

## **Fanning Flames/Flaming Fans: Theorising Fanfiction**

**Sreya Miriam Shaji**

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**Abstract:** Fanfiction is an enormously popular genre with a niche audience. And this niche is growing bigger and wider as more and more people join fan communities. These communities establish their virtual presence through fan labor, and fanfiction is a major contributor to the influence that a fandom constructs for itself. Juxtaposing this phenomenon with the rise of the digitization of literary spaces opens up the discourse about the evolution of literary spaces and genres. Fanfiction is the new item on the agenda that is garnering attention. Although quite a vast field of study, this paper is concerned with a uniform taxonomy and theory of Fanfiction.

**Key Words:** fanfiction, cardinal fics, marginal fics, liminality, intertextuality.

The digitization of literary spaces has picked up pace with the turn of the decade and opens up the discourse about the evolution of literary spaces and genres. A new item on the agenda that is garnering quite some attention would be Fanfiction. Fan Fiction or fanfiction (also abbreviated to fan fic, fanfic, fic or ff) is a work of fiction based on characters or settings originating in another work, created by fans of the original work rather than by its creator. Fans may maintain the creator's characters and settings or add their own. It is a popular form of fan labor, particularly since the advent of the Internet. ("Fanfiction"). Although quite a vast field of study, this paper attempts to focus on the taxonomy and theory of Fanfiction.

The term 'Fanfiction' came into being in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when copyright laws had to differentiate between works that were approved by the copyright holder and those that were unapproved to use their characters or premises etc. Although there has been some dispute on the correct term being 'Fanfiction' or 'Fan fiction', there is tentative consensus in the community that the proper term should be 'Fanfiction'. This being said, both terms as well as their abbreviations are widely used. Fanfiction is an enormously popular genre with a niche audience. And this niche is growing bigger and wider as more and more people join

respective fan communities. These communities establish their virtual presence through fan labor, and fanfiction is a major contributor to the influence that a fandom constructs for itself.

For ease of classification and understanding in terms of content creation, the original author i.e. the creator of the parent content (canon) would be henceforth addressed as the 'Primary Author', and the fanfiction author i.e. the creator of the consecutive content (fan labour) would be addressed as the 'Secondary Author'. Author here refers to the creator or producer of the main narrative (canon) since it is not only the written word that spawns fanfiction. Fanfiction is now written centered on subjects from music/pop and TV shows to anime and video games. It is a way for fans to create their own narratives, to fix what they think went wrong in the canonical narrative, to explore sub texts or sub narratives, to create spaces that went unexplored or were never created in the original canon and so forth.

"Although all audiences bring their own interpretive frameworks to popular media, the deep interest and involvement in media content demonstrated specifically by fans has attracted the close attention of scholars." (Sullivan 195). And two aspects of media fandom have caught the attention of theorists – the social and the interpretive. The social aspect is where fans come together in formal or informal structures to share their mutual interests while the interpretive aspect is where fans act as interpreters and producers of content. The interpretive aspect of fandom culture is what gives us fanfiction while the social aspects of fandoms are found as being mirrored in a smaller scale in Fanfiction. Besides the earliest two categories identified from the works in *Star Trek* 'fanzines' ie. 'Mary-Sue' fics and 'Slash' fics, a study of fanfiction reveals the lack of any uniform categorization or taxonomy. The ten narrative styles in fanfiction identified by Henry Jenkins are useful as a preliminary guide and to get an idea of the variety in Fanfiction. However it is rather cumbersome and focuses more on the functions of the works rather than their characteristics. For ease of understanding and classification, two primary kinds of fanfiction have been identified – ones that remain independent of the secondary author and others that include the secondary author or 'Marginal Fics' and 'Cardinal Fics' are proposed. In the case of the first kind or 'Marginal Fics', the secondary author remains independent of the narrative. They may employ original characters and settings along with canonical characters, situations and settings. They may also manipulate canon characters to display original traits that they have created. Characters, both original and canon may be placed in innovative or new settings and made to tackle new situations or pre-existing ones in new ways. The work is usually narrated in the third person from an impersonal

point of view. The secondary and primary authors remain distinct from the work, remaining in the margins and the work retains a distinct separateness from its creators. In the case of the second kind, or Cardinal Fics, the secondary author creates a space for themselves to enter and function within the narrative. These are usually narrated in first person as the audience experiences the work through the eyes of the secondary author who performs a fundamental function within the secondary narrative. The ‘Mary-Sue’ fanfics that were first identified from the *Star Trek* franchise would fall under this category.

A subcategory of Cardinal Fics that have been observed are ‘Imagines’. Urban Dictionary defines Imagines as, “A type of fanfiction where the reader is included in the story as the protagonist. Oftentimes uses ‘y/n’ (for ‘your name’) to represent the reader's name. Popularized on Tumblr with stories about One Direction” (“Imagines”). Imagines may be short or long and are present on dedicated fanfiction sites as well as various social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr. Cardinal Fics and Imagines allow fans to write themselves into their desired narrative and be part of, and influence the narratives of their choice. Imagines are also found in meme format, i.e. in the form of text on an image along with the usual text formats.

Another interesting form of fanfiction involves ‘OneShots’ or ‘One Shots’. Urban Dictionary defines Oneshots as “A term used in fanfictions to say that there will only be one body of text” (“One shot”). These exist in the abovementioned formats and have also appeared in a slightly different avatar on YouTube. Oneshots are found on YouTube where a single scenario or chapter is tackled in the form of an artificially created video with accompanying text that conveys the plot and dialogue along with music and often sounds to accompany the action.

YouTube has its own style of fanfiction that involves videos and music along with text. These exist as both Oneshots and series. Just like fanfiction authors upload their chapters; these creators upload videos in the form of chapters. They can be both in the form of Cardinal Fics or Marginal Fics. When discussing YouTube, the concept of ‘Edits’ must also be mentioned. These are a unique kind of fanfiction involving the visual medium and a covert narrative rather than a plainly obvious one. Edits will rarely contain text but rather music, video clips, photographs etc. The text, if included are captions, song lyrics or text prompts for the narrative that is being built. In these, audio and visual matter is mastered to form a short narrative. This narrative rarely involves interference with the plot but rather, focuses on character development. They often portray their subjects in the light of sexual appeal or in the light of being cute or adorable. They often create ‘ships’ as well, ‘ships’ being those fan-made platonic or romantic relationships between pre-existing

characters where ‘ship’ is short for relationship. In this way, they portray a narrative, a facet of character, a situation etc. which may or may not be true but which the creator wishes to propagate. It must also be noted that in fanfiction involving the audio-visual media, not all content will be strictly that of the subject. Non related material in the respective media formats can be added to the narrative and with the subjectivity of the audience’s gaze, it becomes a unified whole under scrutiny. They are most commonly found on YouTube but can also be found on Instagram and Twitter along with other social media applications. This is another form of fanfiction that is not usually categorized under the term by conventional standards.

Similarly, there are entire narratives that are created through fanart alone. They may or may not involve the use of dialogue or minimal text to build a narrative. Instances of independent fan labour such as video manipulation and fan art, overlapping with fanfiction and narrative generation produce interesting fan content.

Twitter follows its own unique format for fanfiction. Works are composed in the form of tweets and continued as threads. Secondary authors usually have dedicated fan accounts for their works and a large section of the fandom community is often invested in these works and follow their favourite creators religiously. Another type of fanfiction that deserves a mention are those that are written in the ‘text’ format. In these, the entire narrative is conveyed through a series of ‘direct messages’ rather than plot or dialogue. This can be in the form of screenshots of conversations or works that are simply written in this format. It is thus clear that fanfiction can be categorized on the basis of medium, form and structure, as well as author position within the text.

The Y/N trope is so singular to Fanfiction that just the mention of Y/N calls the entire genre to mind. A primary component of ‘Cardinal Fics’, the Y/N trope has extended beyond just the text of fanfiction to games such as Episode, BTS Universe Story etc. as well as to the practice of Roleplay in fandoms. In Fanfiction it is not just Imagines that hold the Y/N trope, although they carry the trope exclusively. Y/N fics are the most overt representations of ‘Cardinal Fics’, directly addressing the need to be included in canonical narratives. This self-insertion plays on the borders of the erotics of roleplay. Although Roleplay already exists as a sort of build-a-bear version of Imagines, the erotics associated with this translation of a trope into a fan engagement are certainly interesting and worth addressing. This is even more interesting when we add the earliest two tropes of Fanfiction that were identified into consideration – ‘Mary-Sue’ Fics and ‘Slash’ Fics. Both were hugely controversial when they were first introduced and severely condemned as juvenile and inappropriate. The ‘Mary-Sue’ Fics emerged from a 1973 parody story of *Star Trek* where

the protagonist was named Mary-Sue and has hence gone on to describe fics with characters that are unbelievably perfect even for a fictional setting. They accomplish impossible tasks and upstage established protagonists and are severely criticized for being too self-serving or idealized. Although they aren't apparent self-insertions, the subversive message is often that of an unrealistic clone of the secondary author being inserted into the narrative. With 'Slash' fics on the other hand, although there isn't the issue of self-insertion, it is the transfer of audience expectations and fantasies onto canon that is criticized. 'Slash' fics are those that depict intense romantic, often homosexual relationships between characters that aren't romantically linked in canon. They are instrumental in challenging the heteronormative standards of canon literature. These fics "are written largely by women for women audiences." (Sullivan 204). Female erotic fantasies find a space in Fanfiction through these tropes and methods. Where the Y/N and 'Mary-Sue' fics focus on the possibility of relationships between the creator and the muse, 'Slash' turns the focus on relationships within the text which were previously unexplored or explored unsatisfactorily.

Although the sensual and the erotic has found its way into fiction, it still retains the taboo tag of the prudish sensibilities of mainstream society that still blanches at the explicit mention of a 'pussy'. Fanfiction has no such qualms and not only embraces but celebrates the sensual. This is a welcome avenue of expression for women and the non-conformists of gender and sexuality, and their subversive or transgressive love. Fanfiction offers a space to explore these illicit, erotic landscapes without censure or judgement. With the overwhelming presence of women as creators and consumers, the traditional male gaze of patriarchal society is upset in favor of women-centric pleasure. Content is created by, with, and for women and their pleasure. Themes such as BDSM often find a place within Fanfiction where the Dom/Sub dynamics offer another narrative to be explored. For although the creative power still rests within the creator to insert themselves or their characters, they function strictly within the bounds of the Dom/Sub narrative. Aspects of characterization and plot are predetermined by these thematic frameworks. And although they have a slight limiting aspect, creators still pursue these themes relentlessly as an opportunity to express and explore the forbidden and the so-called 'unnatural'. Thus, the politics of the erotics of pleasure can be explored through Fanfiction which adds to the appeal of the genre.

Moving away from the taxonomy of fanfiction, we see that it exists in relation to its subject. It occupies the dual position of being related to the original canonical fictional universe, or canon as well as existing outside canon. Most fanfiction occupies a parallel

space with regards to canon. They are usually produced free of cost and exist on mediums that make them available to a large community. However, they usually appropriate elements from canon works which involve copyright violations. But since they are almost never officially published, they usually remain safe from legal prosecution. Also, it must needs be mentioned that although there are many works that simply tweak or alter one or two elements while remaining canon compliant, there are works that rewrite the entirety of the narrative while retaining only a few elements which means that the end product contains more of the secondary author's originality than that of the primary's. Thus, it can be argued that there are degrees of appropriation in fanfiction rather than plain and blatant plagiarism.

The most common critique against fanfiction almost always rages around the lack of originality or creativity. As an art, fanfiction exhibits both an abundance and a dearth of creativity. Inhabiting a liminal space of creation, fanfiction requires an enormous amount of creativity to see past established canon and create a new narrative. It also has to make the difficult choice of staying true to canon or diverging into new territory. However, the argument for lack of creativity can also be supported by the fact that fanfiction has an already prepared stock to fall back on. Where the secondary author's creativity fails, the primary text can provide resources to fill in the blanks. This means that the secondary author does not begin from scratch but rather on an established foundation laid by the primary author. As it is, a creative spark is of course required in order to deviate from established narratives and produce new content while still staying true to the parent text to an extent. This fine line is often trod carefully by skilled secondary authors. Contrary to popular notion, true literary gems with tight plot construction and infallible characterization can be found even in this genre against popular notion. But these are simply ignored and dismissed alongside the mediocre simply by virtue of the genre and the mass disdain for the subculture. Awareness about the literary merit and capacity of the genre would topple existing power structures and therefore remains dubious.

Fanfiction also spawns its own fiction. They often inspire other works that produce a series or subsequent works. It may also inspire fan labour in other media. For example, exceptional fanfiction often has fanart or fan video edits made for them. Videos are edited and manipulated skillfully to suit the secondary work and often acts as a teaser or trailer for the above mentioned secondary work. Same goes for fan art that is created to suit the secondary work that inspired it. These, if made by someone else other than the secondary author are often exchanged as dedications and many secondary authors include their gratitude to these benevolent fans who have now become tertiary authors and provide links

to their works. Together these media experiences transform the entire process of fanfiction. Often secondary authors themselves create their own tertiary works and aim for a multifaceted experience for consumers of their works. It can then be said that even these forms of fan labour that create their own narratives, albeit without the medium of the written language become a form of fanfiction then, as they alter and transform canon narratives. Thus the continuous organic generation of content might start with Fanfiction but it doesn't end there.

This process is continuous and as a result cyclical with every work coming back to the parent work or the primary text. This process can be seen as almost mirroring the transformative processes that occur in the world of open-source software. Wikipedia defines it as:

Open-source software (OSS) is a type of computer software in which source code is released under a license in which the copyright holder grants users the rights to study, change, and distribute the software to anyone and for any purpose. Open-source software may be developed in a collaborative public manner. Open-source software is a prominent example of open collaboration. ("Open-source software")

Open source software has resulted in huge advancements in the technological arena while cutting down on costs and making innovation from around the world accessible to consumers. The source code that is owned by the copyright holder can be compared to the canon text or primary text. The only difference is that OSS was released to the public with the intention of them creating their own versions of the original. Primary texts however, were meant to remain as standalones, complete in themselves and unalterable. The fact that consumers have appropriated these texts to manipulate into their own narratives lends credence to Roland Barthes' 1967 essay, *The Death of the Author*. The primary author no longer owns or controls the secondary, tertiary or further texts. The production of such works is an infinite and continuous process with each work getting farther away from the primary text.

This however does not influence its position as fanfiction or take away from the specific credibility that its position offers. An apparent example of this phenomenon can be seen J. K. Rowling, the author and creator of the *Harry Potter* universe. With the completion of the seven-part books which is the original canon text, Rowling has branched out into movies, plays, theme parks as well as other storylines set in the original universe. However much of her later interactions with her original canon text and characters has caused the fandom to take a step back from her. Although her craft is venerated, almost the entirety

of the fandom has divorced the primary author from the continuous evolutionary process of the canon text and universe because of her failure to maintain the continuity of the universe. The power that would normally have been localized with Rowling as the sole creator of the primary text has been taken away in literary terms and the author dead to the fandom.

The liminality of fanfiction is an interesting aspect of discussion. Liminality is an intersection between structures. Malynda Taylor has stated that there are, "...two approaches to literary theory, deconstruction and feminism, that have, in my view, moved literature and literary studies into a liminality." (Taylor 172). Similarly, fanfiction occupies a liminal space, the borders of art and creativity. It exists on an alternate plane from mainstream media. However, it transforms this space by virtue of its presence. Existing in the between, the space of change, between the known and the unknown. As a genre, fanfiction occupies an intersectional space in terms of its creative interactions as well as its literary involvements. Fanfiction exists beyond traditional modes and structures of writing. A genre that encompasses a multitude of other genres, fanfiction, is truly a breakaway genre. It has the elements of surprise, longevity, the mantle of a literary legacy and attention, which is garnered on the strength of being the derivative of an existing, well-publicized work. However, at this juncture, fanfiction can be taken as both means and end. It is only when fanfiction is considered as the means to a revolution in literature, to the formation of a new style and form, that it is seen as intersectional. If, however, it is considered as the revolution, it is the end and therefore an independent structure already.

The creative possibilities in fanfiction on the other hand is related to the question of originality. The process of creating fanfiction i.e. appropriation and transformation occurs outside the framework of traditional creativity that demands complete originality. In such a case, the liminality of creativity in fanfiction can also be viewed as the means and the end. If fanfiction is viewed as a completely new product, it is the end but however if it is to be viewed as part of the process of change, it is the means to the end, i.e. an entirely different structure of creativity. However, what can be said with certainty regarding fanfiction is that it is change and the catalyst for change. Fanfiction is the change in process and mentality that is required in the new creative reality. "It is in such liminal, in-between spaces that exist between public and private where ideas can be formed, reformed, and redefined without the constraints of wider societal conventions. What emerges from the liminal space is not necessarily a definitive answer, but rather an alternative way of understanding social realities where artistic, political, cultural, and social ideas and concepts are in constant flux and contestation." (Andrews 85).



Liminality and marginality are so closely related that they are often used interchangeably. However, there is a need for an established distinction between the two as one is a change quotient while the other is a structural quotient. Unlike structured, canon literature, fanfiction involves a freedom of expression, passion and inspiration. This freedom is often construed as the lack of an overarching structure which leads to literary chaos. However, these perceptions regarding fanfiction are false because rather than anarchy, this genre operates within its own localized framework that is significantly different from mainstream frameworks. The presence of a malleable structure that is markedly different from mainstream ones offers Fanfiction its intersectional space. As an intersectional medium, it offers a refuge and an outlet to the literary subaltern of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. “Almost all fan fiction is written by women” (qtd. in Berger 180). Women have had a prominent position within fandom spaces and fanfiction from the advent of the first ‘fanzines’. With the virtualization of these spaces, women and the bearers of alternate narratives have made fanfiction their own. Gender and sexuality are expressed unfettered within the intersectional spaces of fanfiction, both in content as well as members of the community. Creators find expression for their very specific experiences and adopt gender or sexuality specific-identities to ensure maximum visibility for their unique narratives. The intersectional nature of the space ensures freedom of expression without fear of censure.

The position of Fanfiction as a subculture can be better explained with an understanding of the history of fandom scholarship. The very first wave of fandom scholars like Henry Jenkins, Camille Bacon-Smith, John Fiske etc considered the deep engagement with popular culture that is the hallmark of fandom to be a challenge to the existing status quo. Their primary focus was to rehabilitate the negative notion of fandom as the cheap entertainment of consumers of popular culture. The second wave of fan scholars however trained a more critical eye on the existence of the fandom itself and in particular at “the ways in which the attitudes and behaviors of fans may be unwittingly reproducing many of the same cultural, gender, and economic hierarchies that they were attempting to escape from in the mainstream.” (Sullivan 2006). Both waves focused on the idea of fandom as a subculture where the first wave was more concerned with the counter tradition while the second wave concerned itself with the emulation tendencies of fandom.

Media fans are members of subcultures in the sense that they adopt their own linguistic codes (specialized ways of talk, unique forms of greeting and address, and the use of code names or titles, for example) and symbolic forms (including styles of dress) that delineate them from the rest of the population. For Hebdige and other British scholars who observed

and analyzed subcultural groups in Britain (McRobbie & Nava, 1984; Willis, 1981), such forms of cultural expression not only established a sense of self-identity for these groups, but also functioned as acts of emancipation from traditional authority. Early scholars of media fandom suggested that fans, while not necessarily posing the kind of threat to traditional cultural authority that punk music did in the 1970s and '80s, still challenge existing hierarchies by redeeming “trashy” cultural forms like TV soap operas, science fiction programs, horror films, and mystery novels. (Sullivan 196)

Fandom as a social subculture implies the literary subculturalist inclinations of fanfiction as a result, where fanfiction is the subcultural capital of the fandom subculture. Fanfiction even adheres to the six ways proposed by Ken Gelder in 2007 to distinguish subculture as follows:

1. They have a negative relation to work - Fanfiction is often considered to be easy to create and to require fewer creative faculties than canonical creations.
2. They have a negative or ambivalent relation to class – Fanfiction does not adhere to traditional class definitions and is not class-conscious.
3. Their association is with territory rather than property – Fanfiction is associated more closely with fandom and fan engagement than physical texts.
4. There is a movement away from home into non-domestic forms of belonging – Fanfiction is centered on the social community of the fandom rather than the family.
5. Ties to excess and exaggeration – Fanfiction has a powerful tradition of the hyperbole and the superfluous.
6. Refusal of the banalities of ordinary life and in particular, of massification – Fanfiction is notorious for its often-controversial views and methods of literary approach.

These nonconformist characteristics of Fanfiction are reminiscent of the Carnavalesque in literature. The four categories of the carnivalesque sense of the world as identified by Bakhtin coincide with the features of fanfiction such as the free interaction of ideas and individuals and their unbridled expression unencumbered by the regular laws of literature or society. Eccentricities of all kinds are welcomed in Fanfiction without fear of censure or curfew and natural responses are welcomed. ‘Carnivalistic *mésalliances*’ – the forbidden union of unlikely elements such as the holy and the lowly or the new and the old is a primary characteristic of Fanfiction with the seamless merging of various genres and

subjects. The genres of canonical literature are possessed and altered fundamentally to suit Fanfiction. The 'sacred' laws and traditions of canonical literature are debased and stripped of their terror and power in order to manipulate them to suit the medium and thus, there is a subsequent blaspheming of the canonical tradition as well as a sanctifying of the 'base' medium of Fanfiction.

One of the major sources of appeal for Fanfiction is the difference of separation between creator and audience. This separation is one that appears thrice within this discourse. The first separation is between the original creator and the passive audience. This separation follows the guidelines of age-old practices that dictate the terms of traditional author-audience contracts. Hence the separation is usually huge and the author remains separate and distant from their audience with the only point of commonality being the product or work. The second separation is between the original creator and the secondary creator since the secondary author is primarily an audience and consumer before they evolve into the secondary creator. This separation is larger than that between primary creator and passive audience. This is because secondary and subsequent material along with their creators and the community make noticeable efforts to distance themselves from the primary creator.

The secondary creative space is separate and uniquely elitist in that only a portion of the primary audience partakes in the ritual of secondary creation, although at the same time, it is not elitist because anyone of the primary audience can become a secondary creator. The third separation is between the secondary creator and secondary audience. Although secondary creators are mandatorily required to be primary consumers in order to acquire the material and category-specific information that is required to become secondary creators, it is not necessary that all secondary consumers have to necessarily be primarily consumers as well. The large majority would be in favor of this since the secondary content is specialized to appeal to those with prior knowledge of the creative context. There are however accidental consumers who stumble upon secondary content and then proceed to consume the content, thereby placing themselves within the fan community.

The Internet has long been the source and site of much discourse. It has been defined using methods such as the public sphere, multiple realities etc. However, Jodi Dean in her essay *The Net and Multiple Realities* argues that the Net or the Internet is a zero institution. "A zero institution is an institution which is not an institution but which nonetheless stands for (rather than is) a particular kind of social order - where voices are heard outside knowable channels of communication and reception and which is home to 'neo democratic' politics of resistance caught in globalised, networked, hyper-capitalism" (Dean 520-521). As you can see, Dean politicizes the Internet, recognizing and acknowledging its potential to host

resistance and disperse information. The principles of neo democracy which includes “mutating, provisional alliances between individuals and groups who may share common ground only in some causes perfectly suit the Internet landscape as a reactionary means against the hegemony of the nation-state” (Dean 521). These principles reflect in the formation of permeable relations that occur in the fanfiction space. The common ground here is often shared interest and a desire to influence narrative and the hegemony that they rebel against is the hegemony of mainstream literature. The Internet has been defined as not real, but the presence of real people creating discourses that result in real life implications cannot be dismissed as simply virtual. This comprehensive analysis of the Internet structure can be applied to fanfiction as well, a medium that truly possesses the capacity for resistance. The neo democratic politics identified by Dean in the internet coincides with the post structuralist views of destabilising the hegemony of the canon as well.

Fanfiction as a critique of mainstream canon is a Post Structuralist idea. A good example would be *The Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins. The books themselves and the subsequent movies that were spawned portrayed a dystopian world where children were forced to participate in a barbarian competition to fight to the death in order to secure food and necessities for their people. Contrasted against the abject poverty of most of the country was the opulence and extravagance of the Capitol. Human society as a whole has mirrored this power structure since the dawn of time. Sometimes blatantly as in the case of despots like Hitler or Mussolini and sometimes in more subtle fashion such as is the case with the world order today where a select few have monopolized control over the current economy. In the series, the media focuses more on the love triangle between the lead characters rather than on the harsh realities of their lives. In the real world as well, there is a tendency in the media to gloss over important and unpleasant news with trivial scandals and intrigue in order to play down the significance of the original news. And through it all, it is the children who pay the price of sustaining the system. Fanfiction of such a critical text has the potential to be all the more critical thus becoming a critique of a critique – a twice removed reality. Where established literature holds up the mirror of critique to society, fanfiction holds up the mirror to both society as well as its source canon.

Similarly, *Harry Potter*, which is set in a completely fictional universe, bears remarkable resemblances to existing human society although the parallels that are drawn are metaphorical and indirect. For example, the issue of racism is addressed through the pureblood agenda propagated by Voldemort and his Death Eaters, which even gains Nazi undertones with his ideas for mass genocide. The stigma against AIDS patients is addressed through the aversion to werewolves in the magical community with characters such as

Remus Lupin gaining our sympathy. Even mental illness is portrayed in the series with a prime example being the Dementors as symbols of depression. The cure for this, the Patronus spell is basically weaponizing happiness, telling people all over the world to cling on to their happiest moments and use it to overcome their own depression. Works such as these, monumental in form and ground breaking in substance, revolutionizing the reading public and an entire generation of young people, can be seen as the greatest critiques of society. By placing their works in fictional universes, authors deny real life parallels. They can deny accountability while at the same time, producing shrewd critiques of contemporary society. It is then only natural that such works would produce even more radical content. That such scathing critique will inspire and produce works with even more critical potential. This is where fanfiction comes in.

Fanfiction therefore, takes up the mantle where canon ends. It fills in the spaces in canon. Spaces that were ignored or left open, spaces that the marginalized take over. Thus, fanfiction becomes the narrative of the Other. According to Spivak, "...everybody thinks the subaltern is just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie." (De Kock 45). The Subaltern or the Other is defined by the lack of a voice. As Spivak said, "When you say cannot speak, it means that if speaking involves speaking and listening, this possibility of response, responsibility, does not exist in the subaltern's sphere." (De Kock 46). The literary subaltern speaks and isn't heard or is silenced by the dominant hegemony. Fanfiction becomes a medium to speak and be heard for the Subaltern here. Women who have historically borne the brunt of marginalization and being silenced find a voice within the Fanfiction space and make up a large percentage of this demographic. Also, to be taken into consideration is the fact that most fandoms, or at least the fandoms with more creative content generation, are mainly constituted of a female quotient. The presence of women in this space and their utilization of this particular medium facilitates the creation of feminist narratives that provide women with the chance to create and rewrite narratives to make their own. Similarly, alternative genders and sexual orientations are often expressed more fully and emphatically in this space rather than in mainstream canon. Fanfiction doesn't seek or depend on societal approval to exist and propagate. For these invisible narratives, fanfiction is more of a safe space than canon. This is not to say that fanfiction doesn't suffer from its own failings. But rather, because of its alternative nature and particular audience, more tolerance and understanding can be found in this space in relation to the external 'real' reality.

Critics and criticism abound in fanfiction, a space that literally allows anyone. Anything and everything that is posted is fair game and anyone and everyone can have an opinion

and voice it. This leads to interesting analyses and comments, often not very constructive in nature. However, the vast majority of this comment and feedback is aimed at the literary aspect rather than the representational one. Although there is no concrete censorship of either work or comment, communal censure assures that an atmosphere of tolerance is maintained within these spaces. This allows those with little to no representation in canon to create and place themselves fully within a relatively safe space and to include themselves properly and correct mistakes made by canon in representation.

Man has always felt the need to be included, to belong. The current interest in representation in media is indicative of that. Representation is important. It allows us to belong to a narrative larger than us. Society and religion perform the same function. Hence representation in narratives allows us to belong, to be part of a community, a group. For those who exist on the fringes of society, who are ostracized and alienated for their choices and things that are not their choices, representation is even more important. Fanfiction thus allows them to have their own avenue. A space that allows them to rewrite their favourite narratives inclusively. To create their own narratives, centred around them for once. It is just as empowering as it is for a little girl to see women superheroes such as Wonder Woman or Captain Marvel, or a young black boy to see a black hero such as the Black Panther. In the matter of inclusion, fanfiction leaps and bounds ahead of canon. The disruption of existing literary protocols is achieved by fanfiction.

When placed within the post structuralist framework, Fanfiction is heavily reliant on the idea of Intertextuality (Ram 1). Fanfiction is itself the expansion and alteration of an existing text and the very principles of Intertextuality navigate these relations between texts. Intertextuality is of three types: obligatory, accidental and optional (Ram 1). These differences are identified on the basis of two factors – the intention of the writer and the significance of the reference. Of these, fanfiction could be said to be a combination of both obligatory and optional Intertextuality in relation to the canon text. This is so because obligatory Intertextuality is deliberate and requires prior knowledge of the hypotext (canon) before the hypertext (fanfiction) can be understood. This is partially true because although there are fanfiction texts that require a thorough understanding of the canon text before it can be deciphered, there are also texts that are capable of being standalone texts although they exist within a canon-established framework. There are also texts where a minimum awareness of the characters or setting of the canon text will suffice in comprehending the fanfiction text rather than having to know all the nuances and underlying messages of the canon text and its associated fandom-space.

Optional Intertextuality however means that there might be connections to the hypotext. But it is not mandatory for an understanding of the hypertext. This knowledge will simply add another dimension to the hypertext. The standalone texts in fanfiction come into this category. Built within a canon-framework, they are however built independent enough to exist outside the influence of the canon in the case of a new audience. However, since Intertextuality occurs on both sides of the text, ie. On the side of the creator and the audience, accidental Intertextuality may come in during consumption of the hypertext, since most fanfiction texts require a venture beyond established canon to record unorthodox concerns.

Bakhtin has defined Dialogism as a means of meaning-making that incorporates differing voices and views in order to create a cooperative solution where these voices coexist rather than compete. Fanfiction follows a similar pattern where communal ideas are incorporated to form cooperative meaning. Readers and writers combine their knowledge and ideas in a common forum where everyone has access and can contribute to this. Secondary authors and audiences make use of the existing knowledge source of the canon to perpetuate and generate more and more content in close association. There is sharing of ideas and intellectual currency through a constant process of communication between both parties where the end product is designed to be the result of both their combined creative and knowledge resources.

Fanfiction is a constantly mutable space with permeable boundaries. Through this paper we have seen the changes that have occurred in the space in a matter of years and the changes that keep occurring. This happens on various levels from the constantly editable text, to the continuously evolving audience, to the impermanence of the creator-consumer dichotomy. Fanfiction therefore appears "...fixed and flexible, clearly demarcated and ostensibly limitless." (Conclusion 223). Constant rewriting, refashioning, reimagining and reconceptualizing are all markers of the current ethos. The alterable sensibilities of the era are reflected in Fanfiction as it dismantles the idea of the unity of the text, in this case the unity of the canon. Both sides of change can be argued with the constant evolution of contemporary texts being perceived as a reflection of the impermanence of the human condition as well as constant development and improvement of texts. At the same time, this constant alteration and tweaking of texts could be a destabilizing factor as it alters the text which is meant to remain as an unspoiled pillar of civilization. Literature and unified texts have long been considered the foundations of 'polite' society and civilization which is upset with the current practice of mutable texts. Nothing remains inalienable or sacred – both accessible to and changeable by all.

Fanfiction as a genre therefore has the ability to destabilize the centre of canon literature. However, the transformative properties of Fanfiction dictate that if Fanfiction destabilizes the centre, it will take up the position and lose its subcultural position, which will then be taken over by another. Between the changing sensibilities of the audience and the inevitable transition of literary spaces from physical to digital, it is vital that literary sensibilities evolve as well. Fanfiction possesses the ability to help redefine literary standards to suit progressive sensibilities and offers alternatives to the static condition of literary creation to induce a dynamic, evolving definition that rebels against the rigid structures of literature and merit. This can be achieved through the liminality of fanfiction that disregards constricting boundaries of meaning making to spark the flames of literary revolution not just in theme but in form as well. Thus resulting in the potential for the redefinition of elite literary spaces that is essential to keep pace with the vigorously evolving literary sensibilities of the times.

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