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The Wide-Reaching Appeal of Fan Fiction and Its Merits in Popular Culture

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Abstract

This paper takes on the practice of fan fiction by introducing its origins, exploring the concept of it being recognized as a part of “real literature”—while also determining what makes real literature—as well as comparing literary retellings to fan fiction and questioning what makes distinguishes them from one another. The influence that fan fiction already has garnered within popular culture will also be explored, as well as the role fan fiction plays within fandoms.

By examining at primary texts such as E. L. James’s *Fifty Shades of Grey*, Anna Todd’s *After*, and the popular fanfic known as *Heat Waves*, this thesis will analyze the reach of specific kinds of fan fiction and the way they are received within their own fandoms and in popular culture. Additionally, specific studies conducted by Bronwen Thomas, Judith May Fathallah, and others will explore the significance of fandom communities, why fan fiction is considered a cultural phenomenon, and its status as “real literature” in terms of the impact, either positive or negative, it may have on consumers like any published literary work would.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

The Wide-Reaching Appeal of Fan Fiction and Its Merits in Popular Culture

by

Summer Nawaz

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

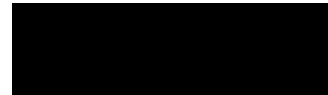
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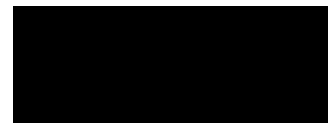
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THE WIDE-REACHING APPEAL OF FAN FICTION AND ITS MERITS IN POPULAR
CULTURE

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts

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Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

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Table of Contents

<u>1.1 Introduction and Overview of Fan Fiction</u>	7
<u>1.2. The Spread of Fandoms and Fans</u>	11
<u>1.3. Controversies, Retellings vs. Fanfics</u>	12
<u>1.4. Fanfics to be Explored</u>	14
<u>2.1. Raw and Real: The Growth of Heat Waves</u>	16
<u>2.2. The Normalization of Slash Fiction</u>	18
<u>3.1. You Love It, You Hate It, But You Definitely Know It: Anna Todd’s After</u>	23
<u>3.2. After and Heat Waves—Real-Person Fiction: Hot or Not?</u>	24
<u>4.1. Fifty Shades of Grey: The Original Fanfic Turned Bestseller</u>	27
<u>4.2. Reception and Portrayal of BDSM</u>	28
<u>4.3. Questionable Content from Fifty Shades and After</u>	31
<u>5.1. Conclusion</u>	33

1.1 Introduction and Overview of Fan Fiction

When the book is closed or credits roll on a movie or television show, many people accept the last scene as the end. Perhaps they spend a moment or so to envision what becomes of the characters in the aftermath of the story they just read or watched, but they are unlikely to dwell on it. A fleeting thought with a speckle of imagination thrown in, before they shelve the book or turn off the TV. However, this is not necessarily the case with many other popular culture consumers. In this sense, these people turn to their laptops or open the Notes application on their phones, perhaps even grab a notebook, and begin theorizing, planning, and writing either a continuation of what occurs after the “The End”, or use what they just consumed to create a story of their own. The characters and their journeys have become a part of these individuals, and instead of letting them go, their active imaginations prompt them to create works that give these characters a new purpose. Maybe a character is brought back to life, another is killed, or maybe the hero loses, or something drives the couple apart. The possibilities for these characters are endless, and so why not allow them to experience multiple avenues of their fictitious lives? It is so easy to dismiss fan fiction (herein referred to as “fanfic”) as “stolen” work, discarding it for not being the product of someone’s original imagination because the characters are already preexisting. But the new storylines they are given, whether they were inspired by the journeys the characters have been on and the arcs they have overcome, *are* the product of a fanfic author’s own imagination. Original ideas from shows and films being taken by fanfic writers are used to produce new content that is fresh from the fan writer’s mind, an original work in its own regard as they provide the characters with a new storyline, new twists, new problems to overcome. Depending on how committed the writer is, the characters could be completely changed in their ways, which brings forth a new perspective never explored before, giving other fans of the show/movie new content to see their favorite characters in. In “Copyright and Ownership of Fan

Created Works: Fanfiction and Beyond,” Raizel Liebler labels such fans as transforming “the material through active production processes or through their own critiques and commentary, so that it better serves their own social and expressive needs” (392). The essence of a fanfic is pure in its integrity, because the writers do not create them for profitable reasons but because they truly connect with the stories and characters and want to express as such in their own ways so others consumers can experience it as well.

The standard Merriam-Webster definition of fanfic reads as “stories involving popular fictional characters that are written by fans and often posted on the internet.” A more scholarly definition can be provided by Judith May Fathallah, describing it as “the unauthorized adaptation and re-writing of media texts” (9) in her text *Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts*. Both are true, though Fathallah’s definition invites a more negative view on an already controversial topic. Fanfics can be found anywhere, but the most popular breeding ground for these works are on platforms such as Wattpad (2006-), Archive of Our Own (AO3) (2009-), fanfiction.net (1998-), and Tumblr (2007-). Essentially, any kind of pre-existing work can be taken and made fanfics out of, the most popular ones being *Harry Potter*, *Sherlock Holmes*, and *Star Trek*. But as more franchises are created, the possibilities truly become endless for individuals who consume any kind of media. Now, if you go on any one of those aforementioned platforms, you will find fanfics about virtually anything: characters from TV shows, book series, or even what we call Real Person Fanfics (RPFs) that involve stories about real people such as actors, musicians, or Internet personalities like YouTubers and video game streamers.

Fanfics and fandom communities are not a creation of the twenty-first century and could in fact be traced back to the 1920s and 1930s in science fiction magazines, when Hugo

Gernsback, the editor of the science-fiction magazine *Amazing Stories* (1926) asked readers to send in letters talking about the magazine's content. This included those stemming from oral and mythic traditions. Stories by Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells were published in Gernsback's magazine, and he continued its publication until 1936, before returning once more in 1952 prior to the age of the internet. By Gernsback's encouragement of readers submitting letters, fandoms were created, specifically for the science fiction genre, allowing people to communicate with one another through the magazine. But because of the rise of the internet, it is far easier for the spread of fanfics and fan communication to be continuous and worldwide.

Bronwen Thomas in "What is Fanfiction and Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things About It?" acknowledges the previously considered marginalized activity and emphasizes how easy it is for fans to get access, finding communities of people who have similar interests, the simplicity of publishing their written work, and getting feedback and reviews from other fans instantaneously (2). The publishing of fanfics on the internet also has the opportunity of creating relationships between authors and readers—whether the "author" in question is the person who created the original work and the "reader" is the consumer, or if the "author" is the one who wrote a fanfic and the "reader" is another fan who shares the interest. As Thomas states, the sharing of fanfics "challenges the boundaries between authors and readers," (2) allowing for a creative production within a fandom community that not only cultivates relationships but also inspires people while sharing in their appreciation for the original work. Additionally, fanfics should not be written off as just a fan's imagination surrounding a particular story or character, but one should recognize the several distinctions between the types of fanfics, beyond whether it is an RPF or an alternate universe (AU) fic. These distinctions, according to Natalia Samutina in "Emotional Landscapes of Reading" include fanfics that can be "drabbles (known as short works of 100 words), or full-

length novels; a comic skit or a horror story; a pornographic fiction or a story based on political power struggle; a same-sex romantic story, so called slash, or a traditional heterosexual romance, or a ‘missing scene’ that fills the gaps in the canon world” (4). With all of these categories, it would be redundant to claim that fanfics about preexisting works limit the paths a writer could take, because the fact of the matter is, fanfics especially allow the writer to expand the world that already exists and make it into something bigger than what the original author wrote, allowing for creative directions not previously explored due to the author aiming to follow the path they created originally. As Thomas states, writing fanfic “poses an important challenge to conceptualizations of story worlds that focus on their universality and familiarity, demonstrating that, in fact, readers and audiences’ relations with those worlds are diverse” (7). The fanfic writer creating new storylines expands the literary structure first established, building off of their own textual engagement and allowing for the audience to build a deeper connection with the original work. In school, we are taught works such as F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders*, J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, any of Shakespeare’s or Edgar Allan Poe’s works, or other canonical works. because they are seen as great works of literature meant to expand a student’s literary taste. If a student truly engages in one or any of these books, they *connect* with them, which ultimately is the goal teachers seek. Cannot the same be said for fanfics, especially when their place in online communities and popular media is normalized? Popular culture begs to be engaged with, allowing consumers to be more integrated with fandom life and make connections with those who value and enjoy the same things as them. “Popular culture” is popular because of how widespread it is on the internet and how easily people can get involved with it, and fanfics have become a significant genre within the culture. The writing and reading of fanfics involve not only the writer’s capability of creating stories but also the readers’

reception of it and the praise and/or critiques they offer as feedback to help improve the writer's story, effectively building a community with those who have similar interests.

1.2. The Spread of Fandoms and Fans

To truly understand the evolution of fanfic and the significance, one must understand what it truly means to be a fan. The first thing I can truly remember myself being a fan of is the British-Irish boyband One Direction (2010-2016), and this is a fandom, I believe, millions of people—mostly girls—my age can relate to. The era of One Direction was one of the biggest worldwide phenomena in our generation, with the band accruing hundreds of millions of fans during their active years and maybe still now, years after the band has split. One of the main reasons for the band's success, besides their talent, was because they had access to something no (boy)band before them did—the internet. In an article written by Douglas Greenwood to celebrate what would have been the band's ten-year anniversary, he argues that easily accessible streaming services allowed the music industry to make a significant turn towards the digital future, allowing for the band's digital presence to grow and, with it, their audience to grow as well. Social media frenzy played a pivotal role in the band's growth and popularity. I recall creating a Twitter account for the sole reason to keep up with the band's activities; to know exactly when they would be releasing new music, have first access to concert tickets, and share my interest with others. There is a certain discipline of dedication that goes into being a fan of someone or something, and that can translate into a better experience of liking that thing as it did for me—allowing me to attend handfuls of One Direction concerts, garner an interest in reading fanfic, and eventually turn to write some of my own.

It is easy to say that everyone is a fan of something, but the term does not seem to hold much substance in figuring out how deeply the fandom devotion runs. When it comes to the idea of fandom studies, particularly those involved in the writing and reading of fanfics, Piotr Siuda

puts it best by acknowledging that fans are “greatly engaged in reception” and that they have “in depth knowledge of the product they are fascinated by as a result of its numerous consumption” (1). They can be seen everywhere—in events such as Comic-Con where fans of comics and science fiction franchises gather and dress up as characters, known as cosplay, and have the chance to interact with the actors who play these characters in movies and TV shows, in teens who religiously attend concerts of their favorite musicians, and even in Elvis Presley fans who impersonate the King of Rock (Siuda, 3). The essence of fanfic lies in the idea of fan reception, where individuals who are truly invested in the fandom they are a part of take the content they have consumed and make it into something of their own. As Peter Gutiérrez describes it, being a fan of something, specifically one that involves themselves in the writing of fanfic, presents “an opportunity for young readers to develop critical and media literacies” (227). Not only are individuals pouring more of their energy into the media they are a fan of, but they are also being receptive of it and creating *more* content. A potential downside could be inner-fandom wars where certain fans do not agree with the content of a fanfic and may turn a healthy discussion into something unnecessarily toxic, but that could be said for any kind of community. Overall, writing fanfic deepens a fan’s understanding of the original content and allows them to strengthen the connection they have not only with the media but with others who are in the same mindset as them.

1.3. Controversies, Retellings vs. Fanfics

However, with the growing popularity of fanfic comes the critique and controversies of whether it is something to be considered original and separate from the book, movie, or TV show they have originated from. These musings are separate from RPF stories, given that those particular types of fanfics rely on the writer’s original plot and storylines and the only thing that is not of their own is the actual person they are writing about. In *Textual Poachers*, Henry

Jenkins quotes Michel de Certeau (1984), who characterizes active readings such as fanfic writers consuming media to plot out their own fanfics as “poaching,” summarizing that such readers are “travelers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write” (de Certeau, quoted in Jenkins, 24). To put it bluntly, relating fanfic writers to “poachers” emphasizes the negative views of fanfic as a whole, because it undermines the concept of fanfic being seen as a literary experience of its own accord, where it has the opportunity to cultivate an entirely different audience.

The introduction of the concept of textual poachers begs the question of what the difference is between fanfics and retellings of classic literature. In today’s media, particularly in young adult novels, there have been multiple retellings of original works; Chloe Gong published a Chinese retelling of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* in her duology *These Violent Delights* and *Our Violent Ends*. Tracy Deonn’s *Legendborn* is a modern-day spin on the legend of Excalibur and King Arthur. The popular romantic-comedy film *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) is a remake of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*. Time and time again, we see new adaptations of previously existing work, but from a literature and cinematic standpoint, we accept them as newly consumed, original content. But why do they stand apart from fanfics that are published on online platforms—especially the ones that haven’t been published into books like some of the examples this paper will explore?

The standard online definition of a retelling is a new version of a familiar story, like a reinterpretation. John Stephens and Robyn McCallum in *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture* claim that “to be a retelling a text must exist in relationship to some kind of source” (4), establishing familiarity between an original text and the retelling. Within its definition, a retelling essentially takes a story and can do it in a new way, like Gong’s retelling of *Romeo and*

Juliet, with characters she renamed Roma and Juliette belonging to rival gangs in 1920s Shanghai, with Russian and Chinese backgrounds, respectively. Gong took the surface story and characters of the known tragedy and transported them to a different setting and time, making it her own reinterpretation. In comparison, fanfic can be said to be taking familiar characters and putting them in a new story structure—except, is that not a simple way of defining a retelling, too? At the root of both concepts, something familiar is being taken and is placed into a new environment, and it is up to the author to provide the audience with an exciting journey that is both familiar in essence but not entirely predictable. Retellings follow the structure of the original work, ultimately landing on the same ending more often than not, while fanfics mostly create a whole new storyline, and while I can see how retellings are more literary and socially accepted than the latter, we cannot ignore how *both* take original works not belonging to the author. They are made by the second writer into their own work. Yet, still, the term “poacher” is more so used to label fanfic writers because their content is seen as more “unofficial” because of it being readily available online. Meanwhile, most retellings are published books, such as the previously given examples, and therefore not looked down upon on the same level. Perhaps because characters are more proprietary than plot and fanfic writers blatantly take an existing character as their own without providing many changes. However, Gong’s Roma and Juliette were still originally Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, and while she changed the overall plot and settings of her book, one can still argue her book is an alternate universe fanfic of Shakespeare’s tragedy. So between fanfics and retellings, where does the line get drawn?

1.4. Fanfics to be Explored

While there are several retellings and fanfics of different fandoms that can be brought up, in this paper, there will be a discussion based on several different examples of popularly known fanfics—whether they are known within their own fandoms or known worldwide. Two out of

three examples are RPFs, while the last—and, arguably, the most globally known—is a phenomenon based on an original work that many of its consumers are not aware of. The first example this thesis will dive into is titled *Heat Waves*, an RPF fanfic on AO3 about two Minecraft content creators, so widely popular within the community that the people the fanfic is written about know of it and have created inside jokes with their fans regarding the story. From there, we move onto a more popular Harry Styles fanfic-turned-book series, published on Wattpad titled *After*, which now also has movies about each book, available on Netflix. Finally, we will explore the popular series and movie franchise *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E. L. James, which had originated as a *Twilight* fanfic, though that is unknown by most.

Each of these fanfics, whether they are still fanfics now or have since been published through traditional settings and have blown up to the point of having movies made after them, has had different impacts within their own communities as well as globally. Some are widely known; others are only known if you are someone who has read them when they were available to read on their respective platforms. The goal of this paper is to dive deeply into each of these stories and their overall impact within their fandom and how they have helped shape popular culture, if at all. Fanfics are a form of mainstream social culture, existing within every fandom, and have formed dents because of how impactful they can be for the communities they are a part of. An example of this is the fanzine (*fan* plus *magazine* molded together) called *Spockanalia* (1967), which was created when the first original *Star Trek* aired on TV. Fans of the show created this magazine before the rise of blogs and other online platforms, and were able to come together with other fans of the show who expressed their creativity in the magazine. The importance of this was recognized by Gene Roddenberry, the creator of the *Star Trek* series, because of the significance that lies within creators forming a relationship with their fans, and so

the magazine also moved to include letters from the actors, establishing a community between fans and the stars of the content.

Despite their similarities and differences, examining each of these fanfics and fanfics that were traditionally published allows for multiple perspectives on how fanfics can be written and received. While *After* and *Fifty Shades* have become published book series and movies, the popularity of *Heat Waves* should not be ignored. Its influence within the Minecraft community is large enough to have its hand in crashing the AO3 site, accumulate over two million hits, and be so widely talked about that the YouTubers who the story is about are well aware of the fanfic—and, at times, have hinted at reading it, too. Adding the term “fan” before “fiction” somehow devalues the work these individuals put into their writing, repeating the claim-turned-excuse that it is thievery of work passed off as their own. But fanfic writers never once express their own rights over the characters they are writing about if it is not an RPF, making sure to include the rights to the original creator in the beginning notes of every chapter before the story continues. By doing so, fanfic writers are recognizing that the characters belong to the original creator; yes, but while they choose to end the original creators’s stories, the fans are the ones that pick up where the stories left off and create journeys of their own for these characters to go through. Or they will add “missing scenes” that they wished they saw, writing something out of their own imagination. So while the characters may not belong to them, the stories fanfic writers choose to tell, for the most part, are their own, expanding the life of the characters and sharing with others—and, in some cases, jumpstarting their own careers as writers.

2.1. Raw and Real: The Growth of *Heat Waves*

Fanfic allows for fans to further enjoy the media they are consuming, whether it be original works such as books, movies, TV shows, musicians, and other genres. A popular fanfic that is currently circulating the net can be found on AO3, *Heat Waves*, is titled after the Glass

Animals song off their album *Dreamland*. It is an RPF story, revolving around two popular Minecraft streamers/YouTubers with the in-game names (IGNs—or, easily put, “streamer names”) Dream and GeorgeNotFound—or, as known by their “relationship” name, DreamNotFound (DNF). These two content creators in their twenties are best friends and have grown their fanbase through YouTube videos and streams they take part in together, along with the help of the third member of their group, content creator Sapnap, who also appears in *Heat Waves*. The melancholy nature of the song, which expresses a romance and heartbreak most of us may have experienced, inspired this fic and went viral on AO3 thanks to the Minecraft community. The fanfic’s first chapter was posted in November of 2020, and by now the completed twelve-chapter fic has garnered over two million kudos (equivalent to “likes” as seen on a tweet on Twitter) while its still continuing sequel, *Helium*—titled by another Glass Animals song from the same album—has over one million. This makes *Heat Waves* the third most kudosed fic on AO3

The popularity of *Heat Waves* has taken everyone by surprise, to the point where once, when the author, [tbhyourelame1](#) on AO3, updated the fic with a new chapter, it was around the same time as another author of a *Star Wars* fanfic updated their own story; as a result, the website crashed. Thousands of people, it seemed, had rushed to AO3 upon learning of the new chapters to read for their favorite fanfics, and the amount of people accessing the website was too overwhelming for it to handle, which forced the server to temporarily shut down. Such a popular story would seem prime to be published through traditional settings, but RPF stories belong to a niche of their own. Particularly because *Heat Waves* takes place in a real-time setting and is heavily influenced by the friendship between two real people, who are not only recognized by their gaming streams but because of their personalities that in publishing this fanfic as a book,

it would be difficult to strip Dream and George’s characters of their personalities to make them characters of the author’s own creation. The fanfic is popular *because* of the people they are and their relationships with one another. To publish it as a book would mean to get rid of any telling marks of the real people the characters are based on, and stripping them of those traits would be strip the entire story of what makes it so likeable.

Following every chapter update of *Heat Waves*, fans then take to Twitter to express their thoughts on what they just read—mostly in the form of vague memes that explain what happened in the chapter but do so without giving away the content. The use of memes and out of context tweets regarding the fanfic is to prevent the tweets from spoiling the new chapter, because fans like to give other fans time to read the chapter without it getting spoiled for them. In this act alone, you see the show of community that is being expressed, a truly raw example of the peak of fan reception to a story as it unfolds in real time, given the current (beginning at the end of 2020) popularity of the specific work.

2.2. The Normalization of Slash Fiction

The categories—or “tags,” as per AO3’s structure—*Heat Waves* falls under, according to the author, consist of slow burn, pining, confessions, and male-x-male romance. The real people the story is about, Dream and George, are best friends who are known to jokingly flirt on their game streams, secure enough in their friendship and in themselves to be able to talk to each other in a flirtatious/sexual manner and uncaring if their fans “ship” them. Their friendship, as well as the song by Glass Animals, is the catalyst for the creation of this fic, becoming one of the most popular same-sex ships compared to the likes of Dean and Castiel from the paranormal series *Supernatural* and Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes from the Marvel Cinematic Universe. However, unlike the spread of heterosexual fanfics being written, there comes a whole slew of issues in the spread of homosexual ones. In “Fanfiction as a Form with Merit,” Alyssandra

Holmes quotes Katrien Jacobs, who had written an article about fandom erotica in *Cinema Journal*, that “fetishization of same-sex relationships is ever present, and that some fans believe that ‘gay sex scenes [are] for female consumers’ and ‘lesbian counterparts are . . . a new type of ‘soft’ arousal for males’” (3). This view of homosexual fanfics only further spreads a negative lens for such fics, when the same kind of treatment is not being given to heteronormative fics. According to Susanne Jung in “Queering Popular Culture: Female Spectators and the Appeal of Writing Slash Fan Fiction,” queer fanfics are described as “romantic pornography” and serve as a critique of traditional masculinities since “feminine” traits such as being nurturing and openly declaring feelings are extended to male characters (30). By labeling homosexual relationships in fanfics as “romantic pornography,” it creates a divide between queer and heterosexual couples in fanfics, suggesting the former is inherently more sexual than the latter, therefor creating a fetishization of queer relationships. “Fetishization” is a term that strips same-sex fanfics—or slash fics—from being understood and seen on a deeper level, beyond the belief that because it is a homosexual relationship, it must revolve around sex. But *Heat Waves* serves as an example of a same-sex relationship that transcends lust and dives deeper into the friendship that entangles itself with yearning.

The fanfic *Heat Waves* reflects some real-life circumstances around Dream and George—one of which is the truth of the two of them having never met in person. Dream resides in Florida, having never shown his face to the world—yet—and is waiting to do so once George moves from London to live with him and their friend, Sapnap. Reality reflects in *Heat Waves*, and the author spends careful time in unraveling the friendship between them, to show how a friendship over five-plus years where two people have not yet met in person could evolve into

more without even touching another. There is a scene in chapter six that truly speaks to the balance of developing yearning/love and lust between the characters:

“Are you a physical person? I don’t think I’ve ever asked,” Dream says, trying to bait away George’s shyness. “With friends and stuff—are you affectionate?”

“I don’t know,” George muffles from behind his palm.

“Sometimes.”

Dream feels his heart leap unexpectedly. “Would you...with me?”

George shows no hesitation. “Yes.”

This is a clear reflection on the undertones of the fic that carries well into the sequel. The softness in which the characters interact in denounces the idea of the so-called constant over sexualization of homosexual relationships and exploitation of homoerotic narratives. While it is true that most slash fics are most commonly written by young heterosexual, cis-gendered females, the notion that lies within popular media and society is that these particular fics are heavy with sexual content when, in reality—taking *Heat Waves* as an example—these fics actually *lack* homoerotic content. In her essay “Pornography For Women, By Women, With Love,” Joanna Russ addresses the undertones that are carried throughout most slash fics by stating:

These endless hesitations and yearnings resemble the manufactured misunderstandings of the female romance books (themselves sexual fantasies for women). In fact, so paralyzing are these worries and scruples and hesitations to the two characters involved that over and over again the

lovers must be pushed together by some force outside themselves. Somebody is always bleeding or feverish or concussed or mutilated or amnesiac or what-have-you in these tales (82).

Following Russ's description, the outside forces that draw Dream and George together in *Heat Waves* are, essentially, the nightmares Dream's character suffers through and finds solace from in his friendship with George. In fact, their friendship itself serves as an outside force in the sense that Dream seeks to deepen it, while George uses it as a shield to keep them from finding emotional intimacy that he hesitates to approach. For one, it is a catalyst and for the other, it is a means of protection. The stereotypical view of slash fics being a gateway to homoeroticism tarnishes the aspect of developing romance that goes into writing these kinds of fanfics, no longer seeing sex as romantic but something to be done. Fics like *Heat Waves* that take the time to explore the foundation of a friendship turned relationship fight against the stigma of slash fics only being written as an excuse—for young females—to fetishize and exploit homoeroticism, because it is not until the sequel that Dream and George meet in person, and up until then, all readers get to experience is the emotional intimacy between them develop. Susanne Jung quotes a concept explored by Eve Sedgwick known as the "crisis of homo/heterosexual definition" (32), and in reading *Heat Waves*, it is obvious that the author does not even touch that struggle. This fic is not about two men struggling with their sexualities, trying to move past the "societal norm" of being heterosexual. Rather, the story sets out to invoke an emotional response not only from the characters, but the readers as well. Dream and George's characters do not struggle with their sexualities; there is no internal conflict of wondering if they are straight or a part of the LGBTQ+

community. They are just *them*, and the true internal conflict relies on acknowledging their feelings for one another and whether they go beyond the scope of friendship.

The popularity of *Heat Waves*, ultimately, has normalized the shipping of two men as well as made it less shameful to indulge in RPF stories, as it was once considered so “cringey” that fanfiction.net had banned any fic within that subgenre back in 2001. In the Minecraft fandom, that mindset completely changed when *Heat Waves* first came around, not only because of how well written it is, but also because people were not being ridiculed for reading an RPF story. Most of that validation comes from Dream and George themselves because, as content creators, they encourage everyone to indulge in what they are good at, whether it’s playing video games, making art, creating video edits, or writing fanfic. Truthfully, you would be hard pressed to find a “celebrity” truly encourage and interact with fanfic written about themselves, but that is not the case with Dream and George. They have been known to say that they are comfortable with their fandom shipping them with each other—as in, wanting them to be romantically involved—and are secure enough in their friendship, masculinity, and whatever their sexualities are to let the people that support them enjoy things that bring the community together. This creates a two-way engagement between content creators and fanfic, according to Fathallah, because the idea of online influencers encouraging writers to write fanfics about themselves and not being disgruntled by them spreads the normalization of writing fanfic in general, which I do not think I have seen be viewed so positively in any kind of fandom like it is in the Minecraft community. Treating it as though it is on the same caliber as a published novel encourages aspiring writers’ creativity, presenting this idea that if a community can enjoy your work, then who is to say you cannot do it professionally, too, in terms of taking the fanfic you have written and going through the steps of having it be traditionally published?

3.1. You Love It, You Hate It, But You Definitely Know It: Anna Todd's *After*

The *After* series by Anna Todd is a recent success story of fanfics posted online being traditionally published and turning into bestsellers. *After* was first published on Wattpad in 2013, under Todd's username of *imaginator1D*, and up to its publication through Simon & Schuster, it has garnered over 1.5 billion reads on the platform, making it the most popular book on Wattpad. It was first posted as a fanfic about Harry Styles, set in an alternate universe where he is a college student in America and pursues the protagonist of the story, Tessa Young. Because the work is set in an alternate universe where Styles is not a famous boyband member, it proves to be easy for Todd to "file off the serial numbers" and strip any mention of Styles, because ultimately it is only him, as a person, that marks the work as a fanfic. But once the books were set to be published, Harry Styles becomes Hardin Scott. Elizabeth Loschiavo in "Toxic Masculinity in Anna Todd's *After* Series" points out that some of the character's tattoos were changed to avoid copyright infringement, and *After* went from being an online sensation to a worldwide one.

Todd began publishing chapters for the first book on Wattpad in 2013, and the fanfic filled with college drama, steamy scenes, and opposites attract dynamic of bad boy and good girl increasingly became the most popular fanfic on the platform. As Todd uploaded more and more chapters on Wattpad, *After* easily also became the most popular fanfic in the One Direction fandom—you either read it and loved it because of the dynamics and tropes it presented, or you hated it for the very same reasons. Even now, its popularity takes me, as a One Direction fan, by surprise when I go on Netflix and see the movies available to watch, or go to Barnes & Noble and see the thick paperbacks available for purchase. As someone who is deeply immersed in fandoms of movies, shows, musicians, and content creators, there is a part of me that appreciates the normalization of fanfic that is slowly but surely spreading around. But if it is because of

fanfics such as *After*, part of me wonders if it is actually a good thing because of the content shown in terms of the toxic relationship that is explored between the two main characters. Even if it is fiction, the target audience for *After* is teenagers, who will be reading about an abusive relationship that is being romanticized throughout the series, and as writers, it is their responsibility to have some kind of caution with the kind of content that they put out.

3.2. *After* and *Heat Waves*—Real-Person Fiction: Hot or Not?

Fanfic, as previously stated, is often linked to young girls who spend their time writing it, and ultimately, the publication of *After* and the movies that followed show the world the kind of content young girls spend their time both consuming and writing. That, in itself, brings a harsh view of fanfic from outsiders whose only example of it is from a book series like *After*. Someone on the outside could read the books or watch the movies and they would be horrified from the toxic and abusive relationship that is being glorified in the franchise, and that turns around to give fanfic, over all, a bad name because of *After*'s representation of it. So while *After*'s publication had a significant role in pulling fanfic out of a shameful shade and bringing it into the light of traditionally published works, making a fanfic writer a bestseller, it would be naïve to ignore its flaws.

Todd's series' breakthrough also brings forth the familiar discussion of RPF stories, and whether or not they breach an invasion of privacy of the celebrity the fic is written about. Anne Jamison, author of *Fic: Why Fan Fiction Is Taking Over the World*, discusses the involvement of celebrities in social media and popular culture, and how it cultivates a community in which writing real-person fiction is practically unavoidable. Jamison declares that "RPF has existed for as long as there have been celebrities" before expanding, "As celebrities become more and more involved in sort of curating their lives on Instagram and understand that people telling stories about them is one of the things they're selling . . . it will become a part of a media strategy"

(465). Admittedly, it is a harsh statement to say that celebrities essentially should expect their lives to be exploited for the sake of RPF stories, but this is something that needs to be viewed from a fandom lens as well. Most RPF stories, such as *After*, or for the sake of adding another example, the *Anarchy* series by Megan DeVos on Wattpad written as a Harry Styles fanfic, take place in an alternate universe. Meaning, Styles is not a celebrity and in the case of *After*, takes the role of a regular college student, while *Anarchy* takes place in a dystopian world where Styles's character is the leader of a survival camp. By making RPF's fall under the AU category, fanfic authors are taking these celebrities—essentially, their looks and personalities—and placing them in a setting completely different from their reality to simply have them exist as a character, and not as themselves. The demographic of fanfic writers falls under teenage girls, and so they—myself included—admire the person that is shown to us in popular culture, like how many of us who were fans of One Direction and decided on favorite members of the band, and create romantic stories where the celebrity we are fans of fit the role of the love interest in the fics.

Putting *Heat Waves* and *After* side by side, both of which are or started out as real-person fanfic, the impact each story had on its respective fandom—or just consumers in general—is vastly different. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Heat Waves* is a wildly accepted fic, with little to no complaints to be seen on Twitter or AO3, to the point where the people the fic is about are accepting of it, are in on the inside jokes revolving around the fic, and, in George's case, have actually read it. The popularity of *Heat Waves* is akin to when Todd was actively posting new chapters of *After* back in 2013, yet it is the reception of both fics that differs. Those who find issues in *Heat Waves* are outweighed by those who support it, the negative feedback stemming from the previously discussed issue of the exploitation of homosexual romances and

erotica in fics, which does not occur in *Heat Waves*. In the case of *After*, while it obviously has its supporters, the subject matter of the stories is controversial due to the toxic masculinity and relationship it promotes.

The main themes of *Heat Waves* fall under the journey of balancing a long-distance friendship between two men in their twenties who have never met in person before, living on two different continents with millions of fans on social media. The storyline and character arcs are ripe with the friendship constantly carrying undertones of *something more*, banter that borders on flirting that neither of them seems to really be aware of until it becomes too obvious to ignore. With the distance between them, the author truly focuses on the emotional connection Dream and George's characters have, built on the strong foundation of friendship. It builds and builds as every chapter uploads, until they finally get to meet in the fic's sequel, *Helium*. On the blatantly opposing end of that lies Tessa and Hardin's relationship, consisting of emotional abuse and manipulation that goes around in a never-ending cycle that does not seem to find an end. As *Heat Waves* gives the audience an insight on how deep some bonds can run without the main theme being that it is a gay romance, *After* promotes the abusive cycles of a "socially acceptable" heterosexual relationship that some fans try to look past or, worse, excuse. Hardin's actions, by both author and readers, are written off as him just being a "bad boy" with a rough past, a trope universally popular for fanfic and books. But as said by Liz Fe in "Toxic Relationship – A New Fetish," "an abuser's unhealthy upbringing does not, under any circumstances, excuse the damage they *choose* to do." This is an especially important reminder given that Todd's audience is young, impressionable girls who put Hardin on a pedestal and set him as the example of the kind of romantic partner they want for themselves. With the popularity of the books and movies, Hardin has become the standard of what girls desire, excusing his actions, and while it is easy to

say that it is “just a book/movie,” it would be just as naïve to say that they don’t effect a consumer’s daily life and have some kind of influence on it. In the case of *Heat Waves*, the influence comes onto the real Dream and George’s lives and the lens in which people view their friendship, yet they have repeatedly said they don’t mind people shipping them because of how comfortable they are in themselves and their friendship. But for *After*, the influence can be seen as far more damaging—not only for Harry Styles, who Hardin is obviously based on and could possibly be subjected to the same kind of views as Hardin’s character reflects—but for girls who have fallen in love with the character and strive to be with someone as toxic as Hardin Scott.

4.1. *Fifty Shades of Grey*: The Original Fanfic Turned Bestseller

While *After* made it big in bookstores and movie theaters, the title for the most popular and commercialized example of fanfic goes to E. L. James’s *Fifty Shades* trilogy. The bestseller books and blockbuster hits had first originated as fanfic for Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* book series, published on fanfiction.net under James’s pseudonym of Snowqueens Icedragon in August of 2009 with the title of *Master of the Universe*. The well-known characters of Anastasia Steele and Christen Grey were first Meyer’s Bella Swan and Edward Cullen, but once the books were set to publish with Writer’s Coffee Shop, an independent Australian publisher created by fans to commercially publish their works, James “filed off the serial numbers,” according to Hayley Cuccinello in Forbes’ article “Fifty Shades of Green.” That phrase, essentially, means she stripped the trilogy of any and every reference to *Twilight* and made it so the characters were brand new and not the established ones of Swan and Cullen to avoid adhere to copyright laws, getting rid of details that previously marked the characters as Swan and Cullen and assigning them new ones so the characters became her own.

The popularity of *Fifty Shades* is, believe it or not, inspiring for fanfic writers who hope to someday make a career out of writing. Fans who dabble in writing can look to James as an

example. She said in an interview with ABC in 2012, “I just sat on my sofa and just read them and read them and read them”—*them* being in reference to the *Twilight* books. She continued, “I was inspired by Stephenie Meyer . . . She just kind of flipped this switch in my head”.

Consuming the *Twilight* books led to James joining fanfiction.net in 2009, when she began publishing *MoTU I*, which would eventually turn into *Fifty Shades of Grey*. In their article about the phenomenon *Fifty Shades* and *Twilight*, Joseph Brennan and David Large provide a detailed history on *Fifty Shades*: the work actually had been removed from the forum in 2010 due to a violation of the forum’s terms of use because of its explicit sexual content, so James created a website for herself in which she published the fic. After joining The Writer’s Coffee Shop, they announced in 2011 that the trilogy would be published as eBooks and print-on-demand paperbacks, which eventually led to James removing all fanfic content from fanfiction.net and her website (29). After significant textual revisions to rid the stories of any and every *Twilight* indicators, the first book was published in May 2011, with *Fifty Shades Darker* releasing September 2011, and the final book, *Fifty Shades Freed*, being published in January 2012.

4.2. Reception and Portrayal of BDSM

The publication of this fic-turned-book series into mainstream media invited mixed reviews from both other fanfic writers and those who already had formed an opinion on fanfic, whether it be a negative or positive one. While there are fanfic writers who believe fanfic should not be commercialized the way James profited off of hers, others rejoice at the idea of fanfic, in some way, becoming normalized through the publication of *Fifty Shades*. But that mindset can be altered, because once the books hit stores, many critics and consumers wanted to write them off as “mommy porn,” derived from the fact that not only does it explore several aspects of sexual content, but readers can somehow find themselves relating to the “pretty but not stunning”

character of Steele, constantly questioning why a billionaire CEO like Grey would be interested in someone as average as them.

The popularity of these books also drew attention to the world of BDSM, an acronym for the sexual practices of Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadochism and Masochism, many of which were appalled at the representation of the practice. In “Fifty Shades of Exploitation: Fan Labor and *Fifty Shades of Grey*,” Bethan Jones brings forth feminist and BDSM critiques that came with the publication of these books to a mainstream audience, arguing that “*Fifty Shades*’ promotion of BDSM reveals the way in which BDSM is culturally identical with domestic violence” (section 1.3). Rather than providing consumers with a healthy depiction of a dominant-submissive relationship between Grey and Steele, one that shows mutual respect and trust, James’s work demonizes what a BDSM relationship between two consenting individuals looks like. Pamela Stephenson Connolly, who wrote an article discussing how the franchise is a bad reflection of bondage, is quoted by Jones that the books show Grey being “portrayed as a cold-hearted sexual predator with a dungeon (that word has been wisely swapped for ‘playroom’), full of scary sex toys. Worst of all is the implication that his particular erotic style has developed because he is psychologically ‘sick’” (section 1.3). Diving deeper into Connolly’s article, she brings up Grey’s lack of competency in BDSM, which essentially reflects on James’s lack of research on the topic. If she is to write a character who is a so called “expert” in BDSM—not a title he has given himself in the books, per se, but if he goes so far enough to have a playroom and the lengths to have a contract to be signed by his submissive—he should be proficiently knowledgeable of the acts and limits that go into such a relationship that involves a whole new avenue of trust. This should be reinforced especially when the character opposite of him has the traits of Steele, who is naïve and utterly new to this kind of lifestyle.

Fanfic is a space within literature that not everyone would understand, especially when it breaks through into mainstream media. We see that in the publication of *Fifty Shades* and the responses it received especially after the movie trilogy was released. Because of the adaptations, the origin of the book got lost in the media storm, but the impact that came from this fic-turned-book-turned-movie was large enough to start multiple conversations, particularly in terms of BDSM practices as mentioned before. Lisa Downing explores these issues from the perspective of critical sexuality studies, exploring how the discourses about gender and sexuality within the media commentary inform the novels themselves (93). The trilogy provides insight into a kind of relationship that is not often seen in mainstream media; in fact, these kinds of relationship where boundaries and limits are tested, especially sexual in nature, are more often explored in fanfic as a writer not only testing their creative imagination but setting a new course for a familiar fictional relationship—i.e., Steele and Grey as Swan and Cullen. Since we know *Fifty Shades* to have been a *Twilight* fic, its popularity was bound to bring attention to the “dangerous” BDSM practices explored in a “heteronormative” relationship—and I use quotes just as Downing does, because that concept oversimplifies the overall relationship explored. The problem, so to speak, ultimately lies in the portrayal of BDSM because, according to BDSM advocates, it is not displayed to its full extent. In an interview, Emily Sarah, a performer who runs BDSM Healing, tells her thoughts on the content, “There was a lot of beautiful equipment, but not much going on in terms of actual BDSM . . . in real BDSM relationships, there’s a lot more connection, a lot more talking, a lot more ritual.” Sarah then goes so far to say that “[Ana] is clearly not up for BDSM, and he could find someone else to do it. That makes their relationship abusive.” This one observation reflects the kind of attention *Fifty Shades* received from consumers that was not based solely in a positive light, because it is significant to note all kinds of impacts a piece of

work has on the world when it is released. So while James's work was the first real piece of fanfic breaking out into mainstream media and introduces the idea of fanfic being viewed as a piece of literature on its own, content like *Fifty Shades* can also invite negative views of not the work itself but become reflective of fanfic as a whole and ostracize it even more.

4.3. Questionable Content from *Fifty Shades* and *After*

The widespread popularity of *Fifty Shades*—as well as Todd's *After*—is significant for the fanfic community because, on one hand, it normalizes the publication of fanfic to contemporary romance novels. But on the other hand, especially as *After* is referred to as the “New *Fifty Shades*,” the impact can also invite backlash on both works. In her article “Toxic Masculinity in Anna Todd's *After* Series,” Loschiavo compares the source of the negative feedback of both works, which stems from the “possessive, vindictive, and emotionally abusive” portrayals of both Hardin and Christian. Loschiavo proceeds to describe them as being

unable to express their feelings or insecurities, so they lash out at Tessa and Ana when something goes wrong, becoming spiteful and self-destructive. Finally, while neither Hardin nor Christian hit their partners in either series, their actions are clearly abusive. Every time they make a mistake they manipulate Tessa and Ana into forgiving them, gaslighting the women into questioning why they were upset in the first place or blaming their faults on their immense, uncontrollable love for the heroines.

The passage clearly points out the negative display of toxic masculinity and relationships, rendering both Tessa and Ana subjects to emotionally abusive treatment yet constantly going

back to these men they love. Together, both of these stories promote unhealthy relationships and distort the meaning of what having a romantic partner is like, promoting dangerous and manipulative elements that come with being with a toxic male partner as well as showing “submissive” female counterparts who keep going back to them. And while it is the unfortunate truth that there are relationships such as this out in the real world, they should not be normalized or romanticized. Because both books are bestsellers and their movies were blockbuster hits, we need to consider that the reason for that is not just because of an intriguing storyline but because the audience—namely, women both young and old—perhaps yearn for relationships like Ana and Christian’s, or Tessa and Hardin’s. In *Shared Narratives: Intermediality in Fandoms*, Nicolle Lamerichs studies fans, fandoms, and the texts they focus on and states:

In their reception, fans draw from a felt and embodied response towards the text and its characters; in other words, being a fan is an experiment that is grounded in a feeling – an admiration of texts that are used to connect to others and the world itself. (18)

This particular observation can be read two different ways. The first way would be seeing the “fans” as James and Todd, and where the text James is drawing from is *Twilight*, and in turn, *Fifty Shades* being what Todd draws from. Because of the impact the books they read had on them and the characters that drew their attention as fans and writers, they proceeded to write their own series that turned into the next bestsellers and became well-known in popular culture. The other way would be to view James’s and Todd’s audience as the fans, all of whom had a visceral reaction to the books and movies seen globally.

The reception of both *Fifty Shades* and *After* exploded across social media and popular culture, and whether people were talking about it positively or negatively, they were still talking about it at the end of the day. The positive, for the sake of this argument, is how fanfic does have the ability to break into mainstream publishing and media, while the negative reflects on how as writers and consumers, we must be careful of the media that is out there for us. While James and Todd are not diverting from a canon text, since James's book is set as an AU and Todd's is both an AU and an RPF story, they are, however, influencing and setting the bar for what young women, in particular, look for in men, diverting their attention towards men and relationships that would be nothing but unhealthy for them. But because of the romantic lens they are portrayed in, it is concernedly easy to excuse the behavior of toxic men. The lack of sensitivity in which these topics are handled by Todd and James suggest a dismissive view of toxic relationships and men and instead normalizes and romanticizes this behavior. The lesson these books teach to their audience of young girls are that men such as Hardin and Christian are desirable and their behavior should be excused as "romantic" and not for what it is, which is particularly abusive in Hardin's case. By reading these books, relationships that lack mutual respect and are founded on possessive and rash behavior are promoted carelessly, appearing as desirable when they are the opposite.

5.1. Conclusion

The existence of fan fiction stretches back far longer than we would assume, whether it is in the sphere of physically writing these stories down or being orally told. It exists as a branch of being a part of a fandom, people of the same interests gathering together to form a community and indulge in the book, movie, or show that has a firm grab on them. Writing it off as fans "copying" original content and stealing ideas is a surface level view that refuses to see the true merits of fanfic and the importance of the content the fic is being written about is to those who

consume it. Fanfic is not a thievery of original content; it is instead a tribute to it from those who genuinely loved the work they are writing about. This can be argued, of course, when the fic in question is in the works of becoming published as its own creation. But if the author “files off the serial number” and reworks the fic into removing all elements that would relate it back to the original work it had been a fic for, does it not become something to be read separate from the original content? Sequels created by someone for a book written by another author fall under the same umbrella of writing original content based off of someone else’s work. In this particular instance, copyright laws come into play; to write a sequel for someone else’s book, the author needs to be granted permission by the copyright holder, according to an article posted on *Writer’s Digest*. If such a law exists where people can ask for permission to write a sequel to someone else’s work, is it not a thinly veiled way of creating their own kind of fanfic by taking pre-existing characters and taking them on a journey of the new writer’s choice?

American author Ursula K. Le Guin once said, “There is a limited number of plots. There is no limit to the number of stories,” which is a belief I hold onto when I am planning to start a new story. Everything we read shares similarities to something already written, whether it be character archetypes or plotlines, but the way it is written and the journey readers go on is different from one to the next. Fanfic does the same thing, except it acknowledges the original work it is derived from, much like retellings do. James has faced plenty of backlash for the publication of *Fifty Shades*, being called out for stealing the premise of *Twilight* to create her own work. But why is the same treatment not expressed for retellings? In those, an author is quite blatantly taking pre-existing work and making it their own, giving it a new plotline that pays tribute to the original story. Chloe Gong’s *These Violent Delights* duet takes Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and places them in a completely different setting and changes up the

background of the character, but the root of the characters' story is the same. Two kids of feuding families fall in love and, by the end, die for that love. Sure, Gong adds magical and scientific elements to her books that Shakespeare didn't, but she also does not deviate from the original names of the characters, so she can stay true to where the inspiration for her books came from. But if instead of becoming a bestselling author, Gong had chosen to post this story on a platform like AO3, it could easily be considered a fanfic, under the "Shakespeare" category, with tags such as "science fiction," "magic," "enemies to lovers," "alternate universe," and the like that speak to the tropes and themes explored in her work. In a similar vein, Tracy Deonn could have done the same with the *Legendborn* cycle, which is her bestselling retelling of the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. If she had gone and posted it on an online platform as a sort of fanfic, she would use tags such as "modern AU," "college romance," or "love triangle." Gong and Deonn gave their own spins on classic tales and, in doing so, gave readers a new storyline to follow with elements they may already be familiar with. Is that not what a fanfic does, too? It takes characters and stories we are familiar with and adds onto the overall consumer experience of enjoying already available content.

The main argument about fanfics being works where fan writers take canonical content and change it to fit a trope or storyline of their choosing is expressed differently in terms of RPF stories and regular fanfics. People against RPF stories protest the invasion of privacy these kinds of stories bring to the real-life people they are about, declaring the writers' unauthorized use of a person in their stories. Those against fanfic of books, shows, and movies are against a fic writer's use of pre-existing characters and plots because they are not writing original content and, instead, are leeching off another person's hard work. It is very easy to write fanfiction off as just that—as taking someone else's work and "rewriting" it to pass it off as your own, but credit should be

given where credit is due. Pushing aside the “invasion of privacy” stance that comes with RPF stories, many of those are fanfics that the author is not extending from another plotline, rather making their own to revolve around the character of the real-life person/people they are writing about. While *After* could be seen as an RPF of Harry Styles with the relationship dynamic that vaguely resembles that of what is seen in *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades*, *Heat Waves* is a fanfic where the author does not seem to get inspired by anything other than the real-life dynamic seen between Dream and George, as well as sentiment of the lyrics behind the Glass Animals song. And despite some of the negative reception of *After* and *Fifty Shades*, as well as the toxic standards they seem to promote, their breakthrough cannot be ignored, as fanfic is making it into mainstream media, extending to a larger audience than the one they had previously garnered on Wattpad and fanfiction.net.

The success of *After* and *Fifty Shades* comes up frequently during conversations about fanfics, simply because of the books becoming bestsellers to the point where movies were made for them. Fathallah says, “As fanfic becomes increasingly visible and easy to access, appearing even as noted on sites like Goodreads, there is no longer any reason we should treat its social potentials less seriously than any form of fiction” (200). Fanfic used to be something that people were embarrassed about, whether reading it or writing it. But because of how much of it is out there, for every fandom you can think of, the normalization of its existence extends to the normalization of writing it. As a twelve-year-old girl, I was embarrassed when people found out I wrote One Direction fanfic. But now, as a twenty-three-year-old, I *still* write it in my free time, albeit for different fandoms, and have published two books that had started off as RPF stories on Wattpad and Tumblr, amassing close to 45,000 followers combined. My own experience in writing fanfic is what drove me forward in my interests in reading and writing in general, finding

enjoyment in content after content, in fandom after fandom. There is a certain kind of validation one feels in the praise and constructive feedback that comes from people on Twitter or the comments on your fics on AO3 that pull you deeper into fandom life, as well as your enjoyment in writing fics, and so how is that any different than being a published author and seeing people leave high ratings and good reviews on your books on Goodreads? Books may have been the backbone of our education, but they also allow for an escape from reality into worlds different than our own. Fan fiction not only unites groups of people together but also instills the motivation and creativity for writing and extending a story we may already be familiar with, or bring us closer to celebrities by using their faces and personalities to develop characters to revolve a story around. It is writing in its rawest form from the perspective of fans who only create it for entertainment and perhaps self-indulgent purposes, and although it may not be perfect, it surely does not deserve to be written off or scorned.

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