Fan Fiction

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Introduction

Writing fanfiction is writing fictional works based on a pre-established story-world or in more recent developments, a person. The fanfiction community is more than passive consumers of stories; the community actively engages what they consume, reshaping and creating new stories within the stories they consume. Furthermore, the fanfiction community has no restrictions or guidelines on its content (Morrissey 3 [https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/551540/17_etd_kem82.pdf]). In contrast, the Romance Writers of America specifically defines a romance novel to have “a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending.” Romance novels follow two lovers risking and struggling for a romantic relationship and being rewarded with a happily ever after (“About the Romance Genre.” [https://www.rwa.org/p/cm/lfd/fid=578]). Morrissey argues that both romance novels and fanfictions are forms of fantasy fulfillment for their respective communities (Morrissey 4 [https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/551540/17_etd_kem82.pdf]). [AZ]

Fanfiction, however, seeks to fulfill different fantasies than the fantasy of a romance novel, which distinguishes the two genres. Analyzing fanfiction within the context of the romance novels further shows that the distinction, and that fanfictions fulfill fantasies different than
romance novels and thus do not fit the Romance Writers of America's framework for the romance novel. [AZ]

**History of Fanfiction and Romance Communities (AZ):**

*Fanfiction's Pre-Internet Era*

As fanfiction are writers that create stories within another author's story-world, there are numerous examples of fanfiction. One of the earliest examples is Virgil's *Aeneid*; eight centuries after Homer's *Iliad*, Virgil continued Homer's story by telling Aeneas', Homer's character's, story. Scholars also know that even Shakespeare borrowed from others; drawing from *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Iuliet* by Arthur Brooke to create *Romeo and Juliet* being a prominent example. Similarly, modern authors and moviemakers consistently draw from *Romeo and Juliet* and other Shakespeare plays for adaptations, retellings and inspiration (Mabillard [http://www.shakespeare-online.com/sources/romeosources.html]).[AZ]

While modern fanfiction does not typically draw from romance novels, early fanfiction began in the story-worlds of the first romance novels: *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* and *Pride and Prejudice*. These novels are early examples of fulfilling the fantasy of the happily ever after romance novels, while their fanfictions are satisfy dierent fantasies. [AZ]

Samuel Richardson's novel, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, was published in 1740 and told the story of a young poor servant woman who finally secures a marriage with her wealthy employer. *Pamela* concludes with a fulfilling happily ever after with love and marriage. Shortly after the novel's publication, *Pamela* readers began to write their own continuations of Richardson's novel, to the extent that Richardson published a sequel to quell story interference from readers-turned-writers (“Pamela the Novel.” [http://www.umich.edu/~ece/student_projects/pamela_illustrated/pamela.htm]). The *Pamela* fanfiction writers desired another fantasy, the happy life of Pamela's happily ever after, and decided to fulfill their own fantasies by creating the stories themselves. In pushing the boundary of Pamela's story past the last page Richardson wrote, readers challenged the notion that a marriage is a satisfying end and instead showed an interest in married life itself. [AZ]
Jane Austen’s timeless *Pride and Prejudice* also stemmed fanfictions, both published and unpublished (“Old Friends and New...” (https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/306841.Old_Friends_and_New_Fancies)). A century after *Pride and Prejudice*’s publication, there are over seven hundred novels described as Jane inspired, sequels, or modern retellings books on Goodreads.com. (https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/227443.Bridget_Jones_s_Diary) One of the most popular adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* is *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. The author of *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, Helen Fielding, even states she “stole” the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* (Bridget Jones vs... (http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-21204956)). While the plot and hero, Mark Darcy, of *Bridget Jones’s Diary* are a direct modernization of *Pride and Prejudice*, the heroine, Bridget Jones, is not a modern adaptation of Elizabeth Bennett. Jones is a flawed heroine, with insecurities and awkwardness that obvious to the other characters and to the reader (Blake 2 (http://www.jasna.org/bookrev/br231p21.html)). [AZ]


Fielding’s insertion of Bridget illustrates a new fantasy: a journey of self-love and acceptance that is rewarded with romantic love. While the Romance Writers of America dictates that the “lovers risk and struggle for each other (“About the Romance Genre.” (https://www.rwa.org/p/cm/ld/fid=578)),”Bridget Jones struggles and risks for only herself. Bridget begins her journey with the goal of self-improvement and to find love. On her journey, she relies upon her friendships, family relationships just as much if not more so than her relationship with the hero. Jessica Hooten’s book reviews says that Jones gradually accepts herself with the support of the love from her relationships, and she is ultimately rewarded with romantic love (Hooten (http://www.jasna.org/bookrev/br231p21.html)). *Bridget Jones’s Diary* as a fanfiction is an example a fantasy for a life larger than a single romantic relationship, and this fantasy does not conform to romance novels’ value of the hero’s and heroine’s romantic relationship. [AZ]

**Fanfiction with the Rise of the Internet**

The transition from published fanfiction books to the now widespread online fanfiction comes from the popular television series *Star Trek* and their fans, Trekkies, in the 1960s. Trekkies consistently published magazines with fanfiction stories called fanzines (typically abbreviated to zines), similar to the mo (http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/spirk/images/17352478/title/tos-kirk-xi-spock-fanart)dern chapter-by-chapter publications of online fanfictions (“Spocknalia.”
A popular subgenre of Star Trek fanfiction was the introduction of “slash” with the Kirk/Spock pairing. “Slash” in fanfiction designates a romantic and probable sexual relationship between two male characters (“Kirk/Spock TOS.”). [AZ]

Slash-fanfiction fulfills a fantasy different and distinct from the happily ever after of romance novels; it fulfills a fantasy for exploration of sexuality. The authors of slash-fiction are typically young adults, as is the case of Harry Potter slash-fiction, or women. Tosenberger argues that young adult authors use slash-fiction to explore the younger character’s sexuality since sexuality in published novels are restricted by the characters’ ages (Tosenberger 188). This fanfiction community does not fantasize about a romantic relationship, but about exploring and developing their own sexualities. [AZ]

Tosenberger also argues women who write slash-fiction challenge the traditional notions of women’s sexualities. Other academic literature on fandoms, namely from Russ, Lamb and Veith, argue that women-authored slash fulfills the fantasy of a romantic relationship between equal individuals and does so as a subversive act within the heterosexual culture (Tosenberger 188). The young adult fantasy for exploring sexuality and the women’s fantasy of equal relationships does not necessarily emphasize either a romantic relationship or a happily ever after. Slash-fanfiction’s stories may fit the Romance Writer’s of America’s framework, however the driving fantasies of slash-fanfiction do not, and thus do not fit the framework. [AZ]

Following the Star Trek zines, fanfictions moved online. During the rise of online fanfictions, the most popular fanfictions were the Harry Potter story-world with over seven hundred thousand published online, and the Twilight story-world with the second most with just over two hundred thousand (Morrissey 14). While J.K Rowling’s Hogwarts-world and Stephanie Meyer’s Twilight-world established romantic pairings for the characters, fanfiction writers may adhere to the story-world pairings or disregard them. [AZ]

Romantic fanfictions, and sometimes fanfiction of other genres, vary greatly and as such the fantasies they address vary widely. Fanfiction.net and other popular fanfiction sites specific to different story-worlds hold countless examples of fanfiction writers fulfilling fantasies other
than the lovers’ struggle for a happily ever after. Fantasies fulfilled by fanfictions explore a relationship after the happily ever after or the exploration of sexuality regardless of the character’s relationship status. [AZ]

The Harry Potter fanfiction community continues and elaborates on Harry’s story that is not covered in the books. By exploring how characters navigate relationships before, during and after the happily ever after, these fanfictions fulfill the fantasy for more after the happily ever after. (Marchese (http://www.vulture.com/2015/03/fanfiction-guide.html)). This community of writers and readers indicates an interest in relationships that are not defined by a happy ending, but rather a happy life. They are interested in how characters navigate life instead of the beginning of a relationship culminating with commitment like romance novels. This interest does not fit the romance industry’s value on the happily ever after. [AZ]

Within romantic fanfiction, (http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/fifty-shades-twilight-and-teaching-young-women-to-desire-abusers) both related to Harry Potter and Twilight, writers might also introduce sexual relationships into their stories. Whereas sex within romance novels serves to connect and bond the hero and heroine together, sex in romantic fanfiction often fulfills other fantasies. The popular fanfiction “Master of the Universe,” which became the worldwide phenomenon Fifty Shades of Grey, used fanfiction to fulfill a fantasy of a BDSM relationship between the Twilight characters (Miller (http://www.vulture.com/2015/03/fanfiction-guide.html)). Members of the fanfiction community read and write sexual fanfictions to explore their sexuality both within and outside the context of a relationship (Morrissey 9 (https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/551540/17_etd_kem82.pdf)). In contrast, a romance novel values sexuality within the hero and heroine’s relationship. The fantasy with of sexual fanfictions is not a committed relationship, but the heroine’s (or hero’s) ability to explore her (or his) sexuality regardless of the state of romantic relationship. [AZ]

Modern Fanfiction (AN)

Fanfiction today is vastly different from fanfiction four years ago. In fact, the popularity of fanfiction has grown exponentially in the past two to three years. There are three key pieces that are the cause of this growth, the first being Wattpad. Wattpad is an app and website that launched in November 2006. Wattpad allows individuals to post their own writing. Authors post chapter by chapter at whatever rate they please and receive copyright protection. Authors can cast the actors they would have play members of their story if they please and more recently
can even add gifs to the beginnings of their chapters. Readers can search stories by genre, title, author, or for stories tags the authors place on them that range from more general tags like ‘fanfiction’ and get as specific as individual characters. In total, there are thirty million fanfiction uploads on Wattpad. The United States uploads the most fanfiction to Wattpad (over fourteen million) and dwarfs other countries (#2 Great Britain uploaded just over two million). In 2014, there were fourteen million fanfiction uploads to Wattpad. However, since Wattpad, the main outlet for modern fanfiction has been around for more than eight years, why have the past two shown such an increase in the popularity of fanfiction? The answer: bands. Two bands have garnered an insane fanbase in the past two to three years, One Direction and 5 Seconds of Summer (aka 5SOS – pronounced “Five Sauce”). It seems almost bizarre that two bands could have such an impact on the fanfiction genre, but the statistics are telling. The most popular fanfiction fandom is One Direction with close to one million seven hundred fifty thousand stories. 5 Seconds of Summer follows with over one million two hundred fifty thousand fanfictions. All the other fandoms that follow have under five hundred thousand fanfictions. For comparison, Harry Potter, one of the most well known sects of fanfiction, has just over seven hundred thousand fanfictions, one hundred twenty five thousand of which are on Wattpad, with Supernatural following and Sherlock far below them. Further, the amount of One Direction fanfiction uploaded has been growing with a 27% increase from 2013 to 2014 (from four hundred thousand stories per year to over five hundred thousand). In winter 2015 alone the two bands combined take the top nine spots in the top twenty five celebrity fanfiction castings, when a celebrity or character is the protagonist in a story, with Harry Styles as number one with more than twenty two thousand five hundred stories and the rest of the One Direction boys ranging from high twelve thousands to mid eleven thousands and with 5 seconds of Summer all above seven thousand but Luke Hemmings with over ten thousand. Their numbers dwarf the rest of the list. One might
question if Wattpad as a medium is more appealing to younger generations, which could then explain the unprecedented popularity of One Direction and 5SOS fanfictions. However, Wattpad has really become the go-to destination for fanfiction of all genres as well as many self-published, non-fanfiction novels due to the copyright protections it offers authors as well as the professional aesthetic its publications receive (when using the app, stories are formatted almost identically to an e-book). Furthermore, these One Direction and 5 Seconds of Summer have been incredibly influential to fanfiction, and understanding their fanbases is crucial to understanding not only where the genre is now, but also where it’s headed.

The One Direction fandom (known as Directioners) formed before the 5 Seconds of Summer fandom (known as the 5SOS Fam), but as 5 Seconds of Summer got their big break opening for the boy band, there is a lot of overlap between the fandoms. The One Direction fandom includes mostly girls from pre-k to mid twenties, although there are still plenty of older members, and the 5 Seconds of Summer fandom has almost the same distribution but the average age of their fans tends to be a bit older. Both fandoms are very active on social media (http://sites.duke.edu/unsuitable/files/2015/02/CBtYs87UcAAdXt.png) including Tumblr, Instagram, and Twitter. Both fandoms are passionate and rather aggressive, both having won multiple awards for best fans, craziest fan army, etc, but Directioners are well known as the ‘deadliest fandom,’ both referring to their unprecedented support and defense of the boys as well as their ability to find out any information they want (past examples include hacking hotel security cameras as well as finding out detailed information regarding the boys’ flight information and hotel plans). Given the extensive networks and passion of both fandoms, fanfiction actually receives a great deal of promotion through social media. Fan accounts themselves often have over a million followers, and fans tend to follow each other on social media. When fans or fan accounts tweet or Instagram about their favorite fanfictions, these titles circulate rapidly throughout the fanbase, allowing for effortless promotion and therefore mass consumption.

An important distinction between the fanfiction of these modern fandoms is that it is RPF, or real person fiction. For these fandoms as well as many others, the fantasy is the boy. For example, the reason there are so many Harry Styles fanfictions is not because the story of a young singer from Cheshire, England who formed a band on the X-Factor is an appealing storyline that needs continuation. The fantasy is the author or the reader ending up with Harry Styles in one way or another. Very few One Direction or 5SOS fanfictions even mention the boys can sing and far fewer incorporate a band at all. Fanfiction is no longer about a
continuation of the plot line of a previous book or TV show but rather creating a story, living the fantasy of being with Harry Styles. In this way, modern fanfiction is bridging the gap between the old fanfiction and the romance genre. Previously, authors of fanfictions did very little world building and put very little work and descriptions into their characters because that was already done for them (Morrissey 80 (https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/551540/17_etd_kem82.pdf)). Authors used their books to provide extended endings or present alternate endings to the plot of the media they were writing about. With real person fiction, there is no story to continue off. Before the major wish fulfillment fanfiction sought to achieve was contentment with the storyline, but now the wish fulfillment is the boy, and authors must write the story. Of course, fanfiction based on other works of fiction still exists, it is however significantly more uncommon now and is no longer “mainstream.” Current fanfiction writers get a clean slate with the exception of characters, although even characters have a lot of leeway. After, the massively popular Harry Styles fanfiction with about three hundred twenty one million reads on the first book alone and six hundred eleven million reads on the third book(After 3), portrays Harry as an troubled college guy covered in tattoos and piercings with daddy-issues, a drinking problem, anger management, and a morally questionable past. Of course, Harry Styles is none of those things in real life. Modern fanfiction uses the boy, say Harry Styles, and picks some of the traits that makes fans love him, say his looks, his child-like humor, etc, and makes a new Harry Styles that looks the same and shares those traits, but everything else is completely different. Often characters have friends that are named after and look like their other bandmates and family members stay the same, but aside from a handful of personality traits and a physical description, they are different people. Essentially, authors are taking Harry Styles, morphing his character, and then writing a story for the new Harry. This is not far from the way romance authors write – both authors must write a unique story for a unique character, but fanfiction authors already have the physical description of the hero.

Although it is clear modern fanfiction bears a lot of similarity to the romance genre in that both genres are writing unique romantic stories, the ages of the fandoms causes the way sexuality is expressed and the valued happy ending in fanfictions to differ greatly from the traditional, mainstream romance genre. As previously mentioned, both Directioners and the 5SOS Fam range from five years of age to twenty five+, but proportionally very little of the fandom is in college let alone has graduated college. As a result of the fans’ ages, fanfiction presents sexuality differently than the romance genre, who’s reader is most likely between the age of thirty and fifty four (https://www.rwa.org/p/cm/ld/fid=582)”Romance Reader Statistics.”)
The modern sexual standard for teenagers and college students is very different from the sexual standards of previous generations. A study done in a university setting regarding premarital sexual standards over a twenty three year period demonstrates that students today have become more sexually permissive than those who graduated twenty three years ago (Sprecher 1). Further, teens are experimenting sexually at very young ages. It is not at all uncommon for underclassmen in high school to be having sex, and they're only thirteen to sixteen years old. In fact, it is reported that over half of teens will have sex before graduating high school ("Teenage Abortion Statistics.").

Because the fandoms are writing the fanfiction, the values held by the author are generally those that get passed on to the story. Although there are no studies that show the average age of romance novelists, it is fair to assume that the vast majority of successful romance novelists, those whose novels are widely consumed by readers, are over the age of twenty two to twenty five (the post-college age). And given that readers are ages thirty through fifty four and the nature of the industry, romance authors must appeal to their readership which, as demonstrated through Sprecher, has a different set of values than the current generation of teenagers. Therefore, most modern fanfiction is significantly more sexual and graphic than the romance genre, and sexual actions progress much more rapidly in fanfiction. In the romance genre, characters don't take sexual activities lightly, and such activities are usually key climaxes in the storyline, whereas sexual activities outside of relationships let alone commitment are common in fanfiction. Jessica Scott previously said that if the hero got a blow job within the first twenty pages of the book, she'd put it down because that's not what she wants to be reading (Unsuitable #4). However, as the authors of fanfictions are exploring their own sexuality at a time when sex can be casual, blow jobs can happen on the first date at the very beginning of the book or maybe the two characters have a one-night-stand. And, unlike Jessica Scott, readers won't stop reading because that's the fantasy they want. Depending on the author's age, sexual activity can be kissing, and that is fulfilling to a certain group of readers who, for example, fantasize about being in a relationship with Harry Styles, but they are at the age where kissing is all they desire. On the other hand, like After, there are fanfictions about college age characters...
who have sex often in the book, and the readers’ fantasy is being in a relationship with Harry Styles which involves sex because that is what they desire sexually at that stage of their lives. This idea of sexuality is very different from the sexuality and values within a thirty to fifty four year old age group, and thus the portrayal of sexuality in fanfiction is vastly different from the portrayal of sexuality in the romance genre. Although erotica has gained popularity in the romance industry, erotica is its own genre whereas the graphic sex in erotica is also present in most fanfictions and does not receive its own sub-genre because of its commonality. The vast commonality or erotic sex in fanfiction likely also has to do with the fact that fanfictions do not get submitted to a publisher and therefore do not have to follow a certain set of guidelines. Fanfiction was thus able to express the erotic fantasy desired by readers before the romance industry fully recognized there was a market for it, and as a result, erotica permeated the majority of fanfictions to meet reader and author desire. In addition, the majority of popular fanfictions in the last four years have emerged in a post-50 Shades era where erotica has become rather mainstream and no longer marginalized. Although age of authors and readership has undoubtedly played an important role in the expression of sexuality in fanfiction, sexuality is most likely a result of all these factors combined.

Similar to expression of sexuality, the ages of fans also cause the ideal happy ending to differ greatly from the ideal happily ever after in the romance genre. The average age of the first marriage for women in the US is 27 (Barkhorn), and the average age of women giving birth is 30 (Chorley). Further, romantic relationships become significant for kids moving from early to late adolescence and increasingly important and common in the late teenage and college years. Thus, it can be concluded that the overwhelming majorities of the One Direction and 5SOS fandoms, ages five to twenty five, do not desire marriage and children at this time. Because they don’t desire these things, marriage and children are often not part of, or at least not the main focus of fanfiction. The fantasy for the majority of the fandom is a relationship with the desired boy. Fanfiction tends to focus on the beginning stages and development of the relationship with the hero. Morrissey explains that fanfictions tend to “focus on different stages of the journey,” and “relationships and romance are commonly framed as works in progress, rather than something that is settled by the end of a story” (83). She explains that stories tend not to “conclude, but move forward” as the relationships are challenged and characters develop over time (Morrissey). Fanfiction today has a new type of romantic promise, “one in which happiness involves a mutual commitment to another person...without a marriage for protection” (Morrissey 85).
In the *After* series, main characters Tessa and Harry consider marriage at one point but later break up, and the series ends with both characters significantly further on their character arcs, meeting years later with an optimistic outlook on their futures together. Because the main characters tend to be young, Harry Styles only turned 21 in 2015 and the main demographic of the fan base is younger than him, they do not get married let alone have children. Although instances of teen pregnancy are not unheard of in fanfiction, they are not common as the point of fanfiction is wish fulfillment, and as previously mentioned, teen pregnancy is not a desirable happily ever after. Furthermore, in real person fiction, by attaining a relationship with the desired boy, wish fulfillment is achieved and marriage is no longer necessary to a happily ever after. In this way, reader expectation for a fanfiction is very different than that of the romance genre as all that is expected is an optimistic relationship. And, the relationships are generally acknowledged as works in progress that require effort on the parts of both of the parties as opposed to romance novels which “end with established, monogamous [permanent] relationships” in which “partners marry, build homes together and create families” (Morrissey 81).

**The Future of Fanfiction (AN)**

As real person fanfiction becomes increasingly popular with the continuation of the One Direction and 5 Seconds of Summer fandoms as well as Wattpad, it is likely some of this fanfiction will begin to permeate the publishing industry. As is clear with *After*, some fanfictions have become wildly successful. Tons of fanfictions have had over millions of reads, many in the tens of millions and a select few in the hundred millions. Because there is such a high demand for good fanfiction, the fanfiction industry has the potential to be immensely profitable. As a result, it's likely that fanfiction will begin to permeate the publishing world as the *After* series already has. If and when fanfiction permeates the publishing world, it will likely be successful as it is very similar to New Adult romance which is very popular at the moment. Both New Adult and modern fanfiction tend to focus on college age protagonists who are experimenting with their sexuality and finding themselves in an angsty plot (Zutter). At the same time however, because of the lack of restriction on fanfiction, fanfiction can be more progressive than the romance genre which has clear rules due to publishing constraints, although these are being challenged with the rise of self publishing. Larry Stylinson, the relationship between One Direction members Harry Styles and Louis Tomlinson is the most shipped couple on Wattpad with over sixty one thousand stories, many of which are very popular. In fact, there are several fanfictions between members of One direction that have
millions of reads such as *Detention* (over seven million eight hundred thousand reads) and *I Sleep Naked* (close to six million reads). As a means of comparison, the best selling book of 2014 in print was *The Fault in Our Stars*.

Therefore, the demand and interest in themes traditionally not explored by the romance industry because of a theorized lack of demand on the part of publishers could increase and permeate the publishing world. Also, fanfiction has a high chance of permeating the publishing world as it tends to have more grounding in reality, does not have characters that bring each other to their knees but rather meet in the middle, and promotes strong modern female women and their sexuality without making them subservient to males (Morrissey 48).

Lastly, it would not be surprising if fanfiction began to compete with the romance industry as many of the same tropes are explored in fanfiction, done well, and are free. However, because of the stigma fanfiction carries, over enthusiastic young fans writing about their infatuation and obsession with guys they will never have, many romance readers may not be willing to give fanfiction a chance, although the publication of more fanfictions and continued push toward real person fiction could combat this stereotype. John Forlines, economics professor at Duke University, explained that markets can't ignore demand, and given the clear demand surrounding fanfiction, the markets probably won't ignore it for long.

**Works Cited**


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