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Filing The Serial Numbers Off: The Role Of The Author In Fanfiction Published As Original Fiction

Lauren McInnis
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FILING THE SERIAL NUMBERS OFF: THE ROLE OF THE AUTHOR IN
FANFICTION PUBLISHED AS ORIGINAL FICTION

by

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A THESIS

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2024

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2024

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FANFICTION PUBLISHED AS ORIGINAL FICTION

LAUREN MCINNIS

ENGLISH

ABSTRACT

With the increase of authors altering and publishing fanfiction as original works of fiction, the practices and attitudes of fan communities cross over into the realm of traditional fiction. Throughout its history, fandom is a community built on the shared love of a piece of media or celebrity. The importance of community appears in fanfiction through Author's Notes and comments sections; both of which traditionally published novels generally lack. When authors choose to make the transition to traditional publication which provides legitimacy that fanfiction lacks, they must remove most of their own identity and the fan-community that they originally relied on. The study of five popular examples of this practice of "filing the serial numbers off" illustrates different ways authors and publishers choose to acknowledge the novels' fanfiction origins.

Keywords: Fanfiction, Authorship, Fandom, Author/Reader Relationship, Publication, Paratext

DEDICATION

To fanfiction authors who write for the love of it.

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CHAPTER 1

FILING THE SERIAL NUMBERS OFF

While far from the level of prestige of other forms of derivative writing, fanfiction and the idea of retelling stories is nothing new. But fanfiction in its modern form also differs from all previous forms of derivative writing because it is produced and consumed within a specific cultural, fan context that has been building and expanding since the later Victorian period.

In recent decades, many fanfiction authors have made the decision to transition from fan-publication to traditional publication. (For clarity, when discussing fanfiction and its related concepts, I will add the prefix “fan-,” and when discussing traditional publication, the terms will either not have a prefix or be preceded by “traditional.” Finally, “self-publication” in this thesis only refers to self-publication of original works, not self-publication in terms of fanfiction.) Some fan-authors eventually decide to begin writing original works of fiction (that is, those not related to previous fanfic works), with one of the most well-known instances being Cassandra Clare (sometimes spelled Claire) who wrote the Young Adult (YA) series *The Mortal Instruments*, among others.¹ Clare was well-known (and infamous for accusations of plagiarism and bullying) within *Harry Potter* fan spaces in the early 2000’s before she moved to traditional, original publication.² Another option is for a fan-author to take a fanfiction that they have already written and “file the serial numbers off,” meaning that they remove and replace all

copyrighted material from the fanfiction such as character names and concepts that are inextricably connected to the original source material (such as the Force from *Star Wars*). Once the work has been anonymized through the removal of copyrighted material, these authors will publish the new, “original” version of the story either with a traditional publisher or through self-publication. Both paths come with their own pros and cons, but the biggest advantage for both is that the fan-authors can count on a pre-existing readership when they move into traditional publication and are theoretically set up for success once their novel goes on the market.

This thesis will focus on those authors who “file the serial numbers off” and on how the transition from fanfiction and fan-author to novel and author raises questions of authorship and the author-reader relationship. Fanfiction is an extremely community-based writing process and is built not only on the original source material but also conventions, genres, and tropes that have developed in fan-communities. So, when fan-authors take the fanfiction out of the fandom and try to move into traditional publication, that fan-identity and community that gave the fan-author their initial success and contributed to the fanfiction are lost even if the result of their input remains. As part of the relationship between fan-author and fan-reader, the fan-author is everywhere on their fanfiction and exerts a high level of control over their writing. While the transition from fan-author to traditional author provides writers with the legitimacy and profit that comes with traditional publication, the original community and the writer’s complete control over their writing are lost.

In chapter two, I will discuss the history of fandom/fan culture and typical fanfiction publishing practices today. Chapter three covers the differences and similarities

between traditional and fan publication. Then in chapter four, I explore and analyze five case studies of fanfictions being adapted and published as original fiction. Chapter five will conclude with discussion of the implications of the rise of fan-authors in traditional authorship.

CHAPTER 2

FANDOM AND FANDOM CULTURE

Even though we often think of fandom as being a very modern, post-internet phenomenon, fan-writing, like all modern forms of writing, has deep historical roots. Not only does understanding this history illustrate the longevity of fanfiction, it also explains many of the conventions that come with fan-publication. The community aspect of fandom has always existed, setting a precedent for fan-authors and fan-readers to follow. While someone can technically write fanfiction without ever interacting with fan-culture, that is extremely rare and is unlikely to have any impact on what I'm discussing here. Fandom can refer to essentially two levels of fan-culture. There are individual fandoms based around specific media and celebrities, and there is the broader concept of fandom as a whole. For clarity, when discussing individual fandoms, I will refer to them by the media or celebrity they are based around; when discussing fandom as an overall concept, I will simply say "fandom."

A Brief History of Fandom

Pre-Internet Fandom

The exact origins of fandom vary depending on which aspect of it is being discussed. The earliest recorded use of the word was in 1903 in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*

which offered the headline, “Fandom puzzled over Johnsonian statements.” *Publishers’ Weekly* then used the term in 1928 with, “Ty Cobb, the idol of baseball fandom” (“Fandom, *N.*”) In both contexts, the word fandom was connected to sports, an association that is much less common. Yes, there are sports fans, but the word “fandom” draws a very specific image of people who enjoy fictional media.

Though the word seems to have not appeared in print until the 20th century, fandom studies generally trace the practice’s origins back for centuries including the dedicated fans of Romantic author, Lord Byron. However, the most notable case of early fandom for our purposes is nearly a century later with the craze surrounding Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s “Sherlock Holmes” stories, a craze that continues to this day. The meteoric success of the Sherlock fandom was not entirely by accident, as George Newnes, owner of *The Strand Magazine* which published the detective stories, encouraged readers to interact with the story in his first newspaper, *Tit-Bits*. This interaction included sections like question-and-answer columns where Holmes readers could write in questions to be answered by the editors. The answers not only remained vague about the the sleuth’s actual existence, they also added to Conan Doyle’s story and background (McClellan). While it is unclear to me whether or not Conan Doyle helped with or even sanctioned the *Tit-Bits* additions to his stories, I hesitate to refer to them as fanfiction though they may meet the general definition. They were more like advertisements that happened to include Sherlock writing not penned by Conan Doyle.

What would be considered fanfiction are the entries into *Tit-Bits’* Holmesian pastiches or competitions where readers submitted their “original stories featuring Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson in the style of Conan Doyle” for potential publication

and small cash prizes (McClellan). While it is difficult to say definitively that this is the origin of fan fiction as certainly derivative works have been written and told for as long as there has been storytelling, it is perhaps the beginning of fanfiction as we know it.

Perhaps the most famous (or infamous) instance of early Sherlock fandom comes after the detective's death in 1893's "The Final Problem." While Conan Doyle was ready to move on from Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson, the reading public was not. Whether true or not, there are stories of readers going into proper mourning and young men in London wearing black mourning crêpes for the next month (Armstrong). What is for certain is that Newnes' papers were flooded with letters expressing dissatisfaction with the ending of the beloved series. Over the hiatus, Newnes continued to reprint the stories and used Sherlock as promotion for his magazine before Conan-Doyle finally gave in and resurrected the beloved sleuth (McClellan).

While the behavior of Victorian Sherlock fans resembles the practices in modern day fandom, the origins of modern day fandom as such are often traced to the publication of zines or fanzines starting in the 1930s in science fiction fan communities. Contrary to the typical image of a nerd, these fanzines have always been dominated by women (Coker). Zines are small, independently published magazines typically made within one's home either with a group of friends or by oneself with less than 1,000 copies being made for each issue ("What is a Zine?"). The fanzines that really caused a boom and the subsequent evolution of fandom were about *Star Trek*, and fans began producing these almost as soon as the show aired. The first *Star Trek* fanzine, called *Spockanalia*, was a major cultural moment within fandom as it not only contained a letter from Spock actor

Leonard Nimoy wishing them luck but set the standard for fanzines moving forward (Verba).

There are many different types of zines and fanzines particularly, and the most important type for this thesis is those that contain fanfiction. Without contests like those held by Newnes in *Tit-Bits*, writers had few ways to share their fanfiction outside of their immediate circles. This restricted circulation brought a certain degree of protection from copyright infringement. *Tit-Bits* was a strange exception where the threat of lawsuits did not exist because Conan-Doyle was directly involved with the publisher and clearly did not mind that they were hosting fanworks of his stories, for he continued to publish with them.³ Zines also allowed writers to create derivative stories without the fear of legal action. Zines were small, usually unnoticed by copyright owners who were unlikely to hear about them, and probably not worth going after legally. As a result, authors who write in zines had a sort of safety. They also got a direct connection with their fellow fans because there was the collective sense that this zine had been made with their own two hands. This is an early example of the intimacy with the reader that is such a central feature of fanfiction communities.

Fandom in the Early Internet

Despite popular belief that the internet is forever, a lot of early internet content has been lost whether from creators choosing to delete posts, servers being taken down, websites not being updated to function with modern hardware and software, or simply being forgotten. This transience is especially true in fan communities. Without

established mainstream places where fan content could be hosted, many primary sources no longer exist. The result is that fandom history from this time has been primarily preserved through digital testimonials and wikis.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, fan communities began to move onto online forums including email mailing lists, and eventually blogging websites like LiveJournal, digital forums, and dedicated websites like fanfiction.net (Coppa 57). With the opening of the internet, fandom became much more accessible than ever before and grew in popularity and started gaining more mainstream attention, including an article in *USA Today* framing fanfiction as an extension of the original work (Berman). A lot of practices like fanfiction, community building, and a specifically feminine approach to fandom all remained. The main difference between pre- and post-internet fandom is the ease of access.

This era is also when we see the most infamous instance of copyright threatening fanfiction: the Anne Rice debacle. *Interview with the Vampire* author, Anne Rice, is hated within fan circles to this day for her stance on fanfiction of her works and the legal actions she took to remove fanfiction of her stories. In early 2000, Rice's official website posted the following message, "I do not allow fan fiction. The characters are copyrighted. It upsets me terribly to even think about fan fiction with my characters. I advise my readers to write your own original stories with your own characters. It is absolutely essential that you respect my wishes" (Rice). This statement was in conjunction with Rice and her attorneys sending out Cease and Desist letters to four prominent fan-authors, threatening them with legal actions ("Spec Writer Massacre"). In 2001, Rice and her attorneys got in contact with Fanfiction.net, the biggest fanfiction hosting website at the

time, and required the website to remove all Anne Rice fanfiction from the website. Fanfiction.net posted a message: “Anne Rice: Vampire Chronicles, the category, has been removed at Anne Rice’s request” (“Sunday | May 20”). This ban still exists today (“Guidelines”). The fear of copyright was always there, but Rice’s actions made it a much more imminent threat. The fear that fan-authors experience manifests itself most notably in the common disclaimer that the fan-author doesn’t own the characters or source material.

Fandom in the Current Day

With the streamlining of the internet, fandom has become much easier to access and to create. While private forums and groups still exist, the primary ways for one to interact with fan spaces are through open websites. All social media platforms are fair game for fandoms to interact and share content. Specialized websites (other than fanfiction.net) which specifically host fanfiction have also been created. We now have access to wikis specifically for fandoms and fandom culture including fanlore.com and fandom.com. In all, while zines and private forums still exist in the modern day, fandom is bigger than it ever could have been before.

Of the social media platforms, Tumblr is the most associated specifically with fandom of fiction. While other social media websites like Instagram and Twitter, now called X, do host plenty of fan-communities, they are not defined by fan communities in the way that Tumblr is. Fandom on Tumblr has an extensive and messy history that cannot be covered in full or even half here. For much of the mid 2010s, Tumblr was

almost the headquarters of fandom on the internet. Tumblr formed a sense of community not only within individual fandoms but fandom as a whole. Specifically, the website is associated with women and LGBTQ+ members of fandom and has the benefit over other social media platforms of not hosting a lot of celebrities or being as commercialized.

While Tumblr has had celebrities with very public accounts in the past--the most notable probably being author John Green who wrote under the username “fishingboatproceeds” though that blog has been deleted--it has never been a major site for celebrities to thrive.

In some ways, Tumblr provides a benefit because fans are freed from the threat of the celebrities or creatives stumbling across their fanworks. This freedom is especially important considering the amount of explicit material found within fandom.⁴ Of course, the concept of fandom and how it is engaged with is all subject to change in the coming years, but the fandom culture of the late 2000s’ through the early 2020’s has the most immediate influence on the fanfiction publication and conventions discussed next.

Fanfiction Publishing

Though fanfiction has been a prominent feature of fandom since at least 19th century, my subsequent focus is on modern day fanfiction and its many complex practices. These practices have been built and expanded upon throughout fandom history and adapt to the ever changing landscape of both fandom and the internet.

Fanfiction Websites

While fanfiction can technically be posted almost anywhere on the internet, there are three major platforms: Fanfiction.net, Wattpad, and Archive of Our Own (AO3).

While a large amount of early fanfiction was posted onto private forums, these are far too many private forums to name here, and they vary too widely in their form and function.

The three websites focused on here are designed for the publication and consumption of original writing, and they allow multi-chapter postings. The popularity of each site has ebbed and flowed over the years, and within fandom each is each associated with different ages and phases of post-internet fandom.

Fanfiction.net, the earliest of the popular fanfiction websites, was founded in 1998 by Xing Li (Berman). Like most websites, the design and some functions of the website have changed. Most notably, Fanfiction.net originally hosted original works of fiction and poetry in addition to fanfiction, but in 2003, all original works were transferred to a new, separate website called FictionPress.Net (“February 17, 2003”). From today’s perspective, , the website looks outdated, both in terms of web design and the fandom culture expressed within it. The features are minimal, and important information has not been updated in years including the content guidelines which were last updated in November 2008 (Guidelines). While it has lost popularity in recent years, Fanfiction.net is the starting point for many fanfiction writers and the original home of some of the most well-known fanfictions to ever exist.

Wattpad, unlike the other sites acknowledged here, does not currently focus exclusively on fanfiction publication but features all types of fiction writing. The website

was started in 2006 and was meant to revolutionize how stories are published and read (Lau). In the current day, Wattpad hosts all kinds of writing and provides opportunities for aspiring writers, including resources, programs, contests, and even the opportunity to be paid for writing. Wattpad is undeniably the most well-connected website, and some recent contests have included collaborations with Netflix, Harlequin Publishers, and Crocs (“Writing Contest”).

AO3 is the youngest of the fanfiction websites. It was originally proposed in 2007 and first opened to the public as an open beta in 2009, sponsored by the nonprofit organization the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW) (“Announcing Open Beta!”). Since then, OTW has expanded greatly. In addition to hosting the fanfiction website, they also host Fanlore, a fan wiki; Open Doors, a project meant to archive fanworks that are at-risk for being lost for various reasons; and *Transformative Works and Cultures*, an academic, peer-reviewed journal that focuses on fanworks and scholarship (“Our Projects”). They also offer legal advocacy for the defense of fanworks. In 2019, AO3 won a Hugo award for Best Related work (“AO3 Wins 2019 Hugo Award for Best Related Work”). AO3 is generally considered the best fanfiction website both in terms of content and user interface.

As a result of the staggered launches, each site has been able to build on the strengths and correct the weaknesses of their predecessors. An example of this is how Fanfiction.net allows an author to tag four characters present in their story, but AO3 allows tags of unlimited characters, character relationships (ships), and custom tags. While Fanfiction.net and Wattpad have their own nuances and formatting, I have chosen AO3 to serve as my standard when discussing fanfiction conventions. AO3 is not only the

website I am most familiar with; it is also the most popular site for fanfiction today, and the most well-made in terms of design.

Fanfiction Publishing Conventions

Some fanfiction conventions would be expected in any sort of publication either physical or digital. These conventions include a title, the author's name or pseudonym, and a summary. Some fan-publishing conventions could theoretically have been implemented widely in traditional publishing but have not, and thus they are relatively unique markers for the fandom reader culture. For example, fanfiction and most non-print forms of media, such as films, feature standardized content rating systems and are clearly labelled with that rating (Figure 1). Content ratings, by contrast, are rarely seen in traditional publications. While some erotic novels will feature a small rating on the back cover, as we see on *Fifty Shades of Grey*'s back cover (Figure 2), this is not standardized by any means (James).

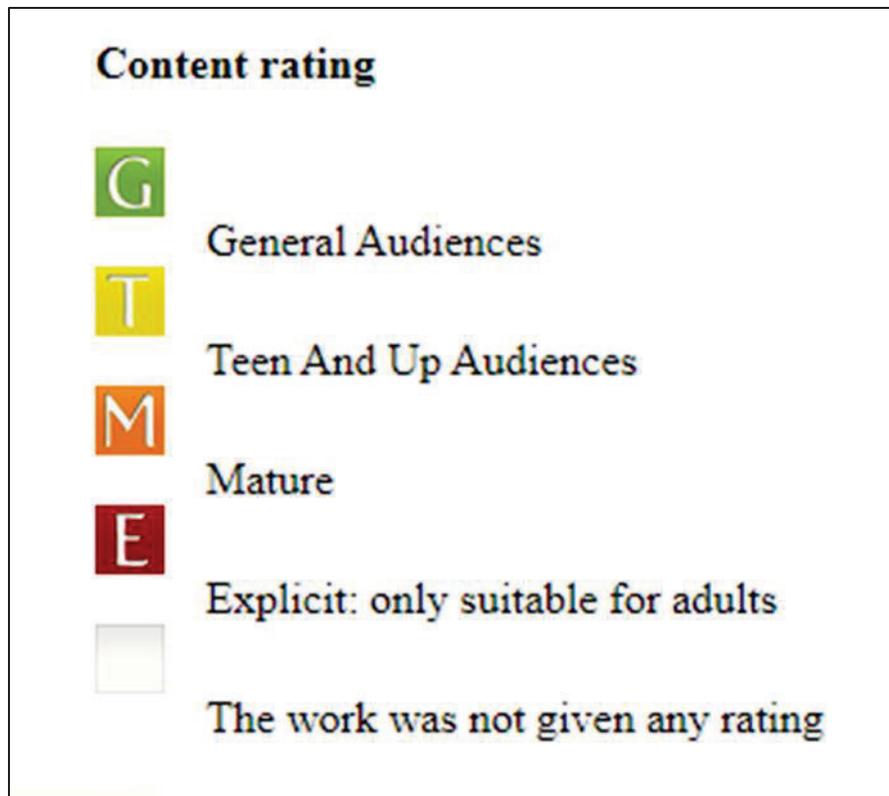


Figure 1. A screenshot of AO3’s content rating system (“Symbols we use on the Archive”).



Figure 2. A section of *50 Shades of Grey*’s back cover including a content rating (James).

The absence of a rating means readers must use their judgement as to what sort of book they may be purchasing. In fanfiction, fan-authors are expected to provide some sort of rating similar to the film rating system even on sites that do not require ratings.

AO3 has gone a step further and also features a content warning system in which authors warn potential readers about certain forms of content such as “rape/non-con” or “graphic depictions of violence” (“Symbols we use on the Archive”). The inclusion of content warnings is a courtesy that has been on the rise in the past few years, especially on the internet. In fanfiction specifically, fan-authors’ use of them creates a mutual understanding between author and reader where the reader consents to reading potentially upsetting material. Fan-authors thereby allow their readers to make an informed decision and receive the appreciation of their readers in return. The popularity of content warnings in fanfiction is not that surprising not only because fanfiction often deals with difficult topics, but also because those writing fanfiction are primarily women and/or members of the LGBTQ+ community, groups which are typically at the front of social change. In contrast, traditional publication does not provide audiences with the same consideration. While there is likely no single reason as to why traditional publication does not implement a similar system, the most obvious reason is money. Traditional publishers are in the business of selling, and clearly labelling that their books contain “graphic depictions of violence” and “rape/non-[consensual sex]” will dissuade readers from picking the book up (Symbols we use on the Archive). Fanfiction doesn’t have this concern because there is no profit; fan-authors are not reliant on people reading their fanfiction to make money. Warnings, which are seen as a positive feature in fan-communities, could potentially be sales killing in traditional publication.

Fanfiction websites also implement features that are more typical of social media rather than traditional print or even ebooks. These features include comments sections, likes (or kudos in the case of AO3), bookmarks, and follows. Some of these features

allow readers to keep up with their favorite stories or rate them, but for my purposes the most important aspect is the comment sections. Like any social media, comments sections are places for feedback, praise, or criticism. On AO3, the comment section is on the same webpage as the fanfiction chapter(s), but the reader is able to toggle the comment section on and off. Here, fan-readers can speak directly to the fan-author and vice versa on the chapter itself. While each fan-author approaches comments differently, they are able to respond directly to comments.

A feature that only makes sense in context of fanfiction and in context of books from major franchises like *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* is labelling the work with the source material and characters included. Fanfiction also includes tags for “ships” or romantic character pairings (“relationships”) that fans enjoy. These ships can be canonical (i.e., relationships that actually exist within the source material) or non-canonical or hypothetical. One of the biggest—perhaps *the* biggest--motivators for fanfiction writing and reading is to see your favorite ships together. Fanfiction’s labelling of source, characters, and ships creates a mutual understanding between the fan-author and the fan-reader where everyone has some knowledge of the original source and is interested in this specific ship. For the fan-author, mutual understanding allows them to skip most of the exposition and world-building expected at the beginning of the story, streamlining the writing and reading process.

Another way for fan-authors to set the scene around their fanfiction is the inclusion of Author’s Notes (A/Ns). These are notes appear typically at the beginning and/or end of chapters, and they allow the author to speak in their own voice directly to their readers. Some authors may insert author’s notes in the middle of the chapter as well,

but this is not common and generally associated with younger fanfiction authors. These notes can contain any sort of information. For example, they might provide links to research, advertisements for other stories by the author, a schedule for further updates, an apology for not meeting a previously scheduled update, etc. In Figure 3 we see a typical example of a fanfiction A/N.

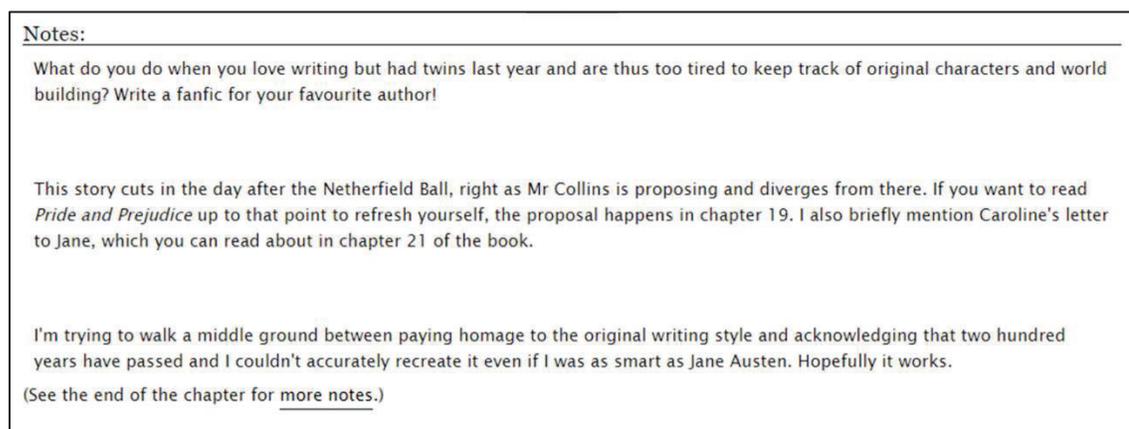


Figure 3. A screenshot of the A/N at the beginning of Chapter One of Taradactyls' *Pride and Prejudice* fanfiction, "Trying to Tread Water."

The fan-author, Taradactyls, explains their mindset going into writing, provides insight on their personal lives, places their fanfiction in the context of the original novel (*Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen), and explains their style of writing. This makes Taradactyls themselves as much a feature of the writing as the characters they are writing about. It also allows them to frame their fanfiction specifically in context of the original, which means that no recap is needed of the first third of *Pride and Prejudice*.

In fanfiction, the author and the community are inescapably present in a way they are not in print books or even typical, kindle-style ebooks. Fanfiction can rarely be written

for profit. Attempts have been made to monetize fanfiction, such as Kindle Worlds, an Amazon led program that existed from 2013 to 2018 and allowed fanfiction to be published for certain pieces of Amazon-partner media. However, these have never really been successful (Hoffelder). Copyright holders have little incentive to cooperate with such partnerships, and publishers are unwilling to risk litigation. But the lack of profit doesn't matter for most fan-authors because the joy of writing and the fan-community are reward enough. The process of tagging fanfiction curates the readerbase and allows readers to make an informed decision about what they're reading. In allowing fan-authors and fan-readers to constantly speak directly to each other about the chapter itself, fanfiction websites encourage conversation and also a celebration of the fan-author which is inserted directly into their writing.⁵ The communal aspects of fanfiction occur there on the page, or at least on the screen, in a way that is alien in other publishing forms.

CHAPTER 3

AUTHORSHIP IN TRADITIONAL AND FAN PUBLICATION

Though the role of an author has evolved over time both in traditional publication and fan publication, in current trends fan-authors are much more omnipresent within their works than traditional authors. In terms of typical print and eBook publication, the creation and publication of fanfiction most resembles the practice of self-publishing because of the amount of control the author has over both the text and the paratext. This control is a major selling point for companies like BookBaby to potential authors, promising that authors get to dictate the editing their manuscript undergoes, the book's design and format, where the book is distributed, and how the book is promoted (“What is Self-Publishing – and is it Right for You?”). Fan authors have the same level of control over their texts with the main difference being that fan authors typically cannot profit from their publication.

To be clear, my focus here is on what exists within the finished work itself. I am not looking at advertisement or promotion of the work to generate sales as they are not really comparable. Fan-authors really can only rely on good will, connections to the fan community, and word of mouth to promote their writing, unlike traditional publishers which have marketing teams, awards, reviewers, etc. Although I occasionally mention the inclusion of awards and review quotes on the covers of traditionally published books. I

do so only as these affect the role and perceptions of the author within the body of the text.

Modern Authorship in Traditional Publication

The Author's Role in Production

When discussing traditional publication (barring self-publication as it means today), we have to acknowledge that many people other than the author play a role in shaping the finished work. As Michelle Levy and Tom Mole state, “Authors, after all, don’t write books. They write novels, poems, plays, political treatises, religious tracts, histories, memoirs, and so on, and these are then turned into books – into material artefacts made of paper, ink, and so forth – by other people, usually many other people” (7). There are plenty of examples in history of authors who actually created books such as William Blake, but even for such authors there comes a time where they can no longer act as both author and publisher. After Blake died, he could no longer create his own books, and others had to come in and fill that role. Unfortunately, most publications of Blake’s works today lack his engraved designs which were part of Blake’s authorial intent. In traditional, print publication, authors quickly lose or surrender much of their ability to control how their writing is published and therefore consumed by their readers.

The Editor and the Filters

In traditional publication, barriers and third parties exist between the author's original manuscript and the published novel. Obviously, editors make changes to the manuscript, but publishers decide what gets published and filter out works that they don't want to publish. While the option to self-publish online and/or through companies who will print anything removes the publisher barrier, editors still exist to work on and change the manuscript. While many editors strive to not compromise the author's vision, they still exist as a third party that the text is run through before it is presented to the reading public.

Authorship in Fan Publication

The Author/Publisher/Editor's Role in Production

Fan-publication, unlike traditional publication, requires the author to take on every role in the publication process. While playing every part seems difficult and perhaps not worth it, fan-authors thrive in the freedom of continuing to shape and even participate in their work. In fanfiction, there is only the author and their writing. Every part of what a reader may see is done by the author. There's no team or other person making the decisions regarding how the writing is published and ultimately consumed by the audience.

The Editor (or the Beta Reader)

Typically in fanfiction, no third party looks over a fanfiction before it is published. Occasionally some fan-authors do make use of editors, often friends or fellow members of fandom, but these editors are referred to as “beta readers” (or betas). In traditional publication, beta readers, unlike editors, aren’t looking to “correct” anything, but instead give an author feedback on the story and the characters (Tuch). In fanfiction, beta readers are whoever the individual fan-author wants them to be. They can be proofreaders, editors, a stand-in for the future audience, etc. all depending on what the fan-author is looking for (War). So even though beta readers are a third party, the fan-author directs what the beta reader does and is never obligated to use the beta reader’s feedback. Typically, beta readers are friends of the fan-author or fellow members of fandom who have garnered a good relationship with the fan-author. It is a very informal process, but there is still one major formality. Beta readers expect authors to thank them in an A/N. Since beta reading is generally unpaid, this is the only benefit to beta readers. The shout-out in the A/N is especially helpful for beta readers who are fan-authors themselves as it serves as advertisement as we see in Figure 4. In this Summary (which is serving a similar purpose to an A/N), the author thanks two people who acted in that beta reader role. Farah_boberra makes a distinction between her two beta readers, with @SaintCorvus being credited as the beta and @SybilEvergreen being credited with checking the French translations. While @SybilEvergreen is not referred to as the beta reader, they fit into that role.

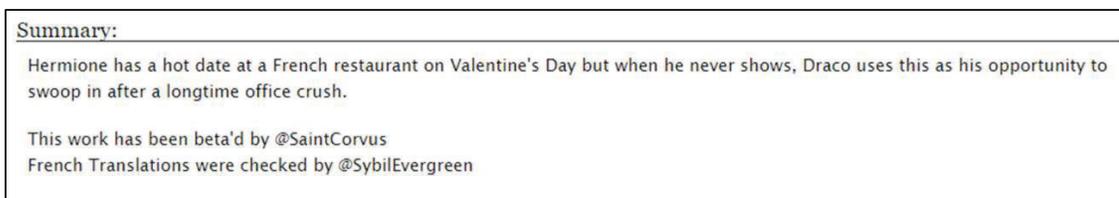


Figure 4. A screenshot of farah_boberra's Summary for their fanfiction "If You Were Mine."

Even if the beta reader doesn't publish fanfiction, they are still thanked because the fan-author wants the beta reader to continue to work with them. In some ways, fan-beta readers aren't that different from professional editors or beta readers, but fan-beta readers work off of good will and the sense of community within fandom. Fan-beta readers' true equivalent in the traditional publishing world are the friends and family who read over drafts and provide feedback during the writing process.

Front Matters (and Back Matters, and In-Between Matters)

Unlike most print publication today, fanfiction is almost always published serially, and fanfiction websites are built with serial publication in mind. Shorter works that are only one chapter long (commonly referred to as "one-shots") do exist, but those are not the fanfics that are turned into novels. The most prevalent form of paratext within a fanfiction is the author's notes (A/N). In fanfiction, while ultimately up to fan-author's preference, the expectation is that some sort of author's note will appear in almost every chapter. The author is inescapable in a way that traditional publication will never be. If you were to take a traditionally published novel and rip the cover and the first and last

few pages off, the author as a personality would be almost entirely removed. You cannot do this in fanfiction because you would have to remove part of every single chapter.

These notes vary in length and can be about anything from an update on the author's personal life, to sources for research the author has done, to responses to questions posed in the comments. Fan-authors can respond in the comment section, but by responding in the A/Ns the author is magnifying the commenter and making them a part of the chapter itself. The interactivity of fanfiction cannot be replicated in traditional publication.

Author's notes have gained a reputation for being very sensationalized. The extreme content of many A/Ns has even led to hundreds of thousands of views of TikTok videos in which people read author's notes (@drakiexoxo). Fan-readers typically expect A/Ns, particularly those focused on the author's personal life, to be extreme and divulge something upsetting that has happened to the author, and this is normally framed as the reason the fanfiction has not been recently updated. While I believe that the majority of the events in these extreme notes are probably not true, I still need to acknowledge that this is a part of the A/N culture. The exaggeration of the plight of the fan-author stems from authors sharing details of their private lives in the author's notes or trying to make their lives seem more interesting than they probably are.

Outside of being a method by which fan authors can communicate directly with their audience, author's notes also allow fan authors to lay claim to their work. Because most fanfiction authors write under pseudonyms and cannot rely on name recognition, they have to take a more roundabout path to asserting ownership. According to Alexandra Herzog, when fanfiction authors include autobiographical information:

the individual fans empower themselves, reinforcing ideas about the centrality of the person of the author by stressing the importance of the self and the validity of their ideas and stories. In spite of using pseudonyms, fan authors thus voluntarily leave the anonymity of the Internet and constitute themselves as legitimate writers, whose opinions and life story matter, even when their production of text does not earn them any money.

In traditional publication and self-publication, the author is generally known. While not every published author will become a huge name like John Green or George R. R. Martin, you will almost always find a brief biography of the author in the book. However, fanfiction author's notes are a lot more than a brief biography on a dust jacket – they are constant and unavoidable. In addition to building community, fan-authors' insistence on using A/Ns may reflect the cultural insecurity that results from being a fanfiction author. Fanfiction is a widely derided form of fiction writing; it's an insult to be levied at other types of texts and media.⁵ It's a joke – something written by teenage girls that should be grown out of. This insecurity is not helped by the derivative nature of fanfiction: fan-authors can never truly “own” their work as it is fully based on someone else's. On the one hand, fan-authors assert much more control over their work in that they control every part of the publication process and the prominence of their own identity; however, on the other hand, they lack legitimacy and the ability to gain legitimacy as long as they remain fanfiction authors.

Death of the Author(s)

Fanfiction authors contradictorily assert that a story does not truly belong to its original creator while also asserting that their own personal interpretation is somehow untouchable.⁶ Fandom is to a certain extent built on what Roland Barthes coined “the death of the author.” While Barthes is primarily concerned with literary criticism and argues that the author is not the ultimate authority over their text and provides a “true” meaning. If fanfiction authors believed that the original creator is the only authority over the meaning of a piece of media and that fan-interpretations do not matter, fanfiction wouldn’t exist. The idea that a story doesn’t belong to an author makes sense within fandom, but as discussed, fan-authors are desperate to exert control and ownership over their own writing. This contradiction speaks to perceptions of power in the fan community. Fans are reliant on the original creator for their fandom to exist. That original creator is the one who makes money from their work and who holds copyright and can threaten litigation as I discussed with Anne Rice. Fanfiction authors are the ones being threatened by that litigation, and they don’t make any money. Fan-authors are more motivated to claim what authority and ownership they can, such as through detailed, pervasive author’s notes, because they are writing from a position of greater disempowerment.

What's the Difference?

Serial Publication

As mentioned earlier, fanfiction is different from most modern print publication in that it is published serially. While this is nothing new (serialized publishing was popular during the Victorian Era and beyond), the serialized publication of, say, Charles Dickens differs in a key way from the serialized publishing of fanfiction: the author is everywhere.

I don't necessarily mean the author's name in the traditional sense. As we can see in Figure 5 from an original publication of Chapter 8 of Dickens' *Great Expectations*, his name is front and center, listed multiple times. In many ways, Dickens' publications in *All the Year Round*, a weekly journal which he created and published, resemble modern day fanfiction publication (Parrott). Dickens played almost every role in the publication process, much as fan-writers do today. However, although Dickens was the publisher, editor, and author of the periodical and the story contained therein, he does not directly address his readership in his own voice, in the way that fan-authors constantly do.

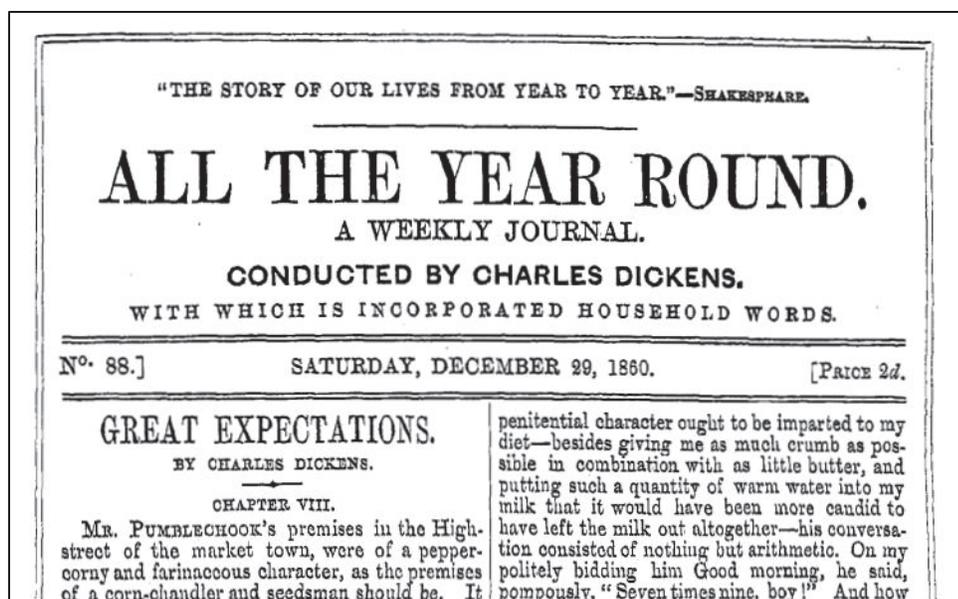


Figure 5. The title page of Charles Dickens' periodical *All the Year Round* number 88.

This particular issue is publishing chapter 8 of Dickens' novel, "Great Expectations."

By contrast, an AO3 chapter features the author's name far less prominently, but instead offers two separate places for the author's notes where the author speaks in their own voice. While these notes are optional and the space for them won't show up if the author chooses not to use them, fan-audiences expect at least one A/N per chapter. Author's notes are considered so important in the format of fanfiction that when an author chooses to include notes at the end of the text, the website automatically tells readers that they can "See the end of the work for [more notes](#)" and hyperlinks "more notes" so a reader can jump to them automatically. When authors do choose to use them consistently, each chapter is likely started or ended with the author's own voice – sometimes both. Unlike a print book, you can't just rip off the cover and remove the author. You would have to remove part(s) of every single chapter. In Figure 6, you can

see a basic template of how AO3 fanfiction appears on a desktop and how the different pieces are assembled.



Figure 6. A basic outline of how an AO3 fanfiction would appear to readers with optional author's notes. Created by author.

The paratext of an AO3 chapter can overwhelm the story itself especially once a comment section builds up a lot of comments. Print publication will never be able to feature the author and the reader in this way where it constantly updates with each new reader. There is no way for an author and a reader to interact in a print text. Of course, social media allows for authors and readers to interact directly, but that interaction occurs outside the pages of the book, in a metaphorical space separate from whatever the reader is holding in their hand. Fandom creates an environment where community interaction rises to almost the same level of importance as the content of a fanfiction. Fan-culture is a realm where everyone is allowed to disconnect from their day to day lives and take on a new persona under a pseudonym. While some authors reach levels of fandom fame where their name is enough to make a fanfic successful, they build that fame not only on the strength of their writing but also their own personality and interactions with their readers.

Author's Notes: They're Not Just for Fanfiction!

While A/Ns are a key identifying feature of fanfiction, there are A/Ns in some forms of traditional publication. Authors like Stephen King occasionally include A/Ns in their novels, but a far more consistent genre utilizing A/Ns are Harlequins and Harlequin style books from other publishers. However, Harlequin A/Ns are still very different from fanfiction A/Ns. Most notably, there is only one A/N per Harlequin novel either before the text or after whereas fanfiction A/Ns cover are expected in every chapter.

While serving a similar function of allowing the author to speak directly to their audience, the Harlequin A/Ns are less personal and casual than fanfiction A/Ns. In

Harlequins like *Beyond Ordinary* by Mary Sullivan and *The Stanislaski Sisters* by Nora Roberts, the A/N serves as a summary of the novel even though there are multiple other summaries in the book. In *Undeniable* by Julie Elizabeth Leto, the A/N allows the author to share how and why she wrote this novel. In *Against the Edge* by Kat Martin, the A/N serves as advertisement for other books in the series. Fanfiction A/Ns can and often do fit similar themes and functions, but there is a notable difference in how the fan-author approaches A/Ns. Unlike the Harlequin A/Ns, fan-author A/Ns are far less formal and also encourage fan-readers to engage with them as equals or collaborators.

Looking at the four examples discussed here, the Harlequin A/N most similar to a fanfiction A/N is Leto's (Figure 7):

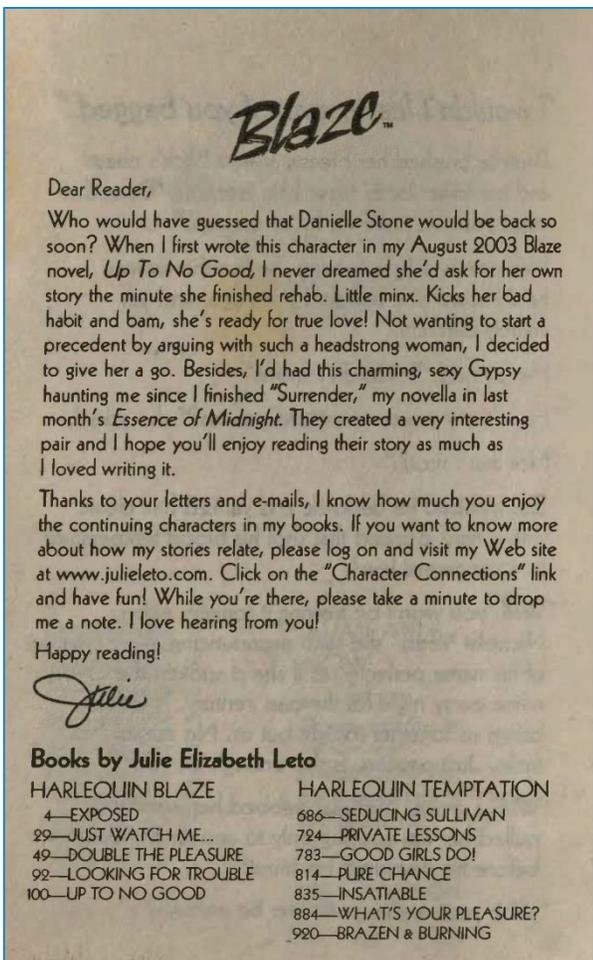


Figure 7. First verso page of *Blaze* by Julie Elizabeth Leto containing an Author's Note.

Compare that Harlequin A/N to this fan-A/N from a *Star Wars: Sequel Trilogy* fanfiction entitled "Landscape with a Blur of Conquerors" by diasterisms on AO3 (Figure 8):

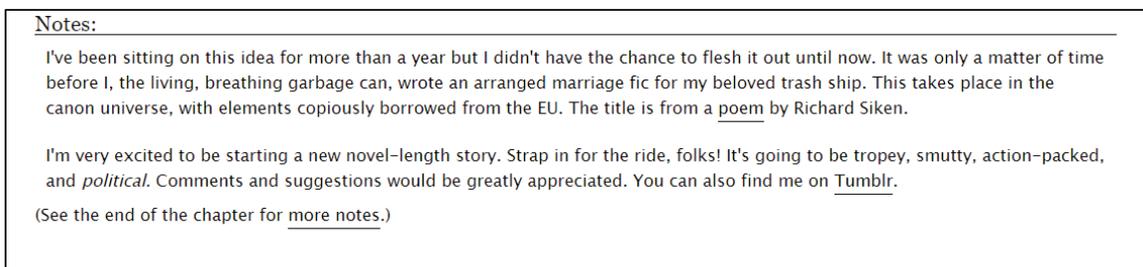


Figure 8. A screenshot of the Diasterisms' A/N from the first chapter of "Landscape with a Blur of Conquerors" ("Chapter 1").⁸

In terms of content, the two A/Ns are not that different. Both discuss the author's thought process leading up to writing their story and end with an encouragement for the readers to go to the author's own website/blog and reach out. Even though they both have a tongue-in-cheek, somewhat crass way of talking about their stories and characters, Leto's A/N still has a formality that doesn't exist in diasterisms'. Leto begins her note with a salutation and ends with her signature as one would write a letter or email. Diasterisms, on the other hand, doesn't bother with any of that, and the A/N reads more like a blog post as a result even though in terms of fanfiction A/Ns, diasterisms' is more formal than most.

An unexpected similarity between the two A/Ns is the reference to pre-existing lore that the audience is expected to have some familiarity with. Leto mentions that the main character of *Undeniable*, Danielle Stone, originated from a previous book that Leto had written. For diasterisms, the audience is not only expected to know about the canonical *Star Wars* universe, but also the "EU." The *Star Wars Expanded Universe* (also referred to as *Star Wars Legends* or the *Star Wars EU*) is made up of books, shows, video games, and other pieces of *Star Wars* media created before Disney declared them no

longer canonical (or “true”) in 2014 (“The Legendary Star Wars Universe”). The EU does not include the theatrically released films of the Original or Prequel trilogies released in the 70s/80s and the 90s/2000s or anything created after this announcement including the Sequel Trilogy which started being released in 2015. So, when diasterisms states that her story, “Takes place in the canon universe, with elements copiously borrowed from the EU,” she is letting her readers know that knowledge of the current *Star Wars* canon will not be enough for readers to recognize everything in the fanfiction. In neither case is lack of extra knowledge a major barrier to the reader, but it alerts the reader that there may be things they don’t understand immediately.

While both authors invite their readers to contact them on a different platform, each author is asking for a very different kind of contact from their readership. Leto is asking for her readers to go to her website to learn about her characters and their connections and to leave a note for her. Meanwhile, diasterisms is asking for participation from her readers in writing the fanfiction. Part of this difference comes down to practicality: when Leto’s audience reads her A/N in this physical book, the book is already completed; but when diasterisms first published her A/N, her story was only beginning to be written. Leto’s readers would have no way of impacting the novel they are actively reading, though they may influence future novels by the author. But this also speaks to the importance of community in fanfiction where a fan-author who clearly has a plan is still asking for input from her readership.

Crossing Over

When fan-authors make the transition into traditional or self-publication of fully original writing (or as original as any piece of writing can be), they are forced to let go of most of their authorial control. The author's notes between chapters have to be removed; the comment sections filled with months or years of conversation disappear; and the author's constant ability to edit and change their writing after publication is greatly diminished. The author and the reader become less centrally important to the text on the page, but at the same time the legitimacy that traditional publication provides is an ultimate goal of many fan-authors.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDIES

When filing the serial numbers off, authors often remove the fanfiction from the internet. Unfortunately for my purposes, that means it can be difficult to find and verify original copies of the fanfiction. Because I have been able to find pdfs posted to fan websites purporting to be the original fanfictions, I have very few ways to verify the truthfulness of those claims. To compensate, I have used what knowledge of the originals I already have and compared the file to the published book to see how similar they are and if it is reasonable to believe that the published novel originated as the fanfiction that I have. While this method is not ideal, I do believe that the documents are a copy of the original fanfictions.

Fifty Shades of Grey by E.L. James: The One That Started it All (Kind Of)

The earliest successful instance of fanfiction being adapted into an original, published work of fiction is 1985's *Cowboy Blues* by Teri White under the pseudonym of Stephen Lewis. Originally a *Starsky and Hutch* fanfiction, "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys," published as a fanzine focused on the titular Stasky and Hutch, *Cowboy Blues* didn't reach anywhere the levels of popularity that *Fifty Shades of Grey* achieved ("My Heroes").⁹ Twenty-five years later, *Fifty Shades of Grey* and its sequels popularized

the practice of filing the serial numbers off. Without the popularity – indeed, the infamy – of this book series, the other novels discussed here might not even exist.

“Master of the Universe” by Snowqueens Icedragon

Fifty Shades of Grey started life as a fanfiction, “Master if the Universe,” which was based on Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* series and posted onto various websites including Fanfiction.net from 2009 through 2011. The characters that would later become Anastasia Steele and Christian Grey were originally Bella Swan and Edward Cullen respectively. “Master of the Universe” was not set in a high school in Forks, Washington like Meyer’s original work and instead James placed the characters in an office setting in Seattle. Ultimately, in terms of the story itself, the change of character names is the only notable difference.

Publication

Initially self-published through the Writer’s Coffee Shop in 2011, James acquired a book deal with Vintage Books, a subdivision of Random house in 2012 (“Popular romance trilogy”). *Fifty Shades of Grey* had already been very popular before being picked up for traditional publication, but it was only after this deal that the book became available in the United States.

The Book Itself

Fifty Shades of Grey has no obvious references to its fanfiction origins.

Remarkably, even James' biography makes no reference to any writing predating the publication of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Outside of the biography, James and her publisher have left only two vague references to fandom and/or the original fanfiction. The first appears in the dedication of the book which reads, "For Niall, the master of my universe." Niall is James' husband who she credits with "tolerating [her] obsession, being a domestic god, and doing the first edit" (James n. pag, 556). We see here a coded nod to the "Masters of the Universe" fanfiction. The second reference appears within the acknowledgements, "To the original bunker babes, thank you for your friendship and constant support" (James 556). The "bunker babes" (I do not know where the name comes from) were James' fans who supported her throughout the writing of "Master of the Universe" and followed her after publication of *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Beaty). Notably, of both of these references require the reader to be in the know to understand them. To an average reader, neither one of these comments would be of note if they read them at all. They serve as coded language for those in the fandom where non-fandom members will both not understand the references.

The Backlash

Over and above its fanfiction origins, *Fifty Shades* started at a reputational disadvantage as an erotica novel. Once *Fifty Shades*' fanfictions origins became common knowledge (which not only was/is looked down on but also raises the possibility of copyright lawsuits), Vintage issued a statement to defend their newly acquired best seller. Specifically, Vintage argues that, “[James] subsequently took that story and re-wrote the work, with new characters and situations. That was the beginning of the 'Fifty Shades' trilogy” (“Popular romance trilogy”). Additionally, James’ agent, Valerie Hoskins, defended James’ work by arguing that James actually rewrote her fanfiction so entirely that it no longer qualified as fanfiction. Hoskins argues that:

[*Fifty Shades of Grey*] did start as *Twilight* fan fiction, inspired by Stephenie Meyer’s wonderful series of books...She took it down and thought, I’d always wanted to write. I’ve got a couple unpublished novels here. I will rewrite this thing, and create these iconic characters, Christian and Anna. If you read the books, they are nothing like *Twilight* now. It’s very 21st Century, don’t you think?

While James’ publisher’s and agent’s opinions do not appear on the text itself, these opinions suggest that James and her team’s negative attitude towards *Fifty Shades of Grey* is to some degree associated with its origins as fanfiction. Additionally, these statements highlight the disruption of the open communication between author and reader. When she was a fan-author, James had no middleman between herself and her readership: she spoke directly to them. Once James made the leap to traditional publication, she speaks through the proxies of her publisher and agent to journalists.

Other people stand between her and her readers. Simultaneously, the publisher and agent celebrate the work James put into writing her original fanfiction, but they also distance the final product from the prior work. Instead, the work that is emphasized is her “rewriting” of the fanfiction and her “creation” of new characters and situations. In reality, according to Anne Jamison, “For the most part, E. L. James just changed the names to create *Fifty Shades*.” While I cannot say exactly how much or little work James put into updating “Masters of the Universe,” *Fifty Shades* does not seem noticeably different from “Master of the Universe” as illustrated in Figure 9. While there are some edits other than character names, in this example, a majority of the alterations are punctuation or single word substitutions. But to James’ representatives, it can’t just be a fanfiction whether for legal reasons or because of the social stigma.

“Master of the Universe”	<i>Fifty Shades of Grey</i>
<p>Rose is my roommate and she has chosen, okay, that’s a bit unfair, because choice has had nothing to do with it, but she has flu and as such cannot do the interview she’s arranged with some mega industrialist for the student newspaper. So I have been volunteered. I have final exams to cram for, one essay to finish and I am supposed to be working this afternoon, but no - today I have to head into downtown Seattle and meet the enigmatic CEO of Cullen Enterprise Holdings Inc. Allegedly he’s some exceptional tycoon who is a major benefactor of our University and his time is extraordinarily precious... much more precious than mine - and he’s granted Rose an interview... a real coup she tells me... Damn her extracurricular activities.</p>	<p>Kate is my roommate, and she has chosen today of all days to succumb to the flu. Therefore, she cannot attend the interview she’d arranged to do, with some mega-industrialist tycoon I’ve never heard of, for the student newspaper. So I have been volunteered. I have final exams to cram for and one essay to finish, and I’m supposed to be working this afternoon, but no – today I have to drive 165 miles to Downtown Seattle in order to meet the enigmatic CEO of Grey Enterprises Holdings, Inc. As an exceptional entrepreneur and major benefactor of our university, his time is extraordinarily precious – much more precious than mine – but he has granted Kate an interview. A real coup, she tells me. Damn her extracurricular activities.</p>

Figure 9. A side-by-side comparison of the second paragraphs of “Master of the Universe” by Snowqueens Icedragon and *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James.

Highlighted sections are differences between the two versions.

Despite Hoskins’ claim that James’ adaptive writing practice is incredibly 21st century, it really isn’t. As we’ve seen fanfiction has existed since the Victorian era, and the fanfiction turned romance novel has existed since the mid-1990’s at the latest. James wasn’t breaking ground in terms of her authorship either in realms of fanfiction or traditional publication, but she did inadvertently tell fanfiction authors that there was a path to traditional publication, to legitimacy, and to profit from their work. For such a poorly written book, James’ book has had an immeasurable impact not only on the reading public but also the fanfiction community.

Beautiful Bastard by Christina Lauren: One Becomes Two (and Become One)

At first glance, *Beautiful Bastard* appears to be nothing more than a *Fifty Shades* knock off. Though *Beautiful Bastard* was published in the wake of James' success, author Christina Lauren never hid from the novel's fanfiction origins and also retain some of fandom's collaborative nature. Christina Lauren (Lauren) is the shared pseudonym for authors Christina Hobbs (Hobbs) and Lauren Billings (Billings) who met through fandom and began writing together.

"The Office" by tby789

Despite eventually being published with both women credited as author, Billings and Hobbs don't hide that the original *Twilight* fanfiction titled "The Office" was only written by Hobbs ("The Fanfiction Friendship"). "The Office" was incredibly successful within the *Twilight* fandom, and the review page of *Beautiful Bastard* features a quote by Jamison: "*The Office* paved the way for *Fifty Shades* and a thousand other imitators" (qtd. in Lauren). Like "Master of the Universe," "The Office" is a fanfiction revolving around Bella Swann and Edward Cullen, whose characters would eventually become Chloe Mills and Bennett Ryan respectively. "The Office" became *Beautiful Bastard* when it moved to traditional publication.

Publication

According to Billings, getting *Beautiful Bastard* published was incredibly easy for Hobbs and Billings. While the duo originally intended to start their professional writing career in the Young Adult genre:

When “Fifty Shades [of Grey]” was published in 2012, publishers were really looking for the “next Fifty Shades.” So we had already reworked [one of our fanfics] just as a way to put it [back] up online and keep [people] from stealing it, but in the end so much of it was changed that our agent said “Let’s send it to a few editors and see if they buy it.” And it sold it to Simon & Schuster in a matter of hours.¹⁰ (“Christina Lauren”)

Beautiful Bastard was published the year after *Fifty Shades of Grey* was picked up by Vintage Books. Following the success of their first novel, Lauren would go on to publish nine sequels and many standalone novels (“Books”).

The Book Itself

Even supposing *Beautiful Bastard* would have been published without the prior success of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the book definitely would not have been formatted and advertised the way it is had James not first popularized the fanfiction-to-romance novel pipeline. The front cover in Figure 10 advertises “More than 2 Million Reads Online – FIRST TIME IN PRINT!”

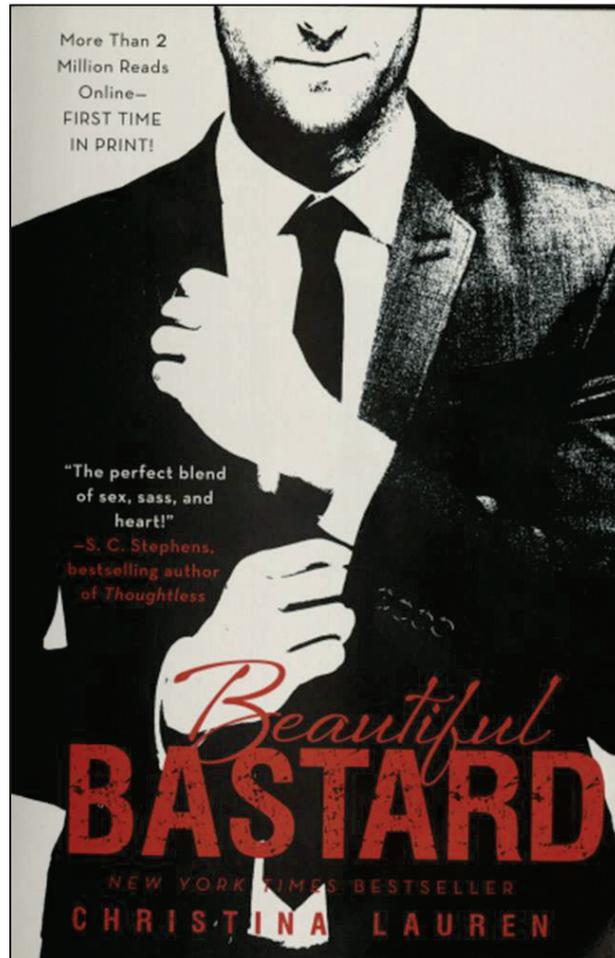


Figure 10. The front cover of *Beautiful Bastard* by Christina Lauren.

While this doesn't necessarily point to fanfiction (plenty of wholly original works of fiction got their start on the internet), the back cover shown in Figure 11 makes the fanfiction origins obvious: "Originally only available as *The Office* by *tby789*—and garnering over 2 million reads on fanfiction sites—*Beautiful Bastard* has been extensively updated for re-release."

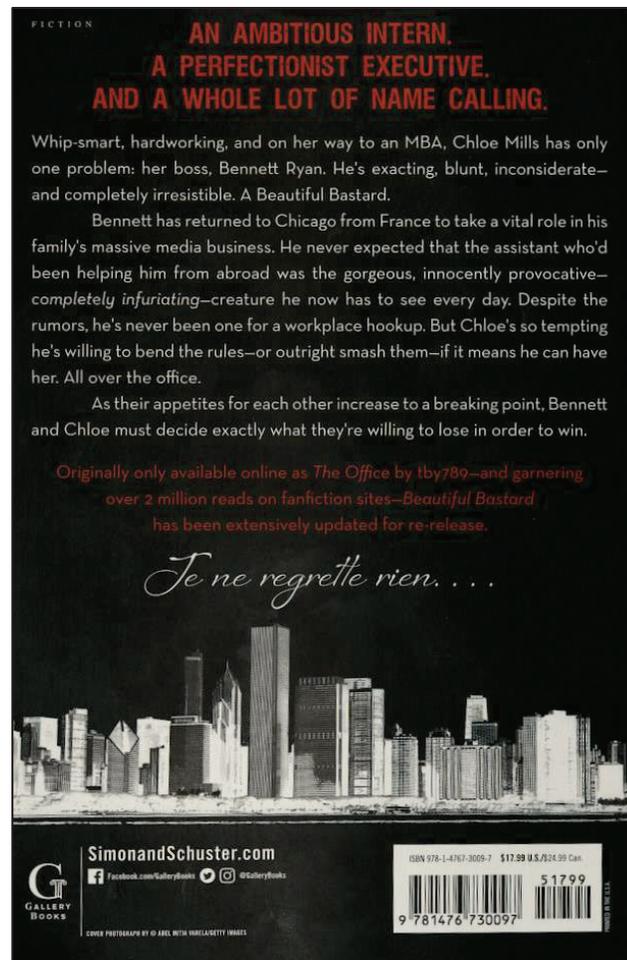


Figure 11. Back cover of *Beautiful Bastard* by Christina Lauren.

Here we see a mixture of the shameless embrace of fanfiction (“2 million reads on fanfiction sites”) combined with a continued emphasis on the work that took place (“extensively updated”) to adapt the story for traditional publication. Within the book itself, the first page contains a series of reviews for both the book and the fanfiction (Figure 12).

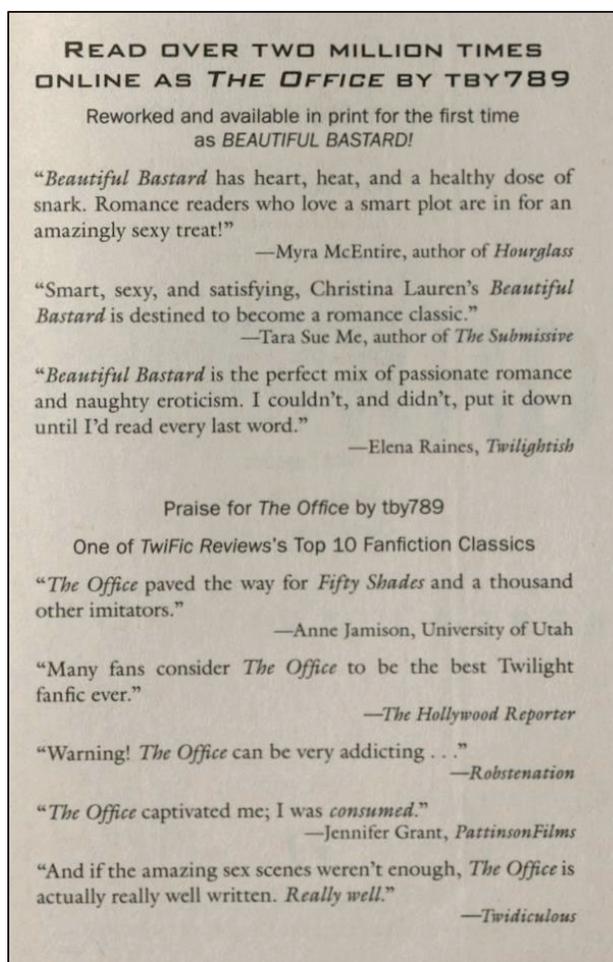


Figure 12. Review page of *Beautiful Bastard* by Christina Lauren.

The reviews of the fanfiction say little about the quality of this book, assuming that extensive revisions actually occurred between the two versions. The page also contains the only reference to *Twilight* in the paratext. *Beautiful Bastard*’s obvious references stand in stark contrast to *Fifty Shades of Grey* which slyly used insider knowledge to indicate its fan origins. *Beautiful Bastard* is more than a fanfiction that is later adapted into an original work of fiction. It remains a fanfiction and presents itself as such.

One or Two?

Unlike *Fifty Shades of Grey* or any other fanfiction-turned-novel analyzed here, *Beautiful Bastard* gains an author in that transition. No one debates that “The Office” was written by Hobbs alone, but most readers of the published book would not know that. The author’s bio inside the back cover states, “The pair first met writing fanfiction in 2009, under the names tby789 (*The Office*) and LolaShoes (*My Yes, My No*) and launched their partnership with their popular collaboration, *A Little Crazy*. Together, they reworked the famous fanfiction *The Office* into the novel *Beautiful Bastard*” (Lauren). While it can be assumed that Hobbs is tby789 as she is listed first both in their pseudonym and the bio, it isn’t outright stated who is who. The emphasis on how the pair “reworked” the fanfiction not only goes back to the previously discussed concerns but also legitimizes Billings’ place as co-author. Fanfiction is an inevitably collaborative effort as it builds on the connection and interaction between author and reader, but this collaboration is inflected differently. Billings seems closer to an editor – someone who comes in after a completed piece is written to polish and make changes. We don’t know for certain how much work Billings put into the published novel as compared to Hobbs; however, by working together, the women are able to retain a small amount of the collaborative nature of fandom. Billings and Hobbs met as fans and wrote fan fiction together (“The Fanfiction Friendship”).

After by Anna Todd: Real Person Fanfiction

“After” the original fanfiction is the only fanfic that I could not find an original copy of. While a version appears on Anna Todd’s Wattpad, it is simply the published novel with the names changed and some editing. Unfortunately, I cannot make any observations regarding changes between the two or provide insight on those changes, but the published novel has a very interesting relationship with its fanfiction equivalent. As a procedural note, since the title did not change, I will refer to the fanfiction as fan-“After” and the novel simply as *After*.

“After” by imaginator1D

Fan-“After” by imaginator1 may be the most successful fanfiction of all time, with the cover claiming that it has “1 BILLION READS ONLINE” (Todd). Fan-“After” was published on Wattpad starting in early 2013 and also had two sequel fanfics written before being picked up for publication (imaginator1D). It is the only Real Person Fanfic (RPF) discussed here and as such doesn’t have the same copyright concerns as the others. An RPF is a fanfiction where celebrities are characters within the story. Sometimes the celebrities will just be the celebrity (i.e., same job, known facts about the celebrity’s real life, etc.), but other times the celebrity character retains only the name of the celebrity. Fan-“After” falls into the latter category. While celebrities can trademark their name and brand and RPF could debatably be considered defamation, I haven’t been able to find any

specific cases of celebrities suing fanfiction writers over RPF. It's probably not worth the effort, and any lawsuit would just draw more attention to the fanfiction.

Fan-“After” focuses on the now-former member of One Direction, Harry Styles. The rest of the band (Louis Tomlinson, Niall Horan, Liam Payne, and Zayn Malik) appear as characters in the fanfiction, but One Direction as a band does not exist in the work. The names have been applied to characters that have nothing in common with their real-world equivalents. The main character, Tessa Young, is not based on anyone and is instead an original character who functions as a self-insert, a character that allows the author and reader to imagine themselves as existing within the story. Tessa is effectively a vessel for the author and readers to live out a fantasy of dating Harry Styles. Todd summarized the fanfiction as follows: “Tessa Young is an 18 year old college student with a simple life, excellent grades, and a sweet boyfriend. She always has things planned out ahead of time, until she meets a rude boy named Harry, with too many tattoos and piercings who shatters her plans” (“After (One Direction story)”).

Publication

The fanfiction was a sensation by itself, having nearly 800 million reads by May of 2014, and Wattpad itself took notice. Wattpad's administration are the ones who got Todd published with Gallery Books of Simon and Shuster in 2014 while also making a deal for movie and audio rights (Reid). Wattpad is so engrossed in this novel that there's no separating them from each other. The published novel is covered with references to Wattpad.

The Book Itself

Like *Beautiful Bastard*, *After* publicizes its online (though, unlike *Beautiful Bastard*, not its fanfic) origins right on the cover. The book boasts about its “1 BILLION READS ONLINE – REVISED AND EXPANDED!” Todd is a “*NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR” and the “wattpad [wattpad logo] SENSATION IMAGINATOR1D” as seen in Figure 13.

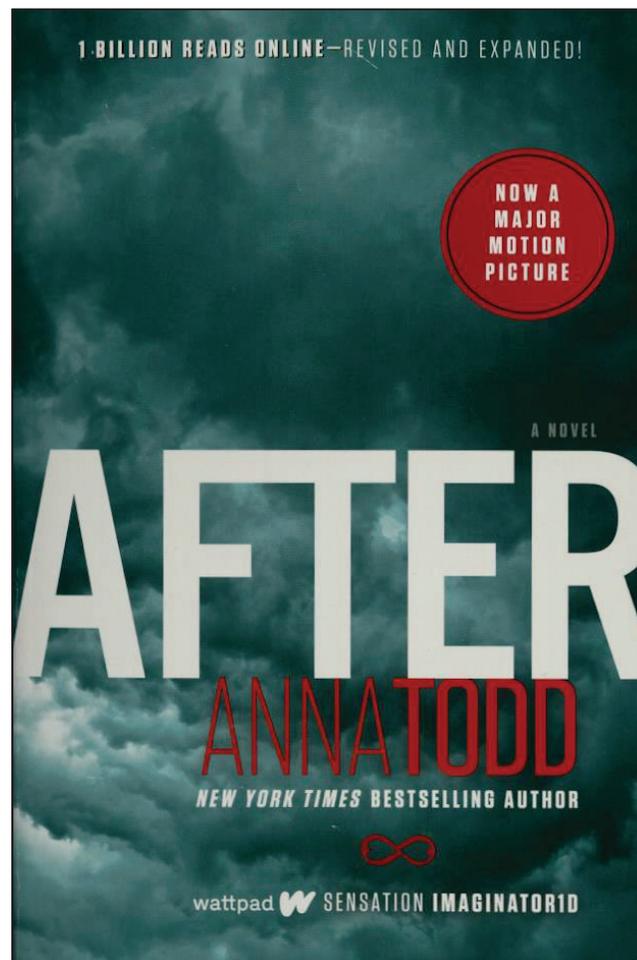


Figure 13. Front cover of *After* by Anna Todd.

In addition to the constant references to Wattpad in general, the first page of the published book contains reviews not of the novel, but of the fanfiction (Figure 14). The value of that pre-existing audience is indispensable to *After*. By featuring reviews of fanfiction, the publishers include and celebrate the original audience, and they are also providing the novel with pre-existing, positive reviews from regular readers. These references to the fans who were already there both celebrates those readers and also creates built-in positive reviews from regular readers who audiences can relate to. After all, if this story has been read over one billion times online (though that does not translate to one billion individual readers) then it must have what readers want.

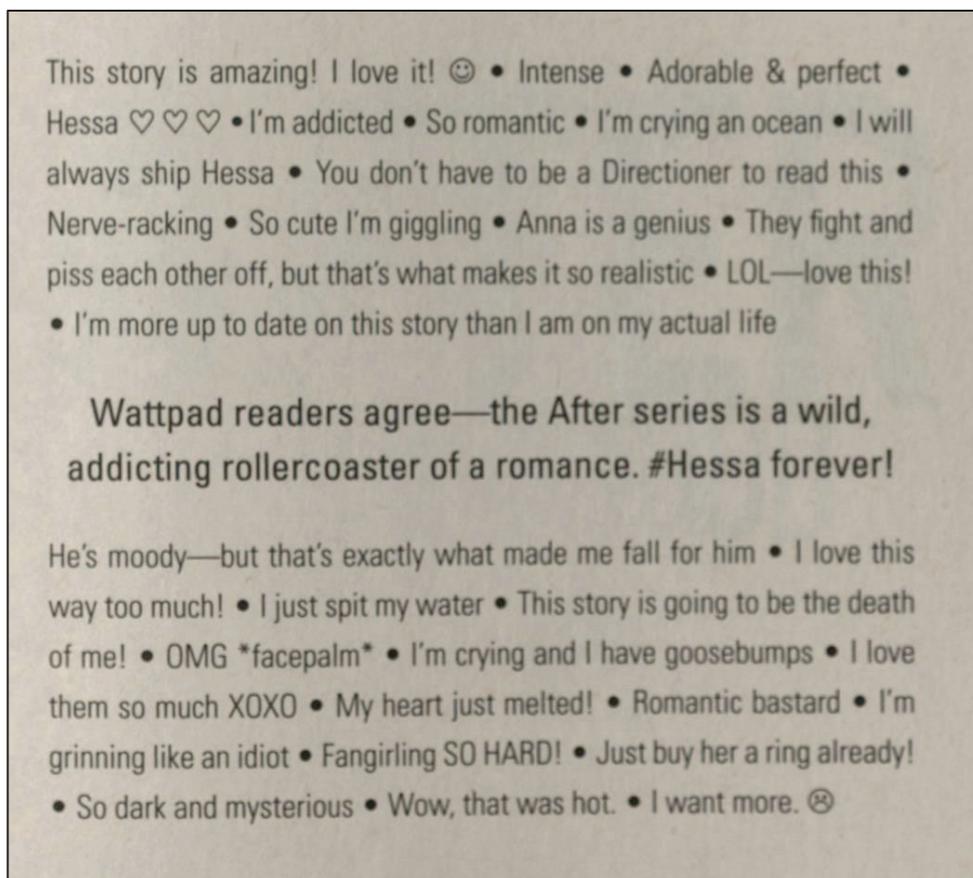


Figure 14. Review page of *After* by Anna Todd.

This review and Todd's Wattpad username are the only references to Harry Styles or One Direction. While many people think that Wattpad equals fanfiction, the site also hosts original fiction, unlike Fanfiction.net and AO3. This means that ordinary readers of the novel who aren't steeped in fandom and paying close attention might believe that this was never fanfiction. One Direction barely appears in the paratext. The back and front covers do mention Todd's Wattpad pseudonym, *imaginator1D*, which is a direct reference to the band; and one of the reviews seen in Figure 14 reads, "You don't have to be a Directioner to read this." The only fanfiction-specific reference to *After* appears on the back cover, reading, "Anna Todd's *After* fanfiction racked up 1 billion reads online and captivated readers across the globe." Even though the fact that *After* was a fanfic is common knowledge, there is still a bit of burying the lead. It isn't like *50 Shades* which makes no obvious reference to fanfiction, but *After* still doesn't announce its fanfiction origins everywhere.

After doesn't have an explicit A/N header for any section of paratext. However, within the "acknowledgements" section (Figure 15), the second paragraph begins, "Author's Note: First, I want to thank my Hessa shippers/Afternators/Toddles (least favorite, ha)/original readers (we couldn't decide on just one name, ha," and she goes on to thank this group (Todd 583). Todd's decision to label only this part of her acknowledgements as an A/N is notable as it singles out the fanfic readers and does so in keeping with fanfic conventions. It mirrors the way A/Ns often work where authors take time to thank their readers. So, here we have the kind of familiar connection that only fanfic readers can have. People unfamiliar with fanfiction probably will not understand or care why this is part of the acknowledgements. It doesn't detract from new readers'

experiences while also enhancing the experiences of returning readers. The original readers of fan-”After” who read *After* are made part of an exclusive club that understands the inside joke of this incredibly successful author.

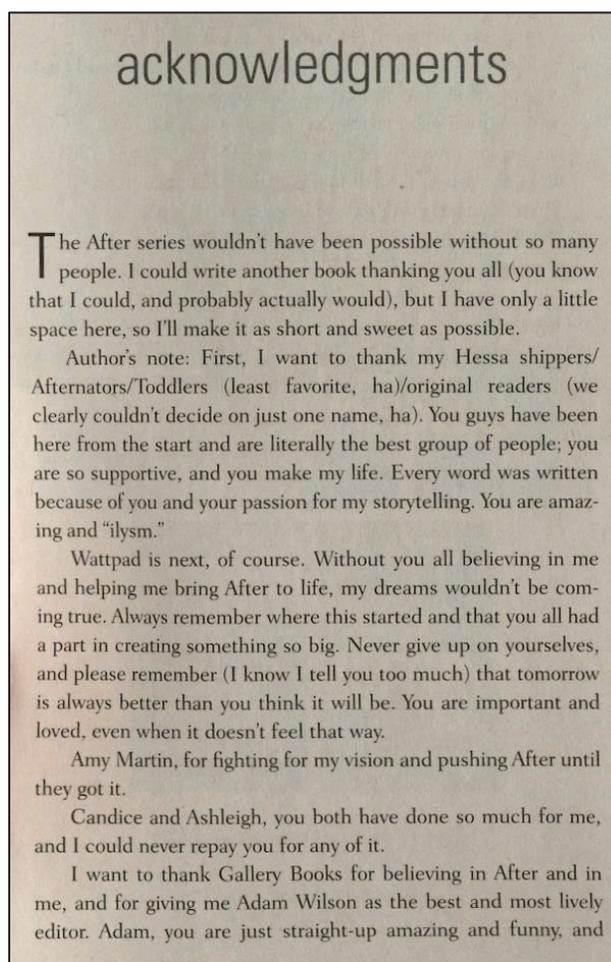


Figure 15. Acknowledgements of *After* by Anna Todd.

Still on Wattpad

As mentioned earlier, it is common practice for the original fanfiction to be removed from the internet when the author wants to publish it traditionally, but Todd

takes a different approach. To this day, *After*, the novel, is posted on Wattpad where the fanfiction once was. Of course, this is a great boon for Wattpad. Having this popular novel available on their website garners more traffic and thus more profits. However, posting the novel seems counterproductive from the author's side as why would anyone purchase the novel if the author has provided it online, for free? I would assume that the online posting hasn't hurt *After*'s sales or it wouldn't still be on Wattpad a decade after the novel was published. *After* has managed to be extremely successful with movie adaptations and multiple sequels, and for many people it is the first or second example they think of when talking about fanfic-turned-original-novel.

The Love Hypothesis by Ali Hazelwood: The TikTok Phenomena

Ali Hazelwood's *The Love Hypothesis* is in some ways a lot more subtle than *After* and *Beautiful Bastard* as it doesn't proudly proclaim its fanfiction origins right on the cover, but it retains features of fanfiction that the others do not.

"Head Over Feet" by Ever_So_Reylo

Originally published on AO3 between 2018 and 2019 under the title "Head Over Feet" by Ever_So_Reylo, *The Love Hypothesis* was originally a *Star Wars* fanfiction based around the "Reylo" ship of Rey Skywalker and Kylo Ren/Ben Solo. Rather than in a galaxy far, far away, "Head Over Feet" saw the characters in an "Alternate Universe – Modern Setting," specifically in a Neurobiology department at Stanford University.

Hazelwood herself is a professor of Neuroscience and used her experience as a PhD student and professor in the U.S. to write this fanfiction. Hazelwood's summary for the fanfiction read:

“Is it working, for you?” Maybe it comes out a little needy, but Rey tells herself that it's only because of how low she has to pitch her voice to talk to him. “Or do you maybe want to fake-break up?”

Ben doesn't answer for a second. Then, just as Doctor Phasma takes the mic to thank the speaker and ask the audience if anyone has questions, Rey hears him say, “No. No, I don't want to fake-break up.”

They're not dating for real. Right? (Ever_So_Reylo)

Publication

Hazelwood's transition from fan-author to traditional author was instigated by her now agent, Thao Le, reading Hazelwood's fanfictions and reaching out in September 2020 (Merry). Eventually, *The Love Hypothesis* was published in September 2021 by Berkley, a subsidiary of Penguin Randomhouse. The most notable reaction to the novel's publication comes from TikTok where it completely took over “Booktok.” The novel became a lot bigger than Hazelwood anticipated and the novel's success has led to her continuing to publish more original novels (Schwartz). As of September 2022 (two years after the books publication), *The Love Hypothesis* had sold over 750,000 copies worldwide and TikTok videos about the book have millions of views (Brown; Schwartz).

The Book Itself

For the most part, *The Love Hypothesis* appears to be like most romance novels, but it not only retains several references to its fanfiction origin, but also retains a single A/N at the end of the novel (Figure 16). Throughout most of this A/N, Hazelwood discusses how her own experiences in academia influenced her story, and also gives information to educate the readers on concepts in the novel. Specifically, Hazelwood takes this time to explain Title IX and her experiences in writing the book.

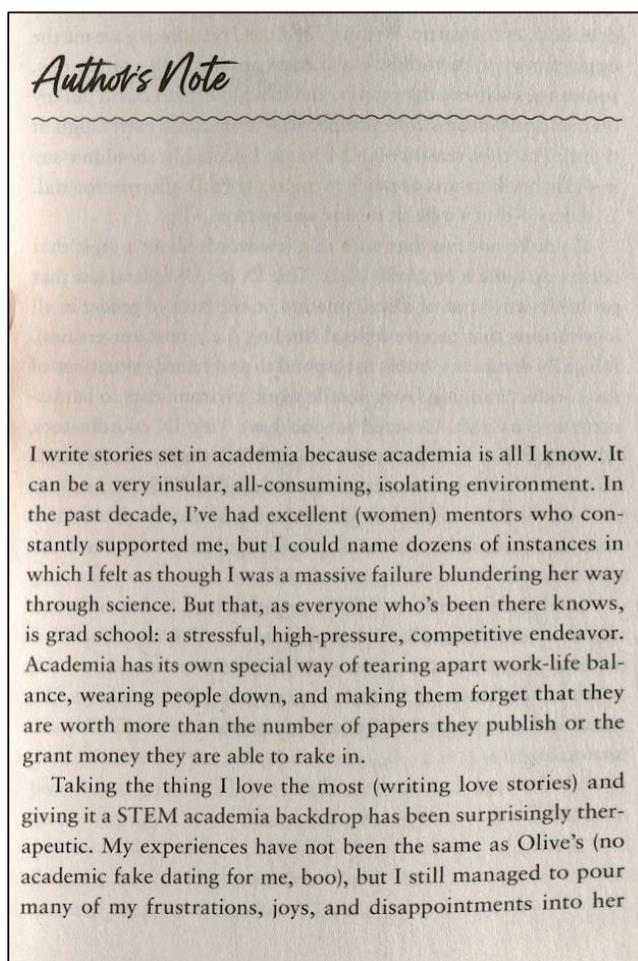


Figure 16. Author's Note from *The Love Hypothesis* by Ali Hazelwood.

The most obvious connection to *Star Wars* and Reylo is the cover and the main love interest's name. The character based on Kylo Ren is named Adam Carlsen and named after Adam Driver, Kylo Ren's actor. Even more overt is the cover (Figure 17) which clearly resembles Driver, and Rey's actress, Daisy Ridley. In fact, this art was not created for the book, but instead the fanfiction. X (formerly Twitter) user @lilithsaur originally created this artwork and published it on January 30, 2019 with a caption advertising the fanfic (Figure 18). This isn't something that could only be noticed by people in the Reylo fandom. Most people have at least seen something to do with *Star Wars*, and the characters look a lot like the actors, making extremely easy for people to recognize them. Utilizing is another way for fan-authors to incorporate the fan community in their traditionally published works.

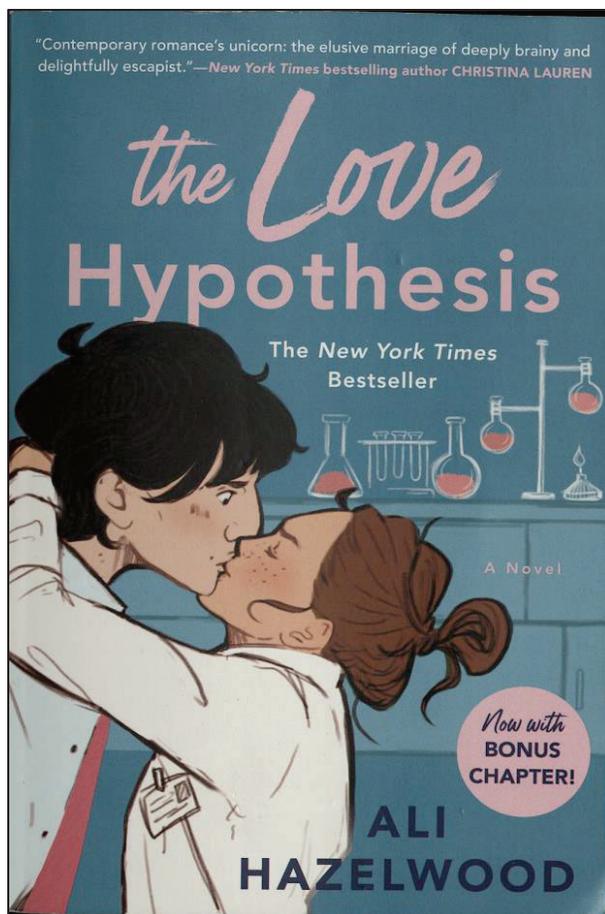


Figure 17. Front cover of *The Love Hypothesis* by Ali Hazelwood.



Figure 18. X post by artist @Lilithsaur for the fanfiction, “Head Over Feet” (“This is a fanart”).

A more overt *Star Wars* reference appears in the summary on the back cover of the novel: “Convincing Anh that Olive is dating and well on her way to a happily ever after was always going to take more than *hand-wavy Jedi mind tricks*:¹¹ Scientists require proof.” This, combined with the cover and Adam’s name may be enough for readers to connect the dots, because “Jedi mind tricks” is a fairly common reference in American culture. This approach of borrowing aesthetics from the source material and including fanfiction A/Ns takes more effort from the reader to understand the truth, but it is very possible.

The use of the original actor's likenesses on the front cover of the novel and one of the actor's names are not seen in other examples discussed here, nor could I find any others. *The Love Hypothesis* utilizing fanart for the cover not only benefits the artist, who was paid for their work; it also signals to Reylos that this is a Reylo fanfiction. Lilithsaur's art style is fairly distinctive, so members of the Reylo fandom are more likely to recognize it. Since publishing *The Love Hypothesis*, Lilithsaur has continued to design the covers for Hazelwood's books and make fan art (@Lilithsaur "Hello I'm Lilithsaur"). Lilithsaur acts as connection between Hazelwood and the fandom even as Hazelwood isn't active in fandom anymore.

The Hurricane Wars by Thea Guanzon: Everything Had to Change

"Landscape with a Blur of Conquerors" by Diasterisms

"Landscape with a Blur of Conquerors" by Diasterisms was originally posted on AO3 between June 2017 and January 2020. Like "Head Over Feet," the original story revolved around the *Star Wars* characters of Rey and Kylo Ren; however, "Landscape with a Blur of Conquerors" was set in the *Star Wars* universe and integrated elements from the *Star Wars Legends*. Guanzon's summary of the fanfiction read:

"While I share your contempt for this situation in which we find ourselves, do not mistake it as apathy," he hissed through gritted teeth, dark eyes burning. "I hardly expect your disposition to sweeten, but I will be damned if I allow my future Empress to behave in a manner that reflects poorly on me and on the First Order!"

"If you allow?" She wrenched her arm out of his viselike grasp, batting his hand away for good measure. "I don't belong to you. I don't belong to anyone."

"That might have been the case back when you were a scavenger on that pitiful scrap heap of a planet, but now?" His sardonic gaze flickered over her silk robes and the jewels woven through her elaborate braids. "Now you are the Chume'da, and the Chume'da belongs to her people. Their fate is entirely in your hands.

Should you cross the line, it is they who will suffer for it. Am I making myself clear?"

"I hate you," she said bitterly.

He sneered at her. "See? Already you are acclimatizing so well to married life."

(Diasterisms)

Publication

“Landscape with a Blur of Conquerors” was pulled from AO3 on January 10, 2022, but the final novel was not published until October 3, 2023 by Harper Voyager (Likeboardicea; “The Hurricane Wars”). While Guanzon has not spoken much on how she was discovered, she shares the same literary agent as Hazelwood, Thao Le from the Sandra Dijkstra Literary Agency (“About;” *Thea Guanzon*). Additionally, Hazelwood provides one of the review blurbs featured on the back cover of the published novel, so it is entirely possible that Hazelwood may have informed her agent of Guanzon and her fanfiction or the agent discovered Guanzon the same way she did Hazelwood.

The Book Itself

Guanzon made heavy use of A/Ns in her fanfiction, and the end of each chapter of “Landscape with a Blur of Conquerors” she would include a list of hyperlinks to wikis on concepts, characters, and other *Star Wars* lore she mentions in the chapter (Figure 19). Fan-readers were able to learn more about the *Star Wars* universe, and Guanzon built credibility in illustrating her extensive knowledge of the source material.

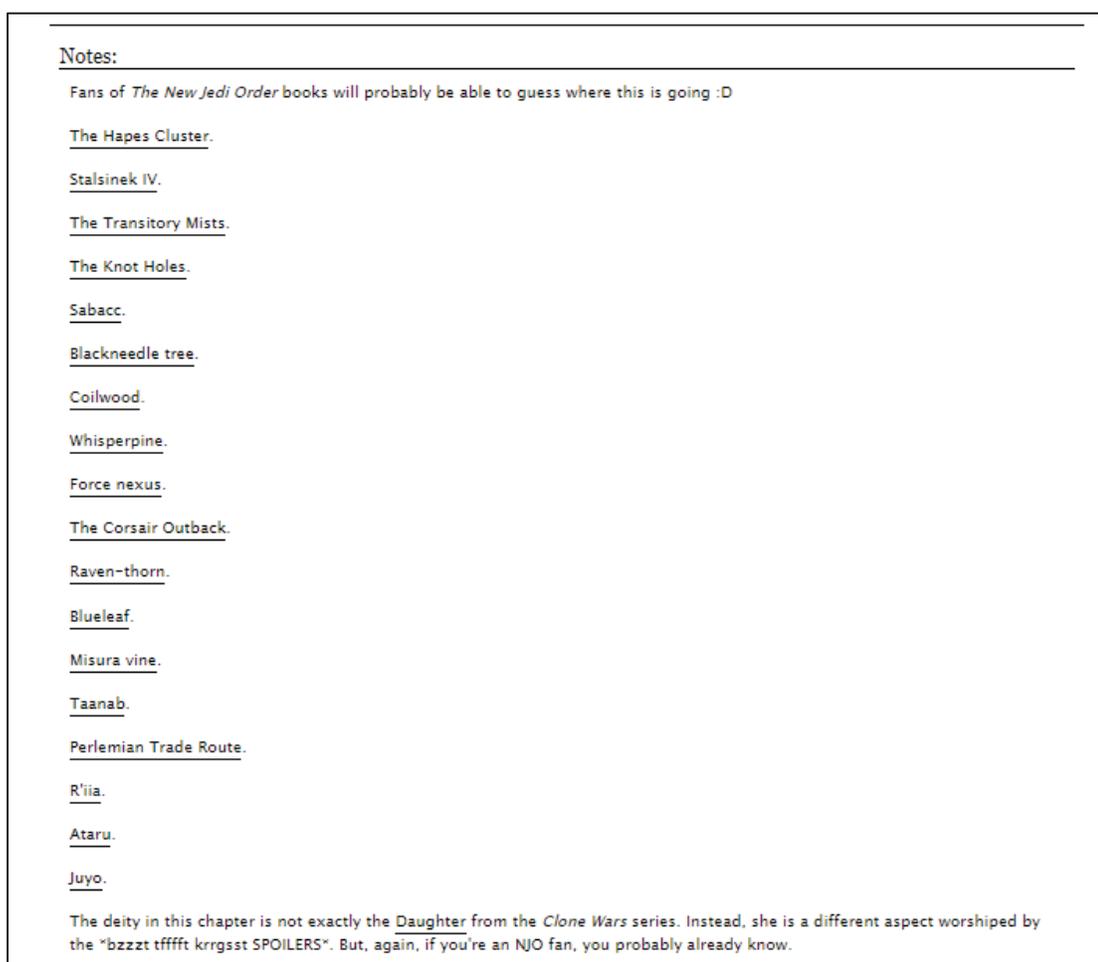


Figure 19. A screenshot of the Chapter 1 ending A/N of “Landscape with a Blur of Conquerors” by Thea Guanzon (Diasterisms).

This practice takes form in the published novel as a glossary at the end of the book, explaining features of the world that Guanzon has created (Figure 20). While glossaries are not unheard of in fantasy or sci-fi novels and readers unfamiliar with the fanfiction wouldn't raise an eyebrow, Guanzon is using the glossary for the same purpose as her A/Ns: providing her audience the story's lore. The biggest difference is that in the book, instead of the lore being about *Star Wars*, the glossary defines terms from the novel.

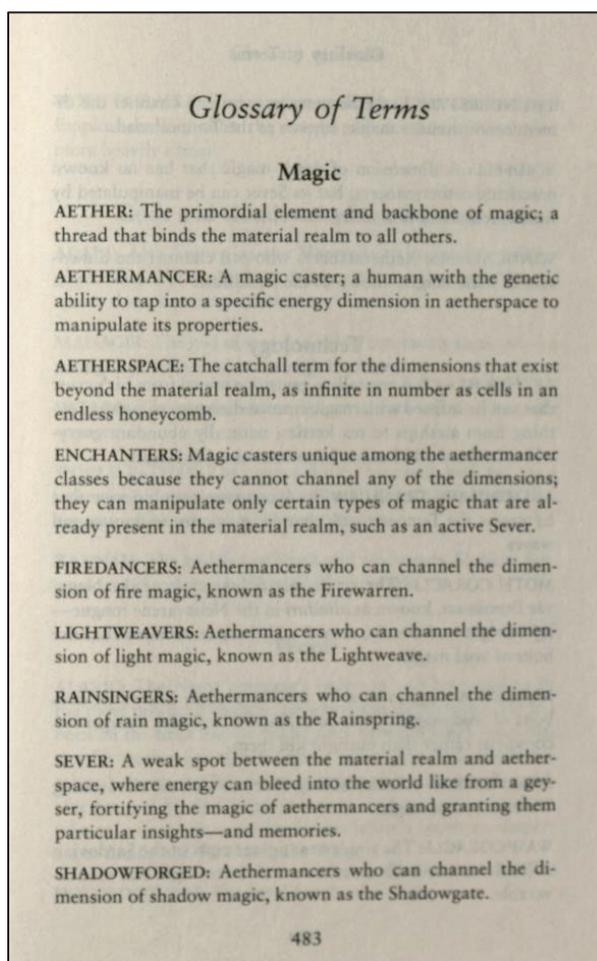


Figure 20. The glossary from *The Hurricane Wars* by Thea Guanzon (483).

There is very little in the finished book that indicates that *The Hurricane Wars* was ever a fanfiction. There are few overt references to Guanzon's fandom ties including one that appears in her bio, reading in part, "When she's not writing, she can be found traveling, running a Dungeons & Dragons campaign, or fangirling over villains" (487). The biggest reference appears in her acknowledgements:

To my AO3 readers and fandom friends from all over the globe, who have graced the last several years of my life with the warmest sense of community, who have had my back since day one: I would never have kept writing if it weren't for you guys. I owe it all to you. (Guanzon 472)

This acknowledgement, while obvious, doesn't make it clear that this book originated as fanfiction but instead simply that Guanzon at one point posted her writing to AO3.

The only other *Star Wars* or fandom reference in the paratext is probably only legible to people who are familiar with the Reylo ship and also participated in the Reylo fandom from around 2015 through the early 2020s, when the *Star Wars* Sequel Trilogy was being released. The novel's dedication, "I did this for the rats," is an inside joke with Reylos. While it is difficult to really track exactly how we got from Reylo to rats, the basic idea was that there were people who shipped Reylo and people who were anti-Reylo and openly hated the ship. Those who were anti-Reylo really hated both the ship and the people who shipped it and eventually began referring to the ship as "Ratlo" and those who shipped it as "rats."¹² Unlike the trend we've been seeing with the previous three books, *The Hurricane Wars* takes a similar approach to *Fifty Shades of Grey* where

there are no overt references to the original source material, but there is coded language meant specifically for the original fans.

In fact, Guanzon claims origins for her novel other than the *Star Wars* films. In the section “Behind *The Hurricane Wars*,” which functions very similarly to an A/N, Guanzon describes her country’s history of subjugation, the turbulent weather common in the Philippines, and her own family’s history enduring both. She claims that, “These are the tales and experiences that inspired my debut novel, *The Hurricane Wars*” (Guanzon 479-80). While it is clear that her culture had a great impact on the final novel, the story she wrote began with *Star Wars*. In terms of reference to Reylo and fandom, there is very little. Guanzon’s approach to addressing fandom is most similar to James’, but it stems from a different state of mind. Both authors seek legitimacy in distancing themselves from their fanfiction, but James does this out of fear of litigation and the stigma of fanfiction. Guanzon likely does not hold the same fear of litigation as she and Hazelwood have since worked with Lucasfilm on a *Star Wars* project (“A Rebel Celebration”). *The Hurricane Wars* is also entering the world of filing the serial numbers off a decade after *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and fanfiction has become a lot more normalized. But more than anything, Guanzon’s published novel is very different from the fanfiction she wrote.

Something New

The Hurricane Wars underwent a much greater transformation than any other novel explored here. *The Hurricane Wars* only makes up the first out of a trilogy, and ends at approximately the same place as Chapter 21 of “Landscape with a Blur of

Conquerors.” While the others were all set in the “real” world and in the modern day, “Landscape with a Blur of Conquerors” was not only set in the *Star Wars* universe but included extensive lore from *Star Wars Legends*. Unlike the other novels, it would not be enough for Guanzon to simply change the names. Her final novel could not utilize the Force, lightsabers, the Empire, the Resistance, etc. and instead had to start worldbuilding from the beginning. There are still plenty of references within the text that are obvious when you realize that this started as a fanfiction with the “Lightweave” being an obvious stand-in for the Light side of the Force, and the “Shadowforge” being the Dark side, but it’s still its own magic system. The story no longer takes place in outer space, but instead a single planet and continent with flying boats. Guanzon had to actually create when she adapted her writing for publication, she kept the skeleton and some of the scenes, but otherwise she had to start over. *The Hurricane Wars* isn’t really fanfiction by the end despite its origins but instead transformed in a way that no other fanfiction examined here has.

Wrapping Up

Through these five case studies, we’ve seen a variety of approaches with incorporating fanfiction customs into published novels. In *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *The Hurricane Wars*, the authors use minimal references and coded language to address the fanfiction. *Beautiful Bastard* and *After* are much more direct in using the fanfiction as a point of advertisement. Then *The Love Hypothesis* does something in-between.

I find it ironic that the two novels that try the hardest to separate themselves from their fanfiction origins are at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of how much alteration occurred to the original fanfiction. *Fifty Shades of Grey* is all but identical to “Masters of the Universe;” there are edits but not major revisions. *The Hurricane Wars* is very different from “Landscape with a Blur of Conquerors” to the point that it mainly only retains the skeleton and some lines. But both of these novels take the same approach to acknowledging their fan origins: they don’t. For James, there is hardly any difference between her fanfiction and her published novel; but for Guanzon, copyright forced her to change almost everything about the story. Theoretically, this amount of alteration and deviation from the fanfiction would make Guanzon safe from litigation and therefore able to safely acknowledge “Landscape with a Blur of conquerors.” But in both cases it comes down to an anxiety of their work being undercut because it started as a fanfiction.

Both *Beautiful Bastard* and *After* treat the fanfiction origins as a badge of honor, probably as a result of the success of *Fifty Shades of Grey* and the general awareness that it began as fanfiction. These novels were both published by Gallery Books within three years of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, so the concept was still relatively novel and exciting. Reading audiences and publishers started looking for that, so it only made sense for these works to advertise themselves in this way. The use of reviews and reading statistics for the fanfiction advertises that the story has already been read (and presumably enjoyed) by millions of previous readers. A drawback to this is that it makes the books seem cheap and closer to something like Harlequins, complete with advertisements for other books in the last pages. It feels hollower and more corporate than the other novels discussed here which could turn a lot of readers off.

The Love Hypothesis takes a sort of middle of the road approach, and it allows for a lot of the benefits that come with clearly originating as a fanfiction without as many of the drawbacks. Not advertising the fanfiction on the cover in the way *Beautiful Bastard* and *After* do provides *The Love Hypothesis* with appeal to non-fanfic readers without the loss of credibility that we see in *Beautiful Bastard* and *After*. At the same time, there are enough hints with the cover art and the main love interest's name for original fans to feel a connection to the published novel.

While one approach isn't "better" than another as they all serve different purposes, I believe that *The Love Hypothesis* makes the transition from fanfiction to published novel the most successfully in terms of the paratext. It is able to walk the line between being welcoming to new readers while not rejecting Hazelwood's original fan-audience.

CHAPTER 5

MOVING FORWARDS

Fanfiction, first and foremost, is a communal form of writing. Not only are there the readers commenting on the fanfiction and interacting with the fan-author, but fandom traditions and conventions have been building since the late Victorian Era.

Over the past decade, the prevalence of former fan-authors and adapted fanfiction has only increased with the popularity and financial success of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Though most published fanfiction has not met the same heights of success or controversy as James' novels, the continued successes of former fanfictions make it clear that fan-authors are providing the stories that a significant part of the general public wants to read. The inclusion of former fan-authors in traditional publication spheres is only going to increase as fan writing becomes a common way for unknown authors to be discovered. As fan-authors transition into traditional publication, they bring with them not only their own stories but also the conventions and styles created within fan spaces.

NOTES

1. There is some debate on whether or not Clare's *Mortal Instruments* series actually was at one point a fanfiction as she did publish a Harry Potter fanfiction with the same title. Clare denies that her published novels originated as a fanfiction in a Tumblr post responding to another Tumblr user's question.

2. Since a lot of this happened in the early 2000's, there is limited documentation still in existence. Clare's reputation within fandom has persisted See contemporaneous postings from third parties: Teamficalley; Finnyrachel, and "Cassandra Claire and her fanfiction..."

3. I will not be discussing issues of copyright or plagiarism in terms of the legality of fanfiction or filing the serial numbers off. I do not have a JD or any specialized training/knowledge that would provide me with the ability to properly discuss this complicated area of law. However, I will discuss copyright insofar as how the fear and threat of copyright lawsuits has impacted fandom in general and specifically fan-authors who file the serial numbers off as many of the practices and decisions we will observe originate from that fear of being sued.

4. This section is based on my own experiences as a member of fandom throughout my teenage and college years.

5. Like everywhere else on the internet, there are still going to be negative comments on fanfiction, but in my experience they are far less prevalent.

6. See Carpico's and Vincent's articles for how this insult was repeatedly levied at *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* when the film was released.

7. Of course, this concept is a lot more disconcerting when it comes to fandoms around celebrities, but I do not have the space or desire to fully explore the ethics of real person fanfiction (rpf) here. See Melanie Piper's "Real body, fake person: Recontextualizing celebrity bodies in fandom and film" for discussion of the fictionalization of real people in fanfiction and in cinema.

8. Underlined portions are hyperlinks to a digital copy of the Richard Silken poem and diasasterisms' tumblr page in that order.

9. While not my focus in this thesis, it cannot be ignored that *Cowboy Blues'* potential of success was likely hindered due to being a romance novel involving two men released in the mid-1980s, only a few years into the AIDS epidemic, a period characterized by rampant homophobia ("A Timeline of HIV and AIDS").

10. Alterations in quote are present in the original source.

11. Emphasis added.

12. There is no source for this because I am drawing from my own knowledge and experiences in the *Star Wars* fandom.

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