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APPRECIATION OR ABOMINATION?
A STUDY OF FANFICTION AS LITERATURE

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G1

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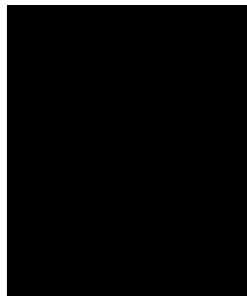
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I would like to thank my tutor Gemma López for her patience and her encouraging comments. I remember her first year classes with a special fondness, as I believe it was thanks to her enthusiasm in what she taught that I realised what my true vocation was: literature.

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Abstract

The legitimacy of fanfiction has traditionally been questioned according to our understanding and definition of what literature is and what it is not. The aim of this dissertation will be to provide evidence that fanfiction is a legitimate literary genre and to explore how it fits into the contemporary literary scene. In order to do so, this study will provide a state of the art overview, with a special focus on representation and revision of canonical texts in fanfiction. The ideas explored will prompt some reconsideration of our concept of literature as well as question the idea of originality as a defining quality of legitimate literature. These ideas will be linked to provide further evidence of the intricate action-reaction relation of fanfiction with the contemporary literary scene. Overall, this paper defends fanfiction as a legitimate literary genre and argues for a new understanding of literature.

Keywords: fanfiction, fan culture, legitimacy, revision, representation

Resumen

La legitimidad del fanfiction ha sido tradicionalmente cuestionada de acuerdo a nuestra comprensión y definición de lo que es literatura y de lo que no lo es. El objetivo de este trabajo consiste en proporcionar pruebas de que el fanfiction es un género literario legítimo y explorar cómo este encaja en el panorama literario contemporáneo. Para ello, este estudio proporcionará una descripción del estado del arte, haciendo hincapié en la representación y la revisión de textos canónicos en el fanfiction. Las ideas expuestas propiciarán una reconsideración de nuestro concepto de literatura y, además, cuestionarán la originalidad como una cualidad determinante de la legitimidad literaria. Posteriormente estas ideas se relacionarán para aportar más muestras de la compleja relación acción-reacción entre el fanfiction y el panorama literario contemporáneo. Globalmente, este trabajo defiende el fanfiction como género literario legítimo y aboga por una nueva perspectiva sobre la literatura.

Palabras clave: fanfiction, cultura fan, legitimidad, revisión, representación

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Appreciation or Abomination? A Study of Fanfiction as Literature

1. Introduction

Last scene fades to black the same way the last page reads 'The End' and, after that, it is up to the public's imagination what happens next. However, not all fans are ready to leave that fictional world behind. They want to know more about the characters and their story, not only what happens next, but also about the what ifs: what if that one character had not died; what if the villain had not been defeated; what if the author had not decided to end their novel in such a rushed and nonsensical way. It is from this desire to dive into, expand and sometimes fix the original fiction that fans started to write their own stories about their favourite characters and their worlds. This is how fanfiction was born. Fanfiction could be defined as a genre of literary fiction based on another original story. Fanfic authors borrow said original worlds and characters to explore the universes they love or to explore issues that were not dealt with in the original, usually regarding identity, gender, sexuality or mental health. Essentially, fanfiction was born from the fans' need for more content and the simple pleasure of exploring the details and what ifs of their favourite stories.

The fandom phenomenon has taken over the world. From the first *Star Trek* conventions to *Game of Thrones* viewing parties in pubs, fans have always found a way to gather and share their interests with other fans. Fandoms quickly installed themselves in the online scene, which opened a door to a whole new era of fan culture and changed the way fans interact with each other, making sharing and posting fan content much easier and accessible. Thus, fan works like fanfiction gained a lot more attention and a relevant role in the dynamics of fandom communities. As these communities are made up of both the producers and consumers of fanfiction, it would be fair to say that fanfiction relies on and is heavily influenced by its community. So, instead of neglecting fan culture and fanfiction, it is crucial to understand the importance of these increasing fandoms and how that is affecting online media and literary production.

Opinions on fanfiction have been assorted and differing. Some see it as some kind of abomination and perversion of the original text, whereas others see it as an appreciation, a rendition of the original text. But despite it being a controversial topic,

the fanfiction phenomenon has not received much academic attention and most discussions about fanfiction actually take place amongst the online community. Fanfiction is discussed by fans, in a more formal or informal way, rather than scholars. However, fanfiction is a topic worthy of study precisely because of the controversy it arises around questions of legitimacy, and more research should be conducted on whether fanfiction is a corruption of another author's work or an appreciative art (and, therefore, a form of art per se). Thus, the aim of this paper is to study fanfiction and provide evidence that fanfiction is indeed a legitimate literary genre. In order to do so, the genre will be studied, first, from a sociological point of view in order to understand its nature and, secondly, from a literary point of view in order to discern where fanfiction works stand in the literary milieu.

This paper will be divided into two parts. The first part of this research will consist on a study on the state of the art. This part will provide an overview of the origins and evolution of fanfiction, the fanfiction community and insights on why fans choose to read and write fanfiction, focusing on creative experimentation and revision of the original texts. The second part of this paper will explore fanfiction in relation to the literary scene. This part will particularly focus on questioning the Western canon and the preconceived idea of literature as well as analyzing and contextualizing fanfiction in a literary context. In order to do so, the concepts of originality and authorship will be challenged and the relationship of fanfiction with the traditional publishing industry will be examined. Lastly, this paper will try to provide an insight into what could the future of fanfiction be.

As previously stated, fanfiction has not been a topic of interest in academic studies, but the works of the scholars Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson could be considered to be referential in the academic study of fan culture and fanfiction. Their works are regarded as referential precisely because they themselves are part of the fanfiction community, as both of them are co-editors of *Transformative Works and Cultures* journal and Busse is also on the Board of Directors for the *Organization for Transformative Works*. It is very hard to understand fanfiction lore from an outsider's perspective, not only because of its complexities but also because of the stigma around fan works.

A dilemma arose during the research process regarding the secondary sources. As previously mentioned, most discussions about fanfiction take place amongst the online fanfiction community in blog posts, forums or even social media, and there are great sources online that, despite not belonging to academic journals, have been really helpful. It had to be considered how much of an individual's reputation, experience and involvement in a subject can compensate for the fact that it is not a reliable academic source. For instance, this paper will quote one of Aja Romano's posts on *LiveJournal*, in which she wrote an essay on Draco Malfoy's character. She is currently a culture reporter and she has been involved and very active in the fanfiction community for years. Aja Romano's insights about fanfiction should be taken into account precisely because of her involvement in the fanfiction community. Another example could be *Fanlore*, a platform that works as an archive of fan works and fan culture. It is based on *Wikipedia*'s software format and, while managed by a committee, any fan may contribute to creating or editing its contents. As this website works as an archive, it has provided many definitions of fan terminology, timelines, information and links to sources that would have been hard to find otherwise and that ended up being really helpful for this research. The usefulness and resourcefulness of this website should be recognized as much as any other academic material.

While the need to use reliable and peer-reviewed academic sources is unquestionable, there is no reason why these online sources should be disregarded as long as their limitations are acknowledged. Therefore, this paper will use academic secondary sources as well as non-academic online sources, accepting their limitations and their value as a product of the fan community that is being studied.

2. State of the Art

2.1. Fanfiction: Origins and Insights

It is hard to set a date to the origin of fanfiction. It could be argued that it was when Sherlock Holmes' fans started writing their own stories after Doyle killed the beloved detective. However, what we understand as fanfiction today started out in the 60s, following the boom of pop culture and the broadcast of iconic television shows. And if there is one television show that sparked the fanfiction phenomenon, it is NBC's

Star Trek. The original show ran for three seasons (1966-1969) and it amassed a huge fan base that kept growing even after the cancellation of the show. All kind of merchandise imaginable was produced: posters, collectible cards, figurines, lunch boxes… The fans just could not get enough of their favourite show. After the huge success of the first *Star Trek* convention in 1972, similar conventions were held in the following years and it was in those fan meetings that fanzines started to be distributed by fans to other fans.

According to Stephen Duncombe (1997), "zines are non-commercial, non-professional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish and distribute by themselves" (as cited in *Properganderpress*). One of those first fanzines was *Spockanalia*, with a total of five issues, the first issue being printed in 1967 and the last in 1970. The fanzine included works ranging from short stories, scripts, studies of the *Stark Trek* universe and its characters, poems, songs and even comic strips. However, the fact that those fanfiction works were only shared with close friends or distributed in small amounts in conventions prompted fanfiction to remain an underground and fairly unknown genre for the first decades of its existence. And even though fanzines are still being produced and sold by fans these days, they are treated as a collectible and a way to support those writers and artists, as fanfiction swiftly found its place online.

The advent of the internet made it a lot easier to share and access fanfiction and it was not long before fans started to create forums and blogs dedicated to their favourite books and shows. These websites usually included all kinds of information, like pictures of the actors, fan theories, fanart and fanfiction. The purpose of these websites was as simple as to share their interests with other people, but this time all around the world. This was truly the beginning of fan communities, or as they are known today: fandoms. While still remaining a niche genre, the development of strong fandoms would be essential for the perdurance of fanfiction in the future.

Later on, websites dedicated exclusively to the posting of fanfiction of all fandoms started to pop up. *Fanfiction.net* was launched on 1998 and it was the pioneer fanfiction website, as it was the first multifandom fanfiction archive. It is the largest fanfiction website to this day, with more than 220,000 *Twilight* works and the impressive number of more than 800,000 *Harry Potter* works. It was a revolutionary

platform because fans no longer had to scroll through countless blogs to find fanfics and in fact, it could be said that the launching of *Fanfiction.net* could be considered the foundation of modern day fanfiction. However, despite its position as the website with the largest number of posted works, its interface has become outdated and fanfic readers have favoured other more practical websites, specially the younger readerships. *Wattpad* (2006) was the next big fanfiction website, attracting a younger audience with its dynamic interface and with the added particularity of allowing users to post original fiction. It has more than 80 million monthly users and has become so popular due to its highly dynamic and customizable interface, which is attractive for both writers and readers. But as the old saying warns, all that glitters is not gold, and *Wattpad* has not earned the best reputation amongst fanfiction platforms. The most popular fanfics usually have some kind of original character inserts, like Mary Sue characters (a fictional original character that can usually be identified as the alter ego of the author) or reader inserts (in which the reader in question is the main character in the story), which are quite looked down upon in the community. Because of this, *Wattpad*'s content is regarded as novice or of poor quality by older or more skilled fanfiction writers and readers.

It is *Archive of Our Own* (2009) who has taken over in the last decade and who is currently the most popular fanfiction platform amongst fans. *Archive of Our Own* (AO3) is a project of the *Organization for Transformative Works* (OTW), which is described as "a nonprofit organization, established by fans in 2007, to serve the interests of fans by providing access to and preserving the history of fanworks and fan culture in its myriad forms" ("About the OTW"). Essentially, AO3's website was born from the opposition of fandom writers to the idea of fanfiction platforms earning money from their works through advertising. Since brands would not advertise on websites with explicit or adult content, some websites like *LiveJournal* or *Fanfiction.net* had several purges of content they deemed as not appropriate. Fans were outraged at the censorship and demanded for an alternative platform that did not restrict their creativity.

In 2007, the *LiveJournal* user *astolat*, very active in the fanfiction community, laid out the a proposal for a fanfiction archive in their post *An Archive Of One's Own*. They proposed an archive run by fanfic readers for fanfic readers, completely non-profit, with no ads, run by donations and that allowed uncensored content (Astolat, 2007). While their proposal could have been regarded as too utopian, after receiving so

many positive comments they made a call for volunteers that same year and started developing altogether what would become OTW. Two years later they would launch AO3's beta website, which to this day has been run by fans and volunteers, remaining a non-profit project and only accepting donations to improve their servers as the traffic of the website increases (in fact, the website is still in beta more than 10 years after its launching). Currently, AO3 hosts more than 6 million fanfics, more than 2 million registered users and still stands with the premise that "fanworks are transformative and that transformative works are legitimate" ("About The OTW"). In 2019, AO3 won a Hugo Award for Best Related Work and thus, recognizing AO3 "as a project and a platform" (*The Hugo Awards*). The launching and development of AO3 is important because it embodies the concept of fan culture and its resistance to remain a space by fans for fans.

As the fanfiction community grows, so do the way fans interact with fanfiction. What is clear is that fanfiction is no longer a niche interest despite remaining an underground genre and that it has an active community that values their sense of community, history and rights as creators.

2.2. The Fanfiction Experience

While AO3 seems to be the preferred platform for most fanfic writers and readers because of its clean design and its ad free platform, it was the introduction of one very interesting feature that made it stand out in the first place: a tag system. This sophisticated tag system allows fanfiction readers to decide what they want to read, turning it into an almost personalized reading experience: the reader can choose the rating, category, characters featured, relationship between the characters, completion status and word count of the fanfics they want to see on their search. Or the other way around, as they may also use it to decide what rating, characters or warnings they want to exclude from their search. The tagging system previously used in other websites was very rudimentary and only allowed a general search by fandom or character, so the introduction of this tagging system changed the way fans interact with fanfiction, as not only does it let readers sort through the most general tags but it also lets them sort through additional tags related to the plot of the story. Tags like 'Fluff', 'Enemies to Lovers', 'Major Character Death', 'Angst with a Happy Ending', 'AU' ('Alternate

Universe'), 'PWP' ('Plot What Plot'/'Porn Without Plot') and a long list of others are very common and have become intrinsic to the fanfiction community.

Fans have become really creative with tags, as the website allows freeform tags, which are not really about categorization and are used as another way for the authors to communicate with the readers. Taking a look at some *Harry Potter* fanfic tags on AO3 one might find things like: 'This is War not a Tea Party', 'Harry thinks Petunia is delusional, which she is', 'I got bored one day and really like the Prologue in Les Mis, so this happened' and 'Author is not good with tags, Sorta like the weasley's with postage stamps'. One could consider this excessive tagging as borderline spoiler sometimes, but the reading experience a fanfiction reader is looking for is different from that of any other reader. Just like anybody else, fanfiction readers have their own preferences when it comes to reading and they will sort through these tags in order to find a work that suits their preferences or their current mood. Most of the time, they are not looking for a complex plot or surprising plot twists, because one of the appeals of fanfiction is the possibility to just indulge in what one likes to read, even if that means reading fanfics with the same tropes and predictable endings again and again. Still, the tagging system has completely changed and improved the fanfiction reading experience, as it gives enormous prominence to the reader.

Basically, this tool enables a reader-based experience in which the reader has absolute control over what works get shown to them as well as allowing them to know the contents in the fanfic beforehand as they are clearly specified. In a way, tags have become inherent in fanfiction and not only have they contributed to creating this personalised reading experience, but have also made it easier for readers to avoid certain tags that would trigger them (like graphic descriptions of violence or major character death) and overall make it a safer space for everyone. Tagging is a special feature that has definitely reshaped and improved the fanfiction experience.

2.3. The Fanfiction Community

It is clear then that becoming acquainted with the most of the intrinsic components of fanfiction is part of joining a fandom community. And at the same time it is essential to understand the community of fanfiction writers and readers behind the

screen in order to understand the nature of fanfiction. Traditionally, the fanfiction community has been dominated by women, as opposed to the canon literary scene where men have historically dominated. Taking *Spockanalia* (1968) as an example, most of its contributors were women. However, Flegel and Roth (2016) argue that "[t]he perception that fanfiction is primarily written by and for women reflects the genesis of media fandom as a haven for fans and writers who often found themselves marginalized from the traditionally male enclaves of speculative fiction" (p. 255). This would support the idea of fanfiction not only being outlet for marginalised voices but also an outlet for voices that were marginalised in specific genres because they were highly marketed to men, like science fiction or comics.

However, to state that women constitute most of nowadays fanfiction community would be a mistake. Firstly, because usernames provide an anonymous persona and it is wrong to assume someone's gender identity. Secondly, the fanfiction community is already known to be quite broad and diverse. As Koehm (2018) stated in her study:

> More recent research indicates that the common wisdom that mostly straight women compose fanfiction communities is out of date; fanfiction communities include a large number of non-binary and queer people, which further shapes the community as a space for marginalized voices to find an outlet and an audience. (p. 9)

This affirmation is partially supported by a census Tumblr user *centrumlumina* conducted on AO3's users in 2013. The aim of the survey was to study the demographics, site use and work preferences of the respondents[1]. The data[2] shows that more than half of the respondents were in their 20s and that the average age of respondents was 25 years. When asked what gender they identified as, 80% of the respondents said that they identified as female, 6% identified as genderqueer, 2% identified as transgender and the same percentage of respondents identified as agender or non-binary. Only 4% of those respondents identified as male. Regarding the sexual

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[1] *Centrumlumina* acknowledges the limitations of this census as it only represents a fraction of AO3's users and the results cannot lead to definite conclusions about the whole fanfiction community. However, the data obtained is worth mentioning because, despite its limitations, it still seems to reflect what most scholars have said about femaleness and queerness in the fanfiction community.

[2] These percentages refer to the % of total responses to this question, which sum up to 100%. To see percentages referring to the % of total survey participants see *centrumlumina*'s post in the works cited.

orientation of the respondents, only 29% identified as heterosexual, while the rest identified with different LGBTQ identities, with 23% of the respondents identifying as bisexual, 9% as asexual and 5% as homosexual. Overall, while this census seems to support the assumption that fandoms are mostly constituted by women, it also seems to support that a lot of fanfiction community members are also a part of the LGBTQ community. Since the census was carried out in 2013, it would be interesting to observe how these numbers have changed almost ten years later. Nevertheless, even if this census has its limitations, it seems to support the idea that the fanfiction community is a specially female and queer space[3].

It would also be interesting to note that when the respondents were asked what ethnicity they identified as, 76% of them identified as White, while 7% identified as Asian, 5% identified as Hispanic and mixed respectively, and only 2% identified as Black. Further study could be conducted on why there seems to be queer diversity but not racial and/or ethnic diversity in the fanfiction community. One of Koehm's personal contacts within the community, Dakotah, argued that:

> There are certainly a variety of races represented, but I think overwhelmingly it is white. Mostly because, from what I have seen, anytime a non-white person tries to share their experiences, or write a non-white character having experiences that portray white people in a negative light, that POC is generally ran out of the fandom. (as cited in Koehm, 2018, p. 48)

Koehm adds that this also seems to support the idea that "media fandom engages in 'structural whiteness through participation in mainstream American culture's default to whiteness and through engagement with default-white media'" (Koehm and Mel Stanfill, as cited in Koehm, p. 48). In essence, fandoms seem to be inherently white because they emulate the default whiteness of the media fans consume and because, even if fanfiction might present itself as a utopian space for marginalised voices, it is still not free of prejudice and institutionalized racism.

It should be kept in mind that the respondents of the census are a small fraction of AO3's users and that the author states that the data should not be used to draw conclusions, but there seems to be a disparity in queer and ethnic user diversity and

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[3] This paper uses the term "queer" as an umbrella term to refer to a LGBTQ identity.

acceptance in the community. The anonymous identity that the internet procures makes it hard to provide an overview of the demographics of the fanfiction community, but the increasing online presence of POC and queer people that are vocal about representation in fandom could suggest that diversity in the community has increased too. Further study should be conducted on this, as it is crucial to understand the community in order to fully comprehend how it affects and how intrinsic it is to the nature of fanfiction.

2.4. Why Fanfiction?

Though heavily misunderstood and stigmatized by the general public, the fanfiction community has shown resistance and has kept growing exponentially through the years. The truth is that while some people might still fail to understand why, people choose to write fanfiction for many reasons and some of them are very similar to the reason people write at all.

One of the simplest reasons people choose to write fanfiction could be the creative experimentation it enables. Fanfiction allows writers to explore the characters and universes they love so much while practicing their writing skills at the same time. Fans write fanfiction because they enjoy doing so, regardless of them wanting to pursue a writing career in the future or not. In fact, the skills that are developed through writing fanfiction, from the study of characters and their world to remaining consistent with the characterization, are essential for good quality writing.

Moreover, while writing tends to be a solitary act, fanfiction is not. Fanfiction is heavily community based and a writer can get a good amount of feedback (which is quite hard to get otherwise) if they decide to share their works online. Plus, there is the further gratification of having someone read and enjoy your work. In an interview, Allen Lau, the co-founder and CEO of *Wattpad*, mentioned that "[f]or most people the motivation is having someone to appreciate their creation. They care more about people showing appreciation of their work" (*The Literary Platform*, 2012). The fanfiction community is usually very supportive when leaving comments on someone else's work. There seems to be an unspoken rule for readers to leave a comment or 'kudos' (similar to leaving a 'like') when finishing a fanfic or a chapter to show their support to the author. And while some are banal but positive comments (telling the writer how much

they enjoyed it or how they cannot wait for the next chapter), some other readers give constructive criticism with the things that they enjoyed and suggestions about what they feel like it could be improved. Rarely does one find negative reviews, as the tag system already helps readers to sort their search results according to their preferences and if they do not enjoy a particular fanfic, they just stop reading it because there is no commitment to do so. This favours an environment in which writers can feel safe sharing their writing and gain more confidence as they improve their writing skills. In short, one of the most appealing reasons why people chose to share their fanfiction works online is because of the feedback, positive validation and sense of community that it brings them.

Another reason why people might write fanfiction is because it allows writers to transform and critique media through their works. As Allison McCracken (2015) stated in her review of Anne Jamison's work:

> The power and cultural value of fan fiction is the way it permits women to write alternative versions of existing narratives and characters that speak more directly to their feminine, feminist, and/or queer investments and desires, creating a shared, mutually supportive subculture that exposes, subverts, and transgresses cultural norms and hierarchies. (p. 172)

Pop culture and media are hugely influenced by the society we live in. This means that a lot of voices and experiences are dismissed and omitted from the media we consume, favouring the white heterosexual and mostly male experience. If one thinks about most renowned literary and media productions, such as *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, *Twilight*, the *Marvel Comics* universe or even *Disney* productions, all of them conform to the same normative canon and have very little to no diversity. The voices of women, ethnic minorities and those who belong to the LGBTQ community have been dismissed and erased from the media we consume. That absence of diversity in today's media is what might lead fans to write and read fanfiction, as the amount of characters or experiences that they can relate to is scarce. Furthermore, the marginalisation of women, queer and POC writers in the publishing world, added to the disregard of their experiences in media, might be the reason why fans turn to fanfiction to write and read about something they can finally relate to.

According to Tosenberger (2008), while male writers usually write what she calls "affirmational fanfiction", women and queer writers write "transformational fanfiction" (p. 7). In other words, fanfiction written by men usually follows the canon of the original work, while fanfiction written by women, queer and POC writers alter the original canon and introduce certain changes in the universe or the characters in order to explore different topics or morals. In fanfiction, writers are allowed to explore themes considered taboo or esteemed not appropriate for most traditional publishing houses, such as gender, sexuality, discrimination and even mental health. Most fanfiction is about the exploration of what is left unsaid, which is part of the revision and reinterpretation of the original text, but it is also about what has been ignored and rejected in media. By introducing topics that are considered taboo in traditional publishing and by exploring "the mutability and variation of these identities" (Koehm, 2018, p. 16), both writers and readers might find that fanfiction "validates their own struggle" (p. 27). In all, a big part of fanfiction is about finding representation and validation of your own identity and experience.

The *Harry Potter* fandom is one of the biggest fandoms online and it is the perfect example of how transformational fanfiction can affect the canon and the perception the fans have on the original work. The characters have been extensively analysed and revised by the fans, exploring not only what the books show but what their interpretation of them is. For instance, the portrayal of Draco Malfoy in the fandom is very different from the one in the books and the movies. Since Draco's motivations and psychology is majorly left undealt with in the canon, the fandom has adopted a more three-dimensional character, one that is rarely seen as a villain. In one post, fan blogger Aja Romano (2004) argued that "[i]n many respects Malfoy in canon is a cipher, a blank page we in fandom have been writing and rewriting for years" (para. 33). The fandom has adopted a new characterization through a revision of the character and thus changed the fans perception on the canonical Draco Malfoy.

Similarly, other *Harry Potter* characters have been reinterpreted. If one takes a quick look around the online *Harry Potter* fandom, one will find that a big part of the fanfics and fanarts feature a Black Hermione. This has been a popular trend in the fandom for years and it is not an arbitrary reinterpretation of the character. As Koehm (2018) explained in her paper:

> With Hermione in particular, fans read a blackness into her experience. Hermione is described as having frizzy, curly hair that she constantly tries to keep straight and is ridiculed for, something that fans have tagged as an experience a black girl might be familiar with. Hermione is also one of the only people in the Harry Potter universe who opposes the treatment of the House Elves, a sentient race of people who are enslaved by witches and wizards. (p. 51)

In fact, the role of Hermione in the two-part play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* was played by the Black actress Noma Dumezweni. In an interview with *The Guardian*, J. K. Rowling confessed that "there was always the possibility of Hermione being black in the way she was described; skin colour was never mentioned" (2016). This brought a lot of controversy but at the same it provided evidence that, more often than not, most of these reinterpretations and revisions of the canon are not unfounded. Yet, the fact that is it left for the readers to dig into the subtext to find this representation is problematic and another form of erasure and discrimination.

Despite racebending (racial rewriting of a character) having a great importance in the *Harry Potter* fandom, it seems like it is not as commonly used in other fandoms. It seems like there is an underrepresentation of POC characters in fanfiction partially due to the lack of representation in media, but even though fans have found ways to rewrite these characters, it is not that common in fanfiction as it is in other forms of fan expression; racial diversity and inclusivity are heavily explored in fanart and fan discussions, but not so much in fanfiction (except for some instances in which fans have read a racial subtext, such as Hermione's). As aforementioned, one of the reasons behind this could be that the fanfiction community is not a space free of racism and discrimination. As Ashley J. Barner (2017) suggested:

> While fanfiction holds the possibility of offering representation for minority readers who were not represented by the original work, this does not mean that fanfiction as a whole is always good at producing as many examples of that representation as it reasonably should. Fans carry their prejudices with them into fandom, and these prejudices can be seen in such quantitative studies. (p. 95)

Racebending should still be regarded as a rewriting and revision tool for fanfiction writers, but it must also be acknowledged that this only seems to be a popular trend on specific fandoms and characters in which fans have read a racial subtext.

There was another controversy in the *Harry Potter* fandom just after the release of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,* when Rowling declared that she "always thought of Dumbledore as gay" (interview transcript from *The Leaky Cauldron,* 2007). Dumbledore's sexuality had been a big question mark in the fandom for years and her announcement seemed to provide further evidence that some fan reinterpretations of the canon are not unfounded. Plus, after her declaration, it could be argued that fan reinterpretations are not a subversion of the text, but "an actualization of latent textual elements" (Jones as cited in Tosenberger, 2008, p. 201). While the fandom's reaction was mostly positive, many fans argued that alluding to Dumbledore's sexual orientation without actually transferring that to the screen was a way of closeting the character. Making extratextual statements was considered not enough by a community that is already discriminated and marginalised in media, as it must be taken into account that most media assumes a heteronormative reading and that "[e]ven where characters' sexualities are not indicated in the . . . text, a wider cultural logic dictates that heterosexuality can be assumed while homosexuality must be proved" (Jones as cited in Tosenberger, 2008, p. 202). Albus Dumbeldore once told Harry to "[a]lways use the proper name for things" as "[f]ear of a name increases fear of the thing itself" (Rowling, 1997, p. 320), and likewise, the uncensored nature fanfiction can be seen as a source of empowerment for both writers and readers to use the proper name for things too.

In all, fanfiction has come a long way, from its origins in fanzines to fan run websites like AO3, and over the years its nature has proved to be more complex than just banal fan creations. It is also clear that it is fundamental to take into account the importance of the fanfiction community when studying fanfiction, as it is the only way to really understand the underlying reasons of its nature. Fanfiction not only has enabled fans to experiment with their creative skills but it has also been used as a way for them to reclaim a spot in media and culture though the revision of canonical texts. It highlights the importance of finding representation for those whose identities and experiences have been erased from mainstream media and traditional publishing.

3. Fanfiction and Literature

3.1. What Is Legitimate Literature?

The literary scene is an elitist world and, as previously mentioned, fanfiction is often based on works whose genre has traditionally been regarded as not worthy of academic study, like fantasy or science fiction. As a consequence, fanfiction has also been ignored or looked down upon by academics because of its amateur and emerging nature. However, in the recent years a discussion on whether fanfiction should be considered legitimate literature or not has stirred up among fans, authors and scholars. This part of the paper will explore fanfiction in a literary context and its place in the contemporary literary scene.

The value of a text is subjective, but according to the criteria of some literary academics, such as F.R. Leavis and Harold Bloom, a few works have been traditionally regarded as superior and named the great classics of literature. For instance, Bloom published *The Western Canon* (1994), in which he discusses 26 authors that he considers to be central or essential to the Western Canon, and thus the inclusion in this canon is considered a sign of prestige and quality. Essentially, literature is valued according to this set of works that have been regarded as important and worthy of study by academia. As these texts would later be considered the great classics of literature, they would consequently play an influential part in constructing the idea of what quality literature is. But most of the time, the Occidental canon is regarded as the only influential literary canon. Western scholars' opinion has traditionally been given a prominent value regarding what texts are worthy of praise and study, which means that this body of scholars and academics was indeed a privileged one, mainly formed by white men. Therefore, their concept of quality might have been biased towards certain narratives and other contemporary male authors, making this a possible reason why most of the texts that are part of the Western literary canon are narrations of male experiences by male authors. For example, out of the 26 authors mentioned in Bloom's work, only four were women and none of them were POC. Can such canon be considered referential when so many voices and narratives were neglected?

When trying to find a defining quality of what a work of art is, English art critic Clive Bell argued:

[A]ny system of aesthetics which pretends to be based on some objective truth is so palpably ridiculous as not to be worth discussing. We have no other means of recognising a work of art than our feeling for it. The objects that provoke aesthetic emotion vary with each individual. (1914)

In essence, there is no point in judging art by objective parameters because art is subjective and entirely dependent on individual experience. While it can be argued that those canonical narratives can be extrapolated to human condition, it illustrates how the Western male experience has been set as the universal human experience, when in reality human condition is extremely diverse and complex. If Bell's ideas were applied to literature, the value of the literary canon and the body of texts that are universally acknowledged to be classics would rely on the individual's reading experience rather than on academic recognition. Since art and literature change and evolve as societies do, we should refrain from defining what literary quality is according to a body of referential texts established by a non-inclusive and outdated academia. Therefore, that idea of quality should be challenged, as the value of art is a subjective aspect and a text does not need academic recognition in order for it to be considered legitimate literature.

The fact that fanfiction is often not regarded as legitimate writing is arguable but understandable. If one is not familiar with fanfiction, it is easy to hold into the idea that, as they are based on and use elements and characters from another text, they are not original enough to be considered legitimate works. In other words, originality and innovation are equalled to legitimacy. The authorship of fanfics is arguable, but the truth is that most fanfics drift so far apart from the original fiction that they barely have any similar elements apart from the characters and their dynamics. Tropes like 'Alternate Universe' are one of the reasons why: how much of the original *Harry Potter* is left if all the magical elements are removed and replaced with a modern day college setting in which the protagonist is a Black Hermione struggling through finals season with her friends?

Moreover, this assumption that only original work is legitimate literature would query the position of renowned texts such as *Ulysses*, *Paradise Lost*, *The Penelopiad* or *Prometheus Unbound*. Are not they, in a way, fanfiction? Rewritings could be considered transformative works, just like fanfiction, as the characters and plots were originally created by another author. This idea was also explored by Tosenberger (2014):

Although in recent years use of the term "fanfiction" has become more widespread, it originates within fandom, and one rarely finds nonfannish academics using the term to refer to commercially published material that conceivably could be defined as such. Stories that, like fanfiction, make extensive and explicit use of characters, plots, and universes from specific preexisting texts that the reader is expected to be able to identify, include many respected and canonical texts: *Paradise Lost*, much of the Arthurian corpus, many of Shakespeare's plays, *Ulysses*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and so on. (p. 14)

Similarly to fanfiction, most rewritings have the purpose of showing the voices that were silenced in the original fiction, which is why there is a huge amount of feminist rewritings, especially of Greek myths: *Lavinia* by Ursula K. Le Guin; Madeline Miller's *Circe* and *Galatea*; *Girl meets boy* by Ali Smith; *Home Fire*, by Kamila Shamsie. Also, it is not a coincidence that most rewritings are written by women. Transformative works, either canonical rewritings or fanfics, are often written by those whose experiences were or are left out of the literary canon.

There are other genres of fiction, like historical fiction or parody, that despite not being fully original texts and borrowing plots and characters from other texts, no one would question their status as legitimate literature. The legitimacy of works like *Ragtime*, *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, *Snowball's Chance* or *Alice in Blunderland* could arguably be questioned if examined under the premise that legitimate literature must be completely original. Shakespeare's historical plays are known for their inaccuracies, but they are still highly regarded for their entertainment value. Likewise, fanfics are not accurate with the original canon, but should still be valued for their creative and entertainment purposes.

The reason why some people might still be reluctant to call rewritings, historical fiction and parody works of fanfiction is because they lack the fan component. However, the similarities of these types of works with fanfiction are unquestionable. In addition to that, people might also be reluctant to refer to these works as fanfiction because of the nature of their publication: since fanfiction is most commonly posted online, under a pseudonym, on websites exclusively dedicated to posting these works, it is often seen as amateur and unprofessional. There is an undeniable stigma against fanfiction because it does not fit into traditional publishing standards and our concept of literature. The idea that all reputable literature has to be traditionally published should to

be eliminated because originality and the publication method do not define whether a work can be considered a literary piece or not. This new perspective might challenge the preconceived idea of fanfiction not being legitimate writing. Hence, the arguments that fanfiction is not legitimate literature because of its lack of authorship over the characters and plots or because it lacks originality are completely questionable.

The discussion of fanfiction as a legitimate genre has sparkled some interest online and even Ariel Bissett, one of the most famous English speaking member of BookTube (YouTube book community), talked about fanfiction in one her videos. While she does not question the legitimacy of fanfiction, she argues that one of the reasons she cannot consider fanfiction literature is because it is not canon; it did not come from the original writer and therefore it is not real. This is a view that a lot of people share, reinforcing the idea that the original canon is some kind of sacred text that only the original author can touch. However, the intention of most fanfiction is precisely to not follow the canon and/or to reclaim the narrative; being faithful and staying true to the canon is not the aim of fanfiction nor are the fans looking for real canon events. She later argues that fanfiction's value relies on the interaction of fans with fiction, as "it allows for anyone to take themes, ideas, characters, settings, plot details and incorporate their own creativity into that moment" (Bissett, 2014, 4:38), so essentially she supports the idea that the value of fanfiction relies on the creative experimentation and revision of texts that it enables. It seems that, when regarding the legitimacy of fanfiction, it always comes down to its creative and revision power.

3.2. Defying the Literary Market

Another reason why fanfiction is usually not considered legitimate writing is because it is not profitable. Unfortunately, the act of writing and the act of publishing have become intertwined, as the general public has this wrong conception that real authors are published authors. Fanfiction cannot be traditionally published for obvious authorship issues and that could be one argument people might have against fanfiction. Nowadays there is a certain pressure to be productive and everything you do, watch and read needs to have a purpose or a profit, and fanfiction is arguably neither of those. But art is not supposed to be productive nor profitable. Writing for fun and without any

pretensions is a choice as valid and licit as writing professionally. Flegel and Roth (2016) wrote in their study that:

> We do not suggest that all fanfiction writers should become published writers, or that fanfiction is only useful insofar as it leads to the "real" work of writing professionally. We respect the role fanfiction plays as hobby, for the pleasure it brings, and for the role it plays challenging the idea that all time must be used "productively" in the service of capitalism and economic and professional advancement. (p. 257)

Taking *Spockanalia* as an example again, the fanzine was "available for ¢50 or exchange" (1968). Essentially, the fanzine was not produced to make a profit out of it; the intention of its editors was to spread their love for *Star Trek* and the subsequent gratification of being an active participant in a fandom community.

Still today, fanfiction is based on what has been described as a gift economy or gift culture (a term coined by the anthropologist Marcel Mauss), which applied to fanfiction would imply that it is a genre based on fandom community recognition rather than any kind of compensation or remuneration. This would also explain the unspoken rule of readers leaving a 'kudo' or a comment when they finish a fanfic, as providing support and feedback is their way of participating in this gift economy. Hellekson argued that "[t]he gifts have value within the fannish economy in that they are designed to create and cement a social structure, but they themselves are not meaningful outside their context" (2009, p. 115). From this desire to actively participate in this "cementing" of the fandom, it can be suggested that value of fanfics also relies on the gratification of fandom validation regarding their work. Moreover, some fans find fanfiction's uncensored nature liberating, as Tosenberger (2014) wrote:

> Though unable to capitalize on their writing in terms of money or official recognition, fan writers are compensated by not being restricted to institutionalized discourses. […] fan writers are free to use existing worlds, characters, and plots to explore any discourse as they wish, a freedom especially felt with regard to non-normative and taboo forms and representations of sexuality. (p. 17)

Fanfic writers are their own editor, which gives them total freedom to write about what they want and how they want to. Fans do not seek to make a profit out of their fanfics, but to write about what they love without the pressure and constrictions of traditional publishing.

However, at some point, publishing houses and editors started to see fanfiction as an opportunity and a business. It is stated in the publication history of the *Spockanalia* fanzine that "[s]ome of the material in the magazine was later printed or adapted in commercially published *Star Trek* books" ("The Online Books Page, Spockanalia Archives"). And according to Aja Romano, publishing houses and editors have been keeping an eye on fanfiction for many years: "Authors often acted with the illicit partnership of agents and editors who would quietly seek out fandom authors whose writing they admired to ask them to submit works that could be easily adapted to an original setting" (2014, para. 13). One of the benefits of online fanfiction posting is that editors can already track the popularity and the kind of feedback a fanfic has before deciding to contact the author. That is why, despite the huge stigma on fanfiction, editors are on the lookout for the new trending stories on websites like *Wattpad* or AO3. Removing fandom details from a fanfic so that it can be published is known as filing off the serial numbers, and it is easier done in those transformative works which deviate the most from the original fiction, like 'Alternate Universe' fanfics.

But bringing fanfiction to traditional publishing is tricky, not only because of authorship issues, but because fanfiction presupposes a pre-existing knowledge by the reader, which is what Busse calls a "shadow text" (as cited in Tosenberger, 2014, p. 10). This "shadow text" consists of both the canonical and fandom interpretations of the texts that the reader is supposed to be familiar with. Furthermore, fanfiction has opened a new interpretation of intertextuality that Busse calls "intense intertextuality" (as cited in Tosenberger, 2014, p. 14). Essentially, the fanfiction reader has to be familiarised and engaged with the story and the characters of the original fiction as well as their fandom interpretations in order to read and appreciate a fanfic. As Busse argued: "Every fan story is in conversation not only with the source text but usually also with other stories in the fandom and the discussions that permeate the community" (as cited in Tosenberger, 2014, p. 13). This underlying collective knowledge is something very intrinsic to every fandom and supports the idea that the value of fanfiction relies within the fandom precisely because of said indispensable "shadow text". This intertextuality could be considered one of the reasons why it is so hard to recreate the kind of engagement fanfiction has in traditional publishing.

On the whole, the rise of fanfiction's popularity has urged editors and publishing houses to innovate and challenge the traditional publication system, but the intricacies

of publishing fanfiction are still to be sorted out. Fanfiction is still an underground genre and, in its own way, it is a resistance movement against the rigid scheme of traditional publishing, as it rejects remuneration in favour of fandom recognition. By rejecting the constrictions of traditional publishing, it advocates for an uncensored literary space and an understanding of entertainment as a valid reason to write and read.

3.3. The Intricate Relation of Fanfiction and the Contemporary Literary Scene

Up until now, fanfiction has performed as an outlet for both amateur and aspiring authors and for all kinds of readership. The steady growth of the fanfiction community seems to support the idea that, despite the claims that the literary market is going through difficult times, it is not because people (especially the youth) are not interested in literature anymore. There is an enthusiastic authorship and readership, but there seems to be a disconnection from the contemporary literary scene. As previously mentioned, fanfiction is attractive to fans because it is free, has almost instant feedback, allows direct communication between authors and readers and offers an almost personalized reading experience, all of which are very difficult to replicate in traditional publishing. Some fans might see fanfiction as a breakthrough from what traditionally published works can offer them in terms of representation, censorship or an improved reading experience.

Silently, fanfiction has become a fierce competitor for the contemporary publishing scene. Fanfiction writers do not make any profit out of their works so they cannot be prosecuted for copyright violation. But even if corporations and publishing houses cannot control the production of fanfiction, they have found a way to use it for their own benefit. They seem to be lenient about fan works because "[e]ven though fan fiction is exchanged for free, the proliferation of this fiction works as advertising for mass-marketed media products, so media corporations are already making money from fanfic writers' labor" (De Kosnik, 2009, p. 124). This free content, created by fans for fans, is publicity that will only make fans more engaged to the original fiction and therefore benefiting media corporations. Besides, it can be also used by editors to test the waters of the market, see what characters are most loved by fans, what kind of relationships they root for… So, in a way, fanfiction could already be considered a part of the literary scene as it participates in the building of the fandom community and,

following Busse's idea of intense intertextuality, it enriches the fan experience in a way traditional publishing would not be able to.

The contemporary literary scene has become more business oriented and it has had to adapt to the new audiences and literary trends. While book signs are still common marketing strategies, editors have shifted their focus to social media marketing, sending copies to booktubers to promote the novel before the official release or even creating macro events like BookCon. The saturation of the literary scene, with more new releases per month than ever, has emphasized the need of target marketing. However, this excessive targeting has led to a heavy categorization of literature that has, in some ways, been damaging and stigmatizing.

Nowadays, literary marketing is defined by factors such as such as age, gender, level of education or beliefs and there are preconceptions on whom or what kind of person should write or read a certain genre. But fanfiction is free of these constraints and stigmas; fanfiction writers and readers that find themselves out of the targeted market find safety in the option to remain anonymous or using a pseudonym to write and read what they really want. In fact, it could be said that fanfiction has opened a new democratisation of literature: anyone with internet access can post their works or read any of the millions of fanfics posted online. The elitism and stigma that are still around in the literary scene has caused some writers and readers to feel disconnected, uninterested or marginalised in the current literary scene and that could be the reason why they turn to fanfiction instead. Fanfiction's increasing popularity seems to corroborate the idea that the public is still interested in reading and writing, just not under the constrictions of traditional publishing.

One could also see fanfiction as a reaction to the contemporary literary scene and media, which would suggest a strong action-reaction relation between both literary scenes. McCracken (2015) wrote that "fan fiction's diversity is reflective of current mass-media production practices in serving niche audiences who are looking for (and finding) content that serves their particular interests" (p. 171). Queerbaiting could be one example of in what ways fanfiction can be reflective of current mass-media as, according to Koehm (2018), "[t]here is a direct correlation between shows accused of queerbaiting by fans and shows that produce a high quantity of slash fiction, suggesting that the sheer amount of fanfiction is a response to representation being denied through

queerbaiting" (p. 34). For instance, BBC's *Sherlock* has had one of the largest online fandoms in the last decade but it is also one of the most frequently mentioned examples of queerbaiting. Despite its popularity, fans claim that *Sherlock* is explicitly queerbaiting the audience with 'bromance' or 'no homo' humour which plays on ambiguous lines and the recurring assumption or misunderstanding that Holmes and Watson are in a relationship by other secondary characters. Rowan Ellis, a YouTuber who analyses pop culture from a feminist and queer perspective, argues that there are also implicit ways of queerbaiting and that is "often in the way that a story is scripted or the way that a show is shot" (Ellis, 2015, 1:54), in lingering camera shots or setting an atmosphere so that, in the end, "the apparently platonic scene that a lot of people read as romantic would be shot in the same way as the explicitly romantic scenes" (2:12).

Sherlock producers and actors have disregarded and gas lighted fans when asked about the obvious subtext of the show, which caused certain frustration amongst the fandom. This frustration led some fans to disdain the original canon and to embrace their power as fans and exercise their right to interpret the narrative as they please. The argument seemed to be that "it does not matter what Mofftiss [Moffat and Gatiss] (or the actors) say they have done; the evidence is in the text, the interpretation is in the reader" (Hofmann, 2018, 6.2). Morimoto also observed that "invalidation and even rejection by the official legitimate creators…can be intensely destabilizing, leaving fans with little recourse but to re-establish ontological equilibrium through the means at their disposal" (as cited in Hofmann, 2018, 4.4). The creation of fan content of said queerbaited characters is the fandom's active response to that frustration and disappointment. In a way, fanfiction can be regarded as way for fans to fulfil that "not-so-subtle subtext" (Koehm, 2018, p. 35), not just to fulfil their fantasies but to reclaim the space that marginalised communities are denied even after being used as marketing ploys. Overall, this would suggest that there is a complex action-reaction relation between the literary and fanfiction scene.

As previously mentioned, editors have been keeping an eye on fanfiction for a while, specially to spot what is trending and what the readers want to read about. They also probably noticed the considerable presence of the LGBTQ community in fanfiction and how that was reflected in the contents of the most popular fanfics. One of the reasons why it might seem like a lot of queer literature is being traditionally published nowadays could be because editors have realised there is a potential readership after

seeing how popular fanfiction dealing with identity and queerness was. The publishing industry is still considered to be very conservative and tends to play it safe with the manuscripts they work on in order to please all kinds of readerships, which means that they usually avoid manuscripts with graphic scenes, violence, different taboos and until recently, manuscripts dealing with racial issues and LGBTQ identities. Even just a few decades ago, editors from leading publishing houses would not take any explicitly LGBTQ novel with a happy ending and still, most of queer novels were published by small or indie publishing houses and kept from the front shelves. It was also very common for authors to be asked to change the endings of their novels by their editors so that they would be fit for publishing.

In the 1989 prologue of *The Price of Salt* (later retitled as *Carol*), Patricia Highsmith explained how the novel was first rejected by Harper & Bros and how she had to look for another editor who would take the manuscript. She also explains how after the release of the paperback edition, she received many letters of queer readers, thanking her for writing a hopeful story about people like them in a time when queer people struggled to be open about their sexuality. In retrospective, she also added:

> The appeal of *The Price of Salt* was that it had a happy ending for its two main characters, or at least they were going to try to have a future together. Prior to this book, homosexuals male and female in American novels had had to pay for their deviation. (Highsmith, 1989)

In that prologue, Highsmith offers an insight into what had been like publishing a novel with a lesbian romance, disclosing a problematic publishing industry and pointing out a marginalised readership. It would take a few decades before queer readers could have stories about their experiences that did not end like a Greek tragedy, but that would be one of the reasons why fanfiction was born in the first place and it could be possible that some of those readers found that fulfilment in fanfiction.

Nowadays, queer literature is starting to gain presence in the contemporary literary scene, especially in the young adult section. While there are a lot of other social factors to take into account, the uncensored nature of fanfiction and the huge queer presence in the community might have encouraged a more inclusive literary scene. The young adult genre (which is essentially contemporary literature targeted to a coming of age audience) is one of the most changing and evolving genres in the current literary

scene, as it constantly adapts to new trends and times in order to keep the younger readership engaged. This young readership is usually more accepting, willing to read more diversely and more vocal about their wishes for more inclusive literature, especially through social media. After observing an increase in the public's interest in LGBTQ stories in the fanfiction community and social media, editors have been trying to attract that potential queer readership which could be one of the many reasons there has been an increase of queer young adult literature, some of them quite successful releases, such as *Call Me By Your Name*, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*, *Song of Achilles* and *Carry On*, to name a few.

In addition, the younger digital native readers are not foreign to *Wattpad* or the concept of fanfiction, and in fact, it might be their first contact with literature outside school readings or their first attempt at writing themselves. Having millions of fanfics about their favourite characters just one click away makes literature more accessible and engaging for the younger audience, but when getting involved in the fanfiction community, one inevitable becomes aware of the weight and importance that representation has in it. Becoming aware of all the narratives that have been silenced or excluded from traditional publishing is the first step to realize what the current literary scene is lacking and to demand for a change. Therefore, it could be said that the online fanfiction and book community are certainly a huge pressure for editors to work with more diverse and inclusive manuscripts.

Overall, it is undeniable that fanfiction and the literary scene are heavily linked in an action-reaction relationship. Fanfiction advocates for an uncensored literature and pushes the conservative boundaries of traditional publishing. When thinking about fanfiction in regards to the contemporary literary scene, it could be said that fanfiction is already a part of it, even if it is off the shelves, because of its complex and intricate relationship with the current literary scene, which affects new trends and promotes inclusivity and diversity in new literary releases.

3.4. The Future of Fanfiction

When considering the future of fanfiction, and according the premise that the literary scene is getting more diverse and inclusive, one could think that fanfiction

production and consumption could decrease as the community transitions to a more modern and inclusive contemporary literary scene. Will fanfiction manage to keep its popularity or will it become an obsolete genre?

The future of fanfiction is difficult to foresee because it is constantly evolving, but there is no reason why fanfiction should stop existing or lose popularity in the near future. It will just continue to co-exist with traditional publishing just as it has been doing for decades. While fanfiction is a great tool for readers and writers to find and post their works without the constraints of traditional publishing, this is not the main reason why fanfiction is popular or even why it exists. Fanfiction was born from the desire to experiment and explore the narrative for entertaining purposes. People write and read fanfiction for the same reason people paint for relaxation, play instruments just so that they can play their favourite songs, practice sports non-competitively… Even if fanfiction has taken a more revisioning nature, trying to rewrite mainstream media and literature into a more inclusive and diverse one, in the end its raison d'être is still to entertain. As long as there is a demand for more stories and content, fanfiction will continue to be the solution to a very simple and human disquietude: the readers always want to know what happens next, they want to hear about the what ifs.

In several instances this paper has argued how fanfiction can affect the original canon, but could fanfiction ever become canon itself? In her video, Bissett ponders about the possibility of fanfiction becoming canon and, despite her initial rejection of the idea, she argues that *Bridget Jones's Diary* has in fact become a modern classic on its own even if it is completely based on *Pride and Prejudice* (2014, 5:10). One subscriber commented that BBC's *Sherlock* "is essentially an alternate universe fanfiction of Arthur Conan Doyle's Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" (TeaLeavesAndBookBindings, 2015). Under that light, BBC's *Sherlock* could be considered another example of how a rewriting has transformed into a whole different concept separated from the original canon. So, in some instances, it seems like fanfiction could become so disengaged from the original canon that it becomes a canonical work itself.

On another note, fanfiction will continue to be an indicator of what traditional publishing is lacking of and pushing its boundaries towards a more inclusive literary scene. As mentioned above, there is no evidence against fanfiction co-existing with the

traditional market in the future. Although more fanfiction will probably get traditionally published in the next decades, following the release of novels like *Fifty Shades of Grey* or *After*, editors will not be able to recreate the personalized experience that online fanfiction offers. This seems to reaffirm and support the idea of fanfiction remaining an underground genre and an alternative literary community, which never had the pretence to become mainstream to begin with. Even though it might take a while before fanfiction is regarded as a valid and legitimate genre in its own, it will definitely stand out for its particularity and impossibility of recreation into the traditional literary scene.

The truth is that there seems to be no hint of fanfiction vanishing in the following decades. In fact, it could be argued that fanfiction will become even more popular and less stigmatized. Even if the literary scene becomes more inclusive and diverse, fanfiction will still provide an alternative platform for those who still do not want to conform to traditional publishing constraints or for those who are just looking for the essence of fanfiction, which is pure entertainment in the fictional worlds that they love and cherish.

4. Conclusion

From fanzines in the 60s to online archives with millions of fanfics, fanfiction has been an outlet for fans to relive, explore and indulge in their favourite worlds again and again. However, its validity as literature has been questioned and been a subject of debate since the beginning. Throughout this paper the ideas presented have offered an overview of fanfiction's raison d'être and how it fits into the literary scene or the conception of literature. The study has illustrated the complexity of fanfiction and has tried to gather evidence to try to determine the legitimacy of fanfiction works and its place in a literary context. So, should fanfiction be regarded as legitimate writing and a legitimate genre of fiction? The arguments presented in this paper seem to support the legitimacy of fanfiction.

Firstly, fanfiction should be acknowledged for the creative experimentation it enables and the writing skills that are developed through writing fanfiction, which are necessary for any kind of writing. Furthermore, the anonymous and generally positive

environment that the fanfiction scene offers makes writers feel more confident when sharing their works as well as offering a sense of belonging in a fandom community. This study also seems to endorse how important it is to understand the community in order to understand fanfiction; essentially, fanfiction is written and read by fans, and the contents of their works inevitably reflect that. Previous studies on the community seem to suggest that fandoms are a specially female and queer space, which would support the idea that fanfiction and its community is a space made by and for marginalized voices. This could be linked to why transformational works (rather than affirmational works) predominate in all fanfiction platforms and could be used as an example of how the community can affect the content that is written and most sought after. Again, more studies should be carried out on the demographics of fanfiction in order to provide an actualized overview, because understanding the diversity and queerness in the fanfiction community is essential to comprehend the intricacies and value of fanfiction, especially as revision texts.

Also, the ideas presented in this paper seem to corroborate that fanfiction, per se, is an appreciative art. It is argued that fanfiction should not be considered a perversion of the original text because its intention is not to supplant the canon, but to explore and delve into it. The idea that the original text is something sacred is outdated and follows the traditional literary criticism that defends that a text (and the interpretation of it) belongs to its author. However, literature is always open to interpretation and once it is out there it belongs to the readers. Exploring the psyche of the characters or looking for a racial or a homoerotic subtext is not a subversion or perversion of the text, but a way of interpreting and reclaiming an inclusive narrative. Therefore, fanfiction can be considered a tool to advocate for all the narratives that are being silenced or ignored in traditional media and publishing.

Secondly, this study tried to analyze the concept and the academic understanding of legitimate literature in order to determine if fanfiction could fit into it and how. The research found that the conception of literature is still heavily influenced by the Western canon and by the romantic idea that an original piece of work should be created entirely from scratch. The voices of marginalised communities and minorities were also left out of the referential body of authors and texts, which makes the literary canon and its definition of quality even more questionable. This paper argues that the definition of quality literature should not be subjected to a body of referential texts established by a

non-inclusive and outdated academia. Further, that conception of quality should be challenged, as it is a subjective aspect and academic recognition is not essential for a text to be considered legitimate literature.

This paper also points out some contradictory arguments against the legitimacy of fanfiction. The originality of rewritings, such as literature classics like *Paradise Lost* or *Wide Sargasso Sea*, historical fiction and parody works, has been queried to expose how originality and innovation are not defining traits of legitimate literature. Fanfiction challenges this preconceived idea of literature and originality, but it should be regarded as a valid form of literature nonetheless. This paper has gathered evidence that supports the idea that fanfics should be studied according to their entertaining, creative and artistic value instead of its originality or publishability. In a way, fanfiction epitomizes the idea that art does not have to be productive in order to be considered art.

Thirdly, this paper studied in what ways could fanfiction fit and defy the literary scene. The evidence substantiates that fanfiction and fan works in general are a reaction to the current media and literary scene. Fanfiction enables writers and readers to find a platform where they can explore themes, issues, identities, relationships and voices that have been traditionally censored or neglected. It advocates for an uncensored literary space and, as it has been silently observed by editors as a sort of mock market, it could be said that fanfiction has pushed the conservative boundaries of traditional publishing. The evidence seems to suggest that, in a way, fanfiction is already a part of the literary scene as it affects new literary trends and promotes inclusivity and diversity in new literary releases.

Most of the ideas presented in this paper have been supported by other academic papers and they compliment studies like Busse's, Hellekson's, Kohem's and Tosenberger's by offering a deeper insight into what makes fanfiction a legitimate genre of fiction. However, fanfiction is such a vast field of study and there have been many topics that were out of the scope of this project and that could be further researched, like the death of the author in fanfiction, the collective creation that fanfiction relies on, the return of serialization or the pros and cons of uncensored content. In any case, there is definitely a gap in the academic sphere about fanfiction and, in regard of the evidence provided it should be reconsidered as a legitimate genre of fiction in future studies.

In conclusion, the ideas presented in this paper seem to provide evidence that fanfiction should be regarded as a legitimate literary genre. Furthermore, fanfiction could be contemplated as a new understanding of literature in future studies. By understanding its raison d'être and by challenging and dismantling the arguments against fanfiction as legitimate writing, this paper argues for an updated understanding of literature that relies on artistic expression and power of revision. Even though the future of fanfiction is hard to predict because it is a constantly changing and evolving genre, as long as there are those stories, the ones that stick with us even long after the film has ended or put the book back on the shelf, fanfiction will exist. And the reason why is because fanfiction, in essence, is the result of the very human desire to know more and to go back to the core of why we humans write and read: because it brings us joy.

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Appendix

This appendix will consist in a series of bibliographical references that were not referenced in the study but that could be useful for future researchers. As mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, both academic and non-academic sources have been used in this research.

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