defines racebending as instances when "fans recast[] white characters as people of color and/or insert[] people of color into predominantly white franchises" (4). The resulting fanfiction stories either explicitly explore race in context of the character and plot of the story or will have little explicit impact on the story itself, but act as a mirror or representation of a reader who is a person of color. These racebending works of fanfiction bring awareness, and act as a challenge to, the

absence of complex depictions of people of color in dominant media. Similar to some forms of disability and LGBTQ+ representation, just changing the race of a character is an act of resistance against the dominant media's portrayal of all people as white, straight, and able-bodied.

Supplementing Petersen-Reed's argument, racebending is becoming more commonplace in fanfiction. In the Harry Potter subsection of fanfiction on Archive of Our Own, the tag "Black Harry Potter" is attached to 57 works and (to reinforce Petersen-Reed's argument and work) the tag "Black Hermione Granger" is a part of over 600 fanfiction stories. The first twenty works of fanfiction under the "Black Hermione" tag have been written in the past week and the oldest work with the tag is from 2014. Recasting white characters as Black is not the only form of racebending happening in Harry Potter fanfiction. Another popular change is casting Harry Potter and his family as Indian. There are currently 282 works labeled with the tag "Indian Harry Potter" on Archive of Our Own. Similar to the increasing use of the "Black Hermione" tag, the most recently written fanfiction works that employ "Indian Harry Potter" tag were published or updated within the past five days. Racebending Harry Potter characters is a popular and fast-growing section of fanfiction.

While Petersen-Reed's research focuses on Harry Potter racebending fanfiction, her statements on how race is portrayed in popular media can be generalized to all fanfiction. Often in books such as Harry Potter, there are assumptions around race - the race of characters is defaulted to white unless "they are explicitly racialized" (Peterson-Reed 6). This can make it hard for readers and fans of color because they cannot see themselves in their favorite books. Even with visual media, often the race of a character is ignored, overlooked, and not taken into account as the

plot's events unfold. The media acts as though it is colorblind, but in reality, this is just another form of erasure that defaults to whiteness and disregards the potential influence of race on a character's life, actions, and more.

Racebending fanfiction acts as both a creative and critical force. It brings representation and nuance forward for the reader and allows the creator to assuage their desire for works that reflect their own identities in more than a superficial fashion. While the default is assumed to be white when it comes to both characters and fans, "there are many people of color in communities most associated with white fans, and their reasons for being in the community are many" (Wanzo). And these fans of color do not consume media passively and ignore the lack of diverse racial representation. They are ready and willing to fill that gap. "Racebending allows [fans] to directly insert perspectives of marginalized people where they explore and vocalize the experience and concerns of people of color" (Peterson-Reed 8). In this way, fans of color can "correct" or change their favorite works to address issues that may have been ignored or glossed over when it comes to representation of diverse races.

Fans of color find a community through fanfiction with other fans who are likewise frustrated with, disappointed by, angry at, and tired of the lack of inclusive racial representation in mainstream media. These fans use fanfiction to create explicit, positive, complicated, and diverse portrayals of race in media that defaults to white and whitewashing. Their fanfiction works to fill a gap in diversity when it comes to race in the dominant media.

Racebending fanfiction also includes casting characters as mixed-race and exploring how that impacts the character and the plot of their stories. For example, the story, "Half" by Dawen on Archive of Our Own, features a mixed-race (Japanese and presumably white, though labelled

American) and bilingual Izuku Midoriya. This fanfiction work focuses on the discrimination that a young Izuku faces in school as a result of being mixed-race. It explores the love and shame he feels about his racial heritage. As a result of the bullying he experiences, Izuku decides to hide his heritage while at school and "pretend he was full-blooded Japanese … Not half" (Dawen). While not a happy ending to the story, this work of fanfiction showcases the reality for some people of mixed-race heritage; they find themselves ostracized. Fanfiction, in this instance, is used to represent the negative aspects of reality that people face on account of their race.

While there is currently limited research on how race operates in fanfiction and racebending in general, I believe that recent racebending in mainstream media will help to trigger more fanfiction dealing with race and, subsequently, more research on this topic. When saying recent racebending in mainstream media, I am talking about the popularity and commercial success of the Broadway play *Hamilton* and Netflix's *Bridgerton*. Both of these productions chose to cast ethnically diverse actors in roles of characters who would have otherwise been white. *Hamilton* takes the white founding fathers and casts them as a diverse set of people:

> Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, among others, are played by black and Latino actors, allowing the creators to comment on America's fractured present through its past, and vice versa. "Our cast looks like America looks now, and that's certainly intentional," said Mr. Miranda, who portrays the title character. "It's a way of pulling you into the story and allowing you to leave whatever cultural baggage you have about the founding fathers at the door." (Paulson)

This racebending allows people to critically evaluate how race influences how we perceive our own history as a country. The recasting of the founding fathers allows racial minorities to see

themselves as history makers; the historical accuracy or inaccuracy of this casting does not impact the positive influence that this portrayal has for people of color.

Similar to *Hamilton*, Netflix's *Bridgerton* is more reflective of the modern, diverse world than the white-dominated aristocracy of the actual 19th century. It also challenges the established narrative that showcases only white people in history, when in reality, there were always people of color present, though often overlooked and unacknowledged. When thinking about the show's casting decisions, Julia Quinn, the author whose books *Bridgerton* is based off of, wholeheartedly supports the racebending:

> "Bridgerton isn't a history lesson; it's a show for a modern audience," [Quinn] notes. There were, of course, people of color who existed in this time and place, but the show hands them more power than historical assumptions allow. It imagines a British aristocracy where Queen Charlotte (Golda Rosheuvel) is of mixed race (a fact some historians suggest there's evidence for), thus elevating other people of color to dukedoms and positions of status. (Lenker)

And she is not the only one who is willing and happy to racebend this story. Show producer Betsy Beers, in a similar situation to *Hamilton's* Lin Manuel Miranda, chose to be deliberately race conscious when casting: "It's not color-blind casting," explains Beers, "We try to imagine history and the world in the way we wanted to see it" (Lenker). The main love interest of the show, played by Regé-Jean Page agrees with this sentiment, "With color-conscious casting, I get to exist as a Black person in the world," he says. "It doesn't mean I'm a slave. It doesn't mean we have to focus on trauma. It just means we get to focus on Black joy and humanity" (Lenker).

By using racebending in this popular television series, people of color are able to occupy positions of power which they were barred from in history.

Racebending in popular media has allowed for more diversity across both the physical stage and on television. Following how racebending has been used in fanfiction to create more inclusive racial representation in white-dominated media, hopefully these recent uses of racebending in traditional media will pave the way for more diverse and equitable racial representation.

3.3   Disability Representation in Fans and Fanfiction

In her article in *The Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, "Enabling/Disabling: Fanfiction and Disability Discourse," AmyLea Clemons asserts that fanfiction creates a discourse around disability:

> While it may be easy to dismiss this relationship as escapism (in which disabled fans engage with media texts to avoid coping with social and physical difficulties) or to see disability as an easy trope on which fanfiction writers can base their stories (such as the "hurt/comfort" genre that often involves disabling a character to provide grounds for emotional intimacy), this relationship between disability and fandom is significantly more complex. (249)

By casting characters as already disabled or becoming disabled through the events in the narrative, fanfiction authors are able to explore how physical and mental disability affects a person's mental, emotional, and physical state, in addition to showing how these characters are able to live as fulfilling lives and adventures as a fully-abled person. Fanfiction allows people with disabilities to see themselves portrayed as complex, competent, powerful characters, in

contrast to the one-dimensional portrayal often seen in mainstream media. Similar to both LGBTQ+ people and racial minorities, fanfiction acts as a community space for people with disabilities.

Disability is commonly seen in fanfiction: "Blindness, deafness, injuries leading to mobility impairments, and other visible and invisible disabilities feature strongly as tropes in fanfictions themselves" (Clemons 249). Fanfiction that focuses on physical disabilities resists common stereotypes that are often associated with this kind of disability. If the main protagonist of a superhero anime loses an arm and yet is still able to operate as a hero and eventually defeat the villain of the series, then the stereotype of a person with limb-loss as being helpless or incapable is thrown out. Two examples of this exact scenario are "Type-2 Hero" by Mad_Nimerod and "evolutionary, endpoint" by firelord_zutara (both are Boku No Hero Academia works involving Izuku Midoriya with limb loss) on Archive of Our Own. Similar to these two works of fanfiction, ElvaFirestone's "To Give Your Hand" showcases a heroic Izuku who is also paralyzed from the waist down. In "A beacon in the dark" by NohaIjiachi, a blind Izuku kicks butt. This is not to say that people with these kinds of physical disability are magically able to act as though they are not impacted by their disability, but what this form of fanfiction does is not discount these people's capabilities from the start.

Just as physically disabled characters are uncommon in mainstream media, so too are mentally disabled characters. Characters with explicit mental disabilities are not often portrayed in traditional media and, when they are, their disability is often glossed over, treated as an endearing character quirk, or as something for laughs. In fanfiction, these characters can be further developed and explored as dynamic, complex people. However, because these disabled

characters are not often present in mainstream media, what more often occurs in fanfiction is that a character is changed to have one or more disabilities. Clemons marks this moment, calling fanfiction "the inscription of that moment when the reader, denied autonomy by the canon text, overthrows the dominating system of encoding by mass culture producers" (Clemons 267). By having the star of the show, the protagonist, the main character be disabled, disabled readers are able to see themselves in the limelight where they otherwise would not.

In a series of fanfics, grouped together under the collective title, "Awareness Fics," fanfiction author bisexualdisaster221 states that their motivation for creating these works is to "bring awareness to various conditions! I hope to break negative stereotypes around these conditions and show you the reality of them, the good and the bad. The works of fanfiction within this collection on Archive of Our Own portray a variety of mental conditions such as neurological disorders, Tourette's syndrome, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety disorder, autism, and more. bisexualdisaster221 included numerous mental conditions in their fanfiction because they wished to see complex, realistic depictions of mental disability, something so often ignored or downplayed in traditional media. Fanfiction has given this writer the opportunity to fill this gap.

 "Lost in thought" by zuk_i is a work of fanfiction in which Izuku is tagged as having undiagnosed ADHD. It is important to the author that Izuku's condition is undiagnosed because that impacts how Izuku acts and how others respond to his actions. It not only highlights the disability that Izuku is living with, but also the impact that it not being diagnosed, and therefore not taking steps to manage it, has on his life. Another character from Boku No Hero Academia named Denki Kaminari is a fan favorite for rewriting through a mentally disabled lens. In "He's not stupid" by Jirousbaby, Denki is smart, autistic, and dyslexic. The plot of this short story is

that Aizawa, the teacher, notices that Denki is struggling with his classwork and reaches out to help him, and in the process, finding out about Denki's disabilities. Both Aizawa and Denki's friends react positively to this revelation. His friends apologize for past jokes they have made about Denki's intelligence and bad grades which they know realize were a result of his struggling with the academic material due to his disabilities. It is a heartwarming story about acceptance and friendship.

Jirousbaby states in their author's note at the beginning of the work that they "project [their] own experiences with dyslexia and autism onto Denki." Through their fanfiction and admittance in the author's note, Jirousbaby reaches out to find connection and support with other disabled people in the fanfiction community. The comments section is full of support and praise for the author and their work. One commenter, Thatsallotadamage, mentions that they will often project their disabilities onto this character as well, adding "Dyscalculia" into the mix of autism and dyslexia. Through writing this piece of fanfiction, Jirousbaby was able to create positive representation for mental disabilities and connection with fellow neurodivergent fans in their community.

Disabled fanfiction writers are able to find community through fanfiction. Fanfiction "returns symbolic agency to fans, letting them constitute new versions of the canon text that is then legitimized by the fan community" (Clemons 274). Fans turn dominant narratives that ignore or downplay disability into empowering ones through their own storytelling. Through this resistant storytelling, fanfiction works to normalize disabled lives and people.

One example of this normalizing process is Archive of Our Own's tagging system. Tagging is when an author attaches searchable labels to their stories. These tags can range from single

words such as "romance" to whole phrases. Adrienne E. Raw, in her article "Normalizing Disability: Tagging and Disability Identity Construction through Marvel Cinematic Universe Fanfiction," examines how tagging in fanfiction systems intersects with disability discourse. She states that while labeling has often been seen negatively when it comes to disability, when it intersects with fanfiction, something else starts to emerge:

> Labelling and classification in disability communities are often associated with medicalization, stereotyping, and erasure of individuality, while tagging in fanfiction provides a communicative framework between authors and readers. These differences in functions of labelling and tagging provide the foundation that enables tagging in fanfiction to function inclusively as a normalizing force, despite the problematic role of labelling in disability communities. (186)

Tagging acts as a "normalizing force" for disability within the fanfiction community. It allows for someone to find all the fanfiction works that deal with a particular disability or works in which a character is disabled in some fashion generally. Raws' study showcases that "the application of disability-related tags to fanfiction demonstrates an attempt to normalize disability in the fanfiction community as part of a normal life experience" (188).

In normalizing disability, disability becomes another facet of identity that builds a community. Fanfiction "enables those who have been traditionally coded as disabled to work within the communication system and tell different stories" (Clemons 274) in which disabled readers are able to see themselves. Similar to how creating LGBTQ+ characters allow LGBTQ+ fanfiction writers to express their own identities, disabled writers are able to craft real and complex disabled characters for both themselves and their readers. These positive portrayals can then

spread for others to read and experience: "The identity that they construct becomes the identity that potential readers consume and, as the identity becomes part of the conventions of what and when to tag, reproduce in their own work" (Raw 213). Additionally, fans with disabilities can communicate and connect with other disabled fans through the networks that fanfiction is built on. This representation in fanfiction may allow these fans to create a community based around the normalizing portrayals and representation of disability that is denied to them in mainstream media.

Fanfiction stories are not limited to displaying one form of identity. Often works of fanfiction will feature queered characters who are also racebent and/or disabled in some fashion. A prime example of this multidimensional writing is "Without Translation" by orphan_account on Archive of Our Own. This Harry Potter fanfic is classified as a one-shot, meaning that it is as a complete short story posted as a single chapter. Despite its short length, the story is jammed-packed with representation for traditionally marginalized identities, all wrapped up in a sweet love story. In a non-magical world, a gay, physically disabled Remus Lupin (one of his hands is nonfunctional) moves into a college apartment where he meets Sirius Black, James Potter, and multiple other characters from the Harry Potter series. Romance blossoms between the physically disabled Remus and the deaf, (ftm) trans Sirius Black. Despite Remus not being able to learn sign language due to his having only one functional hand, the two learn to communicate and love one another. Additionally, Sirius and his depicted as hard-of-hearing brother, Regulus Black, are of Thai descent, and James Potter is of Indian descent. While mostly not central to the tension and plot of the story, all of these identity markers bring new dimensions to the characters of Harry Potter which expand on and complicate the original way the characters were written.

In the comments section of the work, the author reveals that they used tactile British sign language in their daily life as a teacher at a Deaf school and in a former relationship with someone who was DeafBlind. While no other mentions of their identity such as gender identity, race, or sexual orientation are made, this comment highlights how fanfiction authors apply their own identity characteristics to their work to create positive representation with complex, multidimensional characters and stories.

Fanfiction can act as a community space for marginalized identities. Fanfiction itself has been on the margins of society since its inception, only recently starting to come out of the shadows with the rise of the internet. This marginalization of fanfiction and other fan practices allowed it to act as a space for people who did not find themselves represented in mainstream media.

> The pleasure created, shared, and consumed through works of fanfiction and the community intimacy established around those works does not attempt to regulate the desires of its members not restrict the possibilities of narrative, but instead encourages fans to consider the infinite possibilities of the characters they write about just as those possibilities exist for themselves. (Garner 107)

Fanfiction does not limit what could or could not happen in a story, who a character could be, or how they could act. It makes mainstream media a playground with endless possibilities for exploration and creation. This openness is what makes fanfiction a community space because, while a person can write anything, they will often write what they know, sprinkling in their own identities and desires, especially when those identities are marginalized. Through fanfiction, characters could easily be a part of the LGBTQ+ community, have a disability, be of a different race, or more. The possibilities are endless.

This openness can be intimidating for people who do not value fanfiction in the same way that the writers and readers of it do. Dr. Blythe Rippon points out:

> Some might consider fanfiction the ultimate evidence of the death of the author—no longer do original writers control their own stories. Another way to look at fanfiction is that it's the rebirth of the author; fanfic produces hundreds of new writers—amateurs and professionals who tinker with existing characters and worlds both for fun and need.

Fanfiction may appear as a destruction of authorship if one looks at it with a suspicious eye, but if looked at through the lens of identity, it opens the door to a world where representation is more equitable. It "allows its participants to creatively express and rework identity, and the medium fosters a community that provides its readers and writers with a sense of validation for their interpretations of the source text" (Peterson-Reed 3). Marginalized identities are valued and empowered through fanfiction. These writers create the complex, realistic, and positive representation that is absent from traditional media. Through interacting in this space, people of marginalized identities form a community in which they support and encourage one another. In a similar manner to how fanfiction creates a community for marginalized identities, fanfiction also acts as a community space for learning.

4   Fanfiction as: Learning Space

At first glance, fanfiction may seem to be as far from formal education as you can get, but at the same time, it cannot be isolated from education. Educational institutions and teachers often dismiss popular culture, and therefore fanfiction, as frivolous or a distraction from more important or "real" educational work. What these educators fail to realize is that "writing is a social act" ("Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing") and that fanfiction operates as a learning space through existing as a community of practice.

Anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger were the first to introduce the concept of a community of practice: "Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 1). Rebecca Black, in "Convergence and Divergence, Informal Learning in Online Fanfiction Communities and Formal Writing Pedagogy," argues that "engagement with popular culture through online fanfiction writing provides a means for fans to take up knowledgeable social roles, enact more powerful identities, and participate in a range of creative literate, learning, and social interactions around their respective fandoms of choice" (126). These qualities of the fanfiction community that Black highlights fulfill the criteria for being a community of practice: creation of a shared identity, an interactive nature, and a form of practice.

People in the fanfiction community craft a communal identity through their shared passions and the activities in which they place value. They see themselves as passionate fans who write and/or

read fanfiction about the works that they love in a supportive and encouraging community. Members of this community often engage in joint activities and discussions beyond simply writing and posting a work of fanfiction. A commitment to the community and its values is built into the communal identity through these kinds of activities, especially when it comes to interactions between community members such as the peer-review process of leaving comments on works on fanfiction. There is an emphasis on constructive criticism when it comes to leaving comments for authors; hostile or discouraging feedback is not often tolerated by the community as a whole. People in the fanfiction community, both writers and readers, are very active. They are not merely consumers but practitioners. This shared practice of writing, reading, and interacting places value on support and encouragement, which creates a space optimized for experimentation and practice. Because of this practice, fanfiction serves as a community learning space where people are able to develop their writing and language skills in a low-stakes, supportive environment.

The main, and most obvious, way for a member of the fanfiction community to develop their writing skills is through writing their own fanfiction. Doris Lessing, a winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, said "You only learn to be a better writer by actually writing." Fanfiction writers are able to embody Lessing's quote and hone their craft in a supportive environment. Unlike a classroom setting, fanfiction writers are not composing under the restrictions of a class assignment nor pressured by the need to achieve a good grade. Yet, people in the fanfiction community are developing the same skills that they would in a formal educational setting such as the composition classroom. Doug Hesse, an eminent scholar in the field of composition studies, explains that:

The two most dominant pedagogies today in college composition each focus on product as well as process. Genre approaches have students learn features that readers expect in specific kinds of writing (lab reports, op-eds, business proposals, magazine feature articles, movie reviews, and so on). Rhetorical approaches have students analyze the kinds of evidence, structure, and style that will be effective for particular purposes (for example, to persuade, inform, or entertain), for particular groups of readers (experts, novices, or people of particular viewpoints), and in particular situations … One key to both approaches is sustained, guided practice.

Because writing fanfiction is a "sustained and guided practice" (Hesse), better writing is a natural result, in the same way that writing academic essays allow a student to learn the conventions of writing such as genre, cohesiveness, and how to create a logical flow when presenting their ideas or narrative. "Students learn to write by writing, by getting advice and feedback on their writing, and then writing some more," (Hesse) – take this concept outside of the academic classroom and you have the very foundation of the fanfiction community.

The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) released a position statement which includes their recommendations on the best practices for the post-secondary composition classroom. The values that CCCCs showcases through these recommendations align with the values that are found within the fanfiction community of practice. One of the positions the statement takes is that "Instructors [should] emphasize the rhetorical nature of writing by providing writers opportunities to study the expectations, values, and norms associated with writing in specific contexts. This principle is fundamental to the study of writing and writing instruction" ("Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing"). Rebecca Black

emphasizes this idea as well in "Convergence and Divergence, Informal Learning in Online Fanfiction Communities and Formal Writing Pedagogy: "By experimenting with different genres, conventions, and modes of expression, students … gain meta-awareness and insight into why these genres and conventions exist and how they are useful, thus making them more inclined and better able to use them when necessary" (140). People – be they students, fans, or otherwise – need space to build their literary practices, grow their writing expertise, and develop new skills. Fanfiction gives writers space to learn and experiment freely. There are no restrictions on posting a piece of fanfiction, no gatekeepers to say that a piece of writing is not of good enough quality to be shared. The community acts as an open space where writers can reach an audience and receive feedback no matter their current level of skill with writing. Fanfiction writers are learning the rhetorical nature of their writing through experimenting, writing, receiving feedback from their audience, revising again and again, and continuing to writing and publish their work.

Another part of the statement from CCCC asserts that "Writers grow through supportive, specific feedback from experienced postsecondary instructors who have experience teaching writing at the college level and who provide responses tailored to the specific writing project and to the individual writer's needs" ("Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing"). By taking out the classroom specific features of this statement, we are left with the idea that specific feedback from a community member who understands the conventions and expectations of the genre is a valuable learning tool for the writer. Reading fanfiction allows a writer to cultivate an eye for what effective writing looks like, in the same way that reading novels and other texts often assigned in a classroom do. Therefore, members of the fanfiction community gain expertise in the genre that is fanfiction. At the same time, the fanfiction community encourages active

participation instead of passive consumption through an emphasis on peer feedback. Fanfiction acts as a learning environment and encourages a peer reviewing process that helps to strengthen technical writing and rhetorical skills. Regina Weiler, in her study of fanfiction reviews and literacy, found that "readers and reviewers both use rhetorical strategies in line with their comfort level, but through building confidence with General Praise-type comments, can progress to soliciting more critiques, or writing more critical reviews" (74). By being part of a community focused on improvement and support, community members grow their writing skills through writing fanfiction and acting as peer reviewers. As they participate in the community, their ability to give constructive feedback evolves.

By reading fanfiction and giving feedback, these fans are able to critically evaluate what is working effectively in a piece of writing and what needs improvement. Acting as an audience and editor not only benefits the peer who is leaving the comment on the piece of fanfiction, but also enables the writer to understand the viewpoint of the audience for their own works. Being able to effectively understand and reach an audience is a critical rhetorical skill.

The supportive nature of fanfiction spaces not only encourages the development of writing skills but also language skills. The community's practice of peer reviewing "show[s] a strong tendency toward maintaining community relationships by tempering critique of form with genuine enthusiasm for content or rhetorical effect, strongly discouraging hostile feedback, and attending to the expressed needs of the author. This marked emphasis on constructive criticism and lack of tolerance for hostile and deliberately insulting feedback ensures a safe, accessible space for ELLs [English Language Learners] and others to write" (Li 316). The fanfiction community acts as a learning space for people studying to speak and write in a different language.

When it comes to giving feedback on student writing in the composition classroom, best practices in the field generally discourage grammar-focused feedback in favor of higher order concerns such as organization and argumentation. The Harvard Writing Project advises teachers that:

> Your comments on student writing should clearly reflect the hierarchy of your concerns about the paper. Major issues should be treated more prominently and at greater length; minor issues should be treated briefly or not at all. If you comment extensively on grammatical or mechanical issues, you should expect students to infer that such issues are among your main concerns with the paper. ("Responding to Student Writing")

Yet, at the same time, a writer, whether they be students writing an essay or fans writing fanfiction, desires feedback that will help them to develop their writing and successfully connect with their audience. Nancy Sommers, highlights this desire in her article, "Responding to Student Writing," which was published in *College Composition and Communication*:

> As writers we need and want thoughtful commentary to show us when we have communicated our ideas and when not, raising questions from a reader's point of view that may not have occurred to us as writers. We want to know if our writing has communicated our intended meaning and, if not, what questions or discrepancies our reader sees that we, as writers, are blind to. (148)

Learning a new language is a difficult process and many people hesitate to operate in a public space in their additional language for fear of being judged for their lack of fluency. The fanfiction community is a low-stakes environment that accepts non-fluency in a way that is not

47

commonly found in other spaces. Weiler's study highlights this acceptance by pointing out how "ESL writers often state that they are not writing in their native language, and solicit advice on improvement, while native English speakers often ask for help in maintaining cultural accuracies they are not familiar with" (74). To illustrate Weiler's point, in the author's note at the beginning of the fanfic "Lost in thought," fanfiction author zuk_i states: "Hello, this is my first fanfiction so please give advice and constructive critisism in the comments. Also english is not my first language so if you notice any spelling or language mistakes please tell me in the comments." The grammatical mistakes present in this note and the plea for constructive feedback reinforces the supportive, learning nature of the fanfiction community.

Both native and non-native speakers of a language come together in fanfiction spaces. Attempts and practice at operating in a new language in fanfiction works are praised and rewarded. Developing writing skills through practice also applies to language skills because the more a language is used, the better one's grasp of the language will be. Writing fanfiction and receiving feedback on their use of language naturally improves a writer's skills when it comes to language and writing.

Feedback comments on works of fanfiction are often filled with praise. Praise comments contribute to the learning environment of fanfiction spaces in similar ways that praise feedback from teachers on student writing helps students improve. Some educators question the value of praise when giving feedback on student writing, but Dartmouth addresses this concern in "Diagnosing and Responding to Student Writing:"

> Many instructors are hesitant to praise papers that are not truly excellent. It is certainly important not to praise students for poor work; nor should instructors provide false

encouragement. Still, in neglecting to praise students, instructors lose the opportunity to note and to nurture what skills their students do possess. We encourage instructors to praise their students for work well done.

Teachers, and in this case fanfiction reviewers, are encouraged to give praise in their feedback because it does contribute value to writers' skill development. This is not to say that the mistakes are ignored. As pointed out earlier, fanfiction authors who are writing in a non-native language will often solicit grammatical feedback. Teachers and fanfiction reviewers both aim to help students/authors "produce clean and concise pieces of writing … through a pairing of praise and suggestion within [the] commentary … this pairing was meant to praise students [and fanfiction writers] to build confidence in writing while also probing them for further exploration and success in their written work" (Starheim iii). Fanfiction reviewers (and teachers) will pair praise and revision suggestions in order to "soften criticisms and suggestions rather than simply responding to good work" (Hyland & Hyland 185). This softening of criticism through praise can protect the self-confidence of less able writers while also motivating them to keep practicing. The encouragement and praise generally found in the fanfiction community promotes confidence in a new language learner. Instead of feeling ashamed for their lack of fluency or mistakes, non-fluent fanfiction writers are inspired to keep practicing and writing.

Marked by passion and enthusiasm for a work of popular media, fanfiction community members create bonds based on support and encouragement. The community enables fanfiction writers to combine passion with practice: "[I]nstead of just a thumbs up or down, fanfic[tion] is a discursive practice, accepted by a large body of users, that enables its creators and users to

utterly change a text and its effects on the world" (Clemons 274). The fanfiction community is a

dynamic space full of encouragement, experimentation, enthusiasm, and learning.

5   Fanfiction As: Looking to the Future

The goal of teaching is to engage students in their work, and in their education, to show them that it is not a toil or chore but an experience that they can invest their passion in which will benefit them in the future. This goal is a lofty one. It is hard to engage students when they see a class as an obstacle or as a simple obligation to suffer through. Teachers try to rouse interest and passion within their students, changing their pedagogies to try and find what works best for their students:

> Much of popular writing pedagogy is intended to be responsive to the needs and life experiences of a diverse student population. Nonetheless, due to institutional and curricular constraints, difficulty often arises in the implementation of such pedagogies in formal instructional settings such as classrooms, resulting in a situation that offers students little opportunity to actively make meaning and to shape their own learning.
>
> (Black 139)

There may be little opportunity in the classroom to implement these kinds of pedagogies, but that makes any effort even more important. Carve space into our classroom for our students to engage in their learning through their own passions. Teachers must strive to create an environment that values students' attempts at meaning-making. Why not try to bring some of the students' passion into the classroom from the very beginning?

Incorporating fanfiction into the classroom is one possible way to create this space for our students. It offers unique opportunities for both students and teachers, incorporating "an interplay

of officially sanctioned forms of knowledge, such as traditional writing conventions and genres, and unofficial forms of knowledge, such as intimate knowledge of the characters and settings of television series, popular books, and video games" (Black 126-27). Despite not being a part of the traditional literary canon, popular culture, especially branches such as fandom and fanfiction, embrace the same skills and conventions as those valued in academic circles. In the case of popular culture, however, there is a layer of passion often not found in the classroom. The passion that students hold for popular culture does not discount the intellectual rigor of the work they produce in conjunction with the "unofficial knowledge" they gain through that passion. Addressing these types of arguments, Rebecca Wanzo points out: "Accusations of unscholarly approaches cut to the heart of what many people find most troubling about acafandom [the crossover between academia and fandom]: that love obstructs good knowledge production. Yet it is also the love—and at times disappointment—that can produce scholarship that really articulates the intellectual stakes of a work." Passion is not a hindrance nor does its presence produce work that cannot be equal to that of the traditional "objective" academic text. If anything, bringing passion into the classroom through popular culture, such as fanfiction, aids in engaging students in their own learning.

For an example of how fanfiction can exist in the classroom, I offer my own class: Rhetoric of Fandom. As a Graduate Teaching Associate, I am tasked with teaching English 103, an introductory composition course, which is primarily made up of first-year students. My course serves as an intersection point between the realm of academia and that of popular culture. In my classroom, the two are not treated as separate but as intertwined and equally valued. By equally valuing official and unofficial forms of knowledge in my classroom, I make space for my

students to employ the writing, reading, and analytical skills and abilities gained from being a participant in the fandom community in a traditional academic setting. These skills are valued regardless of how they were developed, and that acceptance enables students to engage in the classroom learning in any way that they can without feeling judged for using unconventional knowledge or methods. My students grapple with complex academic texts, such as Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation" and Barthes' "The Death of the Author" alongside texts like "The Digital Millennium Copyright Act," all in the context of the rhetorical situations around and within fandom communities. And they do this with enthusiasm and academic rigor.

While my class is not focused primarily on fanfiction itself, the topic is frequently brought up in class discussion. Fanfiction, due to its structure as a written text, is the closest thing in the fandom community to a traditional academic text and therefore operates as a connection and diving-off point for my students. The goal of the class is for students to develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills through an understanding of rhetoric. Fandom comes in to bring enthusiasm, excitement, and pleasure to the learning. The assignments range from critical analyses of fanworks (fanfiction, video, art), to students creating a piece of fanwork of their own, to a multimodal group project. With each assignment, my students are encouraged to use the skills developed through their participation in fandom as an avenue to understand rhetorical concepts. It is not hard to help students see a connection between audience and authorship when they understand that fanfiction writers often solicit feedback from their audience. Or how to pick apart the nuances of tone in copyright policies and how that may influence works of both conventional fiction and fanfiction. Understanding how tropes and thematic elements are used to create a sense of familiarity and acceptance in an audience enables students to see relationships

of power in society all around them, not just in a work of fanfiction. Fanfiction, and fandom in general, is a lens I employ in my class in order to encourage my students to hone and use their critical analysis skills in all facets of their lives, present and future, in the academic realm and beyond.

In doing background research for this thesis, it became apparent to me how little research has been done on the fanfiction community. Having only gotten a foot in the door in the 1980s, Fan Studies has remained an extremely niche academic subject. Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers*, one of the foundational texts of the field, was published in 1992. Other books in the field are even newer, such as *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* and *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, which were published in 2006 and 2014 respectively. Anne Jamison's *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over the World* was published in 2013 and *The Fanfiction Reader: Folk Tales for the Digital Age* by Francesca Coppa only came out in 2017. The articles and theses referenced in this thesis span from the early 2000s until 2019. The newness of these publications showcases how the field of Fan Studies and Fanfiction is still being formed and shaped to this today.

With all of this in mind, I encourage others to be willing to explore and experiment with fanfiction, both as an area of study and as a possible asset to the classroom. Let's start to fill in the gap between the academic realm and popular culture and acknowledge the interesting and valuable ways in which each can complicate the other. Fanfiction is an underexplored reservoir of writing that deserves serious consideration similar to other forms of literature.

Works Cited

@neilhimself (Neil Gaiman). "I won the Hugo Award for a piece of Sherlock Holmes/H. P.

    Lovecraft fanfiction, so I'm in favour." *Twitter*. 29 November 2017, 6:29 p.m.,

    https://twitter.com/neilhimself/status/936059562863550471.

Adorno, Theodor, and Max Horkheimer. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass

    Deception." *The Culture Studies Reader*, edited by Simon During, Routledge, London,

    1993, pp. 29–43.

Alter, Alexandra. "The Weird World of Fan Fiction." *The Wall Street Journal*, 2012,

    www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303734204577464411825970488.

"AO3 Census: Masterpost." *Fanlore*, Wikimedia Foundation, 7 Sept. 2020,

    fanlore.org/wiki/AO3_Census: Masterpost.

Bazerman, Charles. "Concept 1.3 Writing Expresses and Shares Meaning to Be Reconstructed

    by the Reader." *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, by

    Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth A. Wardle, Utah State University Press, Logan, Utah,

    2016.

bisexualdisaster221. "Awareness Fics." Archive of Our Own, 2020. *The Organization for

    Transformative Works*, https://archiveofourown.org/series/1992742. Accessed 9 April

    2021.

Black, Rebecca Ward. "Convergence and Divergence, Informal Learning in Online Fanfiction

    Communities and Formal Writing Pedagogy." *Counterpoints*, vol. 338, 2008, pp. 125–

    143. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/42979225. Accessed 09 Nov. 2020.

Card, Orson Scott, and Yoda Patta. *Interviews - Questions for a Research Paper*. 1997,

    www.hatrack.com/research/interviews/yoda-patta.shtml.

Clemons, AmyLea. "Enabling/Disabling: Fanfiction and Disability Discourse." *Canadian*

    Journal of Disability Studies, vol. 8, no. 2, 29 Apr. 2019, pp. 247–278.,

    doi:10.15353/cjds.v8i2.500.

"Copyright Act of 1790." *Copyright.gov*, U.S. Copyright Office, copyright.gov/about/1790-

    copyright-act.html.

"Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17) and Related Laws Contained in Title 17 of the

    United States Code." *Copyright Law of the United States | U.S. Copyright Office*, U.S.

    Copyright Office, June 2020, www.copyright.gov/title17/.

Dawen. "Half." Archive of Our Own, 2020. *The Organization for Transformative Works*,

    https://archiveofourown.org/works/28023483. Accessed 9 April 2021.

"Diagnosing and Responding to Student Writing." *Institute for Writing and Rhetoric*, Dartmouth

    College, writing-speech.dartmouth.edu/teaching/first-year-writing-pedagogies-methods-

    design/diagnosing-and-responding-student-writing.

Eden. "Fanfiction and LGBT+ Representation." *The Artifice*, 14 Oct. 2019, https://the-

    artifice.com/fanfiction-lgbt/.

ElvaFirestone. "To Give Your Hand." Archive of Our Own, 2021. *The Organization for*

    Transformative Works, https://archiveofourown.org/works/26052898/chapters/63359752.

    Accessed 9 April 2021.

"Fanlore." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 4 Feb. 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fanlore.

"Firelord_zutara. "Evolutionary, endpoint." Archive of Our Own, 2020. *The Organization for*

    Transformative Works, https://archiveofourown.org/works/16440884/chapters/38496926.

    Accessed 9 April 2021.

Fischlin, Daniel. "A Note About Adaptation and Source Texts for Romeo and Juliet." *Canadian*

    Adaptations of Shakespeare Project, University of Guelph, 2007,

    www.canadianshakespeares.ca/folio/Sources/Source_texts_IF.pdf.

Garner, Alexandra. "The Erotics of Fanfiction: Queering Fans, Works, and Communities in

    Modern Internet Fandom." *Ohio Library and Information Network*, *Graduate College of*

    Bowling Green State University, Graduate College of Bowling Green State University,

    2016,

    etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=bgsu1460129118&dispositi

    on=inline.

"General Introduction." *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from the*

    Seventeenth Century to the Present, by Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, Psychology

    Press, 2000, p. 1. *Google Books*,

    books.google.com/books?id=L8E2N4q7CQEC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=f

    alse.

Guinan, Kellye Ann. "Culture and Community Online How Fanfiction Creates a Sense of Social

    Identity by Reshaping Popular Media." *Middle Tennessee State University*, 2017.

    JEWLScholar@MTSU,

    jewlscholar.mtsu.edu/bitstream/handle/mtsu/5251/GUINAN%20%28Kellye%29%20Fina

    l%20Thesis.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

Hayes, Sharon, and Matthew Ball. "Queering Cyberspace: Fan Fiction Communities as Spaces

    for Expressing and Exploring Sexuality." *Queering Paradigms*, edited by Burkhard

    Scherer, vol. 1, Peter Lang, 2009, pp. 219–240. *ResearchGate*,

    www.researchgate.net/publication/41057827_Queering_cyberspace_fan_fiction_commun

    ities_as_Spaces_for_expressing_and_exploring_sexuality.

Hesse, Doug. "We Know What Works in Teaching Composition." *Chronicle.com*, The Chronicle

    of Higher Education, 3 Jan. 2017, www.chronicle.com/article/we-know-what-works-in-

    teaching-composition/.

Hyland, Fiona, and Ken Hyland. "Sugaring the Pill: Praise and Written Feedback." *Journal of

    Second Language Writing*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2001, pp. 185–212.,

    doi:10.5040/9781350037939.0036.

Jenkins, Henry. Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture. Routledge, 2013.

Jirousbaby. "He's not stupid." Archive of Our Own, 2021. *The Organization for Transformative

    Works*, https://archiveofourown.org/works/30138945. Accessed 9 April 2021.

King James Bible Online. King James Bible Online, Nov. 2007, www.kingjamesbibleonline.org.

Koehm, Diana. "Revision as Resistance- Fanfiction as an Empowering Community for Female

and Queer Fans." *OpenCommons@UConn*, *University of Connecticut*, University of

Connecticut, 2018,

opencommons.uconn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1616&context=srhonors_theses.

Knudsen, Rachel Ahern. "Fanfiction in the Fifth Century BCE." *Medium*, EIDOLON, 10 August

2015, eidolon.pub/fanfiction-in-the-fifth-century-bce-477a68ed732b.

Lee, Sharon. "The Second Answer." *Sharon Lee Writer*, N.p., 26 Oct. 2013,

web.archive.org/web/20171121235203/sharonleewriter.com/2013/10/the-second-

answer/.

Lenker, Maureen Lee. "How 'Bridgerton' Is Poised to Revolutionize Romance on Television."

Entertainment Weekly, Meredith Corporation, 13 Nov. 2020, ew.com/tv/bridgerton-

poised-revolutionize-romance-television/.

Li, Guofang. "Literacy Engagement Through Online and Offline Communities Outside School:

English Language Learners' Development as Readers and Writers." *Theory into Practice*,

vol. 51, no. 4, 2012, pp. 312–318., www.jstor.org/stable/23362838. Accessed 09 Nov.

2020.

Mad_Nimord. "Type-2 Hero." Archive of Our Own, 2021. *The Organization for Transformative

Works*, https://archiveofourown.org/works/19262302/chapters/45809623. Accessed 9

April 2021.

Niven, Larry. "Dedication." *The Ringworld Engineers*, Ballantine Books, 1997.

NohaIjiachi. "A beacon in the dark." Archive of Our Own, 2019. *The Organization for*

> *Transformative Works*, https://archiveofourown.org/works/13616124/chapters/31261698.

> Accessed 9 April 2021.

orphan_account. "Without Translation." Archive of Our Own, 2016. *The Organization for*

> *Transformative Works*, https://archiveofourown.org/works/6145495. Accessed 9 April

> 2021.

Paulson, Michael. "'Hamilton' Heads to Broadway in a Hip-Hop Retelling." *The New York*

> *Times*, 12 July 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/07/13/theater/hamilton-heads-to-

> broadway-in-a-hip-hop-retelling.html.

Petersen-Reed, Khaliah. "Fanfiction as Performative Criticism: Harry Potter Racebending."

> *Journal of Creative Writing Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2019,

> scholarworks.rit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1181&context=jcws. Accessed

> 2020.

"Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing." *Conference on College Composition*

> *and Communication*, National Council of Teachers of English, Mar. 2015,

> cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/postsecondarywriting#principle1.

Raw, Adrienne E. "Normalizing Disability: Tagging and Disability Identity Construction through

> Marvel Cinematic Universe Fanfiction." *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, vol. 8,

> no. 2, 28 Apr. 2019, pp. 185–200., doi:10.15353/cjds.v8i2.498.

"Responding to Student Writing." *Harvard Writing Project*, Harvard College,

> writingproject.fas.harvard.edu/pages/responding-student-writing.

Rippon, Blythe. "(Fan)fiction, Queer Representation, and Identity." *Ylva Publishing*, Ylva

    Publishing, 26 June 2016, www.ylva-publishing.com/2016/06/26/fanfiction-queer-

    representation-identity/.

Sommers, Nancy. "Responding to Student Writing." *College Composition and Communication*,

    vol. 33, no. 2, 1982, pp. 148–156. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/357622. Accessed 10

    Apr. 2021.

Starheim, Suzanne. "Effective Commentary on Student Writing: Pairing Praise with

    Suggestion." *Youngstown State University*, 2013. *OhioLINK*,

    etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=ysu1389907956&dispositio

    n=inline.

Tan, Cecilia. "Statement on Fanfic." *Cecilia Tan*, Cecilia Tan, 2010,

    blog.ceciliatan.com/statement-on-fanfic.

Tanabe, Jennifer. "Creativity." *New World Encyclopedia*, Paragon House Publishers, 23 July

    2020, www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/creativity.

The Constitution of the United States of America, National Archives and Records

    Administration, 1991. constitutioncenter.org/.

The Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998, *U.S. Copyright Office*. Washington, D.C.:

    Copyright Office, Library of Congress, 1998. PDF.

Wanzo, Rebecca. "African American Acafandom and Other Strangers: New Genealogies of Fan

    Studies." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, vol. 20, 2015,

    doi:10.3983/twc.2015.0699.

Weiler, Regina. "Fanfiction Reviews and Academic Literacy: Potential Impacts and

    Implications." *STARS, University of Central Florida*, University of Central Florida, 2019,

    stars.library.ucf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7322&context=etd.

Wenger-Trayner, Etienne, and Beverly Wenger-Trayner. "Introduction to Communities of

    Practice." *Wenger-Trayner*, 2015, wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-

    practice/.

zuk_i. "Lost in thought." Archive of Our Own, 2021. *The Organization for Transformative*

    Works, https://archiveofourown.org/works/29784498. Accessed 9 April 2021.