'Playing in the Literary Sandbox: An investigation of fanfiction writers and readers, exploring relationships between fanfiction as a subversive and dialogic literary form, and issues of authorship, representation, empathy and community.'

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Contents Page

Abstract

Fanfiction is defined as fiction that is based on, and written by fans of, pre-existing literature or other media, and is interpreted in this thesis as a subversive and dialogic literary form. Through use of semi-structured interviews conducted with fanfiction writers, this thesis employs qualitative analysis of data to emphasise that the experiences and beliefs of members of the fanfiction community are not homogenous. Patterns are identified in interview responses and linked to theoretical understanding of four issues surrounding fanfiction: empathy, community, authorship, and representation. Analysis using mental models and Theory of Mind suggests that empathy with fictional characters often inspires fans to read and write fanfiction. The Sense of Community theory is explored to understand how these fans are then drawn together into a community of likeminded individuals. This focus on community emphasises the dialogic nature of fanfiction, introducing discussion on authorship. Theories and essays on Death of the Author, the carnivalesque, dialogism, and fanboy auteurs are used to consider how fanfiction writers subvert the traditional understanding of an 'author' and freely interpret texts to develop their authorial voice. Analysis of case studies focusing on the TV show *Supernatural* and novel *The Fandom* demonstrates how writers of published, traditional media acknowledge the ways that fanfiction writers subvert the original text, often motivated by empathy when doing so. Through the lens of queer theory, and further analysis of *Supernatural,* alongside the novels *Ship It* and *Carry On* as additional case studies, this thesis explores how fanfiction writers, following dialogue with likeminded fans and development of their own interpretations, use fanfiction to criticise traditional media and advocate for representation of LGBTQ+ characters. Ultimately, the thesis aims to highlight that empathy and community are large factors in inspiring fanfiction authors to develop their authorial voice, create new interpretations of texts, and advocate for the representation of minority groups in literature and media.

<p style="text-align:center">Introduction</p>

During the past two decades, the development of digital technologies and social media has diversified the way that literature can be hosted and shared. While there is still a traditional publishing industry for physical books, the presence of literature and storytelling can be found across the internet; from e-books that allow readers to enjoy a text on their digital screens, to literary communities that develop across the internet, such as 'BookTubers'[1] or bloggers who review and critique their favourite texts to an online audience. The access to social media allows readers and audiences to share their enjoyment of fiction in a much more open way. This has led to an uptick in online 'fandoms,' communities where fans discuss, analyse, and enjoy the text that they are a fan of with others across the internet. This dialogue between members of an audience, especially enthusiastic fans, has allowed them to subvert the role of a passive reader and instead encourages fans to engage deeply with the text and the communities that develop around it.

One example of this active engagement is fanfiction, which is defined as fiction that is based on, and written by fans of, pre-existing pieces of literature or other media, such as films, television, video games, or celebrities. Fans create additional scenes for a series, craft events that may have occurred before or after the story's set narrative, or even take characters from their current fictional world into a different or entirely new one. As understood in this thesis, fanfiction is most regularly posted on internet forums or archives for no profit, for other fans to read, enjoy, and comment on, giving their feedback to the fanfiction writer. This thesis regards fanfiction as both a subversive and a dialogic literary form, though these terms are not being used to describe the fanfiction narratives themselves. When comparing fanfiction to other digital modes of literature, such as hypertexts that make use of digital technology and

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[1] A 'BookTuber' is defined as 'A YouTube videoblogger who reviews and/or discusses books.' Wordsense Dictionary, 'Booktuber: Meaning, Origin, Definition', *Wordsense Dictionary*, 2021 <https://www.wordsense.eu/booktuber/> [Accessed 16 February 2021].

hyperlinks to tell their story, it is clear that fanfiction prose isn't typically viewed as subversive or experimental. Thomas argues that in fanfiction, 'the written word is placed at the forefront' and that 'online fanfiction is barely distinguishable from print versions.'[2] Instead, it is certain behaviours of fanfiction writers, readers and the fanfiction community as a whole that are subversive and dialogic, in contrast with communities surrounding other methods of publishing. It is worth emphasising that discussions in this thesis aim not to define the fanfiction community as a homogenous group or to claim that behaviours identified are typical of every individual within it. Rather, the aim is to identify behaviours within the community that are dialogic or subversive and to consider what they accomplish.

Fanfiction as a mode of literature is often compared to other modes of writing or storytelling, particularly modes that allow readers to interpret and remix existing texts and to analyse the original text or tell their own story. For example, fanfiction is often viewed as a modern reiteration of oral fairy tales that were spread prior to the establishment of a widespread publishing industry. Coppa claims that 'fanfiction is what happened to folk culture…the retellings of local legends…drinking songs and ghost stories told round the campfire.'[3] These oral folktales were told many times by different voices, each individual adding their telling to the web that was spun around those stories and characters. Fanfiction is comparable to folktales as it allows readers to take elements of a pre-existing story and make a new story using those elements, to then share with an audience. This element of sharing the text is particularly important; Coppa states that 'it's when [a fan] begins to share her work and to read and write with other fans that her stories become fanfiction…and begin to be shaped to community norms and expectations.'[4] This highlights a vital piece of this thesis – that fanfiction

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[2] Bronwen Thomas, '"Update Soon!" Harry Potter Fanfiction And Narrative As A Participatory Process', in *New Narratives: Stories And Storytelling In The Digital Age,* pp. 205-219 (p.206-207) (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2011) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1000308&ppg=1> [Accessed 6 July 2021].
[3] Francesca Coppa, *The Fanfiction Reader: Folk Tales For The Digital Age* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), p.7.
[4] Francesca Coppa, *The Fanfiction Reader: Folk Tales For The Digital Age* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), p.7.

is a dialogic medium, a method of storytelling that thrives on community and communication. The concept of dialogism is taken from Bakhtin's work, in which he argues that 'truth is…born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction.'[5] Bakhtin's analysis also allows us to draw comparison between fanfiction and literary criticism. Rather than taking the 'truth' of the text from the mouth of the original author, fanfiction has been linked to literary criticism as it allows fanfiction authors to '[analyse] characters,' '[construct] explanations of fictional universes', and 'share their ideas about and interpretations of a story,'[6] often through dialogue with other fans. It is important to remember that fanfiction is not the sole literary genre that encourages this. However, in linking fanfiction to both oral folktales and literary criticism, the subversive aspects of fanfiction and its community in relation to interpreting texts can be identified, reconstructing them from parts of the original, and presenting one's own version of the story to a community.

To find a subversive, transformative, and community-driven fanfiction space, one must look no further than popular fanfiction site Archive of Our Own (henceforth referred to as AO3),[7] which is a useful case study when investigating fanfiction and the beliefs many of its writers value. AO3 is one of many existing archive sites where fans can upload fanfiction and read and comment on others' stories. It was created by the Organization of Transformative Works: 'a non-profit organization, established by fans in 2007,'[8] and in 2019, it won the Hugo Award for Best Related Work. The Hugo Awards are 'annual science fiction and fantasy awards'[9] and the Best Related Work category is typically awarded to 'a work related to the field of science

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[5] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems Of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.110, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=310161> [Accessed 13 October 2021].

[6] Francesca Coppa, 'An Archive Of Our Own', in *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over The World,* ed. by Anne Jamison (Dallas: Smart Pop, 2013), pp. 335-342 (p.340) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1531171&ppg=341> [Accessed 11 January 2022].

[7] Archive of Our Own is typically shortened to 'AO3' by its users, derived from three 'O's in the acronym AOOO.

[8] Archive of Our Own, 'About Home | Archive Of Our Own', *Archiveofourown.Org*, 2021 <https://archiveofourown.org/about> [Accessed 11 July 2021].

[9] Aja Romano, 'The Archive of Our Own just won a Hugo. That's huge for fanfiction.', *Vox*, (2019) <https://www.vox.com/2019/4/11/18292419/archive-of-our-own-wins-hugo-award-best-related-work> [Accessed 11 July 2021]

fiction, fantasy, or fandom…[which] must be "either non-fiction or, if fictional…noteworthy primarily for aspects other than the fictional text."'[10] Naomi Novik, the AO3 co-founder who accepted the award, stated in her acceptance speech that 'all fanwork…centers the idea that art happens not in isolation but in a community. And that is true of the AO3 itself.'[11] Novik also asked audience members 'who feel a part of our community [to] stand up for a moment and share in this with us,'[12] acknowledging victory not just for the site's creators, but for the community. From Novik's speech, it is clear that the value of the fanfiction community is identified in the interaction and dialogue that occurs between individuals to develop and inspire texts, once again emphasising the dialogic nature of fanfiction.

AO3 is also an excellent case study for the belief that fanfiction is a subversive mode of literature. Its creation was a protest against attempts to monetise and commercialise fanfiction works, while most published or professional media such as books, television, or film, are regularly commercialised. Romano, a former member of the Organization for Transformative Works, describes AO3 as a site that was 'born out of fans rebelling against corporate exploitation.'[13] She accredits the creation of AO3, in part, to a 'single 2007 LiveJournal post written by an influential writer called astolat' who was reacting to the creation of 'Fanlib', a company that 'attempted to disrupt the fanfiction community by commodifying fanfiction and exploiting fans for their work.'[14] Astolat's post echoes the attitude many fans held regarding Fanlib, arguing that its creators 'don't care about fanfic, the fanfic community, or anything

[10] Hugo Awards, *Hugo Award Categories*, [n.d.], <http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-categories/> [Accessed 11 July 2021].

[11] Organization for Transformative Works, 'AO3 Won The 2019 Hugo Award For Best Related Work!', *Tumblr*, 2019 <https://transformativeworks.tumblr.com/post/187103795631/ao3-won-the-2019-hugo-award-for-best-related-work> [Accessed 14 July 2021].

[12] Organization for Transformative Works, 'AO3 Won The 2019 Hugo Award For Best Related Work!', *Tumblr*, 2019 <https://transformativeworks.tumblr.com/post/187103795631/ao3-won-the-2019-hugo-award-for-best-related-work> [Accessed 14 July 2021].

[13] Aja Romano, 'The Archive of Our Own just won a Hugo. That's huge for fanfiction', *Vox*, (2019) <https://www.vox.com/2019/4/11/18292419/archive-of-our-own-wins-hugo-award-best-related-work> [Accessed 11 July 2021]

[14] Aja Romano, 'The Archive of Our Own just won a Hugo. That's huge for fanfiction', *Vox*, (2019) <https://www.vox.com/2019/4/11/18292419/archive-of-our-own-wins-hugo-award-best-related-work> [Accessed 11 July 2021]

except making money.'[15] Coppa, one of Novik's fellow AO3 founders, pits fanfiction against large companies that produce mainstream, published fiction, arguing that 'the average person is – in the Marxist sense – alienated from the process of storytelling' and that 'a category like "fanfiction" makes sense' as a rebellion against corporate exploitation of stories. The supposed rebellion against the monetisation of storytelling is one key part of what makes fanfiction and fanfiction communities subversive, returning storytelling to the hands of the people.

However, this view that all fanfiction writers from AO3, and the fanfiction community in general, are a subversive, rebellious group that are pitted against the literary elite cannot be accepted without question. This depiction of the fanfiction community is typical of early fandom theorists such as Jenkins, who once defined fanfiction as 'a way of the culture repairing the damage done in a system where contemporary myths are owned by corporations instead of owned by the folk.'[16] Similarly, when discussing fanfiction authors that she engaged with in her 1992 book, Bacon-Smith said that the women '[knew] they [were] engaged in an act of rebellion,'[17] and described them in a similar vein to criminals, saying they had 'stolen characters' and were engaging in acts of 'blatant civil disobedience.'[18] [19] The first wave often represents fanfiction writers as rebellious figures, who are transgressively, but justly, stealing characters and works from the hands of corrupt businesses who wish to use storytelling solely to make a profit. In an assessment of three waves of fandom studies, Thomas criticises this first wave 'on the grounds of its naivety and its tendency to talk about the audience as a homogenous group,

[15] Aja Romano, 'The Archive of Our Own just won a Hugo. That's huge for fanfiction', *Vox*, (2019) <https://www.vox.com/2019/4/11/18292419/archive-of-our-own-wins-hugo-award-best-related-work> [Accessed 11 July 2021]

[16] Amy Harmon, 'In TV's Dull Summer Days, Plots Take Wing On The Net', *Nytimes.Com*, 18 August 1997, Business Section, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/08/18/business/in-tv-s-dull-summer-days-plots-take-wing-on-the-net.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> [Accessed 21 January 2022].

[17] Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom And The Creation Of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p.4.

[18] Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom And The Creation Of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p.4.

[19] Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom And The Creation Of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p.3.

rather than a loose affiliation of conflicting and competing positions and voices.'[20] AO3, with its rebellious and anti-corporation beginnings, is not the only popular fanfiction site used today, and it cannot be claimed that all fanfiction authors, or even all of AO3's users, adopt the same anti-corporate views when approaching their fanfiction. Later waves focus less on the rebellious nature of fanfiction. Thomas describes the second wave of fandom studies as 'preoccupied with responding to the emergence of new media forms that contributed to an explosion in fan activity that facilitated all sorts of new possibilities and interactions between fans' and 'charting the movement of fans into the mainstream.'[21] New fanfiction sites like AO3 are one such example of these new media forms, facilitating interactions between fans and helping with the growth of fanfiction popularity by making it easy to find and engage with. While taking aspects of the first and second wave of fandom studies into account, this thesis aims to address the recent third wave as well, which Thomas defines through approaches such as 'a shift in emphasis toward exploring the contributions of fans to contemporary culture,'[22] an understanding of 'the diverse forms that fan engagement may take,'[23] and examining 'fan engagement as part of an ongoing experience.'[24] Fathallah identifies that 'fanfiction should not be hastily generalized as radical…but has both 'transformational' and 'affirmational' properties…often simultaneously and within the same text.'[25] This thesis aims to take aspects of each wave into consideration when analysing the fanfiction community of today.

[20] Bronwen Thomas, 'What Is Fanfiction And Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things About It??', *Storyworlds: A Journal Of Narrative Studies*, 3 (2011), 1-24 (p.4) <https://doi.org/10.5250/storyworlds.3.2011.0001>

[21] Bronwen Thomas, 'What Is Fanfiction And Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things About It??', *Storyworlds: A Journal Of Narrative Studies*, 3 (2011), 1-24 (p.4) <https://doi.org/10.5250/storyworlds.3.2011.0001>

[22] Bronwen Thomas, 'What Is Fanfiction And Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things About It??', *Storyworlds: A Journal Of Narrative Studies*, 3 (2011), 1-24 (p.4) <https://doi.org/10.5250/storyworlds.3.2011.0001>

[23] Bronwen Thomas, 'What Is Fanfiction And Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things About It??', *Storyworlds: A Journal Of Narrative Studies*, 3 (2011), 1-24 (p.4) <https://doi.org/10.5250/storyworlds.3.2011.0001>

[24] Bronwen Thomas, 'What Is Fanfiction And Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things About It??', *Storyworlds: A Journal Of Narrative Studies*, 3 (2011), 1-24 (p.5) <https://doi.org/10.5250/storyworlds.3.2011.0001>

[25] Judith Fathallah, *Fanfiction And The Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), p.26 <https://web-s-ebscohost-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=098ce508-7479-4f1a-8241-6938f639732e%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=1593130&db=nlebk> [Accessed 5 December 2021].

To view the fanfiction community as more than a homogenous hivemind and to understand the diverse experiences of its members, this thesis will incorporate responses from fanfiction authors who took part in a semi-structured interview conducted over Zoom, focusing on their experiences of writing fanfiction and being part of the fanfiction community.[26] These interviews took place from May to August 2021 and were conducted with twenty fanfiction authors. Participants were recruited through social media; an advertisement was posted to sites such as Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr, and shared in fanfiction groups on Facebook and Amino, providing a brief explanation of the research and an email to contact to show one's interest. Participants were eighteen years old or over and, with the benefit of the interviews taking part on Zoom, were from many different countries, though a majority of participants were from Western Countries such as the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Participants were not paid for partaking in the research, which could indicate that participants had a passion for discussing and sharing their experiences as fanfiction writers. However, the lack of payment may also exclude participants who lack the privilege of much free time to partake in the study. While interviews were conducted on Zoom to connect with participants across the world, making recruitment and the interview process much easier, the process also unfortunately excluded participants who were unable to use or access the Internet. The interviews were conducted, recorded for future reference with permission of the participants, and transcribed by Zoom's transcription service. Using the recordings and transcriptions, the data was then analysed and coded using coding programme NVivo, to group together key patterns and trends. The in-depth coding data does not appear in this thesis as it was deemed outside the scope of the project. However, patterns and trends that appeared in the data are represented by key quotations that are peppered throughout the thesis. These quotations are included in order to understand how the experiences and beliefs of fanfiction writers and readers connect to the key themes within the thesis. This thesis will explore results in more detail in relevance to each chapter, however, the key patterns that emerged were that

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[26] See Appendix 1 for the list of interview questions that participants were asked.

participants found fanfiction to be an excellent method through which they could practice writing skills, develop their authorial voice, and expand the universes of the stories that they were writing about, which they were often very emotionally connected with. Many participants claimed that their experiences showed the fanfiction community to be very supportive, particularly in encouraging fanfiction writers and providing a safe space for minority groups.[27] Many key patterns in these interviews related strongly to the hypotheses of the thesis, which understood fanfiction and its community as valuing emotional connection to their favourite stories, a strong sense of community, the desire to write, and the welcoming space for minority groups. Another pattern that emerged was the use of the same metaphor by several participants, who compared fanfiction and its community to a 'sandbox', which has inspired the title of this thesis. They would discuss the sandbox of fanfiction as a space that allowed them the opportunity to 'play' with preestablished characters and stories. It conjures the image of a communal space, filled with premade toys to play with or sand to mould into any form they like. It emphasises, above all, the concepts of creativity, interactivity, and a communal space, concepts to keep in mind throughout the thesis.

The use of qualitative data such as interview responses in fan studies has been encouraged by researchers such as Hills, who argues that 'fan autobiographies have typically been neglected'[28] in fan studies. In neglecting to consider personalised, individual experiences, researchers risk oversimplifying the experience of every individual fanfiction creator, as early fanfiction studies may have done. Using the data gathered as part of these interviews, this thesis will not seek to identify one conclusive viewpoint that the fanfiction community shares, but to understand personal, emotional motivations behind and experiences of writing fanfiction

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[27] 'Minority groups' was defined to participants before the interview, and is thus defined in this thesis, as groups that are typically viewed as the 'minority' through representation in mainstream, Western, English-speaking media, e.g., non-white, non-straight, non-cisgender, non-male. It was also acknowledged that this term is not universal in its definition.

[28] Matt Hills, 'Returning To 'Becoming-A-Fan' Stories: Theorising Transformational Objects And The Emergence/Extension Of Fandom', in *The Ashgate Research Companion To Fan Cultures,* ed. by Linda Duits, Koos Zwaan, and Stijn Reijnders, (Farnham, Surrey: Routledge, 2014), pp.9-21 (p.19), <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/books/edit/10.4324/9781315612959/ashgate-research-companion-fan-cultures-linda-duits-koos-zwaan-stijn-reijnders> [Accessed 4 January 2022].

and engaging in the community. Some qualitative analysis of this data facilitates a better understanding of the role of fanfiction in the everyday lives of fanfiction authors and how they view their contributions to contemporary society. These twenty participants have each been assigned a letter from A to T and will be referred to throughout this thesis by their assigned letter to keep participants anonymous. Each participant's preferred pronouns will be used when referring to their responses, however, this is rarely done to bring attention to the gender of the participant or to analyse the relationship between gender and fanfiction. While there is an important relationship between fanfiction and gender, the link has been explored extensively in previous research on fanfiction.[29] [30] Gender will not be analysed in depth in relation to the areas of focus in the thesis, beyond the initial consideration that fanfiction as a practice is 'written overwhelmingly by women,'[31] and that fanfiction communities such as AO3 allow women a subversive space in which they can hone their authorial voice.

The issues regarding fanfiction that this thesis will engage with are empathy, community, authorship, and representation of minority groups. A fan's intimacy and empathy with the fictional stories and characters they engage with is a key motivator when deciding to write fanfiction, and then, upon posting their work online, an individual will often find a community of likeminded people to engage with. Considering this, this thesis will use theoretical approaches to empathy and community, such as Stockwell's work on fiction and empathy and McMillan and Chavis' Sense of Community theory, to understand how experiences of these

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[29] Nickie Michaud Wild, 'The active defense of fanfiction writing: *Sherlock* fans' metatextual response', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 32.2 (2020), 244-260 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549418790453>

[30] Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett, 'Fanfiction, Transformative Works, and Feminist Resistance in Digital Culture', in *Gender in American Literature and Culture*, ed. by Jean M. Lutes and Jennifer Travis (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2021), pp.271-285.

[31] Francesca Coppa, 'An Archive Of Our Own', in *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over The World,* ed. by Anne Jamison (Dallas: Smart Pop, 2013), pp. 335-342 (p.340), <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1531171&ppg=341> [Accessed 11 January 2022].

elements make the fanfiction community subversive and dialogic.[32][33] Previous research from Vezzali *et al* has identified that empathy for fictional characters improves readers' attitudes towards stigmatised groups, [34] and Chadborn *et al* and Obst *et al* have identified a strong Sense of Community in online fandom.[35][36] However, these topics have not been extensively applied regarding the fanfiction community specifically. Using the key ideas around empathy and community and theories surrounding these themes, such as Theory of Mind, mental models, and the aspects of a Sense of Community that McMillan and Chavis outline, Chapter 1 will highlight how the fanfiction community operates as a subversive and dialogic group that encourages fans to write stories that expand the original text.

Authorship and representation, on the other hand, are issues in fanfiction that have been explored in previous research. Fathallah has analysed authorship through fan relationships with popular series *Game of Thrones, Sherlock,* and *Supernatural,*[37] while researchers Neville and Llewellyn have noted the fanfiction community as a tolerant space for LGBTQ+ individuals,[38][39] where queer identities can be freely represented. In a similar approach to Fathallah's, this thesis will make use of the principles underlying the third wave of fandom

[32] Peter Stockwell, *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics Of Reading* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=537030> [Accessed 27 September 2021].

[33] David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, 'Sense Of Community: A Definition And Theory', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 14.1 (1986), 6-23, <https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::aid-jcop2290140103>3.0.co;2-i>

[34] Loris Vezzali, Sofia Stathi, Dino Giovannini, Dora Capozza, and Elena Trifiletti, 'The Greatest Magic Of Harry Potter: Reducing Prejudice', *Journal Of Applied Social Psychology*, 45 (2015), 105-121, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12279>

[35] Daniel Chadborn, Patrick Edwards and Stephen Reysen, 'Reexamining Differences Between Fandom And Local Sense Of Community', *Psychology Of Popular Media Culture*, 7.3 (2018), 241-249 <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000125>

[36] Patricia Obst, Lucy Zinkiewicz and Sandy G. Smith, 'Sense Of Community In Science Fiction Fandom, Part 1: Understanding Sense Of Community In An International Community Of Interest', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 30.1 (2001), 87-103 <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.1052>

[37] Judith Fathallah, *Fanfiction And The Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), <https://web-s-ebscohost-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=098ce508-7479-4f1a-8241-6938f639732e%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=1593130&db=nlebk> [Accessed 5 December 2021].

[38] Lucy Neville, ''The Tent's Big Enough For Everyone': Online Slash Fiction As A Site For Activism And Change', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25.3 (2018), 384-398 <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2017.1420633>

[39] Anna Llewellyn, '"A Space Where Queer Is Normalized": The Online World And Fanfictions As Heterotopias For WLW', *Journal Of Homosexuality*, 2021, 1-22 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2021.1940012>

studies 'that recognize(s) the deepening relationship between fandom and mainstream culture.'[40] This will be achieved not only through analysis of theories and interview responses, but also through case studies such as popular television show *Supernatural,*[41] or books that represent or are inspired by the concept of fanfiction, such as *The Fandom* by Anna Day,[42] *Ship It* by Britta Lundin,[43] and *Carry On* by Rainbow Rowell.[44] By studying published books and a television series as case studies, rather than written pieces of fanfiction, this thesis will consider whether the wider media regards and represents fanfiction as a subversive practice. Within this thesis, perceptions of fanfiction will be explored both from inside and outside of the fanfiction community, with the semi-structured interviews providing the insider's perspective. Alternatively, the professional case studies are used to understand whether fanfiction and its community are regarded as subversive and dialogic by the professional creators they engage with, as well as whether those creators see this subversiveness positively. As fanfiction continues to become recognised, discussed, and represented outside of the online sphere it typically resides in, it is important to acknowledge the deepening relationship between fandom and mainstream culture that Fathallah highlights, as well as the deepening relationship between professional creative individuals or teams and their fandoms. The case studies chosen are extreme examples and very few professional, published texts acknowledge or engage with the practice of fanfiction to the same extent. However, such extreme examples allow for a greater understanding of how the creative teams or authors of professionally released media may interact, successfully or otherwise, with fanfiction writers and readers, and even encourage the fanfiction community's subversive tendencies.

Each case study was chosen because they represented fanfiction or transformative works as subversive pieces regarding the themes of authorship or representation. The key case studies for the authorship theme are *Supernatural* and *The Fandom. The Fandom* tells the story of a

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[40] Louisa Ellen Stein, *Millennial Fandom* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), p.11.
[41] *Supernatural,* (The CW, 2005-2020).
[42] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018).
[43] Britta Lundin, *Ship It* (New York: Freeform Books, 2018).
[44] Rainbow Rowell, *Carry On*, 3rd edn (London: Macmillan Children's Books, 2019).

fan who is pulled into the narrative of her favourite story, and she is told to re-enact the canon story perfectly to return home. However, her experiences in the story and empathy that she develops for the characters leads her to criticise the original text and author. She decides to subvert the narrative, as fanfiction writers do in their works, thus developing her own sense of authorship. Similarly, the television series *Supernatural* introduced the concept of fanfiction and fanfiction-writing characters into its narrative, engaging with themes of fate and free will to encourage the subversive interpretations of the story that fanfiction writers and readers enjoyed outside of the canon story. However, *Supernatural* has also been met with criticism regarding the theme of representation, facing allegations of queerbaiting for its portrayal of characters that many fans interpreted as LGBTQ. This case study provides a clear example of how fans can rebel against professional creative teams and subvert their stories through fanfiction, and how the deepening relationship between fans and authors can lead to a sense of betrayal in the eyes of loyal fans. When studying the theme of representation further, case study *Ship It* was chosen to further explore the issues of queerbaiting. It considers how fan engagement with creators continues to grow in a world reliant on social media, allowing for a deeper relationship between the two parties, as well as presenting fans with the opportunity to make their criticisms of the original texts known to the original writers. *Carry On*, on the other hand, does not reference fanfiction explicitly, but relies on tropes from fanfiction and popular series such as *Harry Potter* to subvert the themes of the published texts that Rainbow Rowell has been inspired by. Through this transformative text, Rowell advocates for a clearer, more progressive representation of queer characters in media.

Analysis of these case studies will occur throughout Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 will make use of theories and concepts such as Barthes' Death of the Author and Bakhtin's dialogism and the carnivalesque to establish how fanfiction writers subvert the traditional role of a

passive reader.[45] [46] The chapter will include analysis of popular TV show *Supernatural* and its in-text representation of fandom and fanfiction, as well as Anna's Day's book *The Fandom*, to assess how much of an authorial voice fanfiction writers can develop, as well as how the fanfiction community is presented in books and television as a space to hone one's authorial voice and subvert the original text. Chapter 3 will make use of queer theory and the concept of 'compulsory heterosexuality',[47] [48] [49] identifying issues such as queerbaiting and the 'Bury Your Gays' trope in popular media, particularly focusing on fanfiction authors' reactions to the ending of the *Supernatural* TV show and its representation of queer characters. *Ship It* will be used to explore the positives and negatives in the fanfiction community's subversive representation of queer relationships, and to consider how the fanfiction community are inspired by fanfiction to advocate for the representation of marginalised groups. Furthermore, *Carry On* will be studied as an example of a heterotopia, analysing how transformative texts such as fanfiction can be used to mirror the published fiction they are based on and therefore highlight the issues surrounding representation of marginalised groups in the media.

This thesis will not provide a comprehensive analysis of all themes and arguments surrounding fanfiction. However, creating fanfiction will be established as a personal, emotive experience through analysis of fanfiction and empathy, and sharing fanfiction will be viewed as a dialogic experience through analysis of fanfiction and community. The personal empathy developed for fictional characters and the dialogue encouraged between fans will identify the fanfiction community as a space through which new writers can be encouraged to find their authorial voice. Underrepresented minority groups can also use fanfiction to both write texts that include characters like them and advocate for better and more visible representation in wider media.

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[45] Roland Barthes, 'The Death Of The Author', in *Modern Criticism And Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), pp. 146-151.

[46] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems Of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=310161> [Accessed 13 October 2021].

[47] Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now* (London: Red Globe Press, 2020).

[48] Tyler Bradway and E. L McCallum, *After Queer Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[49] Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality And Lesbian Existence', *Signs: Journal Of Women In Culture And Society*, 5.4 (1980), 631-660 <https://doi.org/10.1086/493756>

<u>Chapter 1 – Empathy and Community</u>

When interpreting fanfiction as subversive and dialogic, it is important to analyse why fans engage in fanfiction, and how a community develops around the practice. Fanfiction is a dialogic and community-based mode of literature, having found its popularity on social media. It thrives as a form of literature where writers and readers can discuss and debate, build their own interpretations of their favourite narratives, and create their own stories using those interpretations. Fanfiction also encourages empathetically engaging with media, both while reading the original text and while writing one's fanfiction. This chapter considers how high levels of empathy with texts and a strong-knitted online community makes fanfiction subversive as a mode of literature. The thesis will use both Stockwell and Keen's texts on empathy and literature, as well as the concepts of Theory of Mind and mental models, to consider how fans develop a deep intimacy with and empathy towards fictional characters that is different from the typical, more passive audience, and how this may inspire them to write fanfiction. This chapter also explores McMillan and Chavis' concept of Sense of Community, as well as newer uses of the theory, to assess the importance of community within fanfiction groups. Through these theories, the fanfiction community can be viewed as a subversive literary community, as it creates a supportive space for dialogic interaction between fanfiction authors, through which they discuss the original text as well as their fanfiction and develop their own authorial voice.

1.1 <u>– Fanfiction and Empathy</u>

Firstly, to understand the importance of empathy in the fanfiction community, researchers must consider how empathy affects those who engage with fiction, particularly those who consider themselves dedicated fans. Keen describes empathy as 'a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, [which] can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about

another's condition, or even by reading.'[50] Research surrounding empathy and fiction often argues that, while people do not develop empathy only by reading, engaging in fictional stories 'supposedly trains people to care for one another,'[51] allowing readers to place themselves into and empathise with another's situation. This belief was echoed during interviews conducted for this thesis. Participant I emphasised that they saw fiction as a valuable way to develop empathy:

> You are never going to be able to fully […] understand another real-life person's life experiences […] because they're only going to be comfortable sharing a specific part of anything with you. But for fictional characters, if the writer is good, and the narrator is reliable, you are going to be put into their shoes in a much deeper way than you would with a real-life person. So, you develop more empathy for that character. And I think it's a really important stepping-stone […] to really learn how to empathize with real-life people when you only share a portion of the story.

Participant I touches on a well-researched concept, which states that fiction allows readers to simulate placing themselves into the shoes of somebody whose lived experiences are different to theirs. Oatley argues that fiction 'is a kind of simulation'[52] through which 'readers and audience members come to understand more about other people and circumstances they can find themselves in' and that these simulations '[enable] people to understand others from the inside…not just from a perspective of an outside observer.'[53] Such a connection allows those who engage with fiction to feel real emotions for fictional characters and scenarios. Despite knowing they aren't real, audiences or readers will still laugh, cry, and cheer along to stories, often due to the empathetic connection they develop for characters in the text. This experience is argued to be universal for anyone who enjoys fictional media; however, for those who

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[50] Suzanne Keen, *Empathy And The Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.4, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=415270> [Accessed 3 January 2022].
[51] Suzanne Keen, *Empathy And The Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.20, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=415270> [Accessed 3 January 2022].
[52] Keith Oatley, 'The Cognitive Science Of Fiction', *Wires Cognitive Science*, 3.4 (2012), 425-430 (p.425) <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcs.1185>
[53] Peter Stockwell, *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics Of Reading* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.78 <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=537030> [Accessed 27 September 2021].

consider themselves dedicated fans of a text, this experience seems much deeper. Stockwell argues that, for fans, 'a close identification of the fictional in their lives approaches the level of a pathology' which 'constitutes an authentic and deeply felt intimacy with the literary work.'[54] Stockwell discusses that fans will visit locations, buy merchandise, and build communities around their deep intimacy with fictional worlds. Engaging in fanfiction is another activity that shows how a fan's dedication to and intimacy with a fictional text may surpass those of a casual reader of that text. A high level of intimacy and empathy with the text and characters often motivates fans to engage with fanfiction, in which fans may extend, develop, or even challenge events that took place in the original text using their work.

Firstly, it is worth noting that within pop culture, fans and the fanfiction community are often portrayed as outcasts, loners, or otherwise socially inept, which provides a possible explanation as to why fans hold such high intimacy with fictional texts and empathy with certain fictional characters. This idea of fanfiction writers and readers as social outcasts was prevalent in early fanfiction research of the 1990s and 2000s. Pugh notes that 'fandom itself sometimes draws mockery from those who are not involved,'[55] while Jenkins introduces 'Textual Poachers' with a discussion of a 1986 *Saturday Night Live* skit involving William Shatner, where fans are portrayed as 'social misfits who have become so obsessed with the show that it forecloses other types of social experience.'[56] Even in recent years, while fan culture giants such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe have grown in popularity, 'media often [represents] fandom in a negative way' despite fandom today being 'considered part of the everyday lives of 'normal' people'[57]. Interviews for this thesis found that some participants felt outcasted or

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[54] Peter Stockwell, *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics Of Reading* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.78 <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=537030> [Accessed 27 September 2021].

[55] Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre* (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), p.8.

[56] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans And Participatory Culture*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1097854> [Accessed 12 May 2021], p.10.

[57] Hilde Van den Bulck, Nathalie Claessens, Jelle Mast, An Kuppens, 'Representation Of Fandom In Mainstream Media: Analysis Of Production And Content Of Flemish Television's Superfans', *European Journal Of Cultural Studies*, 19.6 (2016), 513-528 (p.514), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549415597924>

stigmatised, and therefore would connect to stories and characters who they saw as similarly outside of the 'norm' within the text. Participant L, for example, found a 'kindred spirit' in the character of Michael in TV series *Lucifer*, stating that 'I have a history of being bullied, of being an outcast, alone […] ridiculed, and that's exactly what you see happening in the series […] I feel connected to him […] and I want to give him the voice I didn't have when I was younger.' This connection with outcasted fictional characters develops beyond the simple definitions of outcasts as 'losers' or 'loners'. Some research finds that texts that present stigmatised, outcasted groups within society in a positive light are excellent tools for improving attitudes and increasing empathy towards such groups. The *Harry Potter* series, for example, is described as a world 'characterized by strict social hierarchies and resulting prejudices, with obvious parallels to our society.'[58] Research finds that, in *Harry Potter* stories, Harry 'tries to understand [the stigmatised characters] and appreciate their difficulties, some of which stem from intergroup discrimination.'[59] This then allows audiences a window through which to empathise with groups who may face discrimination, scorn, or ignorance in our own world. If fans, particularly from stigmatised groups or with a socially outcasted history, find characters they empathise and connect with strongly, this explains the high levels of intimacy fans have with their favourite texts. Participant L's desire to give Michael 'a voice' shows that this connection and empathy also motivates her into writing fanfiction.

Within interviews, several fans approached the discussions about fictional characters in a very personal and intimate way, addressing them as if these characters were their friends or people they knew in real life. Participant A, for example, described the sensation she felt when the Japanese manga *Attack on Titan,* which she read monthly, ended back in April 2021: 'I feel like I've lost like, ten friends because I felt like they were real, they were never real but it feels

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[58] Loris Vezzali, Sofia Stathi, Dino Giovannini, Dora Capozza, and Elena Trifiletti, 'The Greatest Magic Of Harry Potter: Reducing Prejudice', *Journal Of Applied Social Psychology*, 45.2 (2015), 105-121 (p.106) <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12279>

[59] Loris Vezzali, Sofia Stathi, Dino Giovannini, Dora Capozza, and Elena Trifiletti, 'The Greatest Magic Of Harry Potter: Reducing Prejudice', *Journal Of Applied Social Psychology*, 45.2 (2015), 105-121 (p.106) <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12279>

like they were because you read about them consistently every month, so you felt what they were feeling.' Stockwell highlights the sensation of connecting to and feeling for fictional characters, despite the knowledge that these characters do not exist in our reality: 'that is not to say…the death of a fictional character is equivalent to the death of someone you know in reality…the fictional emotion is 'tagged' as fictional after the initial experience.'[60] He notes that 'at the moment of experience'[61] for readers like Participant A, their emotional responses are very real. Participant A shows a clear awareness of the sensation that Stockwell discusses. Even though she acknowledges that the characters never existed in reality, the sensation of losing these characters felt real at the moment of experience and continues to feel real to her due to her strong attachment to them. Comparing Stockwell's assessment of the sensation to Participant A's statement, there is one key, subtle difference – Stockwell's assessment implies that the sensation of grief or loss is typically momentary at the time of reading the story, however for Participant A, this sensation remains months later. Participant A has 'tagged' the moment as fictional as Stockwell suggests, which is made clear by her insistence that she knows the characters 'were never real', yet she continues to grieve for them as if they were real friends of hers who have ceased to be in her life. Participant M also suggested this sentiment and expanded on why she sees these characters as friends: 'I know that the general consensus [in fan communities] is that we love these characters so much and we're so involved with them, they become like a part of your friend group.' Dissecting this concept of characters being a part of one's friend group presents a few interesting hypotheses; perhaps that fans see these characters as people they wish to spend time with; whose company they enjoy; who they know on an intimate, personal level, to the point where they reportedly feel the genuine emotion of love towards them. This highlights an important trait for fans of texts,

[60] Peter Stockwell, *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics Of Reading* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.77 <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=537030> [Accessed 4 October 2021].
[61] Peter Stockwell, *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics Of Reading* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.78 <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=537030> [Accessed 4 October 2021].

whose strong intimacy with and connection to fiction often surpasses that of most readers or audiences.

Fanfiction writers viewing these fictional characters as fully developed beings ties into the cognitive concept of the Theory of Mind (ToM). The Theory of Mind is said to be 'what enables us to "put ourselves in another's shoes,"'[62] or imagine another's perspective of a situation and empathise with them. This is a sensation that is not exclusive to interaction with other people; Leverage declares that 'when we read a work of literature, we treat characters as if they were real people, and we ascribe to them a ToM.'[63] It is indeed a regular practice, not only in fanfiction writers or fans in general, but any engaged reader, to create a 'mental model'[64] of fictional characters. In doing so, readers construct these fictional characters into fully developed beings, who act and react as existing humans would, according to the beliefs, behaviours, and desires they have exhibited within the original story, as well as how the reader interpret the characters based on their own lived experiences. Oatley suggests that 'the better our mental model of people, the better we can know what they are thinking and feeling on a particular occasion.'[65] This is one method to differentiate between a casual reader and a fan, and, to a further extent, a fanfiction writer or reader. Fans are dedicated to knowing everything they can about these characters through reading creator interviews, engaging with the content repetitively to find every detail, or in the case of groups such as the fanfiction community, creating or engaging with content that has been made to further expand their mental model and extend the life or existence of fictional characters. For example, fans will often develop

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[62] Paula Leverage, *Theory Of Mind And Literature* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2011), p.1, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=3118811> [Accessed 3 October 2021].

[63] Paula Leverage, *Theory Of Mind And Literature* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2011), p.2, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=3118811> [Accessed 3 October 2021].

[64] Paula Leverage, *Theory Of Mind And Literature* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2011), p.16, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=3118811> [Accessed 3 October 2021].

[65] Keith Oatley, 'Theory Of Mind And Theory Of Minds In Literature', in *Theory Of Mind And Literature* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2011), pp. 13-26 (p.16) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=3118811> [Accessed 3 October 2021].

'fanon' traits for a character, or traits that are not confirmed in the original story but are agreed upon by many fans, to the point that groups of fans will accept it as an aspect of that character's life or personality to 'supplement their canons'[66] [67] and flesh out their mental model of the character.

Pugh argues that fanfiction is often created because fans 'wanted either "more of" their source material or "more from" it,'[68] something that was regularly implied in interviews. Participant I, for example, used fanfiction as 'a way to keep the story alive in a time when we were waiting so long between instalments,' their choice of words not only showing they desire more of their favourite story, but also that they feel their fanfiction is keeping the canon story 'alive,' as opposed to being a separate story altogether. Participant G similarly stated that fanfiction writers are 'not just writing these little stories […] we're further developing these universes.' From these statements, it is made clear that members of the fanfiction community see their stories as valuable additions to a web of stories surrounding the original text, breaking the confined narrative of the original stories to develop their mental model further. To extend the original characters' stories and make a believable addition to the character's existing mental model, fanfiction writers must empathise with characters and use the Theory of Mind to understand exactly how the character would act and react in the situations fanfiction writers place them in. Making sure the characters are loyal to the mental model that the original author and other fans have created is viewed as very important, as discussed by Bacon-Smith, who stated that 'the [fanfiction] writer works hard to create in her stories characters that speak like the ones on television, and whose personalities match the screen product.'[69] This is an important aspect of fanfiction writing that can be seen to this day; during his interview, Participant C stated that 'when I see the characters [in fanfiction] acting as they would [in the

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[66] Aja Romano, 'Canon, Fanon, Shipping And More: A Glossary Of The Tricky Terminology That Makes Up Fandom', *Vox*, (2016) <https://www.vox.com/2016/6/7/11858680/fandom-glossary-fanfiction-explained> [Accessed 8 December 2021]

[67] The term 'canon' is used to describe the source material, the original text the fanfiction is based on.

[68] Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre* (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), p.19.

[69] Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom And The Creation Of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p.58.

original story], that's a sign that the writer's obviously done the homework…[it] adds a level of immersion for me.' Fanfiction writers and readers value presenting the character as a true reflection of readers' agreed 'mental model', as it feels more authentic to the original character and allows them to empathise and connect far deeper with the fanfiction variants of their favourite characters.

Remembering the idea that fanfiction writers and readers feel a deep emotional connection to fictional characters, a couple of key examples from interviews highlight how these emotional connections operate in encouraging fans to write fanfiction. Firstly, Participant D claimed that she enjoyed reading and writing fanfiction because 'it's really nice just to spend more time with those characters.' Her choice of words is important as it connects well to another of Stockwell's points. This is that when describing the experience of reading fiction, readers often use one of three metaphors: reading as transportation, reading as control, or reading as a form of investment.[70] Particularly, her comment ties to reading as transportation, which Stockwell describes as 'the notion that a reading mind is 'transported'…shifted into the imaginary landscape.' Participant D's use of words, 'spend more time,' place her physically alongside the protagonist, as an active member of the story who is enjoying the presence of these characters as if they are real people that she can interact with in the landscape she is experiencing. On the other hand, when explaining her experience in playing the video game *Undertale,* Participant J focused on one character named Sans: '[He is] depicted as a depressed character…I want to have for him a more happy ending.' Participant J's comment shows an active desire, which remains long after finishing the game, for one of the main characters to find a happier ending, even though, as a fictional character, it is not true that he *can* feel happiness. Both participants show that they have a mental model of fictional characters in their minds and that they, in some way, regard them as real people, to spend time with, feel sympathy for, and maybe wish to improve their lives. Therefore, it can be

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[70] Peter Stockwell, *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics Of Reading* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.80-81 <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=537030> [Accessed 27 September 2021].

inferred that fanfiction is read and written by these fans as it allows them to both spend more time with characters whose lives are finitely limited to the stories they exist in, and to simulate a character's story in their own way, to give them a happier ending or a different experience more suited to the fanfiction author's vision. One may argue that such changes to a character's story or ending would damage the fandom's 'mental model' of a character. However, returning to Participant C's assessment of a good portrayal of a character, fanfiction writers often prioritise and value characters 'acting' as they would in the original text, while not necessarily worrying about changes to the story's initial plot. Pugh confirms this, arguing that, while fanfiction is often, though not always, used to fix 'holes and inconsistencies in plot lines'[71] or 'to find out "what happened next,"'[72] 'the one aspect of canon that is not usually up for alteration is the nature of the characters.'[73] Putting together Participant C and J's comments, as well as Pugh's text, suggests that it is a character's behaviour and actions that define their 'mental model' most strongly, while the events that occur in the text are less consequential and so can be altered in the fanfiction.

As considered above, empathy with characters is extremely important in encouraging fans to read or write fanfiction. Multiple interview participants reported that reading and writing fanfiction was an extremely empathetic and emotive experience for them. Participant G stated that 'even as a writer, I empathise with my own characters, I feel what they're going through cos I'm the one writing it…there are times where I'm writing something and I start crying.' The idea has been discussed that readers can find a deep connection with the texts they read, but the suggestion that writers can engage and empathise with the emotions their characters are 'feeling' regularly arises, even outside of fanfiction. For example, a survey by Marjorie Taylor 'surveyed 50 fiction authors and found that a full 92 percent of them experienced this phenomenon of their characters having their own agency.'[74] Davies discusses the reasons for

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[71] Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre* (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), p.41.
[72] Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre* (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), p.47.
[73] Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre* (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), p.65.
[74] Jim Davies, 'How Do Some Authors "Lose Control" Of Their Characters?', *Literary Hub*, (2019) <https://lithub.com/how-do-some-authors-lose-control-of-their-characters/> [Accessed 13 October 2021].

this, arguing that an author's 'idea of what the character is like is so detailed and well-understood that the mental processing done to explain and predict what these characters say and do becomes completely unconscious.'[75] Taylor's interviews highlighted that some authors found themselves emotionally connecting to fictional characters, either by '[having] imaginary conversations with them'[76] or even reporting that 'their characters give them unsolicited advice about the writer's own life.'[77] This shows that the friendly connection fans develop with characters isn't exclusive to them, however, it is important to note that fanfiction writers will sometimes report feeling the exact same sensations as the original author, despite not having created the character. For example, Participant G discusses writing fanfiction where a character who was not her own original character 'just kind of hijacked my story and now he won't give it back,' before adding 'it's so funny how, you know, characters just have their own minds,' implying that fictional characters are beings that can have an active influence on a fanfiction text. Many other participants expanded on this topic. Participant P highlighted that when writing about characters she empathised with and related to, 'fanfiction provides an outlet to be able to speak through the characters' or 'to distance myself from my own problems.' The idea of speaking through the characters one empathised with arose again – Participant S claimed 'a few years ago, [fanfiction] was definitely something to help me process a lot of stuff that was going on in my life…I couldn't really talk about it myself, but I could put these characters that everyone knew in a similar situation and try to work through it that way.' A common theme appeared throughout these interviews – that fanfiction writers often identified with characters, empathised with them, and used these familiar characters, who they may find comfort or affection in, to explore situations they were going through. Not every participant approached their writing this way. Participant E, who is pursuing a career in writing for video games, argued that fanfiction and writing in general may not be the best place to

[75] Jim Davies, 'How Do Some Authors "Lose Control" Of Their Characters?', *Literary Hub*, (2019) <https://lithub.com/how-do-some-authors-lose-control-of-their-characters/> [Accessed 13 October 2021].
[76] Jim Davies, 'How Do Some Authors "Lose Control" Of Their Characters?', *Literary Hub*, (2019) <https://lithub.com/how-do-some-authors-lose-control-of-their-characters/> [Accessed 13 October 2021].
[77] Jim Davies, 'How Do Some Authors "Lose Control" Of Their Characters?', *Literary Hub*, (2019) <https://lithub.com/how-do-some-authors-lose-control-of-their-characters/> [Accessed 13 October 2021].

explore one's problems and emotions: 'I can always sit down and examine my feelings through other means.' He believed that his writing and other emotional coping mechanisms, such as meditating or keeping a journal 'have to be separate things,' and that 'when you're workshopping, you're improving your craft, you're not improving yourself.' However, even Participant E valued the importance of empathy in fiction and fanfiction, stating, 'that feeling of empathy, it comes from being brought a character, or a representation of a character, with…relatable goals, relatable representations of thoughts and feelings.' This shows that he considered the presentation of characters as whole people who others could empathise with as extremely important to the success of that character as a relatable figure.

Considering previous Theory of Mind research highlights reasons as to why fans partake in writing or reading fanfiction, as well as why fanfiction is viewed as such a unique mode of literature regarding its relationship with empathy. Firstly, a fanfiction writer's experience of creating a strong mental model of their favourite characters and viewing them as friends or full-fledged personalities influences their decision to take on a role in the characters' 'lives', evolving from passive readers to active fanfiction writers. Kaufman and Libby proposed the concept of 'experience taking', through which 'readers lose themselves and assume the identity of the character, adopting the character's thoughts, emotions, goals, traits, and actions and experiencing the narrative as though they were the character.'[78] Indeed, some fanfiction authors use their stories to experience the narrative as though they were the character and to speak through character's voice and explore their struggles. However, Kaufman and Libby do not consider that, while some audience members will experience a story *in the place of* characters, other fanfiction writers and readers use fanfiction to experience the story *alongside* those characters, therefore it can be argued that the concept of 'experience taking' for fanfiction readers and writers is somewhat unique. As well as 'taking' the experience *from* the character, they may also use the original text to observe the character and create strong

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[78] Geoff F. Kaufman and Lisa K. Libby, 'Changing Beliefs And Behavior Through Experience-Taking.', *Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology*, 103.1 (2012), 1-19 (p.2), <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027525>.

mental models through which they can present their authentic version of the character through their fanfiction. Discussions of fiction also argue that 'we can allow ourselves to sympathize strongly with a character of a fictional story, because we do not have obligations towards the characters of a fictional story, while sad reports in a [non-fictional] newspaper may cause feelings of obligation towards the victims to help.'[79] As seen previously, fanfiction writers often experience the above sensation much differently. Because they care for and empathise with the characters so strongly, they do feel the desire to 'help' characters in their fanfiction, be it through changing their fate, giving them a happier ending, or changing the story to make their version truer to the mental model they have constructed of the characters. Overall, this shows how fanfiction writers and readers may subvert the experience of empathy and fiction, in becoming active constructors of a character's mental model, motivated by their empathy for the character.

1.2 – Fanfiction and Community

So far, this chapter has considered how emotional and empathetic responses that individuals experience when reading can lead them to create an intimate connection with characters and texts. This chapter has also considered how this experience can inspire individuals to read or write fanfiction, allowing them to spend more time with their favourite characters and expand their mental models beyond the original text to which the characters would otherwise be restricted. Fanfiction as a practice has grown exponentially since the spike in popularity of the Internet, and with this, a large community has developed around the phenomenon, particularly residing online. Sites such as Archive of Our Own or FanFiction.Net receive hundreds of

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[79] P. Matthijs Bal and Martijn Veltkamp, 'How Does Fiction Reading Influence Empathy? An Experimental Investigation On The Role Of Emotional Transportation', *Plos ONE*, 8.1 (2013), p.3, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0055341>.

millions of visits each month,[80] [81] and studying the groups that are active on sites like these allows researchers to understand how numerous people with an intimate connection to fictional stories and characters band together and create a community. This section will study the fanfiction community, considering how it forms and operates by using McMillan and Chavis' Sense of Community theory. By analysing the four aspects of this theory, this section will debate whether the fanfiction community is subversive and dialogic as a literary community, as communication between individuals is not only encouraged but instrumental to its existence.

Firstly, this section will explore McMillan and Chavis' Sense of Community theory and how it, in general, relates to the fanfiction community, before identifying each aspect of the theory in the fanfiction community. McMillan and Chavis' Sense of Community theory proposed four criteria that define their belief of what a 'Sense of Community' entails. These four criteria are; Membership, or 'the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness;'[82] Influence, or 'a sense of mattering, or making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members;'[83] Integration and fulfilment of needs, or 'the feeling that members' needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group;'[84] and Shared emotional connection, or 'the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experience.'[85] McMillan and Chavis' original Sense of Community theory was published long before widespread access to

[80] SimilarWeb, 'Archiveofourown.Org', *Similarweb.Com*, (2021)
<https://www.similarweb.com/site/archiveofourown.org/#overview> [Accessed 24 January 2022].
[81] SimilarWeb, 'Fanfiction.Net', *Similarweb.Com*, (2021)
<https://www.similarweb.com/site/fanfiction.net/#traffic> [Accessed 24 January 2022].
[82] David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, 'Sense Of Community: A Definition And Theory', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 14.1 (1986), 6-23 (p.9), <https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::aid-jcop2290140103>3.0.co;2-i>
[83] David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, 'Sense Of Community: A Definition And Theory', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 14.1 (1986), 6-23 (p.9), <https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::aid-jcop2290140103>3.0.co;2-i>
[84] David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, 'Sense Of Community: A Definition And Theory', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 14.1 (1986), 6-23 (p.9) <https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::aid-jcop2290140103>3.0.co;2-i>
[85] David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, 'Sense Of Community: A Definition And Theory', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 14.1 (1986), 6-23 (p.9) <https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::aid-jcop2290140103>3.0.co;2-i>

the Internet. However, more current research has shown that the Sense of Community theory can be applied to online communities, such as 'fandom' communities surrounding sport, music, and media.[86] The fanfiction community and fandom in general provides an excellent example of how communities have evolved since the growth of the Internet – Obst *et al* discuss how 'modern society appears to develop community around interest rather than locality,'[87] and in fanfiction, this is certainly true. During the period of Bacon-Smith's research in the early 90s, fandom activity remained rather localised as fans did not have widespread access to the Internet. She described fandom as 'a cluster of circles, groups of close friends who come together to participate in a particular interest group.'[88] She suggested that 'circles may form around the first person in a neighborhood to "come out" about her fan activities,'[89] altogether implying that fandom interaction remained on a low scale between a few local friends at this time. Now, people who engage in fanfiction use the Internet to develop relationships and create communities that are spread across countries, and the key interest that links them is their intimate emotional connection to the media they are a fan of. Obst *et al*'s study, conducted in 2001, highlighted that the beliefs of the time '[pointed] to the danger of the internet in destroying community and promoting social isolation.'[90] They disagreed, theorising that 'a strong sense of community can exist among those interacting within cyberspace,'[91] and this is something that studying the fanfiction community will demonstrate.

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[86] Daniel Chadborn, Patrick Edwards and Stephen Reysen, 'Reexamining Differences Between Fandom And Local Sense Of Community', *Psychology Of Popular Media Culture*, 7.3 (2018), 241-249, <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000125>

[87] Patricia Obst, Lucy Zinkiewicz and Sandy G. Smith, 'Sense Of Community In Science Fiction Fandom, Part 1: Understanding Sense Of Community In An International Community Of Interest', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 30.1 (2001), 87-103 (p.88) <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.1052>

[88] Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom And The Creation Of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p.26.

[89] Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom And The Creation Of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p.27.

[90] Patricia Obst, Lucy Zinkiewicz and Sandy G. Smith, 'Sense Of Community In Science Fiction Fandom, Part 1: Understanding Sense Of Community In An International Community Of Interest', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 30.1 (2001), 87-103 (p.99) <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.1052>

[91] Patricia Obst, Lucy Zinkiewicz and Sandy G. Smith, 'Sense Of Community In Science Fiction Fandom, Part 1: Understanding Sense Of Community In An International Community Of Interest', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 30.1 (2001), 87-103 (p.99) <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.1052>

The first of McMillan and Chavis' four criteria is Membership, or how fanfiction writers and readers develop a sense of belonging within the online fanfiction community. Previous research has found that a sense of Membership is strong within online fandom communities; Chadborn *et al* found that 'fans can feel part of a larger community…sharing the same interest, providing them a sense of belonging with others.'[92] In their first study on the Sense of Community, McMillan and Chavis identified that 'membership has *boundaries;* this means that there are people who belong and people who do not.'[93] McMillan and Chavis argue that a community needs 'a deviant to denounce and punish as a whole,'[94] implying that an 'us and them' dynamic is often created by members of a community to decide who does and does not belong. Within my interviews, the boundaries of who belonged within the fanfiction community and who didn't were clear. Interviewees found they were often motivated to seek out a fanfiction community for their favourite fiction as they felt isolated in communities in which they were already members, harkening to Obst *et al*'s claim that locality is less valued than interest in modern communities. If fans were unable to find others with similar interests in their local community, they may seek out the fanfiction community online to satisfy those needs. Participant D stated that, upon finishing a new show, she would look for 'someone else who loves this show that no one else knows about,' implying that she felt an 'us and them' dynamic between herself and those around her, though her statement doesn't vilify or actively denounce the 'them' who were not part of the community, merely emphasising the desire to find an 'us.' Participant K also argued that 'you had to be in these fandoms, in these select circles, to experience these fanfics,' once again highlighting that there were people who

[92] Daniel Chadborn, Patrick Edwards and Stephen Reysen, 'Reexamining Differences Between Fandom And Local Sense Of Community', *Psychology Of Popular Media Culture*, 7.3 (2018), 241-249 (p.241), <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000125>

[93] David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, 'Sense Of Community: A Definition And Theory', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 14.1 (1986), 6-23 (p.9), <https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::aid-jcop2290140103>3.0.co;2-i>

[94] David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, 'Sense Of Community: A Definition And Theory', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 14.1 (1986), 6-23 (p.9), <https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::aid-jcop2290140103>3.0.co;2-i>

belonged and people who didn't, but without calling for the punishment of community outsiders.

Many interviewees made it clear that they saw themselves as the 'outsiders', the ones who had been excluded from other groups and so found their comfort in fandom and fanfiction. Participant T, for example, claimed, 'because so many people within [the fanfiction community] have been excluded from so many groups, I think that's why they come together.' This comment demonstrates one key attribute of the Membership discussion – the 'sense of belonging and identification,' which facilitates the 'feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group.'[95] Participant R found emotional safety, another attribute of Membership, within the fanfiction community – 'I've met a lot of friends online that I am really close with' – while Participant S found her experience in her niche fanfiction group very reaffirming – 'obviously you'll only get positive reinforcement from that group, because that's why you're there.' Both participants display awareness of a sense of friendship and reassurance that they achieve through being part of their tight-knit community. Discussions with fanfiction writers highlight that the fanfiction community's experience of Membership was much closer linked to McMillan's revised attribute from a later study on the Sense of Community, where McMillan changed Membership to 'Spirit' and where 'greater emphasis…is now placed on the spark of friendship'[96] rather than contrasting themselves against a deviant outsider group. McMillan argued in this updated study that 'each one of us needs connections to others so that we have a setting and an audience to express unique aspects of our personality,'[97] which, as seen above, is true for fanfiction authors. Feeling isolated from individuals outside of their fandom, these fans will find in the fanfiction

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[95] David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, 'Sense Of Community: A Definition And Theory', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 14.1 (1986), 6-23 (p.10) <https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::aid-jcop2290140103>3.0.co;2-i>

[96] David W. McMillan, 'Sense Of Community', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 24.4 (1996), 315-325 (p.315), <https://doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1520-6629(199610)24:4<315::aid-jcop2>3.0.co;2-t>

[97] David W. McMillan, 'Sense Of Community', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 24.4 (1996), 315-325 (p.315) <https://doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1520-6629(199610)24:4<315::aid-jcop2>3.0.co;2-t>

community a place to 'see [themselves] mirrored'[98] in others who enjoy the same stories and wish to discuss them, and a place where they can express those unique aspects of their personality and their thoughts about the texts they enjoy to a willing audience of fellow fans. Analysing the importance of Membership or Spirit within the fanfiction community can allow researchers to understand that fans see this community as welcoming space to express their thoughts. The fanfiction community is therefore a dialogic one, where sparks of friendship can lead to dialogue between fellow fanfiction writers and readers.

The concept of Influence, or the bidirectional sense of both mattering to the group and the group mattering to those within it, was also highly identifiable within my interviews. When studying Sense of Community and fandom, past researchers have found less evidence for Influence – for example, throughout their study of virtual relationships, Abfalter *et al* argued that 'it is possible that the dimension influence is not as important in the virtual online context as it is in real life communities.'[99] One of their key items for testing Influence, 'I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community,'[100] was dropped from testing as it did not frequently appear within their results. However, within the fanfiction community, there appears to be a belief that a lot of time and effort is spent on their work, that participants do matter to the group, and that the group matters to them in return. McMillan and Chavis argued that 'members are more attracted to a community in which they feel that they are influential,'[101] implying that individuals find more satisfaction in groups where they can make their mark and make a difference. This concept was especially clear when looking at smaller fandoms where there might be less fanfiction published, and so in writing a piece of fanfiction for that fandom, a

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[98] David W. McMillan, 'Sense Of Community', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 24.4 (1996), 315-325 (p.315) <https://doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1520-6629(199610)24:4<315::aid-jcop2>3.0.co;2-t>

[99] Dagmar Abfalter, Melanie E. Zaglia and Julia Mueller, 'Sense Of Virtual Community: A Follow Up On Its Measurement', *Computers In Human Behavior*, 28.2 (2012), p.403, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2011.10.010>

[100] Dagmar Abfalter, Melanie E. Zaglia and Julia Mueller, 'Sense Of Virtual Community: A Follow Up On Its Measurement', *Computers In Human Behavior*, 28.2 (2012), p.403, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2011.10.010>

[101] David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, 'Sense Of Community: A Definition And Theory', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 14.1 (1986), 6-23 (p.12), <https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::aid-jcop2290140103>3.0.co;2-i>

participant will feel as though they have made a bigger impact in a smaller community. Participant G implied that she feels like an important member of the community due to her fanfiction, claiming 'the character that I write about […] I've been the main supplier of [fanfiction about] them since 2018 […] I did a count, not too long ago, and I want to say that at least 70% of them were mine.' Here, Participant G has influence over or 'matters to' the community as she provides fans of the character with a large amount of content they otherwise may not have received. Participant Q also stated that a big motivator to write fanfiction was that she was contributing something to the group that it was otherwise missing, stating that she chose to write in the *Gorillaz* fandom because 'I can't seem to find anything else that's a narrow enough space that I would feel like, like I'm contributing to something.' Later, she stated that 'if somebody's enjoying [her fanfiction] I'll keep putting it up,' but also emphasised that 'I'd still put it up if nobody did [read it].' While having an audience and contributing to content wasn't the sole motivator for Participant Q, her awareness of an audience and wish to give them enjoyment with her writing shows a desire to have influence on the community and to matter to its members.

Moreover, the concept of Influence is bidirectional, and researchers must remember that, as well as contributing to the group, fans must also feel that they are also getting something out of being a part of the group. McMillan and Chavis argue that this relationship operates concurrently,[102] and this concurrent relationship in fanfiction is most noticeable when considering that readers sometimes review fanfiction. While reading fanfiction matters to the person who is reading it, when they review, they are also contributing to the community. Participant M found a lot of emotional value in the reviews she received: 'it's also nice to know that I'm touching so many people with the fact that I wrote something that they like enough to leave kudos or to leave a comment or to follow and like. And I think that's why I do it.' Participant M shows evidence of this concurrent relationship, as when she receives reviews,

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[102] David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, 'Sense Of Community: A Definition And Theory', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 14.1 (1986),6-23 (p.12), <https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::aid-jcop2290140103>3.0.co;2-i>

she feels encouraged to write more fanfiction, which will lead to more grateful or constructive reviews from her readers, and so on. This study of the back-and-forth Influence within the fanfiction community shows that fanfiction involves a clear, direct dialogue between readers and writers. This is not to claim that writers outside of the fanfiction community experience no feedback or encouraging interaction from their audience. However, for fanfiction, the dialogue between writer and reader is faster, more direct, and conversational as it is conducted online, and integral to the strengthening of the fanfiction community.

Within the fanfiction community, the relevance of 'integration and fulfilment of needs' may not seem as clear at first. However, Chadborn *et al* identified that this aspect of the theory exists within fandom culture, through both the 'production of a variety of transformative works which are suggested to be a core aspect of fan culture'[103] and the 'perceived individual psychological benefits (i.e., well-being)'[104] that fandom culture provides. These aspects are identifiable within the fandom subculture surrounding fanfiction as well, ranging from social needs to the needs that the production of fanfiction itself fulfils. Participant F discussed how she enjoyed writing fanfiction for her friends that fulfilled the desires they had for the story: 'It's just fun to write a little story, send to your friend and say, look, you wanted this scenario, I wrote it for you.' Reading fanfiction allows fans to find content involving their favourite stories, which expands on the universe and fulfils any desires that they believe were missing from the original text, providing them with a rewarding experience by being part of the community. Interviews also brought up some key 'resources' that fanfiction writers make use of, which would both 'maintain a positive sense of togetherness' and provide 'rewards' that members could benefit off of, such as the 'success of the community, and competence or capabilities of other

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[103] Daniel Chadborn, Patrick Edwards and Stephen Reysen, 'Reexamining Differences Between Fandom And Local Sense Of Community', *Psychology Of Popular Media Culture*, 7.3 (2018), 241-249 (p.243) <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000125>

[104] Daniel Chadborn, Patrick Edwards and Stephen Reysen, 'Reexamining Differences Between Fandom And Local Sense Of Community', *Psychology Of Popular Media Culture*, 7.3 (2018), 241-249 (p.242) <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000125>

members.'[105] Some fans benefitted from assistance on their writing – Participant F discussed a 'review tag' within her community, where fanfiction writers would read and critique each other's work. She said, 'I really enjoyed that, I think that really helped me build as a writer,' implying that both her emotional needs and skill-based needs were met by the tag and that she thrived within the group due to the capabilities of those who critiqued her work. Participant C expands on this, saying that 'one thing the fanfiction community has provided me with is some beta readers,' or readers who would check his fanfiction before he published it and give advice on how to improve it. In working together to improve each other's writing skills, the fanfiction community ensures 'group success [which] brings group members closer together,'[106] as their improved writing skills leads to better quality and more enjoyable texts. Fanfiction writers also told me about events that many fanfiction communities would hold, particularly around holiday seasons. Participant H spoke about 'Yuletide', an event during which any fandom that had less than 1,000 works posted between Fanfiction.Net and AO3 were eligible to receive fanfiction written by writers taking part. The event shows that the goodwill of sharing resources extends beyond sub-community fandom boundaries, while also returning to the concept of Influence, of mattering to the community and the community mattering to you. Participant H claimed that participating in Yuletide allowed her to 'branch out a bit and look at a fandom that I may have loved but never written for.' Not only was Participant H giving to her community, but also found that the event allowed her to broaden her writing scope and write from new character perspectives. Interviewing fanfiction writers allows for the discovery of existing 'resources' through which fanfiction writers and readers' needs can be met, and through which they grow much closer as a community.

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[105] David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, 'Sense Of Community: A Definition And Theory', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 14.1 (1986), 6-23 (p.13), <https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::aid-jcop2290140103>3.0.co;2-i>
[106] David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, 'Sense Of Community: A Definition And Theory', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 14.1 (1986), 6-23 (p.13), <https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::aid-jcop2290140103>3.0.co;2-i>

The final concept of the Sense of Community theory is a Shared emotional connection, which describes a shared history that is understood and can be identified by those in the community. A strict shared history may be more difficult to pinpoint, particularly as each new fandom, created around a new piece of media, will birth a different 'shared history' than other fanfiction communities based on other pieces of media. When criticising fandom academia previously, Hills has argued that 'by 'fixing' fans into rigid communities and object-based categories, academia frequently loses its capacity to consider how people can be fans of multiple texts at the same time, as well as how people might move through and between different fandoms.'[107] Such criticism, when considering shared emotional connection, is worth considering. Every individual's fluid experience with fandom, which fandoms and how many fandoms they join, and how involved they are in the fandom, will mean that researchers cannot fix a strict history to the experience of being a member of the fanfiction community. However, when looking over interview responses, key events from the history of fanfiction did stand out as influential historical moments, one key example being author Anne Rice's request that her fans stop writing fanfiction based on her work in 2000[108]. Despite the announcement happening over 20 years ago and Anne Rice since having supposedly relaxed her stance on fanfiction,[109] numerous participants pointed to her, and authors like her, as having had a massive impact on the culture and history of fanfiction. Some participants referred to the event in a dramatic manner: Participant I described the event as a 'horror story' while Participant S claims she was 'really just dabbling in fanfiction at the time, when the whole […] Anne Rice saga went down.' These comments suggest a stronger connection to McMillan's reassessment of his theory, where he changed 'Shared emotional connection' to the new term of 'Art', which Obst

[107] Matt Hills, 'Returning To 'Becoming-A-Fan' Stories: Theorising Transformational Objects And The Emergence/Extension Of Fandom', in *The Ashgate Research Companion To Fan Cultures*, ed. by Linda Duits, Koos Zwann, and Stijn Reijnders, (Farnham, Surrey: Routledge, 2014), pp. 9-21 (p.9), <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/books/edit/10.4324/9781315612959/ashgate-research-companion-fan-cultures-linda-duits-koos-zwaan-stijn-reijnders> [Accessed 4 January 2022].
[108] Gita Jackson, 'It Used To Be Perilous To Write Fanfiction', *Kotaku*, (2018) <https://kotaku.com/it-used-to-be-perilous-to-write-fanfiction-1826083509> [Accessed 10 October 2021].
[109] metrowebukmetro, 'How Fan Fiction Is Conquering The Internet And Shooting Up Book Charts', *Metro*, (2012) <https://metro.co.uk/2012/11/11/how-fan-fiction-is-conquering-the-internet-and-shooting-up-book-charts-617396/> [Accessed 10 October 2021].

et al describe as 'shared dramatic moments in which the community shares in common experiences that represent the community's values.'[110] Discussions on authors like Anne Rice showed that the reactions to such events birthed certain community values. Firstly, it caused a heightened need to declare that one was not claiming ownership of the characters they were writing fanfiction for. Participant S points out that 'when people put disclaimers at the top [of their stories], a lot of new fans are just like, what are you doing that for? And it's like, oh, my sweet child, you know, people were literally taken to court.' While not as expected anymore, placing disclaimers at the top of fanfiction was a common practice, and throughout many interviews, fans were explicit in expressing that they respected the original author's ownership of the text due to this history. These major events in the community's history, however, also appear to have strengthened their passion for their craft. Participant B argued against Anne Rice's negative stance on fanfiction, stating that authors like Anne Rice who criticised fanfiction 'go after people who aren't making any money from this […] often either teenagers or young adults just looking for somewhere to share their passion.' As discussed by McMillan, 'Art supports the Spirit,'[111] as these historic events from the history of fanfiction cause the members of the group to bond more closely together, to find common ground in approving of and supporting each other, making the group much stronger. When the Sense of Community theory is applied, the fanfiction community reveals itself to often be a group that supports itself and those within it, that encourages the voices of younger, amateur authors and places no less value on their work than on the original authors' work, creating a very dialogic community and literary form.

This chapter has used key concepts regarding empathy and fiction to consider how fans may be inspired to write fanfiction in ways that subvert typical experiences of engaging with media. While this experience is not exclusive to fanfiction, high levels of empathy experienced by

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[110] Patricia Obst, Lucy Zinkiewicz and Sandy G. Smith, 'Sense Of Community In Science Fiction Fandom, Part 1: Understanding Sense Of Community In An International Community Of Interest', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 30.1 (2001), 87-103 (p.88) <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.1052>

[111] David W. McMillan, 'Sense Of Community', *Journal Of Community Psychology*, 24.4 (1996), 315-325 (p.323), <https://doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1520-6629(199610)24:4<315::aid-jcop2>3.0.co;2-t>

fanfiction readers and writers promote empathy with others, particularly those in outcasted or stigmatised groups. This chapter has also used the Sense of Community theory to assess how the community built around fanfiction is instrumental to its existence. In providing encouraging, tight-knit sub-groups for fanfiction writers, the fanfiction community can be a space where new writers, inspired by their empathy and intimacy with fictional text, can engage in dialogue with other writers to develop their authorial voices and share their work. Through this, this chapter has introduced the idea of the fanfiction community as dialogic. This term arises from Bakhtin's work and describes fiction or a community that is made up of 'a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness.'[112] Bakhtin suggests that voices in a dialogic text or community exist within a 'polyphony'[113] of equally valued interpretations of the world. Chapter 2 will explore fanfiction as a dialogic community in more detail, particularly through analysis of the theme of authorship and whether the voices of fan and author exist together in an equal polyphony. This section will consider whether the original author to a text possesses the most important role in defining and interpreting the text, or whether the fanfiction community is subversive by allowing fanfiction writers to add their own consciousness, their own voice, to a plurality of voices that exist to extend the original text beyond its canon.

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[112] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems Of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.6, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=310161> [Accessed 13 October 2021].
[113] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems Of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.6, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=310161> [Accessed 13 October 2021].

Chapter 2 – Authorship

The previous chapter explored how fanfiction writers' and readers' experience with empathy in fiction, as well as the Sense of Community that develops among them, are subversive in that they create an empathetic and dialogic literary community. This thesis has explored how a heightened level of empathy for fictional stories and characters, as well as an encouraging group of fellow fans, inspires fanfiction writers to find their authorial voice, through writing fanfiction that may expand on, or even contradict, the original text. This chapter will discuss how the concept of an 'author' is interpreted in the fanfiction community. Recent research around literature, authorship, and social media argues that the flourishing popularity of online literature such as fanfiction means that the 'received understandings of a "real" writer as one who has been published are [being] destabilized, if not rendered meaningless.'[114] Therefore, in this thesis it is valuable to consider how an author can be defined, as well as how online writing such as fanfiction is destabilizing and subverting the traditional expectation of what an author is. Theories and concepts such as Bakhtin's dialogism and carnivalesque sense of the world, Barthes' Death of the Author, and the 'fanboy auteur' will be used to analyse the extent to which fanfiction authors have authority when interpreting and adding to the intertextual web surrounding a story. This chapter will consider the representation of fan writings within professionally created works by looking at TV series *Supernatural*, a show whose narrative frequently encouraged subversion in fanfiction by presenting fanfiction writers in a battle with tyrannical author figures. Finally, analysis of *The Fandom* by Anna Day, a novel where fans of a book are sucked into the story and forced to enact its canon, will allow consideration of a fan's relationship with the canon story, fanfiction as a concept, and the importance of the original author on the meaning of a text. This chapter will consider the extent to which

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[114] Simone Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, And Selling Books In The Internet Era* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2018) <https://www.scribd.com/document/485003779/Simone-Murray-The-digital-literary-sphere-reading-writing-and-selling-books-in-the-Internet-era-Johns-Hopkins-University-Press-2018-pdf> [Accessed 19 July 2022], p.20.

participating in the fanfiction community allows fanfiction writers to develop their own authorial voice within a dialogic plurality of voices. This chapter will also assess how representations of the fanfiction community in books and television encourage fanfiction writers in their subversion and adaptation of the original material.

2.1 – Voice, Truth, and Interpretation in Fanfiction

When considering fanfiction and the importance of the original author, Bakhtin's concept of dialogism is valuable, particularly through his analysis of the carnivalesque. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, Bakhtin's work explores dialogic novels and ideologies, particularly describing Dostoevsky's novels as 'a genuine polyphony of valid voices.'[115] In these texts, each character is presented with a fully realised worldview and their own voice, and is given equal attention and value to each other character. Bakhtin contrasts dialogism against a monologic artistic world, discrediting monologism by stating, 'once placed in the mouth of a hero who is portrayed as a fixed and finalized image of reality, [an idea] inevitably loses its direct power to mean, becoming a mere aspect of reality, one more of reality's predetermined features.'[116] He implies that reliance on an author's monologic voice within a text limits the experience of the text and restricts the ability to interpret it further. Instead, Bakhtin values a text in which multiple voices 'enter the great dialogue of the novel on completely equal terms with other idea images.'[117] This ideology encourages fanfiction, as through many fans' voices, various 'idea images' that are born out of a single text can coexist on equal terms with each other. Bakhtin's work further relates to fanfiction when considering the concept of the

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[115] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems Of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.6, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=310161> [Accessed 13 October 2021].
[116] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems Of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.79, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=310161> [Accessed 13 October 2021].
[117] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems Of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.92, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=310161> [Accessed 13 October 2021].

carnivalesque in fiction, as the way that Bakhtin describes a carnivalesque state of the world has key similarities with the practice of and community surrounding fanfiction.

Bakhtin describes a carnivalesque state as 'a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act.'[118] In fanfiction, the eradication of this division between performers and spectators, or writers and readers, is clear. Pugh confirms the idea that a 'basic premise of fanfiction' is that 'anyone can be an author,'[119] meaning that anybody can take on the role of the authorial performer and present their 'performance' of the narrative in the same way that the original author presented theirs. The carnivalesque is also described by Bakhtin as a suspension of the everyday hierarchal structure of reality – 'all *distance* between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: *free and familiar contact among people.*'[120] As found in Chapter 1, the fanfiction writers and readers experience this free and familiar contact by joining the community and having the chance to share their work in a typically supportive environment of other fanfiction writers and readers. Bacon-Smith describes the fanfiction community as having 'no head, no center, no focus at which to strike,'[121] as well as 'no established hierarchy or profitmaking economy,'[122] all of which presents the fanfiction community as a group without the hierarchal divisions between writer and reader that are otherwise set in professional publishing. Bakhtin also highlights that 'in carnival, parodying was employed very widely…distorting in various directions and to various

[118] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems Of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.122, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=310161> [Accessed 13 October 2021].
[119] Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre* (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), p.122.
[120] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems Of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.123, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=310161> [Accessed 13 October 2021].
[121] Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom And The Creation Of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p.5.
[122] Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom And The Creation Of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p.41.

degrees.'[123] Writers can use fanfiction to distort and alter the original text in whichever way they like, as a 'parody' of the original. Participant I argued that fanfiction 'has a sense of freedom and creative freedom and creative uniqueness in the stories…you get more unique and free-feeling stories than what you get through traditional media, whether it be books, movies, TV.' Interviewees often found enjoyment in the parodying and distorting of the original text. Participant O stated, 'it's cool to imagine characters which I love […] I love making up new scenarios for them […] what would these characters be doing? How would they fit into this pre-established different world?' while Participant R argued, 'the fun part of fanfiction [is that] you can take scenes […] and change it to how you would like it.' Creating fanfiction allows fanfiction writers to parody, alter, and distort original texts into their own stories, as well as providing them with a carnivalesque community of fellow writers from varying backgrounds and levels of experience as authors. Participant G challenges people who 'don't think fanfiction writers are legitimate writers because we're writing fanfiction,' declaring 'we are legitimate writers,' and showing that, in fanfiction, the hierarchal structure that defines what makes somebody a 'legitimate' writer is non-existent, as is typical of a carnivalesque sense of the world. In the same way that Murray argues that "literature" has become 'what the digital literary sphere *deems* to be literature,'[124] in the fanfiction community, a writer is defined as a writer because they write, regardless of what type of text they are writing. The community deems fanfiction authors as legitimate authors, despite any disagreements presented from the typical hierarchy that the carnival of fanfiction aims to disrupt. In this way, the dialogic nature of fanfiction is subversive as it defends Pugh's claim that anyone can be an author.

However, it is important to note that this suspension of norms and boundaries between authors and readers doesn't come into effect for the authors or 'kings' of the literary carnival. Pugh

[123] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems Of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.127, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=310161> [Accessed 13 October 2021].

[124] Simone Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, And Selling Books In The Internet Era* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2018) <https://www.scribd.com/document/485003779/Simone-Murray-The-digital-literary-sphere-reading-writing-and-selling-books-in-the-Internet-era-Johns-Hopkins-University-Press-2018-pdf> [Accessed 19 July 2022], p.20.

highlighted this distance between fans and authors, stating that 'all fanfic writers are playing in someone else's sandpit…nobody is asking the permission of the original creators, who in some cases would rather they didn't play there,'[125] showing that, while the fanfiction community is carnivalesque, the authors or 'kings' of the literary world are not included in, nor desire to be part of this carnival. Pugh's book on fanfiction was written in 2005, and many authors of today have a more positive opinion of fanfiction over fifteen years later. However, while some authors admit to having written fanfiction themselves and therefore engaged in the 'carnival', the concerns of legal repercussions often prevent them from reading fanfiction of their own published stories. Neil Gaiman, an author who encourages fanfiction and has claimed to write it himself, recently posted to his Tumblr account, 'If you send me an ask containing links to *Good Omens* fan fiction you think I should read, I'll delete it…I don't want to read it, legally I can't read it…no matter how pure your motives, it's crossing a line.'[126] This shows that, while fanfiction can be viewed as a carnivalesque, subversive practice, the concern of copyright and plagiarism accusations prevent authors themselves from getting involved in the 'carnival'. Nevertheless, for fanfiction writers and readers, the fanfiction community remains as freeing and carnivalesque. As discussed by John Fiske, 'carnival may not always be disruptive, but the elements of disruption are always there.'[127] The carnivalesque state of fanfiction means that, while fanfiction doesn't disrupt the entire literary hierarchy, by removing authority from the original author or breaking boundaries between the original author and their fans, fanfiction is still disruptive and subversive in the way it allows fans to take on their own authorial role and engage in a carnivalesque community with little clear hierarchy. Pugh's above statement shows that the carnivalesque fanfiction community continues without interference from their 'king.' The author does not openly take part in the specific carnival surrounding their original text, but fanfiction writers still take on an authorial

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[125] Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre* (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), p.126.
[126] Neil Gaiman, 'This May Sound Mean, But …', *Neil Gaiman Official Tumblr*, (2021) <https://neil-gaiman.tumblr.com/post/670808913198907392> [Accessed 11 January 2022].
[127] John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 2nd edn (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=958078> [Accessed 18 July 2022], p.82.

role themselves and take control of the story without requiring any power or status within literature.

When considering fanfiction alongside Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and the carnivalesque, it is clear that fanfiction writers can develop an authorial voice through their interpretations of the original text and the stories that they write based on those interpretations. Other theories surrounding authorship can also be applied, to further emphasise the dialogic and subversive nature of fanfiction that gives fanfiction writers and readers the chance to develop their authorial voice and places no strong importance on the original author's interpretation of a text. Barthes' Death of the Author theory argues that understanding the original author's biography and voice is not essential when interpreting a text. Barthes states that, 'the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person, but by a mediator, shaman, or relator, whose 'performance'…may possibly be admired but never his 'genius.''[128] This is similar to an argument Oatley presents about the Indian term for poet, 'kavi', which 'does not mean 'maker'…but 'perceiver.''[129] These arguments interpret the author as a mouthpiece through which a story is told, a performer who creates an interpretation of traditional storytelling elements, but Barthes places no importance on the authority an author possesses over the telling of that story. Barthes argues that 'the author is a modern figure'[130] and views the high level of importance placed on an author and their interpretation as a 'culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author.'[131] He claims that there is a strong contrast between the days of oral folktales, where stories were shared freely and altered by each new voice that told them, and the days of printing and publishing, where stories are commodified and sold for a profit. Having previously compared

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[128] Roland Barthes, 'The Death Of The Author', in *Modern Criticism And Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), pp. 146-151 (p.147).
[129] Keith Oatley, 'The Cognitive Science Of Fiction', *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, 3.4 (2012), 425-430 (p.426), <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcs.1185>
[130] Roland Barthes, 'The Death Of The Author', in *Modern Criticism And Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), pp. 146-151 (p.147).
[131] Roland Barthes, 'The Death Of The Author', in *Modern Criticism And Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), pp. 146-151 (p.147).

fanfiction to oral folktales, this research shows that fanfiction can be viewed as subversive as it is a modern rebellion against the capitalist ideology of the commercialisation of storytelling.

It is important to note that a significant percentage of interview participants expressed the belief that the original text legally belonged to the original author, acknowledging the author as more than a simple voice through which the story was told. Participant G stressed that 'the characters belong to the entities that created them […] I so, really, really, firmly believe that.' Participant L also held high praise for the original authors of the stories she liked: 'I firmly believe that I can't make them better. They're just better writers than I am.' This thesis is not attempting to argue that all fans hold no respect for, or awareness of, the legal protection authors have in the modern day, nor that published, professional authors themselves are representatives of a soulless, capitalist literary world. However, the commercialisation of fanfiction by corporate figures has faced criticism and outrage from fans in the past, and fans typically focused on criticising those corporate figures over the original authors themselves. Coppa, a key member in the creation of fanfiction archive AO3, reports on fan scepticism of sites such as FanLib, which she describes as 'a for-profit, multifandom fanfiction archive'[132] which was debuted in 2007 and aimed to 'partner with media companies, publishers, and sponsors'[133] in the running of their fanfiction archive. From her experience within the 2000s fanfiction community, Coppa recalls that 'fans were understandably wary of being exploited by internet entrepreneurs, many of whom seemed to want to capitalize on our productivity and vast creativity without having any particular understanding of, or sympathy with, fans or fan culture.'[134] In the perceived battle between FanLib and AO3, FanLib was viewed by fans as a

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[132] Francesca Coppa, 'An Archive Of Our Own', in *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over The World,* ed. by Anne Jamison (Dallas: Smart Pop, 2013), pp. 335-342 (p.338) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1531171&ppg=341> [Accessed 11 January 2022].

[133] Fanlib, 'Fanlib.Com - About Us – Introduction', *Web.Archive.Org*, (2007) <https://web.archive.org/web/20071028150526/http://www.fanlib.com/cms.do?page=about_us.html> [Accessed 11 January 2022].

[134] Francesca Coppa, 'An Archive Of Our Own', in *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over The World,* ed. by Anne Jamison (Dallas: Smart Pop, 2013), pp. 335-342 (p.336) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1531171&ppg=341> [Accessed 11 January 2022].

capitalist exploitation of their work, while AO3 gave them a space to exercise their authorial voice and expand on the stories they were fans of in transformative ways. Barthes concludes his essay with the statement 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author,'[135] a statement that encourages readers to create their own interpretations of texts and dismisses the importance of the author figure in the development of these interpretations. With an awareness of the Death of the Author theory, fanfiction, particularly a space where fanfiction could be written without monetary exploitation, appears as one method through which the reader can be 'birthed', where their interpretation is encouraged, and their authorial voice may be found.

Unlike the monologic artistic world that Bakhtin discussed, where 'other thoughts and ideas – untrue or indifferent from the author's point of view, not fitting into his worldview – are not affirmed,'[136] the Death of the Author places no real value on the author's presentation or interpretation of their story. Instead, it presents the original author as one of many voices who can interpret the words they write. Interviewees for this thesis valued the presence of fanfiction as a subversive mode of literature, free from a single author figure or dominant voice. Participant I felt that in professionally published, traditional media, authors' visions could be altered by editors of publishers in the name of making a profit, and that writing fanfiction allowed fanfiction authors to explore their vision without any outside interference: '[With fanfiction] you do not have to write for anybody but yourself; if you are writing for traditional media, you have to make sure that it's going to be accepted and put out by the editor, by the publishing company.' They argued that even famous authors such as 'Stephen King [are] still held accountable by a publishing company who says, this won't sell, change it.' Participant I further presents storytelling as an intertextual experience, arguing that 'in some ways all

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[135] Roland Barthes, 'The Death Of The Author', in *Modern Criticism And Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), pp. 146-151 (p.150).
[136] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems Of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.80, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/detail.action?docID=310161> [Accessed 13 October 2021].

authors borrow from the collective, the communal storytelling pot.' This concept of 'intertextuality' was originally coined by Julia Kristeva, who describes individual texts as 'a permutation of texts, an intertextuality,'[137] and declares the novel to be 'a semiotic practice in which the synthesized patterns of several utterances can be read.'[138] Similarly to Barthes, Kristeva argues that '[the author] does not so much *speak* as *decipher*,'[139] presenting the author as a figure that interprets pre-existing tropes and themes, shaping and translating them into a new telling of pre-existing ideas. Barthes considers that all texts are intertextual, or linked to and shaped by other texts, when he declares that 'the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture,'[140] and that a single text is 'a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.'[141] Similarly, Eliot argues that 'the poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.'[142] These statements present writing not only fanfiction, but any kind of fiction, as intertextual as their meaning and creation is not accredited only to the author, but also to the texts that the author read before creating their own. By each borrowing from this 'communal storytelling pot,' authors may be presenting stories that may have been told before, just in different ways, as the new 'perceiver' of a certain way of telling of a story. In this way, Participant I presents fanfiction writers in the same way as Barthes and Eliot present other writers, as writers who take pieces of texts that they have engaged with before and recreate the stories in the way they wish to tell them. Like the original author, they are another perceiver of the tale, and so in a dialogic literary world, their interpretation of the

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[137] Julia Kristeva, 'The Bounded Text', in *Desire In Language: A Semiotic Approach To Literature And Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p.36.

[138] Julia Kristeva, 'The Bounded Text', in *Desire In Language: A Semiotic Approach To Literature And Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p.37.

[139] Julia Kristeva, 'The Bounded Text', in *Desire In Language: A Semiotic Approach To Literature And Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p.46.

[140] Roland Barthes, 'The Death Of The Author', in *Modern Criticism And Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), pp. 146-151 (p.149).

[141] Roland Barthes, 'The Death Of The Author', in *Modern Criticism And Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), pp. 146-151 (p.149).

[142] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition And The Individual Talent', *Perspecta*, 19 (1982), 36-42 (p.40), <https://doi.org/10.2307/1567048>

text holds just as much value as the original author's and leads to further expansions of the text through fanfiction.

Since key theorists such as Barthes, Bahktin, and Kristeva introduced terms such as Death of the Author, dialogism and the carnivalesque, and intertextuality, many scholars have related these concepts to fandom and fanfiction. Consideration of these scholars can emphasise the importance of viewing fanfiction as a subversive and dialogic mode of literature and consider what motivates fanfiction writers to subvert the traditional roles of author and reader. Firstly, Fiske's discussion of popular, 'producerly' texts provides a more updated understanding of why fans use pre-existing texts to aid in the creation of their own. Fiske discusses the 'writerly' and 'readerly' texts, describing a 'readerly' text as a text that 'invites an essentially passive, receptive, disciplined reader who tends to accept its meanings as already made' and a 'writerly' text as a text that 'challenges the reader constantly to rewrite it, to make sense out of it…and invites the reader to participate in the construction of meaning'.[143] [144] Bacon-Smith defined fanfiction as constituting a writerly text: 'ever changing, ever growing, ever entwining the creative lives of its writers.'[145] Indeed, fanfiction itself is always changing and growing, allowing fans to make sense out of the original text and construct new meanings. However, one could argue that not every reader of an original text will take on this active approach of creating fanfiction to interpret the original text's meaning; rather, most who engage with fiction do so in the passive, readerly fashion, and so a more neutral term that acknowledges both the active and passive approaches to engaging with fiction is needed. Fiske goes on to define the 'producerly' text, which 'has the accessibility of a readerly one…but it also has the openness

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[143] John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 2nd edn (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=958078> [Accessed 18 July 2022], p.83.

[144] John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 2nd edn (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=958078> [Accessed 18 July 2022], p.83.

[145] Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom And The Creation Of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p.67.

of the writerly.'[146] Fiske argues that a producerly text is a popular text that 'does not *require* this writerly activity' but still 'has loose ends that escape its control…its gaps are wide enough for whole new texts to be produced in them.'[147] In fan culture, these 'gaps' are often filled by fanfiction authors, as they craft their own scenes and stories to explore sections of the original text that they feel may have been neglected or remain uncharted. While audiences are not expected or actively encouraged to interpret and rewrite the texts, fans can still feel motivated to do so, adopting a 'writerly' approach to engaging with the text and so taking on a subversive authorial role.

Derecho is another scholar who makes use of existing literary concepts to present fanfiction as a subversive mode of literature, which allows fans to take on an authorial role by contributing to the intertextual web of ideas surrounding the original text. As discussed through Kristeva's ideas of intertextuality, 'the writer's interlocutor…is the writer himself, but as a reader of another text. The one who writes is the same as the one who reads.'[148] This implies that the writer exists not as an authoritative figure with ideas that are unique and original to their text alone, but as a figure that both writes and reads in a dialogue between and inspired by other texts. Derecho's concept of 'archontic' literature, however, presents fanfiction as a mode of literature that belongs a step beyond intertextuality. An archontic text is described by Derecho as a text that 'allows, or even invites, writers to enter it, select specific items they find useful, make new artifacts using those found objects, and deposit the newly made work back into the source text's archive.'[149] In contrast with the concept of intertextuality, which suggests

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[146] John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 2nd edn (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=958078> [Accessed 18 July 2022], p.83-84.

[147] John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 2nd edn (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=958078> [Accessed 18 July 2022], p.84.

[148] Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue And Novel', in *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), p.56.

[149] Abigail Derecho, 'Archontic Literature: A Definition, A History, And Several Theories Of Fanfiction', in *Fan Fiction And Fan Communities In The Age Of The Internet* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), p.65, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1784005> [Accessed 18 July 2022].

that the author is 'unconsciously under the sway of influences,'[150] the concept of archontic

literature acknowledges a clear relationship between the original text and the fanfiction

surrounding it. This is important to consider as the growth of social media allows the

relationship between fans and the creator of the original text to deepen. The archontic term

also doesn't present fanfiction as a lesser form of literature, unlike the terms 'derivative', which

'signifies a ranking of the two texts according to quality and classifies the secondary text as

the lesser one',[151] or 'appropriative', which 'connotes "taking" and can easily be inflected to

mean "thieving" or "stealing"'.[152] This consideration of the secondary texts not being viewed

as lesser relates to Kristeva's analysis of the carnivalesque, in which she laments that 'the

word 'carnivalesque'…generally connotes parody' in contemporary society,[153] meaning that

these secondary, carnivalesque texts like fanfiction are often looked down on as parodical,

comical, and therefore lesser. Kristeva argues that the carnivalesque 'is *serious'* as well as

'politically and socially disturbing.'[154] This sense of disturbance shouldn't be viewed as

frightening or unsettling; rather, these carnivalesque, archontic texts are simply disturbing and

subverting political and social norms. Indeed, Derecho viewed fanfiction as a 'genre that has

a long history of appealing to women and minorities, individuals on the cultural margins who

used archontic writing as a means to express not only their narrative creativity, but their

criticisms of social and political inequities as well.'[155] This updated consideration of fanfiction

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[150] Abigail Derecho, 'Archontic Literature: A Definition, A History, And Several Theories Of Fanfiction', in *Fan Fiction And Fan Communities In The Age Of The Internet* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), p.75, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1784005> [Accessed 18 July 2022].
[151] Abigail Derecho, 'Archontic Literature: A Definition, A History, And Several Theories Of Fanfiction', in *Fan Fiction And Fan Communities In The Age Of The Internet* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), p.64, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1784005> [Accessed 18 July 2022].
[152] Abigail Derecho, 'Archontic Literature: A Definition, A History, And Several Theories Of Fanfiction', in *Fan Fiction And Fan Communities In The Age Of The Internet* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), p.64, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1784005> [Accessed 18 July 2022].
[153] Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue And Novel', in *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), p.50.
[154] Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue And Novel"' in *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), p.52.
[155] Abigail Derecho, 'Archontic Literature: A Definition, A History, And Several Theories Of Fanfiction', in *Fan Fiction And Fan Communities In The Age Of The Internet* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), p.76,

as a by-product and example of archontic literature in action emphasises that fans can develop their own authorial voice when creating their texts and adding them to the archive. It also shows that the reasons for doing so are often subversive in motivation and that fanfiction writers and readers are often inspired to partake in the practice to disturb societal or literary norms that they would otherwise be restricted by.

2.2 – The Fanfiction Community in *Supernatural*

It is known that authors, among other things, define and create the plot, characters, and meaning of the story, however, as Death of the Author implies, the original author is not the dominant authority on the meaning of their text, nor should their intention deeply effect the reader's own interpretation. While fanfiction authors value the original canon, their interpretation of the text, and therefore the story they create, may not necessarily align with the author's original intentions. Despite this, it is important to remember that, with popular or published texts, there is still a desire to promote a product and make money, so while the fans can develop their own voice and subvert the original story through fanfiction, the original author's text is the product that gains the most attention from the general audience, and fanfiction authors may hold great appreciation for original authors who approve of the practice of fanfiction. With more and more authors speaking out in approval of fanfiction, does fanfiction remain a subversive mode of literature that rebels away from the original author's interpretation? To consider how fanfiction is being approved of by authors and original creators to both validate fanfiction and promote the original text, this section will consider fanboy auteurs, a concept used to describe author or creator figures who appear to gain the respect of their fanbase through their fan credentials. This allows for an understanding of how the approval of fanfiction from an author can encourage fan loyalty and validate fans who create their own stories. This section will also study the way the fanfiction community is represented

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<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1784005> [Accessed 18 July 2022].

through TV series *Supernatural.* A show with a large fandom and a clear, strong relationship with its fans, both inside and outside of the canon text, *Supernatural* is an interesting case study for the concept of authorship and fanfiction. This section will explore how the use of godlike author figures and fanfiction-writing characters within *Supernatural* encourages fans to make their own interpretations of text and challenge the voice of the original creator, considering whether fanfiction remains subversive with the approval from the original author. This section will also debate if fans hold respect for the power that the author may hold over how the story is told and received, or if the fans challenge this power and value their own stories and control over the text in their dialogic community, free from the author's influence.

Despite finding in the previous section that the author does not hold a dominant authority on how a story is interpreted, it cannot be argued that the author possesses no power over the story or how it is perceived by fans. Murray argues that, while the Internet has 'democratized' literary culture, it has also 'amplified traditional concepts of authorial genius;'[156] meaning that traditional published authors are revered by their readers as key figures in the understanding of the text, while the authors themselves develop a celebrity identity that is viewed as 'something to be professionally managed.'[157] In a clear reference to Barthes' Death of the Author, Murray suggests that 'authors are far from dead and have been, if anything, positively revived.'[158] Murray's argument can be explored in practice by assessing the work of Juliet Gardiner. Gardiner argues that, in the context of modern popular culture, the original author continues to have an essential role in the creation and spreading of the text. She suggests

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[156] Simone Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, And Selling Books In The Internet Era* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2018) <https://www.scribd.com/document/485003779/Simone-Murray-The-digital-literary-sphere-reading-writing-and-selling-books-in-the-Internet-era-Johns-Hopkins-University-Press-2018-pdf> [Accessed 19 July 2022], p.24.

[157] Simone Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, And Selling Books In The Internet Era* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2018) <https://www.scribd.com/document/485003779/Simone-Murray-The-digital-literary-sphere-reading-writing-and-selling-books-in-the-Internet-era-Johns-Hopkins-University-Press-2018-pdf> [Accessed 19 July 2022], p.24.

[158] Simone Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, And Selling Books In The Internet Era* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2018) <https://www.scribd.com/document/485003779/Simone-Murray-The-digital-literary-sphere-reading-writing-and-selling-books-in-the-Internet-era-Johns-Hopkins-University-Press-2018-pdf> [Accessed 19 July 2022], p.26.

that in modern popular media, 'the author not only writes the text, increasingly in various ways she or he speaks it, circulating its meaning through media interviews, reviews, [and] business reports.'[159] Gardiner argues that 'customer loyalty' develops from having an author who 'is the brand…[is] recognisable and built in as product recognition.'[160] Scott further suggests this through her analysis of the 'fanboy auteur', which she defines as 'a creator/figurehead of a transmedia franchise who attempts to navigate and break the conventional boundaries between producers and consumers. Fanboy auteurs are relatable because of their fan credentials.'[161] Scott argues that fanboy auteurs, even those who do not identify themselves as fanboys, have a 'close proximity to the fans with an understanding of their textual desires and practices,'[162] and therefore are 'better positioned to engender fans' trust, and thus has a greater potential to channel fan interpretation and participation into the text in ways that best suit the industry's financial and ideological interests.'[163] These analyses suggest that creators and authors who form a relationship with their fans and encourage their interests or acknowledge their interpretations of the text are more likely to gain the trust, respect, and control of their audience. This was a sentiment echoed by interviewees, such as Participant T, who stated, 'it's very validating and helpful when creators of what's considered real writing or real media […] will come out and say […] this is good, this is writing,' or Participant I, who

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[159] Juliet Gardiner, ''What Is An Author?' Contemporary Publishing Discourse And The Author Figure', in *Print Cultures: A Reader In Theory And Practice*, ed. by Caroline Davis, (London: Red Globe Press, 2019), pp. 71-77 (p.72), <https://www-vlebooks-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/Vleweb/Product/Index/2090577?page=0> [Accessed 29 October 2021].

[160] Juliet Gardiner, ''What Is An Author?' Contemporary Publishing Discourse And The Author Figure', in *Print Cultures: A Reader In Theory And Practice*, ed. by Caroline Davis, (London: Red Globe Press, 2019), pp. 71-77 (p.76), <https://www-vlebooks-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/Vleweb/Product/Index/2090577?page=0> [Accessed 29 October 2021].

[161] Suzanne Scott, 'Who's Steering The Mothership? The Role Of The Fanboy Auteur In Transmedia Storytelling', in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 43-52 (p.44), <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1024648> [Accessed 4 November 2021]

[162] Suzanne Scott, 'Who's Steering The Mothership? The Role Of The Fanboy Auteur In Transmedia Storytelling', in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 43-52 (p.44), <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1024648> [Accessed 4 November 2021]

[163] Suzanne Scott, 'Who's Steering The Mothership? The Role Of The Fanboy Auteur In Transmedia Storytelling', in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 43-52 (p.44) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1024648> [Accessed 4 November 2021]

said, 'it is very encouraging when the original team encourages it, [and] when it's not, I think it kills the passion.' Participant I went on to explain that 'being told that your passion and your creative vision for something is not permitted is kind of like saying you are not permitted, and so being rejected like that by the creative team definitely would put a damper on anybody. Having that validation […] just creates a much more welcoming and safe environment.' While Scott's interpretation of the fanboy auteur presents a figure whose vocal approval of fan practices like fanfiction is partially motivated by meeting the financial interests of the industry, the message that fanfiction authors seem to receive from such a practice is positive and encouraging to both their presence in the fandom and their fanfiction. This therefore implies that fanfiction is no longer as subversive, rebellious, or 'perilous'[164] as it used to be, and that some fanfiction writers view the original author not as a figure to rebel against, but as an ally of the fanfiction practice.

In recent years, it is not only individual fanboy auteur figures, but also whole creative teams, that have taken steps to encourage fan behaviours and practices, one example being the team behind TV show *Supernatural. Supernatural* is a cult television series that ran for fifteen seasons from 2005 to 2020 and focused on brothers Sam and Dean Winchester, who hunted and fought paranormal threats across the USA. Its creators were fully aware of the fan practices that occurred within its fandom, to the extent that such fan practices were often addressed, not only by the cast and crew of the show, but within the narrative of the show itself. *Supernatural* featured a recurring plot device within its narrative – during season 4, it was revealed that a prophet of God named Chuck Shurley had created a set of books, also named *Supernatural*, in which the episodes viewers watched on-screen were featured as a book series within the story. This addition allowed the show to create a fandom for their characters within its narrative, playing with the concepts of fan conventions, cosplaying, and fanfiction, but it also allowed for development of the story's key theme: that the characters

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[164] Gita Jackson, 'It Used To Be Perilous To Write Fanfiction', *Kotaku*, (2018) <https://kotaku.com/it-used-to-be-perilous-to-write-fanfiction-1826083509> [Accessed 10 October 2021].

could use their free will to confront and change their fates, which had been predestined by a godlike 'author' figure. Studying how the show presented author figures and fans of the *Supernatural* books can help to identify how *Supernatural* encouraged fans to interpret the show in their own way and even rebel against the storylines set by the show itself, particularly regarding the ending of the story, which has gained mixed reviews from fans since airing in 2020.

Previous research into *Supernatural* has identified that the show makes use of an 'Author-God'[165] figure in Chuck, who, while originally introduced as a prophet for God and author of the *Supernatural* books, was in season 5 hinted to be, and in season 11 revealed to be, God himself. However, even before Chuck was revealed to be God, *Supernatural* frequently played with the battle between a godlike, tyrannical author figure and its heroes, Sam and Dean. In a season 9 episode named 'Meta Fiction', Metatron, an angel, Heaven's scribe, and key antagonist in seasons 8 and 9, posed a question regarding text and meaning directly to the audience: 'What makes a story work? […] And who gives a story meaning? Is it the writer, or you?'[166] In the scene, he is sat with one of the *Supernatural* books, writing on a typewriter, presenting himself as the new Author-God figure in the absence of God himself, who not only the characters but also the audience are in direct competition with for gaining control of, and giving meaning to, the text. Wilkinson highlights that Metatron 'can be seen to represent both the show's and fandom's writers when he says, "When you create stories, you become gods…"' and acknowledges that 'he is later revealed to be a twisted, vengeful character.'[167] In the context of this narrative, Metatron seems more reflective of the show writers than fanfiction

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[165] Judith Fathallah, *Fanfiction And The Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), p.172, <https://web-s-ebscohost-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=098ce508-7479-4f1a-8241-6938f639732e%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=1593130&db=nlebk> [Accessed 5 December 2021].

[166] 'Meta Fiction', *Supernatural*, The CW, 15th April 2014, 20.00.

[167] Jules Wilkinson, 'The Epic Love Story Of *Supernatural* And Fanfic', in *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over The World* (Dallas: Smart Pop, 2013), 343-350 (p.350) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1531171&ppg=349> [Accessed 13 January 2022].

writers – Chuck disappeared in season 5, alongside show creator Eric Kripke, the Author-God who '[wrote] himself *out* of the text, to continue without him.'[168] His efforts to overtake the writing of the *Supernatural* books infers that Metatron represents showrunners that took control in the remaining seasons. What is notable about Metatron's inclusion as an in-text representation of the writers and as a villain is that the audience is positioned to root against him. *Supernatural* is a series in which free will of the characters is championed over their predestined fates, to the extent where their primary goal within season 5 of the story is to prevent the apocalypse, which they are destined to have key roles in causing. Dean and his friend, angel Castiel, are seen actively rejecting their destiny and Chuck's books, his prophecies, in the season 4 finale:

> *Chuck: "You guys aren't supposed to be there. You're not in this story."*
>
> *Castiel: "Yeah, well, we're making it up as we go."[169]*

As the early seasons presented the *Supernatural* books as a dark fate that the brothers and their allies had to fight to defy, Metatron introduces himself as a key antagonist for the brothers when he decides to take control of writing the books in later seasons. However, in speaking directly to the audience in the season 9 scene, Metatron is also challenging the audience, for control over the story, the interpretations, and the fates of our protagonists. This discussion arising within the narrative itself encourages fanfiction writers to rebel against the boundaries of the text, just as the protagonists aim to battle against the fates preordained by a villainous, tyrannical character.

Fans of the *Supernatural* books and fanfiction authors are also portrayed within the text, with varying representations that both poke fun at and validate the real-life fans of the show.

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[168] Judith Fathallah, *Fanfiction And The Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), p.166, <https://web-s-ebscohost-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=098ce508-7479-4f1a-8241-6938f639732e%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=1593130&db=nlebk> [Accessed 5 December 2021].
[169] 'Lucifer Rising', *Supernatural,* The CW, 14th May 2009, 20.00.

Fathallah highlights Becky, a character who is freakishly obsessed with the brothers in early seasons, as an example of 'fan-tagonism' which 'supposedly de-legitimates certain kinds of fandom…by exposing, exaggerating and shaming.'[170] When Becky is first shown writing an incestuous fanfiction between Sam and Dean, she is a caricature of fandom, designed to be looked down on or discouraged for its presentation of morally transgressive fanfiction stories. Later representations of fanfiction writers are more positive, such as Marie, who, in the 200th episode of the show, writes a high school musical based on the *Supernatural* books. The musical is parodical in its essence, from the references to popular ships[171] to the songs that pay homage to fan-favourite moments, such as 'A Single Man Tear' which references the show's use of 'childhood trauma and…daddy issues.'[172] These themes lead to many emotional moments for the characters, which Wilkinson references when describing *Supernatural* as 'a show made for fanfic.'[173] When Dean raises concerns about these elements of Marie's play, he is met with the assurance of 'Well, this is Marie's interpretation.'[174] Fathallah notes that Dean 'is scornful' when he meets a fan creating her own interpretation of his life, but 'by the end of the episode…he has changed his tune.'[175] Indeed, Dean comes to accept fan Marie's interpretation of the books based on his life when, after working together to defeat a monster

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[170] Judith Fathallah, *Fanfiction And The Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), p.14, <https://web-s-ebscohost-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=098ce508-7479-4f1a-8241-6938f639732e%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=1593130&db=nlebk> [Accessed 5 December 2021].

[171] 'Ship' is a concept used to define the state of two or more individuals, fictional or otherwise, in a relationship, which is typically romantic. The individuals in these 'ships' are not always represented as romantic within the original piece of media or, when referring to real people, in real life.

[172] Jules Wilkinson, 'The Epic Love Story Of *Supernatural* And Fanfic', in *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over The World* (Dallas: Smart Pop, 2013), 343-350 (p.343) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1531171&ppg=349> [Accessed 13 January 2022].

[173] Jules Wilkinson, "The Epic Love Story Of *Supernatural* And Fanfic", in *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over The World* (Dallas: Smart Pop, 2013), 343-250 (p.343) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1531171&ppg=349> [Accessed 13 January 2022].

[174] 'Fan Fiction', *Supernatural,* The CW, 11th November 2014, 20.00.

[175] Judith Fathallah, *Fanfiction And The Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), p.167, <https://web-s-ebscohost-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=098ce508-7479-4f1a-8241-6938f639732e%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=1593130&db=nlebk> [Accessed 5 December 2021].

attacking the high school, he tells Marie, 'I have my version, and you have yours,'[176] assuring

fans that fanfiction and transformative works are very much encouraged by the creative team.

Scott highlights that 'when an author is involved in (or publicly approves) an extension of the

transmedia story, it creates greater emotional investment for audiences,'[177] suggesting that

this approval from the author validates extensions like fanfiction as a practice in the eyes of

fans. With greater emotional investment, fans may be more inspired to discuss their own

interpretations and make their own fanfiction. A *Supernatural* fan interviewed, Participant O,

approved of *Supernatural*'s involvement and approval of fanfiction in its narrative: 'I like that

they acknowledge that this is a by-product of the show that they have created…they have

inspired people.' *Supernatural's* use of the books has succeeded in encouraging fan voices

and interpretations, answering Metatron's question that: while the writer can give the story

meaning, so can the story's fans.

This chapter has thus far explored how *Supernatural* makes use of the books within its

narrative to represent its fans positively in later seasons and its authors as tyrannical, almost

encouraging fans to freely rebel and change the text if they wish. However, it is worth

considering that Metatron isn't our key Author-God figure, and that Chuck, the true 'God' or

'fanboy auteur' of the narrative, is also tyrannical, but now is less aware of his fans' desires

and interpretations. Fathallah's analysis of authorship and *Supernatural*, while extremely

thorough, was released in 2017 and therefore could not explore the final few years of the

show, which provide some of the most vital pieces of *Supernatural's* relationship with

authorship and their fans' interpretations of their text, both within and outside of the narrative.

Chuck acts as the major antagonist in the show's final season, once again showing the

audience a battle between a tyrannical author figure and our protagonists, whose desire to

challenge their cruel, prewritten fates remains an important theme. An interesting reflection of

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[176] 'Fan Fiction', *Supernatural,* The CW, 11th November 2014, 20.00.
[177] Scott, Suzanne, 'Who's Steering The Mothership? The Role Of The Fanboy Auteur In Transmedia Storytelling', in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 43-52 (p.45) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1024648> [Accessed 4 November 2021].

the perceived relationship between the author and fans appears in season 15, episode 4, where the Author-God character Chuck and the *Supernatural* fangirl, Becky (now portrayed more positively than in earlier seasons), discuss Chuck's plans for his next book. Since Chuck's books are shown to be prophetic, it is expected that Chuck's planned ending will happen for the 'real' characters too. At first, Becky seems pleased by the plans, even 'inspired…[to] jump in and get back to my own work,'[178] hinting at Becky's own past as a fanfiction writer, showing the typical experience of fan being inspired by an author's original text. Becky's main critique is that the danger feels 'thin, low stakes,' that 'these villains are just not feeling very dangerous,'[179] and that the story appears to be lacking originality. The viewer see Chuck's expression change from pride to anger and as Becky goes on, the sinister sound of strings begins, warning the audience of Chuck's shift to a villainous role in the Winchesters' lives. Consequently, Chuck crafts a darker ending for the brothers, one that Becky immediately expresses horror at: 'It's so dark…it's hopeless. You can't do this to the fans. What you did to Dean, what you did to Sam…'[180] Becky expresses disgust that one may have come to expect from fans when reacting to seeing their favourite fictional characters mistreated. Moreover, since Becky is not only a fan of the *Supernatural* books, but has also met the 'real' Sam and Dean within the show's narrative, she sees the brothers as 'real' people with complex emotions and who she doesn't wish to see suffer a cruel fate, which Chapter 1 considered as typical of fanfiction writers. Interestingly, the writers represent the author figure as far colder than his fan, even declaring 'fans are gonna love it,'[181] showing he is out of touch since Becky, the representative of his fandom, reacts so negatively. Chuck concludes by snapping his fingers to zap both Becky and her family from existence, stating 'I can do anything, I'm a writer.'[182] This scene positions fans and authors in opposite roles, portraying the fans as kind, empathetic, and hopeful, while the author is presented as cruel, villainous, and controlling. In

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[178] 'Atomic Monsters', *Supernatural*, The CW, 7th November 2019, 20.00.
[179] 'Atomic Monsters', *Supernatural*, The CW, 7th November 2019, 20.00.
[180] 'Atomic Monsters', *Supernatural*, The CW, 7th November 2019, 20.00.
[181] 'Atomic Monsters', *Supernatural*, The CW, 7th November 2019, 20.00.
[182] 'Atomic Monsters', *Supernatural*, The CW, 7th November 2019, 20.00.

snapping Becky out of existence, Chuck is presented as an author who, despite his desire to appeal to his fanbase, will ignore the feedback from his fans and only values his own telling of the story.

Overall, *Supernatural* makes use of fanfiction writers within its story to encourage the practice and validate its fans and appears to dismiss the tyrannical Author-God figure, implying that the *Supernatural* creative team take the 'side' of the fans, encourage their free interpretation and free will in challenging the original text. Scott describes these supportive creative figures as 'tasked with steering the mothership [and] reinforcing the centrality of the mothership.'[183] From this interpretation, one may think that these authorial figures gain little to no criticism or subversion by their fans, however, Scott also highlights that 'in some cases, fans will openly question and critique the fanboy auteur's control over the transmedia narrative through their own textual production.'[184] This thesis has considered how fans may subvert or challenge the original text through their own fanfiction, and this is often attempted through 'fix-it fics', fanfiction that is specifically written to fix an issue that the fanfiction author has with the original text. It is worth mentioning that interviewees expressed mixed opinions on fix-it fics. Some fans may view the original author as the key voice and respect the canon, while others will reject the original text if they disapprove. Participant A felt disappointment for the author of Japanese manga *Attack on Titan* when fans disapproved of its ending and made their own alternative version: 'I felt really bad for him […] people are literally going around calling [a popular fix-it fanfiction] the better ending.' Alternatively, Participant C discussed his use of the fix-it genre to amend problems he had with the ending of cartoon *Voltron: Legendary Defender:* 'that's one of the reasons why I'm writing this big, long story, because I just didn't like the

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[183] Scott, Suzanne, 'Who's Steering The Mothership? The Role Of The Fanboy Auteur In Transmedia Storytelling', in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 43-52 (p.46) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1024648> [Accessed 4 November 2021]

[184] Scott, Suzanne, "Who's Steering The Mothership? The Role Of The Fanboy Auteur In Transmedia Storytelling", in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 43-52 (p.49) <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/lib/brookes/reader.action?docID=1024648> [Accessed 4 November 2021]

ending.' These responses show that there is no clear belief among fanfiction writers whether fanfiction should be freely used to criticise and completely change how a text has been written by its original author. *Supernatural* is one example of a text that faced negative attention for its ending, however this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, to link the use of fix-it fics to fanfiction writer's desire to represent marginalised groups in their work.

2.3 – *The Fandom* by Anna Day

This next section turns to the novel *The Fandom* by Anna Day, a novel that tells the story of Violet and her friends, fans of a popular book series who are sucked into the universe of their favourite story and are set with the task of seeing the story through to its established, canon conclusion, after accidentally causing the premature death of the story's original protagonist, Rose. The world Violet and her friends are drawn into divides humanity into two factions – the 'Gems', genetically-enhanced, perfect superhumans who have taken control of the world, and the 'Imps', the remaining regular humans who, oppressed and enslaved by the Gems, plan to rebel. This premise ties superficially to the popular fanfiction trope of the 'self-insert,' where fans write themselves into their favourite stories and interact with the characters. However, the novel raises fascinating questions about the importance of the canon to a fandom, fans' relationship with the original text and author, and the role fanfiction and fandom plays in defining and challenging a story. This final section of Chapter 2 will explore how a traditionally published young adult novel presents the fanfiction practice and community as subversive in the way that fans can feel empathy for characters within a narrative and how this empathy inspires the decision to subvert and develop the narrative beyond the restrictions of the world the original author created.

This research has thus far considered how fans will sometimes rebel against or subvert the original story, but have also kept in mind that elements of the canon text remain important to fans as well. This is something that is visible throughout *The Fandom,* as, when Violet and her

friends are sucked into their favourite book, *The Gallows Dance,* they are told by a prophet named Baba, who is aware that she is a character in a story, that that the only way they can return home is by re-enacting the story themselves, keeping strictly to canon events and not deviating at all. Violet agrees to assume Rose's role in the story, aware that the story will involve her falling in love with a Gem and facing certain death, and decides to adhere to the canon as strictly as she can. However, as she begins to grow close to characters within the story, she finds herself falling for Ash, an Imp who, in canon, is merely a side character, as well as desiring to play more of a role in the Imps' revolution against their Gem oppressors. The canon itself is anthropomorphised, which makes it appear like a living creature with goals, expectations, and desires. More than once, the 'canon' is said to be desiring its own conclusion – 'Baba told me that the story wants to unfold'[185] – or is often described with active, personifying verbs – 'the canon… [is] pulling you back in, dragging you along.'[186] Within the story, the author of *The Gallow's Dance,* Sally King, is dead, however the canon of her story remains alive. In anthropomorphising the canon and showing it has desires that tie to maintaining the fixed story, it is made clear that Sally King's telling of her text remains in control. Despite this, as the story progresses, Violet and her friends begin to break out of the roles set for them by the canon and create their own version of the story, in a similar way to how fanfiction authors may craft their own narratives around pre-existing material. Rather than the canon story being the strict rules that must be adhered to, it becomes more like a guideline, an optional path for the protagonists to follow.

As their path begins to stray from the strict guidelines of the canon, readers see Violet's faith in Baba's plan starts to waver, and she claims that the woman 'may have lost the plot.'[187] The wordplay hints at Baba's insanity, but the use of the term 'plot' specifically shows that the canon itself has been 'lost' due to Violet and her friends' intervention in the story. Violet herself laments about her dilemma and the difficulties she faces with sticking with the canon, claiming

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[185] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.125.
[186] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.110.
[187] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.194.

that 'I used to cling to the script, to predictability, but now it feels like someone is ripping me down the middle.'[188] Both the use of 'script' and 'ripping' connote the idea of 'ripping the script', or tearing apart the plans, showing that Violet is torn between adhering to the plot, as strictly laid out by Sally King, and the desires and hopes she finds while interacting with her favourite story.

The last few chapters of the story reveal a fascinating development in terms of the nature of storytelling, of canon, and of the power both the author and the fanfiction community hold over bringing a story to life. When readers meet the president of the Gem society, he reveals that he, like Baba, is conscious of the fact that he and his people live in a book. As Sally King's story is linear, with a distinct beginning and end, he and his people are 'trapped in a loop, in a cycle, unable to break free,'[189] as, once the linear story is over, it repeats again continuously. Desiring to break free from the loop, the president wishes for a sequel to be written to extend his story and, while she was alive, decided to speak to Sally King to convince her to write another book. When she dies, his plan is disrupted, until fanfiction writers like Violet's friend Alice, begin to write fanfiction on *The Gallow's Dance*. The president says, 'thanks to [Alice], a new Fandom grew, holding the promise of a new story, an existence beyond this eternal loop…we began noticing tiny changes in canon.'[190] Alice's power as a fanfiction writer to add to the story and change aspects of canon highlights the ability that fanfiction and fandom holds in changing perceptions of a story, expanding the canon beyond the author's original vision, and bringing the fictional characters 'to life', particularly as, within *The Fandom,* this happens in a very literal way.

While Violet is our protagonist and a key representative for fandom's adaptation and alteration of canon, her best friend Alice stands as the representative for fanfiction writers, and through her this research can interpret how the fanfiction community affect the way a story is

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[188] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.238.
[189] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.366.
[190] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.369.

perceived. Alice is established as popular, beautiful, and a 'rising fanfic star'[191] from the beginning, though the way her fanfic writing is described makes writing fanfiction seem manipulative and controlling. Violet describes Alice as 'messing with the plot, making the character bend to her will,'[192] and 'accomplished at getting people to do what she wants in real life.'[193] This interpretation of a fanfiction writer is atypical, different from the shy, awkward, geeky characters represented in novels such as *Ship It* by Britta Lundin, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Initially feeling at home amongst the Gems due to her beauty, Alice ultimately chooses to help her friends complete the canon and return home. The canon story is due to be completed after the lead Gem character Willow confesses his love for protagonist Rose, leading to Rose's death and sparking a revolution. However, with Violet set to be killed in Rose's place, Alice speaks up at the execution instead, '[quoting] the canon almost word for word, sticking to the script for the first time ever.'[194] While Alice's decision to stick to the canon appears at first as her giving in to the order and control of the original author's vision, her decision to take control of the situation herself, as opposed to, for example, prompting Willow to do something, reflects a fanfiction author's behaviour of actively taking control of the story. In taking charge of the narrative and using her authorial voice, Alice facilitates the Imps' revolution.

Throughout the story, Violet finds herself connecting with characters that she does not expect to connect to, particularly due to the empathy she develops for them when living alongside them and experiencing their oppression. Remembering previous discussions about empathy in Chapter 1, it is visible that Violet's empathy and intimacy with the text is a motivator in her ultimate decision to tackle the canon differently, and battle in the Imps' revolution, while, in the original story, Rose hides away. The clearest example of a connection that she makes is with Ash, a character that is viewed in the canon as a 'Buttons'[195] archetype, 'a little dweeb who

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[191] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.368.

[192] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.12.

[193] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.12.

[194] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.390.

[195] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.204.

follows [Rose] around looking lost and in love.'[196] Buttons is a reference to the Cinderella fairy-tale and pantomime traditions, a character who is typically played as a sidekick or comic relief in 'canon' representations of the Cinderella story. In describing Ash in this way, Violet's brother Nate makes Ash's predetermined role in the canon story clear. However, upon spending time getting to know Ash deeper than the surface level character he is portrayed as in the original canon, Violet is defiant in her description of how she sees him – 'You're thinking of Ash from canon. My Ash is completely different.'[197] Violet has built a clearer mental model of who Ash is, to the point where she is able to view him as a living being and defines a clear line between the 'canon' Ash and 'my Ash', the Ash she has interacted with. This difference between canon and fan interpretations is seen regularly within the fanfiction community. Participant M expressed a similar sentiment when discussing elements of her favourite stories that she does not enjoy or agree with – 'that might be canon in the literal sense of the word, but it's not my canon.' Once again, the possessive use of 'my' is vital, as it separates the written canon from the mental model an individual accepts. This concept emphasises that stories can have different 'layers' or levels of canon, that people accept or reject depending on how they see the stories, what characters they connect to, and so on. Indeed, the close relationship Violet builds with Ash allows her to desire change for him in the story, so much so that she takes an active role in doing so. After returning home at the end of the story, though without her memories of her time in *The Gallow's Dance*, Violet and Alice decide to make Ash the protagonist of their sequel fanfiction – 'I knew immediately [the protagonist] had to be the puppy – Ash. Because a puppy can only get bigger.'[198] The description of Ash as a 'puppy' is often used throughout the book in the same way that 'Buttons' is, to belittle him and cast him to the side. However, in this instance, Violet is reclaiming this metaphor to emphasise her belief that, as a character, Ash has room for growth and requires attention not granted to him before to develop the existing mental model for him. Participant S addresses this same idea,

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[196] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.204.
[197] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.204.
[198] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.398.

claiming that 'some characters…you get close to them. Yeah, and you give them sometimes their character arcs or the redemption arcs that you wish they'd been given and that they deserve.' Overall, Violet's relationship with Ash in the story provides a clear mirror for the closeness fans develop with characters and the extended mental models they create, as well as the idea that this closeness to characters leads to a feeling that a character has been mistreated or misrepresented and a desire to take a proactive role in treating a character 'properly' or 'with respect.'[199] It represents a rebellion against the original author and text, as fans feel that they can take on the authorial role themselves and establish their own version of the story in order to represent characters in a way they believe is justified.

Violet's relationship with Ash is not the only instance of her developing a better understanding of a character and wanting to make an active change in the characters' lives, challenging or extending the author's original vision. Violet's experiences within the story allow her to see the characters and the world from the inside, and, given that empathy, even finds herself often critiquing both Sally King's writing and the behaviours of the original protagonist, Rose, who she has replaced in the story. One of Violet's first criticisms addresses Sally King directly – 'It was a rubbish first kiss scene anyway…come on Sally, sort it out.'[200] She begins by critiquing the tale in a rather superficial way, the way fans may colloquially discuss the stories they like, emphasised by the casual way she calls the author by her first name. However, as the story goes on, Violet becomes more engrossed in the tale, more empathetic with its characters, and therefore more willing to criticise elements and desire a better world for the people of the story. As Violet and her friends get to know and spend time with the Imps, Violet is able to experience the discrimination they face first-hand and to empathise with the characters' situations. She takes an active role in helping the Imps' rebellion rather than focusing on the canon story's central romance with Willow, which she has been told is the only way to return her and her friends home. She makes her empathy for the Imps clear when she establishes an 'us and

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[199] Participant O.
[200] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.180.

them' dynamic between herself and the Gems – 'they live upstairs, we live downstairs. They stole our beautiful Georgian halls,'[201] – defining herself as an Imp early on by identifying that the Imp world is 'our' world, which she sees as having been stolen. As the story goes on, she is able to evaluate the original love story, stating, 'when I think of the canon, of Rose and Willow running through the sewers, just skulking away to the river, I feel a sense of pride that I chose to help."[202] Rather than a superficial critique of a kiss scene, Violet is now critiquing Sally King for not focusing enough on the Imps' rebellion, because she has been able to empathise with them and become a part of their world. She compares the pettiness of the romance story with her own active actions and desires to help, and feels proud that she has taken this active approach and changed the story for, as she sees it, the better. She also no longer only cares for the main characters, expressed when she states, 'I can't believe I ever thought of [other characters] as extras…their fight for freedom…seems so much bigger.'[203] Violet's progression through the story and her desire to fight for the Imps' freedom reflects the experience of many fanfiction writers, of seeing 'more potential in these characters and situations than met the eye of their original creators.'[204] Participant N similarly believed that fanfiction writers 'read into [the characters] in a way that maybe the creators hadn't intended or hadn't imagined would.' With her chance to take an active role in the story like a fanfiction writer, Violet uses her autonomy, her authorial voice, to strive for a better ending for the Imps that she now empathises with, viewing them as 'real and human'[205] and trying to challenge the canon she has been told to re-enact. The narrative of *The Fandom* shows that a fanfiction writers' high levels of empathy for fictional characters. established in Chapter 1, often leads directly to their desire to develop autonomy in their authorial voice and critique and challenge the original canon in their fanfiction.

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[201] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.166.
[202] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.304.
[203] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.311.
[204] Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre* (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), p.21.
[205] Anna Day, *The Fandom* (Somerset: Chicken House, 2018), p.182.

This chapter has explored the ways that fanfiction subverts the modern definition of an author, through theories that challenge the authority of a single author voice and one defined 'truth' or meaning to a text. The chapter considered how fanboy auteurs may encourage transformative fan practices and linked this relationship between fans and authors to popular series *Supernatural. The Fandom* was used to explore how fanfiction writers make use of fanfiction to interpret and rebel against the canon set by an authorial figure, inspired by their empathy for fictional characters. Both *The* Fandom and *Supernatural* showed how fanfiction is being represented by professional texts as subversive, but also how published, professional media is beginning to encourage the medium of fanfiction. As mentioned before, it is worth noting that *Supernatural* has faced criticism for its ending in the past, particularly regarding its representation of queer characters, which has led to the creation of many 'fix-it' fics that have subverted and challenged the canon conclusion. The next chapter will explore the representation of minority characters in both traditional media and in fanfiction, and consider whether fanfiction, as a subversive mode of literature, facilitates a space through which fans can represent groups that they feel are underrepresented in professional media.

Chapter 3 – Representation

Previous chapters discussed fanfiction writers and readers in relation to key themes such as authorship and readers discovering their own authorial voice as writers, empathy and the emotional connection of fans to fictional characters or scenarios, and the community that builds around fanfiction. Each of these concepts is important when considering this thesis in relation to representation in literature and media, particularly when questioning why some fanfiction writers may make use of characters from minority groups in their work. Activism has historically, and continues to, call literature and the media to action in representing minority groups more visibly and positively, to allow these groups to 'discover themselves in a world that otherwise denies their very existence.'[206] This has been motivated by the belief that up until recent years, representation of anything beyond the expected 'norm' of white, straight, cisgender, able-bodied, and so on, has been minimal, when focusing on western media. This chapter will explore how traditional media and fanfiction tackle the issue of representation of minority groups, focusing on the LGBTQ+ community and queer theory. When discussing fanfiction and minority groups, the LGBTQ+ community is the clearest example of how fanfiction attempts to subvert and surpass the traditional norm of diversity representation in published media such as literature, films, and television. This is primarily because slash fanfiction (or fanfiction featuring romantic and sexual relationships between two men) is often popular within the fanfiction community, which initially suggests that fandom culture is 'a good place to feel more accepted'[207] if you are an LGBTQ+ individual. This chapter will contextualise how published, traditional media currently presents LGBTQ+ characters by analysing recent statistics on the matter, as well as looking to the final season of TV show *Supernatural*, where the presentation of a main character as queer was met with mixed reception from fans.[208] Two

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[206]Tyler Bradway and E. L McCallum, *After Queer Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p.10.
[207] Quotation from Participant T, though many participants echoed a similar sentiment.
[208] 'Queer' in this statement, and throughout the chapter, is used to describe a sexuality that does not correspond with the established idea of the heterosexual norm.

case studies of young adult fiction that are based on or around the concept of fanfiction or fandom will be used to highlight the desire for queer representation in media, particularly through the lens of queer theory. The first text, *Ship It,* features the story of a teenage fangirl who hopes to convince the head writer of her favourite show to make the main queer ship 'canon,' addressing issues such as 'queerbaiting' and the debate of a lack of diverse characters in popular media. The second text, *Carry On,* is a spin-off of Rainbow Rowell's novel *Fangirl* and is a clear mirror to the *Harry Potter* franchise. *Carry On* makes use of similar tropes as the *Harry Potter* series, yet its strong 'otherness' is used to challenge the marginalisation of queer narratives in mainstream texts. Overall, each of these case studies show fanfiction as a subversive medium through which queer stories are encouraged and negative presentations of queer themes are criticised.

3.1. Representation in Fanfiction and Traditional Media

Throughout this thesis, the fanfiction community has been established as subversive, as some members use fanfiction to take elements of the original story and adapt or alter the canon to their own desires and interpretations. Similarly, queer theory has a history of taking what is considered 'normal' or 'acceptable' and twisting it, changing it, or reading into the subtext of what is presented to interpret texts as anything other than the norm: 'to queer is to distance oneself from norms, and to embrace that distance.'[209] Early queer theory scholars identified that 'compulsory heterosexuality' dominates our society, that culture is constructed to enforce that the only 'normal' sexual relationship exists between a man and a woman, and that any subversion of this norm is deviant or transgressive. The term was popularized by Rich, who identified that 'the ideology of heterosexual romance, beamed at [a woman] from childhood out of fairy tales, television, films…is a tool.'[210] Rich claims that this compulsory

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[209] Tyler Bradway and E. L McCallum, *After Queer Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p.3.
[210] Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality And Lesbian Existence', *Signs: Journal Of Women In Culture And Society*, 5.4 (1980), 631-660 (p.645) <https://doi.org/10.1086/493756>

heterosexuality is used to control women and position men as the dominant power in society. Recent assessments identify that Rich's essay 'focused on compulsory heterosexuality as it related to *women's* experience'[211] and argue that 'queer theory encourages us to think about the ways that compulsory heterosexuality is imposed upon people of *all* genders.'[212] Therefore, while the importance of women in fanfiction is acknowledged, this chapter will not simply focus on the female, queer experience. Rich identified that one way that heterosexuality is enforced is through television, films, and other media and stories, such as fairy tales, that typically establish heterosexuality as the default. Any alternate sexuality, on the other hand, has in the past and continues to be erased or discouraged through negative representation. Ng identifies that 'a disproportionate number of queer characters continue to meet untimely ends,'[213] which she describes as 'a residue of the Hays Code's stipulation that homosexuality could be depicted only in an unappealing or negative fashion.'[214] The Hays Code was established by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America as a 'self-imposed industry set of guidelines for all the motion pictures that were released between 1934 and 1968.'[215] It forbade the representation of 'sex perversion or any inference to it,'[216] meaning that queer characters were either excluded from films or only represented as a queer-coded villain, therefore presenting such 'perversion' as immoral. By drawing attention to large numbers of queer characters that are killed in media, Ng suggests that decades later, traditional western media continues to present queer characters negatively due to this code. It is widely believed in queer theory that 'a lack of representation on television becomes a problem if not handled

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[211] Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now* (London: Red Globe Press, 2020), p.66.

[212] Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now* (London: Red Globe Press, 2020), p.66.

[213] Eve Ng, 'Between Text, Paratext, And Context: Queerbaiting And The Contemporary Media Landscape', *Transformative Works And Cultures*, 24 (2017), 1-25 (p.4) <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2017.0917>

[214] Eve Ng, 'Between Text, Paratext, And Context: Queerbaiting And The Contemporary Media Landscape', *Transformative Works And Cultures*, 24 (2017), 1-25 (p.4) <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2017.0917>

[215] Maria Lewis, 'Early Hollywood and the Hays Code', *ACMI,* 14 January 2021, <https://www.acmi.net.au/stories-and-ideas/early-hollywood-and-hays-code/> [Accessed 28 January 2022].

[216] Andreas Babiolakis, 'Film History: Motion Picture Production Code', *FilmsFatale.Com*, 17 June 2020, <https://www.filmsfatale.com/blog/2020/6/16/film-history-motion-picture-production-code> [Accessed 28 January 2022].

with care,'[217] as 'LGBTQ fans and their identities also become marginalized, causing a misrepresentation for understanding themselves and others.'[218] This history of both presenting the heterosexual identity as the only 'normal' human experience of sexuality, and presenting queer characters in negative or minimal roles, has caused queer theorists to encourage the representation of the queer community in literature and media.

In previous decades, where queer representation has been recovering from dismissive ideologies such as those established by the Hays Code, fanfiction provided a safe space for this ignored community. Many interviewees for this thesis both praised the fanfiction community for largely operating as a welcoming space and believed that the high level of representation in fanfiction was positive for the LGBTQ+ community. Participant C suggested that 'when the larger media companies were a bit less open-minded about representing those characters, it was down to the people who were consuming [media], but who are of [a marginalised] community, […] to create their own stories.' Participant O similarly stated that to achieve representation for her sexuality, she could use fanfiction to 'either make characters that fit my ideal or I can squint and see all these might be like me […] they're not queer in canon, but I'm going to make them gay.' These responses show that when faced with a lack of representation in media, queer fans may reinterpret pre-existing characters by writing or reading fanfiction in which those characters are given queer identities. Despite the use of fanfiction to interpret characters as LGBTQ+, participants still expressed a desire to see these identities represented in professional media. When discussing prevalent heterosexuality in the media, Participant F argued that 'it's damaging to pretend like this is what normal is when this is not what normal is for many of us, and the more you talk to people, everybody's just pretending to be what normal is on TV.' Queer and ally fanfiction writers discuss wishing to

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[217] Erin B. Waggoner, 'Bury Your Gays And Social Media Fan Response: Television, LGBTQ Representation, And Communitarian Ethics', *Journal Of Homosexuality*, 65.13 (2018), 1877-1891 (p.1878-1879) <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2017.1391015>
[218] Erin B. Waggoner, 'Bury Your Gays And Social Media Fan Response: Television, LGBTQ Representation, And Communitarian Ethics', *Journal Of Homosexuality*, 65.13 (2018), 1877-1891 (p.1879) <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2017.1391015>

see queer characters represented in media, as it allows queer audiences to find themselves represented and empathise with characters like them, as well as portraying LGBTQ+ identities as valid to outsiders. So, in previous years, where representation for LGBTQ+ identities may have been minimal in professional media, fanfiction has acted for many as a method to challenge and subvert the 'norm'.

To argue whether the representation of LGBTQ+ characters in fanfiction challenges or surpasses representation in traditional literature or media, researchers should consider what the portrayal of queer characters is like in most recent traditional media, both through the numbers being represented and the quality of their representation. Throughout the last decade in particular, the numbers of LGBTQ+ characters on television and film have significantly increased. In GLAAD's Where We Are On TV report of 2010-2011, GLAAD estimated that 3.9% of scripted series regular characters in that year of broadcasted television were within the LGBTQ+ community.[219] Ten years later, in the 2020-2021 report, that number has risen to 9.1%,[220] showing a clear growth in the number of LGBTQ+ characters that are presented on television. GLAAD's 2020-2021 report also suggests that the quality of representation is steadily improving as well: 'A majority of respondents (68 percent) said they had watched a show or film that gave them a better understanding of the LGBTQ+ community, and, among LGBTQ+ respondents, 87 percent feel that film and TV more accurately reflect the LGBTQ+ community now than just two years ago.'[221] Within interviews for this thesis, some participants were happy with the presentation of LGBTQ+ characters in the media: Participant C believed that 'big studios and TV companies, they're starting to take notice…there's a wider world out there and these people want to see themselves in the media.' Therefore, before moving on to

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[219] GLAAD, 'Where We Are On TV Report: 2010 - 2011 Season', *GLAAD*, (2011) <https://www.glaad.org/publications/tvreport10> [Accessed 7 December 2021].
[220] GLAAD Media Institute, *Where Are We On TV: 2020-2021*, Where Are We On TV (GLAAD Media Institute, 2021) https://www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/GLAAD%20-%20202021%20WHERE%20WE%20ARE%20ON%20TV.pdf, p.7, [Accessed 7 December 2021].
[221] GLAAD Media Institute, *Where Are We On TV: 2020-2021*, Where Are We On TV (GLAAD Media Institute, 2021) https://www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/GLAAD%20-%20202021%20WHERE%20WE%20ARE%20ON%20TV.pdf, p.4, [Accessed 7 December 2021].

assessing the detailed representation of these characters, it is worth specifying that representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in traditional media has improved within recent years, disrupting Rich's concept of 'compulsory heterosexuality' in media by allowing for the representation of other sexualities in a positive light. However, when compared to the representation of LGBTQ+ characters in fanfiction, there is a stark clarity that, most notably, gay men are presented more in fanfiction than in traditional media. Looking at a page identifying the top 'ships' of all time on AO3, or the one hundred ships with the most works written about them, male slash ships dominate the list at 69%, with 17% heterosexual-presenting ships and only 4% 'femslash.'[222] [223] It is important to note here that this list of popular ships was made by identifying how many fanfics feature these ships in the 'tags', which are hyperlinks used to easily categorise fanfics on AO3. This doesn't always guarantee that the ship is central to the fanfiction, nor that they are represented in a positive light in comparison to how the LGBTQ+ community is represented in traditional, published media. These numbers also, unfortunately, cannot highlight characters that are represented as bisexual, transgender, or any other identity within the queer community. Nevertheless, these numbers reveal that, across this popular fanfiction website, the representation of gay male relationships makes up the majority of content created.

Despite an improving percentage of representation for the LGBTQ+ community in professional media such as television or film, as suggested by the assessment from GLAAD, scholars argue that 'it would be premature to declare' that such media outlets are positively representing queer characters, as 'media visibility does not necessarily translate to positive portrayals.'[224] Indeed, while participants of GLAAD's study believed that the quality of representation was improving, criticisms are still voiced regarding traditional media and its

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[222] centreoftheselights, 'AO3 Ship Stats 2021 - Chapter 1', *Archiveofourown.Org*, (2021)
<https://archiveofourown.org/works/32940190/chapters/81752386> [Accessed 5 December 2021]
[223] 'Femslash' is a term used to describe romantic and sexual fanfiction written about two female characters.
[224] Ansley Birchmore and Heather Hensman Kettrey, 'Exploring The Boundaries Of The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis: An Experimental Analysis Of The Effects Of The "Bury Your Gays" Media Trope On Homophobic And Sexist Attitudes', *Feminist Media Studies*, 2021, 1-17 (p.2)
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1887919>

LGBTQ+ characters, and it is argued that such characters mostly feature as background characters in film and TV. In another report by GLAAD, it was argued that 'a repeated problem [was] found across several films in 2019: LGBTQ+ characters are too often featured in major blockbuster films in moments so small many audiences could have easily missed them.'[225] This trend was noticed within interviews – Participant M argued, 'it's like fan service…and not as much to show the world that people like that are out there…it's lucky [to have] a more background character that's seen kissing another guy.' Participant M's claim and the GLAAD report highlight controversy surrounding *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker*, where two minor, female characters shared a kiss in the background of a scene, a moment that Vanity Fair's K. Austin Collins labelled as 'pandering, not progress.'[226] Collins suggests that the kiss between two women, hinted at 'early in its press cycle…was a moment that some people must have gone into the film expecting to see, because the studio and/or filmmakers had already patted themselves on the back for it.'[227] A similar moment is also criticised in *Avengers: Endgame*, where a side character, 'played by codirector Joe Russo himself,'[228] briefly discusses his date with another man. These moments show that LGBTQ+ people do exist in blockbuster films, but are sometimes confined to small, nameless or lineless roles, without any expansion of character or spotlight. Returning to interview responses, when asked how she believed the mainstream and published media present LGBTQ+ characters, Participant T said of traditional media: 'In a comparison, I think they lose' to fanfiction, suggesting that 'though it is certainly improving, I don't think it's been their guiding purpose […] they haven't taken deliberate steps to represent various groups, much less represent them well.' This highlights an important

[225] GLAAD, 'Observations & Recommendations (2020)', *GLAAD*, (2020) <https://www.glaad.org/sri/2020/observations-recommendations> [Accessed 7 December 2021]

[226] K Austin Collins, 'Are We Really Going To Pretend The Gay Kiss In The Rise Of Skywalker Matters?', *Vanity Fair*, (2019) <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2019/12/are-we-really-going-to-pretend-the-gay-kiss-in-the-rise-of-skywalker-matters> [Accessed 27 November 2021].

[227] K Austin Collins, 'Are We Really Going To Pretend The Gay Kiss In The Rise Of Skywalker Matters?', *Vanity Fair*, (2019) <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2019/12/are-we-really-going-to-pretend-the-gay-kiss-in-the-rise-of-skywalker-matters> [Accessed 27 November 2021].

[228] K Austin Collins, 'Are We Really Going To Pretend The Gay Kiss In The Rise Of Skywalker Matters?', *Vanity Fair*, (2019) <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2019/12/are-we-really-going-to-pretend-the-gay-kiss-in-the-rise-of-skywalker-matters> [Accessed 27 November 2021].

factor in the representation of minority groups in media, arguing that it is not enough to simply place a character from a minority group into a narrative with little to no character development. Audiences who wish to see this representation also believe that media should strive to 'accurately, clearly, and positively represent queer lives and experiences.'[229] Participant T argued that within the fanfiction community, 'people have taken deliberate steps to make it kind of safe and well represented,' and this is a sentiment echoed in research elsewhere. Neville labels the online slash community as 'a type of counterpublic – a space in the public sphere where alternative identities can be reflected and where subordinated social groups can find support and collective resistance.'[230] Therefore, with its higher levels of gay representation, fanfiction is often seen by its readers as more empathetic and respectful in representing the LGBTQ+ community, and the fanfiction community itself is regarded as a group that resists the belief that heterosexuality is the 'norm'.

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is often an argument that in professional, published media, a large driving force for media corporations is the desire to make money, so it can be inferred that this is often a motivator in these 'pandering' representations of queer characters in small roles. Popular films such as *Star Wars* or *Avengers: Endgame* make use of these small, marketable moments to present their film and the Disney company that produces them as progressive and accepting. However, the moments are so small and inconsequential to the plot that they can be edited out of films when screened in countries where LGBTQ+ characters are not as accepted or welcomed. Using Fathallah's assessment of Scott's concept of fanboy auteurs presents this pandering level of representation as a performance of 'self-abnegation,'[231] or the denial of one's interests in favour of the interests of others. In representing queer characters in these small roles, media companies 'perform self-abnegation and liberality to their fans through text and paratexts,' while they also 'retain an economic and

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[229] Tyler Bradway and E. L McCallum, *After Queer Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p.10.
[230] Lucy Neville, ''The Tent's Big Enough For Everyone': Online Slash Fiction As A Site For Activism And Change', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25.3 (2018), 384-398 (p.386), <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2017.1420633>
[231] Self-abnegation is defined as the denial of one's own interests in favour of the interest of others.

institutional position of control over the text.'[232] This appears not to just be a problem in large films, but across media. When discussing comics in 1989, Triptow argued that 'gay cartooning denotes pornography to some minds. So, for artists with marketable styles to work for a homosexual audience is a risky business.'[233] Even though now, more than thirty years later, the inclusion of queer characters is far less controversial, there is undeniably an aversion to representing such characters, especially in large projects like blockbuster films. At the time at which this thesis is being written (winter 2021/2022), Disney have taken a large step in representation with the inclusion of openly gay characters with more central roles in 2021's *Eternals*. However, with various bouts of negative attention and mixed reviews for the film, it remains to be seen whether Disney will view this risk as a success and repeat it in the future. As assessment of the GLAAD reports has shown, media such as film and television appear to be shifting to a more visible and positive representation of sexuality. However, as yet to be explored, fanfiction remains a method through which fanfiction authors can subvert traditional expectations of heterosexuality that they may still see dominating published media.

Contemporary queer theory encourages an approach to representation that no longer regards sexual minorities as deviant or transgressive. Recent research argues that 'queer marks an opportunity for reinterpretation,'[234] a practice that fanfiction often adopts by reinterpreting not only stories, but also characters, reading into the 'mixed messages' placed into 'heteronormative scripts through sexually ambiguous characters and storylines,' in order to 'construe these relationships in markedly different ways.'[235] It appears that the goal of these fanfictions is to not hide behind the guise of subtext or 'will-they-won't-they' representation, instead advocating for the erasure of queerbaiting and including a visible and validating

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[232]Judith Fathallah, *Fanfiction And The Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), p.21, <https://web-s-ebscohost-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=098ce508-7479-4f1a-8241-6938f639732e%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=1593130&db=nlebk> [Accessed 5 December 2021].

[233] Robert Triptow, *Gay Comics* (New York: Plume, 1989), p. 4.

[234] Tyler Bradway and E. L McCallum, *After Queer Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p.3.

[235] André Carrington, 'Reading In Juxtaposition: Comics', in *After Queer Studies*, ed. by Tyler Bradway and E. L. McCallum, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 154-170 (p.156).

presentation of queer individuals. Queerbaiting is defined as 'a fan-conceived term that describes a tactic whereby media producers suggest homoerotic subtext between characters in popular television that is never intended to be actualised on screen,'[236] to draw the attention of audiences who wish to see queer characters represented. The use of queerbaiting in media is frequently discouraged by queer activists, particularly as popular series and media continue to portray characters with unconfirmed sexualities or in ambiguous relationships, or make it a priority to discuss the queer sexuality of a character in press material para-texts only to give that character minimal representation within the official text. One TV series that has been accused of queerbaiting is *Supernatural*, which was discussed regarding its relationship with authorship in Chapter 2. The key example of 'queerbaiting' surrounding *Supernatural* arises when studying the relationship between main protagonist Dean, and Castiel, an angel who becomes Dean's friend, ally, and a recurring character after his first appearance in the show's fourth season. *Supernatural* is infamous for accusations of queerbaiting, to the point where some interviewees for this thesis acknowledged the show as a key example of the discouraged practice. Participant O declared that watching *Supernatural* 'got really draining […] because of the queerbaiting between Dean and Cas.' 'They had to know what they were doing,' she added, voicing the perception that writers and showrunners are aware of their 'queerbaiting' and lean into it purposefully to attract audiences who wish to see queer relationships on screen. Another trope that is often criticised in queer representation in media is the 'Bury Your Gays' trope, described as 'a systematic pattern in which SGM [Sexual and Gender Minority] characters, typically lesbians and bisexual women, die in violent ways and often in service of another character's development.'[237] Birchmore and Hensman Kettrey discuss this trope with the example of Lexa and Clarke in *The 100*, a popular femslash couple, the former of the two having been infamously killed in the season 3 episode 'Thirteen,' the same episode where the

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[236] Joseph Brennan, 'Queerbaiting: The 'Playful' Possibilities Of Homoeroticism', *International Journal Of Cultural Studies*, 21.2 (2018), 189-206 (p.189) <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877916631050>

[237] Ansley Birchmore and Heather Hensman Kettrey, 'Exploring The Boundaries Of The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis: An Experimental Analysis Of The Effects Of The "Bury Your Gays" Media Trope On Homophobic And Sexist Attitudes', *Feminist Media Studies*, (2021), 1-17 (p.2) <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1887919>

two characters engage in intercourse. Lexa's death gained backlash from fans, as Birchmore and Hensman Kettrey demonstrate, audiences reacting by '[live-tweeting] #LGBTQFansDeserveBetter during the airing of the next episode…and [creating] fan fiction depicting alternate storylines in which the victim of the [Bury Your Gays] trope does not die.'[238] The example of *The 100* demonstrates how branches of fandom desire better representation for LGBTQ+ characters, often trying to reach the show's creators with their message and creating their own narrative with their fanfiction in order to give these characters, and LGBTQ+ fans, the storylines they believe they deserve.

While not based around a femslash couple, but a slash couple, *Supernatural* also faced negative backlash for allegedly adhering to the Bury Your Gays trope. After years of being accused of queerbaiting by fans, *Supernatural* confirmed that at least one individual in the ship between Dean and Castiel was not only queer, but in love, with the other. In the eighteenth episode of season 15, two episodes before the show's conclusion, Castiel expressed his admiration for Dean in what Castiel's actor, Misha Collins, described as a 'homosexual declaration of love.'[239] However, the character is killed within the same scene, and while another character states that he has been brought back to life by the final episode, Castiel never appears on screen again. Actor Misha Collins responded to backlash in a series of Tweets: 'in my opinion Cas doesn't play into the "bury your gays" trope…Cas doesn't die! He actually goes on to rebuild heaven!'[240] '…Could Cas' departure have had more resonance in the final episodes? Sure. But I'm confident you guys can sort that part out as your writing, art,

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[238] Ansley Birchmore and Heather Hensman Kettrey, 'Exploring The Boundaries Of The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis: An Experimental Analysis Of The Effects Of The "Bury Your Gays" Media Trope On Homophobic And Sexist Attitudes', *Feminist Media Studies*, (2021), 1-17 (p.3) <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1887919>

[239] Nick Duffy, 'Supernatural Star Misha Collins Finally Confirms His Character Was Gay All Along – But Fans Are Divided', *PinkNews*, (2020) <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2020/11/11/destiel-supernatural-castiel-dean-misha-collins-jensen-ackles-gay-reveal/> [Accessed 7 December 2021]

[240] Misha Collins (@mishacollins) Also, in my opinion Cas doesn't play into the "bury your gays" trope. His declaration of love saves Dean, enabling Sam & Dean to save all of humanity. And Cas doesn't die! He actually goes on to rebuild heaven! 26 November 2020.

and imaginations play the story out past the last frames we filmed.'[241] Collins later apologised for the tweets following some fans' explanations of the backlash, one fan tweeting, 'this problem extends beyond just castiel. nearly (if not all?) all gay characters in this show had died by the end,'[242] while another stated, 'Bury your gays isn't problematic because gay people died. It's problematic because it keeps happening.'[243] Collins' tweets also show an awareness that fans who are not pleased with the show's portrayal of queer themes will make use of transformative arts like fanfiction to play out the story further, a trend that, when looking into AO3, is shown to be occurring in large numbers for this show.

Fanfiction and fandom practices allow fans to see what *could* be, and when they feel cheated or disappointed by what is presented to them by the official text, they often use social media to speak out, 'to be heard about their dissatisfaction with their current representation on modern television.'[244] Their fanfiction, alternatively, allows them to use their own authorial voices to enact their expectations, quell their disappointment, and create an alternate world where queer stories are told and where what they perceive as budding romance gets its chance to come into fruition. A look through AO3 reveals that, following the disappointing conclusion of Dean and Castiel's story in the eyes of many fans, fanfiction was an excellent medium for them to fix what they believed had been wronged, using 'fix-it fics' discussed previously in this thesis. Taking into consideration the date of Castiel's love confession episode (5th November 2020), the final two episodes in the next two weeks in which Castiel did not return on-screen, and two more weeks to allow fans to process their opinions and write

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[241] Misha Collins (@mishacollins) Was the show perfect? No. Could Cas' departure have had more resonance in the final episodes? Sure. But I'm confident you guys can sort that part out as your writing, art, and imaginations play the story out past the last frames we filmed. 26 November 2020.

[242] deteriorating (problydave) and if this many gay people are saying they feel it is in line w "bury your gays" then it is....and this problem extends beyond just castiel. nearly (if not all?) all gay characters in this show had died by the end. all of them. 26 November 2020.

[243] Evan Ouellette (@evan_ouell) Misha, I love you, but this is bury your gays. It doesn't matter why it happened, it happened. Bury your gays isn't problematic because gay people died. It's problematic because it keeps happening. Was Cas' sacrifice noble, and good? Yes. The writers still wrote bury your gays. 26 November 2020.

[244] Erin B. Waggoner, 'Bury Your Gays And Social Media Fan Response: Television, LGBTQ Representation, And Communitarian Ethics', *Journal Of Homosexuality*, 65.13 (2018), 1877-1891 (p.1877) <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2017.1391015>

any fanfiction influenced by the final three episodes, it is best to analyse *Supernatural*'s AO3

database from the 5th of November to the 5th December 2020. This allows this research to see

how fans reacted to the ending and how it influenced their fanfiction. While it's important to

note that this trend of disappointment and subversion was not necessarily true for every

fanfiction being written on every site about *Supernatural* in the analysed month, the desire to

change the ending for themselves was widespread across the AO3 *Supernatural* fanfiction

community. Of the 4,173 fanfictions written in that month, 2,654 (63.6%) focused on the

Dean/Castiel ship and 757 (18.1%) were specifically tagged 'Fix-It', with just under half of that

(306, or 7.3%) tagged, 'Episode Fix-It: s.15e20 Carry On.' [245] [246] Focusing on the fanfiction

featuring that ship, the most popular tags from that month all adhered to the trend of adding

on to the ending and giving the characters a happier and more concrete conclusion than the

one they were given in canon, including 'First Kiss,' 'Happy Ending,' and 'Love Confessions'.

In fact, of the 757 fanfics that were tagged 'Fix-It', 702 (92.7%) were also tagged with

'Castiel/Dean Winchester,'[247] showing that a large majority of fans who wished to use their

fanfiction to 'fix' the canon ending viewed the representation of the queer ship as an aspect to

fix. Some tags and descriptions veered on passive-aggressive, frustrated, and emotive,

highlighting a critical mood among fans. One fan labelled their fanfiction as '(a BETTER finale

where cas [sp] comes back as human)…Because 15x20 can suck it.'[248] [249] Another labelled

her fic with the tag '(aka the author hops on the fanfic fix-it train to cope with her own

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[245] S.15e20 Carry On – The season, episode, and title of the final episode of *Supernatural.*
[246] Archive Of Our Own, 'Supernatural - Works | Archive Of Our Own', *Archiveofourown.Org* [n.d.]
<https://archiveofourown.org/works?utf8=%E2%9C%93&work_search%5Bsort_column%5D=created_at&work
_search%5Bother_tag_names%5D=&work_search%5Bexcluded_tag_names%5D=&work_search%5Bcrossover
%5D=&work_search%5Bcomplete%5D=&work_search%5Bwords_from%5D=&work_search%5Bwords_to%5D=
&work_search%5Bdate_from%5D=2020-11-05&work_search%5Bdate_to%5D=2020-12-
05&work_search%5Bquery%5D=&work_search%5Blanguage_id%5D=&commit=Sort+and+Filter&tag_id=Super
natural> [Accessed 7 December 2021]
[247] Tags such as this, which features [Character name]/[Character name], connote that the fanfiction tagged
will portray these two characters in a romantic and/or sexual relationship.
[248] Shorthand describing the 20th episode of the 15th season of *Supernatural.*
[249] LiberAmans214, 'A Little More Yours Today - Liberamans214 - Supernatural [Archive Of Our
Own]', *Archiveofourown.Org*, (2020) <https://archiveofourown.org/works/27896221> [Accessed 7 December
2021].

feelings)'.[250] Both the popular tags that highlighted an individual's desire to fix the ending with their own fanfiction, and the more colloquial, emotive tags that showed one's distain for the original *Supernatural* ending, provide clear examples of fanfiction writers subverting the original canon. This also infers that these fanfiction writers were motivated by the desire to give queer characters a happy ending, an ending that scholars and fans argue is not typically given to them in traditional media.

A frequent trend among these *Supernatural* fanfiction writers was the implication that both the characters and fans of *Supernatural* 'deserved' more from the original text, and so fanfiction was being written to give the characters and fans what they were owed by the show's creative team. Perhaps this is due, in part, to the *Supernatural* team's strong relationship with fans and positive acknowledgement of fanfiction. Participant G even suggested, when discussing Castiel's love confession, 'I don't think that maybe would have come about, if not for the fanfiction…' This hypothesis suggests that Castiel's confession was inspired by large numbers of fans 'shipping' Castiel with Dean, and while it cannot be confirmed, it does explain why many fans may have felt queerbaited and believed that the ending was ultimately less than they deserved. This trend is highlighted in tags such as: ''the ending we deserve'…'the ending they deserve,''[251] 'Giving Dean and Cas the Happiness they deserve,'[252] or 'Dean Winchester Deserves Better.'[253] This echoes the trends discovered in Chapter 1, where fans grew intimately close to and strongly empathised with characters within the original text, leading them to feel disappointment, grief, or a desire to fix the fictional 'lives' of the characters through

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[250] wolfpacklove, 'Static Of This Cruel World - Wolfpacklove - Supernatural [Archive Of Our Own]', *Archiveofourown.Org*, (2020) <https://archiveofourown.org/works/27889660?view_adult=true> [Accessed 7 December 2021].

[251] EverTheRenegade, 'I Heard You - Evertherenegade - Supernatural [Archive Of Our Own]', *Archiveofourown.Org*, (2020) <https://archiveofourown.org/works/27558400> [Accessed 18 January 2022].

[252] cottagecorecas, 'Winds Go Sighing - Chapter 1 - Cottagecorecas - Supernatural [Archive Of Our Own]', *Archiveofourown.Org*, (2020) <https://archiveofourown.org/works/27692069/chapters/67770224> [Accessed 18 January 2022].

[253] thegreenfairy246, 'Everything Was Lovelier With You - Thegreenfairy246 - Supernatural [Archive Of Our Own]', *Archiveofourown.Org*, (2020) <https://archiveofourown.org/works/27649604?view_adult=true> [Accessed 18 January 2022].

their fanfiction. Focusing particularly on the issue of queer representation when considering what fans were 'owed', it is possible that this belief stems from the desire to see more queer representation in media. Photojournalist Cheriss May argued in 2018 that 'the media needs to represent the society that it serves because if people don't see themselves, then it's almost like a lack of care that's communicated to people.'[254] This argues that traditional media such as film or television holds a responsibility to represent minority groups in ways that are positive and visible, not only to subvert the expectations of heterosexuality as the norm but also to allow those minority groups to feel acknowledged and validated in their identity. Therefore, when fanfiction writers feel that a community has been ignored or poorly represented, they will convey this frustration through their fanfiction. Participant O expressed this sensation when discussing her experience with media, stating, 'it's sad […] you don't see yourself on TV or any media,' adding that fanfiction is 'where I go to actually see me.' For queer fans, the lack of representation equates to the media's ignorance towards their personal identity, and so fanfiction provides a subversive escape through which they can read the stories they believe they are owed.

3.2. *Ship It* and its Presentation of Slash Fiction

To analyse the positive approach to queer representation that fanfiction takes, and to understand how the fanfiction community is seen as a welcoming space for queer individuals, this thesis turns to *Ship It* by Britta Lundin, a book that centres on Claire, a teenage fangirl of the in-book television show *Demon Heart*. Claire meets the stars of the show at a Comic Con and asks one of the stars, Forest, about a potential queer relationship between his character Smokey and another male. After being mocked by Forest for her question, Claire is invited by the show's publicity team to join the cast and crew on a tour around three more conventions

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[254] Lauren Washington, 'The Importance of Representation in Film and Media', *Medium.Com*, 29 December 2019, <https://medium.com/@Laurenwash/the-importance-of-representation-in-film-and-media-2d006149cac9#> [Accessed 28 January 2022].

to mend the show's reputation in the eyes of its queer fans. Given this opportunity to speak to the showrunner, Claire aims to convince him to make this couple 'canon'. The book preaches the importance of queer representation in allowing queer youths to explore their identity. Within her acknowledgements pages, Lundin accredits her own understanding of her sexuality to fandom culture: 'When understanding my sexuality as a teenager seemed impossible, there were others on the internet who were going through the same thing, writing stories about it, and publishing them, for free, online.'[255] In these acknowledgements, Lundin touches on important topics explored previously, such as the value of the community aspect of fanfiction and the benefit of fanfiction being published for free. But for Lundin, her reward for taking part in fandom and fanfiction was a clearer understanding of her sexuality. This is a sentiment that has often arisen in research. Neville found that, when discussing online slash communities, members of the community 'who did not identify as heterosexual commented on how their involvement with slash had helped them to better understand their own gender identity and sexual orientation.'[256] This trend also appeared in interviews for this thesis. Participant O said, regarding her sexuality, 'I came out to fandom first…they're such a queer-positive place,' adding, 'as I got more and more comfortable and then started to be able to write about characters like myself, it was a very positive thing to do and it brought a lot of comfort.' These opinions from different fanfiction writers across different pieces of research show that in allowing these individuals to find themselves represented, fanfiction plays a role in '[dismantling] the incentives that entice sexual minorities and other marginalized subjects to internalize the logic of deviance.'[257] No longer do they see their sexuality as a deviant subversion of heterosexuality, but have found media and a community that supports and affirms them. However, throughout *Ship It,* the aim is not simply to enjoy LGBTQ+ centric

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[255] Britta Lundin, *Ship It* (New York: Freeform Books, 2018), p.377.
[256] Lucy Neville, ''The Tent's Big Enough For Everyone': Online Slash Fiction As A Site For Activism And Change', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25.3 (2018), 384-398 (p.392) <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2017.1420633>
[257] André Carrington, 'Reading In Juxtaposition: Comics', in *After Queer Studies* ed. by Tyler Bradway and E. L. McCallum, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 154-170 (p.162).

fanfiction, but to preach the importance of such relationships being shown in traditional, published media.

Recent queer studies aim to '[shift] away from positions that seek to disturb the norm, and toward positions that advocate for a way to build a better shared world,'[258] presenting queer identities not as subversive or deviant, but as acceptable in society. Claire's attempt to encourage the transition of a queer lead couple from the small online fanfiction communities to the screens of every *Demon Heart* viewer shows her desire to advocate for the presentation of queer couples as an accepted norm. When explaining her reasons for encouraging gay representation on *Demon Heart*, Claire argues that the representation is needed beyond just fanfiction – 'for all the kids out there who are watching the show and didn't even know that someone like Smokey could be gay…Not everyone reads fanfic…Do you know how many people this show could reach?'[259] Claire's desire for LGBTQ+ representation as a young queer girl echoes the desire for professional media to validate and normalise those identities. Later, Claire even attempts to speak to Jamie, the showrunner of *Demon Heart*, to encourage him to incorporate this validation in his show: ''You have a reach that is so, so much bigger than mine. With fanfic, I'm already preaching to the choir. They know what they're going to get. But *you.* You have this opportunity to change everything.'[260] Recalling the high percentage of GLAAD's respondents who claimed to understand the LGBTQ+ community better when witnessed on screen, is it clear that presentation of queer characters in the media improves opinions on these characters and the real-life community as well.

Ship It also addresses queerbaiting in traditional media, particularly questioning whether these shows are aware of their 'queerbaiting' and what their intentions are for making use of this tactic. The narrative of *Ship It* holds similarities to an infamous moment at a *Supernatural* convention. In a similar fashion to how the novel's secondary narrator, Forest, dismisses

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[258] Rebekah Sheldon, 'Reading For Transgression: Queering Genres', in *After Queer Studies,* ed. by Tyler Bradway and E. L. McCallum, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 171-187 (p.171-172).
[259] Britta Lundin, *Ship It* (New York: Freeform Books, 2018), p.97.
[260] Britta Lundin, *Ship It* (New York: Freeform Books, 2018), p.284.

Claire's panel question about his character's sexuality, Jensen Ackles, actor for Dean Winchester, has been criticised in the past for supposedly dismissing a fan who asked a question about the character's potential bisexuality.[261] This connection infers that Lundin wishes to use *Ship It* to explore and discourage queerbaiting within traditional media. Her attempts to do this as clear towards the climax of the book, when Claire plays showrunner Jamie a reel of scenes from his show that feature the two leads, characters named Smokey and Heart, who are played by actors Forest and Rico respectively. The scenes feature Smokey and Heart being referred to as boyfriends by other characters, as well as other lines that present the two as romantically involved, lines that Jamie dismisses as jokes.[262] Lundin suggests that Jamie aimed to use queer representation superficially – '*Fine.* We were queerbaiting. We knew what you fangirls like, and we were never gonna follow through, but we thought it was fun to joke about it. Aren't you glad we did? Because otherwise you would never have loved our show.'[263] This approach to queerbaiting echoes a suggestion posed by Ng, that queerbaiting occurs when 'those officially associated with a media text court viewers interested in LGBTQ+ narratives – or become aware of such viewers – and encourage their interest in the media text without the text ever definitively confirming the nonheterosexuality of the relevant characters.'[264] This emphasise the accusation that queer moments or hints are added into certain published texts to draw in viewers, without aiming to affirming queer identities or disrupt the norm of heterosexuality that still, to a certain extent, dominates media.

Ship It presents the fanfiction community as a positive space for the representation of queer identities, as while Claire's intervention unintentionally causes Forest's removal from the show, thus erasing any chance of representation for the pairing on-screen, Forest himself

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[261] Aja Romano, 'How 1 Question Triggered A "Supernatural" Fandom Meltdown', *The Daily Dot*, (2013) <https://www.dailydot.com/unclick/jensen-ackles-homophobia-supernatural-fandom/> [Accessed 17 January 2022].

[262] Britta Lundin, *Ship It* (New York: Freeform Books, 2018), p.273.

[263] Britta Lundin, *Ship It* (New York: Freeform Books, 2018), p.274.

[264] Eve Ng, 'Between Text, Paratext, And Context: Queerbaiting And The Contemporary Media Landscape', *Transformative Works And Cultures*, 24 (2017), 1-25 (p.2) <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2017.0917>

grows to understand and appreciate queer interpretations of the text that have been expanded through fanfiction. He concludes the story by encouraging fans to develop their own interpretations – 'If you see *Demon Heart* as a love story, then it's a love story'[265] – before kissing the actor who plays Heart, Rico, onstage at a convention, warning beforehand 'sometimes, I get the sense that you're disappointed that your specific canon might not ever make it to the screen…maybe just in case, some people might want to film this.'[266] *Ship It* presents a conclusion that encourages queer readings of texts as valid. However, it is important to note that the book has been faced with many criticisms for its representation of teenage fangirls and slash fiction. The book has sparked debates as to whether Claire's self-appointed mission to convince Jamie to make her ship 'canon' is manipulative and highlights a negative aspect of representation in fanfiction, questioning whether it instead facilitates the fetishization of gay men by women and therefore is not as positive in its representation of queer themes as first believed.

Reader reviews of *Ship It* complain about Claire's behaviour and attitude towards queer men and slash relationships. One reviewer noted that both Claire and her love interest Tess 'joke about writing-reading incestuous, smutty Jonas Brothers fic. They defend this by saying that "slash fic is just more fun!"'[267] Another reader criticises Claire for writing a 'real person fan-fic about Forest and Rico…where [Claire] includes details about Forest's life that he told her as a friend,'[268] these details being personal details about his own struggles with sexuality in the past. Some reviewers are pleased that Claire isn't a morally perfect character, one reviewer saying, 'I really liked how Lundin resisted the urge to make her characters 'good'' and highlighting that the book deals with 'geek culture (the good, bad, and ugly).'[269] Others criticise

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[265] Britta Lundin, *Ship It* (New York: Freeform Books, 2018), p.356.
[266] Britta Lundin, *Ship It* (New York: Freeform Books, 2018), p.358.
[267] Kaylin (The Re-Read Queen), 'Ship It', *Goodreads.Com*, (2018)
<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/36204669-ship-it> [Accessed 17 January 2022].
[268] kav (xreadingsolacex), 'Ship It', *Goodreads.Com*, (2018)
<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/36204669-ship-it> [Accessed 17 January 2022].
[269] CaseyTheCanadianLesbrarian, 'Ship It', *Goodreads.Com*, (2018)
<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/36204669-ship-it> [Accessed 17 January 2022].

Claire's character as a destructive example of fans – 'The representation of how fandom looks like always ends up with girls like Claire, slashers who are single minded for their otp.'[270] [271] These criticisms echo a regular concern with slash fiction, especially as fanfiction is primarily written by women. The exploitative nature of slash as a method of gay fetishization has been debated extensively in the past, Neville considers both sides of the debate, highlighting that women, particularly straight women, writing gay slash exemplifies 'an attempt to appropriate the 'good bits' of gay culture…without having to experience the discrimination and stigma.'[272] This is a worry echoed by drag queen Sato Masaki, who argued that some fiction that focused on gay men but was written by women, like yaoi or slash fiction, 'lacks the authority of lived experience' and 'risks a socio-political nihilism for the sake of aesthetic expression.'[273] This implies that some fanfiction authors write slash not to authentically portray and empathise with gay men, but to enjoy the image of two men in sexual relations. However, Neville finds that many queer fanfiction writers view slash communities as 'an opportunity to foster communication and understanding,'[274] and that those who engage in slash fanfiction are more likely to understand both their own sexuality and others'. Despite a misguided and problematic approach to achieving her goals, Claire uses her experiences within the book to discover her own sexuality and champion the representation of sexuality in media. Therefore, the text presents fanfiction and the fanfiction community as a subversive space through which the concept of heterosexuality as the only acceptable, 'normal' sexuality is challenged.

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[270] Beej, 'Ship It', *Goodreads.Com*, (2018) <https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/36204669-ship-it> [Accessed 17 January 2022].

[271] 'OTP' is the acronym for 'One True Pairing', a fandom term which defines the 'ship' or relationship that an individual views as their favourite.

[272] Lucy Neville, ''The Tent's Big Enough For Everyone': Online Slash Fiction As A Site For Activism And Change', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25.3 (2018), 384-398 (p.387) <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2017.1420633>

[273] Mark John Isola, 'Yaoi and Slash Fiction: Women Writing, Reading, and Getting Off?' in *Boys' Love Manga,* ed. by Antonia Levi, Mark McHarry, and Dru Pagliassotti, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2010), p.87.

[274] Lucy Neville, ''The Tent's Big Enough For Everyone': Online Slash Fiction As A Site For Activism And Change', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25.3 (2018), 384-398 (p.392) <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2017.1420633>

Beyond the issues of queer representation, *Ship It* also faced backlash from many reviewers for its minimal inclusion of Tess, a character who is both Claire's foil and her love interest, as well as a homoromantic, pansexual woman of colour. While Claire tries to convince Jamie to make the show's main gay ship canon, Tess argues that Claire is ignoring intersectional issues in her quest to diversify *Demon Heart*: 'you're not pushing for more black characters, are you? …You only care about the thing that affects *you.*'[275] The concept of 'intersectionality' was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, in a paper in which she highlights the experiences of Black women to criticise works that 'treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis.'[276] Crenshaw defines intersectionality as 'a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects,'[277] and states that 'it's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.'[278] Therefore, in the eyes of Tess, a queer, Black girl, Claire is pushing for only sexuality diversity, without considering individuals who may identify with more than one minority identity and may be regularly underrepresented. While *Ship It* briefly touches on the argument that there is a lack of intersectional diversity in both professional media and fanfiction, it features very little focus on this issue. This is a problem when considering that popular fanfiction groups place a lot more focus on gay, white, male ships, and diversity beyond this is not as apparent. Looking back into the most popular ships of all time on AO3 shows that nine out of ten of the most popular ships of all time are comprised of two white men. Studying the intersectional representation between characters' sexual and racial identity

[275] Britta Lundin, *Ship It* (New York: Freeform Books, 2018), p.238.

[276] Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing The Intersection Of Race And Sex: A Black Feminist Critique Of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory And Antiracist Politics', *University Of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989.1 (1989), p.139, <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf> [Accessed 23 June 2022].

[277] Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Kimberlé Crenshaw On Intersectionality, More Than Two Decades Later', *Law.Columbia.Edu*, 2017 <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later> [Accessed 23 June 2022].

[278] Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Kimberlé Crenshaw On Intersectionality, More Than Two Decades Later', *Law.Columbia.Edu*, 2017 <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later> [Accessed 23 June 2022].

presents varied results. There are 53 Asian characters in the list, out of 200 names, and most of them are in slash pairings, either with another Asian character or otherwise. This high percentage of Asian characters could be accredited to the rising popularity of Korean-Pop (K-Pop) bands and Japanese anime. Other ethnicities, on the other hand, have a lot less representation in fanfiction. Only four Latinx characters appear in the Top 100 ships list, three of which are in slash ships and one in a femslash ship, whereas only one black character appears on the list – Finn from the *Star Wars* sequel trilogy, appearing as one half of the 100th most popular ship alongside fellow POC Poe Dameron. Current theorists criticise queer studies of the past, arguing that intersections such as 'race, class, ability and gender'[279] must be acknowledged when discussing queer theory. Particularly, they highlight that 'early gay and lesbian activism has strong connections to the civil rights movement' and that 'these intersections need to be highlighted to counter the whitewashing and erasure that is so prevalent' in early queer theory.[280] In fanfiction, while the numbers of POC characters being written about remains low, interviewees theorised that this is due to low numbers of these characters on screen in popular culture. Participant L argued that 'with the Black Lives Matter movement, now you will see more people of colour or people of different cultures on TV in the coming, you know, twenty years or so. And fanfiction will evolve with it.' While fanfiction can be criticised for its lack of diversity and intersectionality, it is possible that, as representation of minority groups continues to grow and evolve, fandoms will develop, and fanfiction will be written around texts with higher levels of diversity in race, gender, ability, and so on.

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[279] Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now* (London: Red Globe Press, 2020), p.22.
[280] Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now* (London: Red Globe Press, 2020), p.22.

<u>3.3. *Carry On* – Fanfiction, Utopias, and Heterotopias</u>

Within her analysis of slash fiction as a site for activism, Neville also argues that 'explicit online slash sites can act as heterotopias.'[281] A heterotopia is a term devised by Foucault and contrasted against utopias, the latter of which Foucault described as 'present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down…fundamentally unreal spaces.'[282] Alternatively, Foucault describes a heterotopia as 'something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.'[283] He describes mirrors as both utopic and heterotopic: both a 'placeless place' that 'gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent'[284] but also an object that exists in reality, '[exerting] a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy.'[285] Theorists such as Llewellyn describe online communities, such as the fanfiction community, as heterotopias because they 'significantly disrupt normative societal discourses.'[286] As counter-sites to the worlds of the original texts, fanfiction created by fans in minority-represented groups often acts as a subversive mirror to the original text, giving visibility to that which the original may be missing and enabling them to see themselves in a tale where they are otherwise absent.

To explore this concept of fanfiction and transformative works in general as heterotopias, this section will consider Rainbow Rowell's novel *Carry On*, a spin-off novel that is based on the story within the story of Rowell's earlier novel *Fangirl*. Rowell portrays *Carry On* as a mirror to the *Harry Potter* franchise through many plot elements, from the orphaned 'Chosen One' roped

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[281] Neville, Lucy, ''The Tent's Big Enough For Everyone': Online Slash Fiction As A Site For Activism And Change', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25 (2018), 384-398 (p.384) <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2017.1420633>

[282] Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 22-27 (p.24) <https://doi.org/10.2307/464648>

[283] Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 22-27 (p.24) <https://doi.org/10.2307/464648>

[284] Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 22-27 (p.24) <https://doi.org/10.2307/464648>

[285] Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 22-27 (p.24) <https://doi.org/10.2307/464648>

[286] Anna Llewellyn, ''A Space Where Queer Is Normalized": The Online World And Fanfictions As Heterotopias For WLW', *Journal Of Homosexuality*, 2021,1-22 (p.1), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2021.1940012>

into a war against an undoubtedly evil villain who constantly sends attacks to a magical school set in the United Kingdom, to his rival, born on the other 'side' of the war and one of the protagonist's key tormentors. Rowell has even acknowledged the similarities between her protagonists Simon and Baz, and the rivalry between Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy. She emphasises in an interview about the book, in which she states 'I know Harry as a character really well because I've invested so much time in him, and Draco as well, so it was fun to reference them.'[287] Many of Rowell's readers will have grown up with the *Harry Potter* stories, thus making her usage of certain character tropes and plot points heterotopic, presenting them with a world that readers are in one way familiar with, but that is also distinctively 'other' when placed beside its 'real world' counterpart. *Carry On*'s approach to magical spells even feels heterotopic and intertextual, each spell having spawned from a popular phrase or text, such as, 'Out, out damned spot,' 'Clean as a whistle,' or 'twinkle, twinkle, little star,' among many others. In using idioms or lines from popular culture as spells, Rowell mirrors our popular phrases, and therefore our world, back to us, but also makes them distinctly 'other' when doing so by turning them into fantastical, magical spells. While it is not fanfiction in the sense that has been discussed, because *Carry On* is based on Rowell's own characters, the story is heterotopic as it is based heavily on tropes that have already been explored, and pre-existing character archetypes through whom she discovered she 'had a lot that [she] wanted to *say*.'[288]

However, the difference between *Carry On* and *Harry Potter* or any other 'Chosen One' story is the presentation of the 'Harry' and 'Draco', the protagonist and his nemesis, Simon and Baz, as queer and the telling of their love story. One goodreads review describes the book as 'basically Harry Potter but *gayer*. A LOT GAYER.'[289] The inclusion of queer characters in *Carry*

[287] Joanna Robinson, 'Why Rainbow Rowell Thinks Her Readers Are More Than Ready For A Gay Teen Love Story', *Vanity Fair*, (2015) <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/10/rainbow-rowell-carry-on-gay-teen-love-story> [Accessed 14 January 2022].

[288] Nicole Chung, '"I've Always Inhaled Chosen One Stories": Rainbow Rowell On Fantasy, Love, And Carry On - The Toast', *The-Toast.Net*, (2015) <https://the-toast.net/2015/10/06/rainbow-rowell-carry-on/> [Accessed 30 November 2021]

[289] chai ♡, 'Carry On (Simon Snow, #1)', *Goodreads.Com*, (2017) <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/32768522-carry-on> [Accessed 30 November 2021].

On is the 'otherness' that distances it from the story it is mirroring. Looking into her Author's Note shows that Rowell views *Carry On* as 'my take on a character I couldn't get out of my head,'[290] as well as 'a way to give Simon and Baz, only half-imagined in *Fangirl,* the story I felt I owed them.'[291] Even though Simon and Baz are Rowell's characters, her insistence that these characters were 'owed' this story reflects fanfiction writers' desires discussed previously. It is particularly notable that, in her take on these characters, Rowell found the interpretation of their queerness important their story. This is a belief she has expanded on in interviews, and, when probed about the romance between two young men in the text, Rowell responded, 'It's not a secret. I've been loudly flailing that from day one. People kept saying, 'I can't wait for the subtext' and I have such a negative reaction to that.'[292] For Rowell, the explicit inclusion of Simon and Baz, our mirror reflection of Harry and Draco, as a queer couple, was an essential piece of the text. She dismisses the accusations of the use of 'subtext', a method of including queer themes that, when implemented but not followed through with, can lead to accusations of queerbaiting, as found with *Supernatural.* Rowell continues, 'I do think in our culture there was a time when [gay relationships] had to be subtext, but I don't think that time is now…As a culture, we are ready for text.'[293] Indeed, this may be true – as considered previously, diversity in traditional media has risen in recent years and continues to rise. However, until the critiques such as queerbaiting and Bury Your Gays are acknowledged and abandoned by professional, traditional media creators, fanfiction will continue to be used as a subversive mode of literature, a heterotopia that '[disrupts] the normative processes and power – including heteronormativity and cisnormativity – within which society functions.'[294]

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[290] Rainbow Rowell, *Carry On*, 3rd edn (London: Macmillan Children's Books, 2019), p.521-522.
[291] Rainbow Rowell, *Carry On*, 3rd edn (London: Macmillan Children's Books, 2019), p.522.
[292] Joanna Robinson, 'Why Rainbow Rowell Thinks Her Readers Are More Than Ready For A Gay Teen Love Story', *Vanity Fair*, (2015) <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/10/rainbow-rowell-carry-on-gay-teen-love-story> [Accessed 14 January 2022].
[293] Joanna Robinson, 'Why Rainbow Rowell Thinks Her Readers Are More Than Ready For A Gay Teen Love Story', *Vanity Fair*, (2015) <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/10/rainbow-rowell-carry-on-gay-teen-love-story> [Accessed 14 January 2022].
[294] Anna Llewellyn, '"A Space Where Queer Is Normalized": The Online World And Fanfictions As Heterotopias For WLW', *Journal Of Homosexuality*, 2021, 1-22 (p.7), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2021.1940012>

This chapter has assessed the importance of representation of minority groups in the fanfiction community, with particular focus on LGBTQ+ stories and queer theory. It has focused on analysed modern representation of LGBTQ+ characters in both traditionally published media and fanfiction, identifying that both mediums could improve on their level, quality, and intersectionality of representation. However, the fanfiction community was concluded as a space through which queer fans saw themselves represented better in terms of both quality and quantity when reading fanfiction. This chapter highlighted issues with queer representation in media, such as queerbaiting and the Bury Your Gays trope, particularly through analysis of *Supernatural*. This identified how fanfiction writers may use fanfiction to give LGBTQ+ individuals the characters they can empathise with and are believed to 'deserve'. Analysis of *Ship It* identified that, while some would claim that the fanfiction community fetishes the queer community, taking part in the fanfiction community can inspire individuals to encourage and advocate for better representation for marginalised groups, especially regarding intersectional representation. Finally, this chapter considered *Carry On*, a transformative text inspired by *Harry Potter*, and analysed it as a heterotopia, a mirror through which one can identify both that which they are familiar with and that which is missing in other professionally published texts, such as leading roles for queer characters. Throughout this chapter, the value that the fanfiction community and any transformative work provides in encouraging published media to improve on the quality and quantity of their diversity representation has been clearly identified.

<u>Conclusion</u>

This thesis has investigated fanfiction writers and readers, exploring fanfiction as a subversive and dialogic literary form, through the themes of empathy, community, authorship, and representation. Fanfiction has been identified as a good method through which fanfiction writers can develop their authorial voice, use empathy with fictional characters to place themselves into the shoes of those characters or of minority groups, and find a community in which they can interact and engage in constructive and supportive dialogue surrounding key literary issues. At the beginning of this thesis, fanfiction was compared to oral folk tales, stories which were shared vocally by individuals, passed from mouth to mouth, and interpreted and told in different ways by each voice that told them. With this in mind, fanfiction can be identified as both dialogic, as it relies on dialogue, communication, and interpretation between individuals, and subversive, as it is one of few genres that challenges and reinterprets existing stories and what it means to be an author in modern times. Analysis of semi-structured interviews that were conducted as part of this thesis were essential in understanding personal, individual motivations for and opinions on fanfiction and its community from the perspective of fanfiction authors who partake in it.

Chapter 1 explored the link between empathy, community, and fanfiction. Intimacy with and empathy for fictional characters and scenarios was identified as important for many fanfiction writers, as it often connected them to fictional worlds and inspired them to write fanfiction. Using mental models and Theory of Mind allows understanding of how fans develop strong empathy for characters, to the levels that they believe they can create their own texts based on those characters, often motivated by the desire to give characters a happier, better ending, or by the desire to spend more time with characters that they have grown close to and identify themselves with. Once this connection between individual and story has been made, fans are able to find the fanfiction community, a group analysed through use of McMillan and Chavis' Sense of Community theory. The concept of community is vital to this thesis, as a supportive

group of likeminded individuals providing feedback such as reviews will encourage fanfiction writers in developing their writing skills and authorial voice. Furthermore, the interaction between fans facilitates dialogue about the interpretations and critiques of the texts they engage in, allowing fans to join together to criticise issues in both the text they write fanfiction for and literature or media in general. Thomas identified that 'fanfiction is about far more than the writing and reading of stories, as fans engage in all kinds of social networking and community building,'[295] as demonstrated in studies such as Neville's, in which she found that communities that were built around slash fiction were said to have 'a positive effect'[296] on the lives of their participants, particularly regarding social change and activism. Through focusing on the Sense of Community theory, this thesis highlighted the spark of friendship that brings fanfiction writers and readers together, and the resources and shared histories that allowed fans to engage in dialogue and think more interpretatively and critically about literature and media.

However, keeping criticisms of the first wave of fanfiction in mind, researchers must remember that the fanfiction community is not homogenous, and that interpretations and critiques of the text will never be the same amongst every reader, nor will every individual partaking in the fanfiction community be supportive. Some interviewees acknowledged that they had faced less-than-supportive criticism in the past on their work, often from fans who viewed the text differently from them and did not appreciate their interpretation. Participant L stated, 'it can get ugly […] ship haters or trolls happen,'[297] while Participant H criticised those who interact negatively with her work: 'If you don't like this and you're going to give me these comments, why are you reading it? […] You are clearly not my target audience.' This is a reminder that

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[295] Bronwen Thomas, 'What Is Fanfiction And Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things About It??', *Storyworlds: A Journal Of Narrative Studies*, 3 (2011), 1-24 (p.6) <https://doi-org.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/10.5250/storyworlds.3.2011.0001>

[296] Lucy Neville, ''The Tent's Big Enough For Everyone': Online Slash Fiction As A Site For Activism And Change', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25.3 (2018), 384-398 (p.384) <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2017.1420633>

[297] 'Trolls' is an online term that describes an individual who purposefully targets, insults, or criticises another user online with the aim of getting a reaction from their target.

each individual fan will have a different mental model regarding fictional characters and therefore a different interpretation on the text, thus disagreements and backlash will occur within the community. It must be acknowledged that critiques will not always be the same and that fanfiction authors will not always get support from others in their community. However, Participant H's comment also suggests that negative comments are often ignored or discarded, implying that the fanfiction community is not entirely dialogic when considering interactions with others, as not every voice is given equal value in the eyes of some fanfiction community members. Further research would benefit from exploring these relationships and dialogues between fans who disagree in more detail to truly evaluate fan reactions to criticism and appreciation of dialogue that might challenge their own view.

Chapter 2 assessed fanfiction writers and the concept of authorship, and considered that, in the dialogic community considered above, traditional ideas about what makes an author can be challenged when individuals are encouraged by those around them to explore their own interpretations of texts. This thesis used Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and the carnivalesque, as well as the ideas presented in Barthes' essay Death of the Author, to consider how fanfiction writers can, after developing mental models of characters, disregard the original author's intentions when crafting their fanfiction. Rather than relying on the author's voice, fanfiction writers exist in a dialogic community of individual voices who are given the same online space to interpret the text differently, and from their interpretations, make their own intertextual stories. Analysis of *Supernatural* and the concept of the fanboy auteur facilitated consideration of how a professional creative team's interaction with and approval of fan practices can further encourage fans to subvert and reinterpret canon. *The Fandom* by Anna Day showed how empathy with characters and separating the fictional world from the canon story told by the original author can allow one to think more critically about even their favourite texts. Considering authorship and fanfiction, with the conclusions drawn from analysis of empathy and community, emphasises the importance of fans' individual interpretations of texts when crafting their fanfiction. Chapter 2 also explored key examples of

how professional texts are beginning to interact with, encourage, and understand fanfiction authors. While *Supernatural* and *The Fandom* are extreme examples of professional media and creators' relationship with fandom and fanfiction, they highlight how creative teams are beginning to interact with fans and acknowledge their interpretations of and contributions to the wider web surrounding the original text.

Returning to Neville's analysis of slash fiction and social activism, Neville found that those who partook in the slash fiction community found it 'impacted on their political and social beliefs' and moved them 'from a position of ignorance or ambivalence to one of awareness and action.'[298] Chapter 3 observed this in action, considering how the fanfiction community makes use of fanfiction to express its desire for better representation of marginalised groups in literature and media. The chapter identified queer issues such as queerbaiting and the 'Bury Your Gays' trope in popular show *Supernatural* and explored how the fanfiction community may react to stories that they believe represent queer themes in a disrespectful or disappointing way. The novel *Ship It* echoed and explored these issues in its narrative, presenting a fanfiction author as our protagonist, who aimed to push the understanding of queer issues that she had developed from participating in the fanfiction community into mainstream, traditional media. While not a fanfiction itself, *Carry On* acts as an excellent piece of transformative work, which is in this context defined as a work that 'takes something extant and turns it into something with a new purpose, sensibility, or mode of expression,'[299] with fanfiction being one such example. *Carry On* is a transformative work as it acts as a heterotopia of popular fantasy series *Harry Potter*, with the aim to represent queer characters that had been otherwise misrepresented or supressed in other similar pieces of media or literature. Chapter 3 found that fanfiction and other similar transformative works are platforms

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[298] Lucy Neville, ''The Tent's Big Enough For Everyone': Online Slash Fiction As A Site For Activism And Change', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25.3 (2018), 384-398 (p.390) <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2017.1420633>

[299] Organisation for Transformative Works, 'What do you mean by a transformative work?', *Transformativeworks.Org,* (2016), < https://www.transformativeworks.org/faq/what-do-you-mean-by-a-transformative-work/> [Accessed 30 January 2022]

through which its writers can call attention to marginalised groups that may have been underrepresented in media in the past, though it must also be acknowledged that the fanfiction community has most famously focused on LGBTQ+ representation rather than representation of other minority groups. Even within this minority group, this thesis acknowledged that the representation was not equal among subgroups. However, while the pieces of fanfiction written may not provide equal representation, the acceptance of marginalised groups that the community often encourages aids in a shifting mindset on what is considered 'normal' in media representation.

It is important to remember that this thesis is not a comprehensive analysis of the nature of all fanfiction readers and writers. As discussed, fanfiction writers and readers are not all defined by a strict set of opinions, boundaries, and ideas. However, this thesis aimed to identify the key areas through which fanfiction still appears as subversive, finding that the key areas of subversion come from the individuals who partake in fanfiction and their desires to change, rebel against, or simply expand the stories that they enjoy. Therefore, certain aspects or areas of the fanfiction community were focused on more than others. For example, AO3 was used as a key example of a fanfiction community to highlight the subversive, anti-corporation origins of certain fanfiction groups, however it is only one example of many fanfiction sites. Analysis of specific fanfiction sites in more depth, such as AO3, Fanfiction.Net, Wattpad, and so on, may reveal different results, or even clear divides between different archives or fandom communities. Furthermore, having used interviews within this process, this research has relied on a small sample size of twenty participants, so conclusions reached cannot be generalised to the entirety of the fanfiction community. However, even within this data, participants showed differing opinions to each other. Some used their empathy with characters and their own experiences to greatly influence what they wrote about in their fanfiction, while others kept their writing and personal lives separate. Also, while some participants used fix-it fics to change the ending of the original text in their minds, others disapproved of this practice and saw popular fix-it projects as disrespectful to the original author. Such a range of opinions in

a small sample size truly shows that the fanfiction community cannot be seen as a collective group with one set of views and opinions about the media they engage in. In future research on fanfiction, it would be beneficial to combine both the qualitative information from interviews with the quantitative data from methods such as a large-scale surveys or questionnaires. Through the latter method, patterns and trends could be identified, particularly through defining categories such as gender, sexuality, age, or nationality. This thesis also briefly visited AO3 to highlight key themes in fanfiction tags regarding some *Supernatural* fans' distain with the show's ending. A more in-depth analysis of tags, comments, and other types of dialogue on these archive sites would allow for a clearer understanding on how interaction between fanfiction writers and readers occurs in a natural environment, rather than through answers purposefully constructed by participants in interviews. Nevertheless, the use of interviews in this thesis has been vital to understanding 'what fans are *doing*, rather than trying to impose terms and values on their activities,'[300] and to identify individual experiences of the key themes within this thesis. These interviews showed that many fanfiction authors view the fanfiction community as a subversive and supportive space where they can develop their authorial voice and writing skills, as well as find likeminded individuals with whom they can share their enjoyment for and discussions on their favourite texts.

This thesis began with discussing the news of AO3's Hugo Award for Best Related Work and Naomi Novik's acceptance speech, in which she stated, 'All our hard work and contributions [as AO3 volunteers] would mean nothing without the work of the fan creators who share their work freely with other fans, and the fans who read their stories and…nourish the community in their turn.'[301] In 2007, after the days of the first-wave of fanfiction studies, where fanfiction was viewed as a transgressive way to rebel against the commercialisation of storytelling, AO3

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[300] Aja Romano, 'The Archive of Our Own just won a Hugo. That's huge for fanfiction.', *Vox*, (2019) <https://www.vox.com/2019/4/11/18292419/archive-of-our-own-wins-hugo-award-best-related-work> [Accessed 11 July 2021]

[301] Aja Romano, 'The Archive of Our Own just won a Hugo. That's huge for fanfiction', *Vox*, (2019) <https://www.vox.com/2019/4/11/18292419/archive-of-our-own-wins-hugo-award-best-related-work> [Accessed 11 July 2021]

was 'born out of fans rebelling against corporate exploitation.'[302] However, reflecting Novik's speech, AO3's perception of fanworks also champions the importance of the feeling of community as well as dialogue between individual fans. This thesis began in Chapter 1 by establishing both the importance of community and dialogue between fanfiction readers and writers, as well as the initial sense of empathy that often inspires intimacy with fictional characters and drives the desire to read or write fanfiction. This understanding of empathy and community is essential in discussing other fanfiction issues such as authorship or representation, as it allows for great focus on motivations of the individual fanfiction author and their experiences and dialogue with others in their groups. Ultimately, current fanfiction studies must adapt in the same way that queer theory continues to, and regard the fanfiction community not just as a space to subvert, 'to distance oneself from norms, and to embrace that distance,'[303] but also as a space that is shifting towards 'positions that advocate for a way to build a better shared world.'[304] As traditional media continues to be aware of its fans and what they want from the stories they engage in, the dialogue that the fanfiction community has around the representation of minority groups may help encourage higher levels of diversity in media. Furthermore, the authorial voice that individual fanfiction writers develop may inspire them to take their own step into writing professional media, with their experiences in the supportive and diverse fanfiction community kept in mind. These hypotheses do not aim to declare fanfiction as the pioneer of minority representation or the birthplace for millions of new, professional, diverse authors. However, with the examples explored in this thesis and the acknowledgement that fanfiction continues to grow more recognised and popular, the effects that fanfiction writers and readers have on these areas of literature and media are undeniable.

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[302] Aja Romano, 'The Archive of Our Own just won a Hugo. That's huge for fanfiction', *Vox*, (2019) <https://www.vox.com/2019/4/11/18292419/archive-of-our-own-wins-hugo-award-best-related-work> [Accessed 11 July 2021]

[303] Tyler Bradway and E. L McCallum, *After Queer Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p.3.

[304] Rebekah Sheldon, 'Reading For Transgression: Queering Genres', in *After Queer Studies,* ed. by Tyler Bradway and E. L. McCallum, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 171-187 (p.171-172).

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Below is a list of the 18 questions participants were asked in Zoom interviews conducted as part of this thesis, as well as a glossary of interview key terms and an introduction that was read to each participant before the interview was conducted.

Note: A glossary of key terms used in this interview is provided below. It is presumed by the researcher that participants will understand what these terms mean, as they are frequently used terms within the fanfiction community. However, if the participant requires clarification for any key term, the definition will be given.

Key terms:

- Fandom – The collective community of fans than forms around a shared love of or fascination for a fictional series, celebrity, etc.

- Fanfiction – fiction that is based on, and written by fans of, a pre-existing piece of literature or other media. Often colloquially shortened to 'fanfic'.

- Ship – a concept used to define the state of two or more individuals, fictional or otherwise, in a relationship, which is typically romantic. The individuals in these 'ships' are not always represented as romantic within the original piece of media or, when referring to real people, in real life.

Note on the term 'minority groups' as used in this study

As it is defined in this study, the term 'minority groups' describes groups that are typically viewed as the 'minority' through representation in mainstream, Western, English-speaking

media, e.g., non-white, non-straight, non-cisgender, or non-male. The researcher is aware that this term cannot be generalised universally. For example, regarding ethnicity, the term 'minority' does not apply to the same set of ethnic groups in every country across the world. However, as the research focuses mainly on Western, English-speaking media where non-white communities are typically underrepresented, the term 'minority' is being used to describe non-white groups.

Introduction Script

Hello and thank you for participating in this interview. Before we start, I'll just need to mention a couple of quick things about the questions and key words in this interview. Firstly, I think most of the 'fan' centric words used in this interview, like 'fandom' or 'ships', are universal among fanfiction writers, we all know what they mean. But at any point, if you are confused by a word, or by the phrasing of a question, just let me know and I can try to explain it a little better.

Secondly, this interview will focus in part on the topic of minority groups within fanfiction, so I'd just like to define clearly what we mean by 'minority groups' in this research. As it is defined in this study, the term 'minority groups' describes groups that are typically viewed as the 'minority' through representation in mainstream, Western, English-speaking media, e.g., non-white, non-straight, non-cisgender, or non-male. The researcher is aware that this term cannot be generalised universally. For example, regarding ethnicity, the term 'minority' does not apply to the same set of ethnic groups in every country across the world. However, as the research focuses mainly on Western, English-speaking media where non-white communities are typically underrepresented, the term 'minority' is being used to describe non-white groups.

Now, onto the interview. I will ask you a series of questions in order to understand your personal reasons for writing fanfiction, your experiences of being part of the fanfiction

community, and your opinions on fanfiction as a practice. The interview is estimated to take 45 minutes to complete, but feel free to take as much or as little time needed to answer each question. Before we start, do you have any questions or concerns you would like to raise?

<u>Questions</u>

1. You can choose not to answer this question if you wish, but first of all, how would you best describe your gender identity?

Why Fanfic?

2. Why do you write fanfiction?

3. Do you write stories that aren't fanfiction as well? And would you ever consider publishing such stories through traditional publishing routes, such as a publishing house or self-publishing, etc?

4. What kind of emotional/social function does fanfiction hold for you? For example, an emotional support during difficult times, or a way to find friends/a community?

5. 'Empathy' is described as the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Do you believe that people can develop empathy for fictional characters and scenarios? And does this influence your fanfiction at all – who you write about, what they go through?

Relationship with Text and Representation

6. What fandom(s) do you write fanfiction for currently, and why?

7. What kind of ships, if any, do you write about, and why? E.g., M/M, F/F, M/F?

8.   Do you consciously represent minority groups – LGBT, POCs – in your fanfiction, and if so, what are your aims in doing so?

9.   How do you feel the fanfiction community deals with the representation of minority groups?

10.   How do you feel the media you consume (books, films, tv, etc) deals with representation of minorities?

Relationship with Author

11.   Do you find it validating or encouraging whenever authors, TV creative teams, etc, speak out in favour of fanfiction? Or on the contrary, would the disapproval from these groups discourage you from writing fanfiction?

12.   Who do stories and characters 'belong to' upon publication? Why do you think that?

13.   How do you react when an author takes a story in a direction you don't like? Do you have any examples?

Relationship with 'Outsiders'

14.   Have you ever shared fanfic with friends, family, or people outside of the fanfiction community? Why/why not?

15.   Some evidence suggests that people outside of the fanfiction community 'look down on' fanfiction as a practice. What do you think about this?

Relationship with the Community

16. How do you feel about commentary on or criticism of your work from readers, constructive or otherwise?

17. How do you feel about the community surrounding fanfiction as a whole?

18. Do you feel that fanfiction has had any influence on story-telling conventions of today, or society as a whole? If yes, what kind?