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## Making Fanfic: The (Academic) Tensions of Fan Fiction as Self-Publication

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## Making Fanfic: The (Academic) Tensions of Fan Fiction as Self-Publication

Chelsea J. Murdock

### Abstract

This article considers fan fiction as (self-)publication, particularly noting the tensions between institutional notions of textual production within academia and how fan writing works against paradigms of publishing espoused in higher education. Such tensions are indicative of institutional pressures for “legitimate” publications. Offering a fan writer’s first-person perspective on fan fiction, this article questions who defines “publishing” and how that definition affects fan creators within academia and offers a consideration of these relationships as meaningful in ongoing conversations regarding how “publishing” is conceived.

**Keywords:** self-publication, academic publishing, fan fiction, fan writing, transformative works, fandom

Published across two major archives, my works total over 750,000 words. My current project is yet unpublished, totaling another 35,000 words and hours of research. Sitting on the proverbial dusty shelves of my jump drive, there are stories that I may never share with anyone. Those unpublished works contain nearly another 300,000 words. From mysteries to romances, from novel-length tales to multi-genre explorations (as well as the occasional humorous jaunt), my stories helped me to develop as a writer and thinker, brought my voice and views to several globally diverse communities, and aided me in overcoming numerous personal and professional struggles. I explored and commented on politics and identity. I wrote through tragedy, comforted my readers in some of their darkest times, and received transformative work from them in the form of drawings, comics, and music. Over the years, I developed a loyal following of readers, some of whom actively engaged in conversation with me through my social media pages. Through those pages, my readers and I discussed characterization, writing styles, and the various political and historical issues I brought into my writing. I’ve been publicly publishing my writing for the past twelve years—since I stumbled onto fan writing.

I have written over 750,000 words of *fan fiction*<sup>1</sup>.

That is roughly the equivalent of nine novels or about 100 academic journal articles. Perhaps that caught you off-guard?

My fan writing has led to more than a few tense, and often theoretically steeped, conversations with colleagues who questioned my production of fan materials. On more than one occasion, I was on the defensive against arguments regarding why my fan writing wasn't original or even "the kind of thing you do in grad school." For every supportive friend or mentor, there was another who immediately placed my work as a fan writer and my work as a scholar into direct opposition. "Seriously, fanfic? Why are you wasting your time on that?" Following my colleague's questions, asked in an innocent enough tone so as not to *start something*, I doubled-down on my fic of the moment. I published a 10,000-word chapter the next day. That same night, I finished an assignment for my grad class in composition theory. Throughout graduate school, I toed the line as a fan writer in academia. I never actively sought out others who studied the topic or others who wrote fic. I provided my pen name to only a few colleagues, each of whom guaranteed they would keep the pen name private. After a few years, my fan writing became a refuge from theoretical papers, lesson planning, and the scholarship of academia at large. Not because it was less rigorous, as is the usual assumption, but because my fan writing allowed me to adventure outside of my discipline.

My fan fiction publications won't appear on my *curriculum vitae*. A small, mulish part of me wants them to be included, the many hours of work (and the tremendous amounts of research) demanding some purchase in my professional profile. At interviews, I want to be asked how my interaction with readers affects my notions of textual production. I want to show off the artwork my readers have crafted for me on my professional profiles. I want my work as a fan writer to sit comfortably beside my work as a scholar and instructor. In some cases, I have crossed the lines between "public" and "academic"—between my "fan" self and my "professional" self. After all, I have been having my students write fan fiction for years. Despite the notions of the fan-academic espoused in work by media and fandom scholars, putting such a persona into practice is a difficult task (Jenkins; Hills). Jason Mittell asserts in a blog post discussing his dislike for *Mad Men*, "We should own up to our own fannish (or anti-fannish) tendencies regarding our objects of study, not regarding fan practices as something wholly separate from our academic endeavors by acknowledging how taste structures what we choose to write about." Ian Bogost responded in turn, citing that "aca-fandom" is "too great a temptation" to be uncritical of the media with which we engage. What seems to be missing in discussions of aca-fandom is the active presence of those academics who are also fan *creators*—and the impact of that fan creation, whatever form it may take, has on their academic process, persona, and production.

While at the 2016 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in Portland, I attended an evening reception for a large and diverse composition department. One conversation eclipsed the many others that were held over hors-d'ouerves that evening. I revealed to a distant colleague that I had been writing fan fiction for more than a decade. She, too, was a fan author. She lowered her tone and warned me over the cheese plate: "I've heard of others who struggled on the market because of their fan writing. They shared theirs. It's a strange thing

about our field. We love writing, but— not *that* kind of writing.” I was cautioned to be careful whom I informed of my fan writing pen name. Though I had guarded my pen name carefully over the years, to hear that the fan writing of another scholar may have negatively impacted a job search made me doubly cautious. Fan writing self-publication, in many senses, worked and continues to work against the paradigms of academic publication. Fan writing works against many academic notions of productivity, the harnessing of that productivity for our *curricula vitae*, and the use of that productivity in securing tenure.

Fanfic is written and digitally self-published for the sake of enjoyment and engagement rather than for any notions of productivity for profit. Scholars such as Karen Hellekson, Kristina Busse, Anne Jamison, Lev Grossman, and Francesca Coppa, among many others, who have continuously labored to promote the fair consideration of fan work, theorize fanfic’s placement in publics and counterpublics, and evaluate its impact in the meaning-making of various communities. To clarify, my understanding of meaning-making derives from Ann Berthoff’s conceptualization of “meaning-making” as “an active critical consciousness” through which understandings are carried out or through which we (as readers and writers) create connections to “make meaning” (xv). In addition to defining fanfic meaning-making through particular community literacies, many other scholars attempt to define and situate fan writing—citing its functions both in contention and in concert with media industries. These can range from notions of fanfic as a form of countercultural literature, such as Abigail Derecho’s consideration of fan fiction as “archontic literature,” or literature utilized by minorities and women to convey social, political, and cultural critiques, to fan fiction as “media play.” Paul Booth contends that the conception of fan production as “play” establishes a relationship between the source media and a fan’s own creative impulses, not necessarily placing the two into opposition. For decades and even still, theorists of multiple fields have attempted to define fanfic—from first distribution of fanzines to today’s digital archives and beyond as new technologies continue to change the conversation.

Is it literature? Is it play? Is it neither or both? Is it something else? Does fanfic comment on social, political, and cultural issues? Does it “have fun” with the source text? Is it derivative? Transformative? Does it move? Must I define which explanation to which my fan writing prescribes in order for this article to be considered “critical” enough? My goal here is not to espouse and/or decry the negative perceptions of fan writing that exist in academia. Likewise, my goal in this article is not to attempt to triangulate my own fan writing within or without the theoretical definitions espoused by interdisciplinary theorists. To do so would be to encroach on the work of others who have already pursued such work. Instead, my goal is to consider my own self-publication of fanfic over the course of the past decade, how my perceptions of that self-publication have changed over time, and how—despite the positive influence of mentors and colleagues—the general negative perceptions of fan writing in academia have kept me from revealing my extensive record of self-publication.

This article draws from personal experience and story, pulling from my background as a scholar of transformative works and cultural rhetorics. Although

my research does not incorporate the voices of the many others who participate in fan writing within the field of Rhetoric and Composition, as well as other disciplines, I believe that many of my experiences in self-publishing fanfic, while simultaneously building a “professional” portfolio, is generalizable and indicative of larger trends in the field. Throughout, I will attempt to make connections to the idea of self-publication and self-presentation in academia and academic spaces while negotiating my own identity as a fan writer with an extensive background in fanfic writing. What emerges from such a personal exploration is a critical look at tensions regarding fan fiction as self-publication, the way that fan writing is engaged and discussed in conversation with “publishing,” and how we might become comfortable in the blurriness of defining fanfic. And there is a lot of blurriness here. Some of the following might be unclear as I raise questions that have no distinct answer. That questioning is important. The blur is important. It’s just another way of telling the story.

### ***Making Fanfic: A Cultural Rhetorics Perspective on Fan Writing***

After years playing two different roles, the fan writer and the scholar, I internalized some of my colleague’s earlier skepticism. I kept the two personas separate. As I was months into my dissertation project, my fan writing had been set aside for my dissertation goals. My fanfic readers sent notes of support through social media, not knowing the reason for my extended absence but knowing that it must have been a “serious situation.” My serialized chapters were regular and constant until the dissertation proposal was due. My fanfic audience was accustomed to promptness. I needed to focus on the production of my dissertation though, which was written on the topic of Native American ledger art and the material-rhetorical presence of that ledger art within a variety of spaces. Months following the “keep it secret” exchange at CCCC, I attended another conference. This time, I was surrounded by scholars of Cultural Rhetorics. I sat for hours in the workshop space at that conference. I sewed beads to felt in the form of a turtle and spoke to others about the “making” within that space. At one point, I felt adrift. I turned to a mentor who also attended the conference and told her: “I don’t really *make* anything. I’ve never quilted or anything like that.” She stared at me for a moment and then her brows pulled together in confusion: “You write fanfic, don’t you? You put it out there for people? You *make* something. You make all the time.” It should have been telling at the time that my immediate response was that I don’t “*make*” fan fiction.

Malea Powell and Phil Bratta argue that “cultural rhetorics” is a practice of “build[ing] theoretical frames from inside the particular culture in which [scholars] are situating their work.” As an example of this, they explain that the use of Burke’s pentad to study powwow dancing would not quite work, but that instead, a rhetorical/theoretical frame must be built from the tribal practices and stories enacted in the powwow dancing. I began to think of what that might look like in the fanfic community. Though obviously very different in terms of tradition, history, and practice, there is meaning-making that is taking place in the writing of fan fiction and, often, scholars come to that writing with heuristics and notions of

mapping scholarship onto the community. I began to wonder if I— as a fan writer— might blur a few lines and draw a few constellations. Constellative practice is a pillar of cultural rhetorics study noting that “*all* cultural practices are built, shaped, and dismantled based on the encounters people have with one another within and across particular systems of shared belief. In other words, people make things (texts, baskets, performances), people make relationships, people make culture” (CRTL, 1.2).

And I *make* fanfic.

Why use cultural rhetorics to frame this discussion of fan writing as self-publication? It *values* my position as a fan writer, with important and meaningful experiences, while also valuing my identification as a researcher, scholar, and instructor of Rhetoric and Composition. Likewise, a cultural rhetorics approach to this topic allows the fanfic to be just as valuable as the theory that discusses it. These identities and actions do not exist separately but in relation to one another, in conversation. As scholars (as writers and as creators), we seek to promote community literacy— that is, we seek to support the knowledge-work of communities as they produce, consume, exchange, and distribute texts. In many ways, as a fan writer, I was active in the promotion of literacy among my readers. They took up writing extensions of my fan work (fanfic for fanfic). They created playlists with detailed explanations for selected music. They performed in-depth reviews of chapters as they were published, placing the work into its historical context. They created fan work (from art to audio experiences) that expanded the interpretation of my writing (and thereby, the source material). To observe this in terms of cultural rhetorics, people made things and people made relationships, while perceiving the work from a variety of different cultures from around the world. After all, as Anne Jamison notes: “fanfiction is fueled by relationships, and it fuels relationships” (74).

*Making fanfic* requires a reorientation in how fan writing is approached, perceived, and theorized. This is particularly so in academic discussions of fan fiction. Rather than framing fan textual production as derivative, countercultural, or even playful, *making fanfic* reframes the discussion toward the “meaning-making” that takes place in the active writing and publishing of fan fiction. That is, the act of fan writing itself. In this, such a frame would require that fan writings be understood as rhetorical, cultural, and community-based—no matter the content of that fan work<sup>2</sup>. *Making fanfic* would likewise demand that fan writing be understood as an act of making in a way that values not only the systems that bring it into existence, but also the tools with which it is created, the communities in which it is enacted, and the practices that promote its publication, distribution, and circulation. In fact, “the process of its production is often as important as [the] textual remnants” (Gray, Sandvoss, and Lee 53). Certainly, there is work that discusses these aspects of fan culture, particularly with regards to fanzines and the digital mediation of fan writing (Birkel et al.; Helleckson and Busse). Still, there is little work (academic or otherwise) that considers fan fiction as *making*. Those few discourses that do consider fan writing as part of “maker culture” situate it within discussion of countercultural production or part of gift culture (Booth; Skågeby; Turk; Wang). Often discussions of fan countercultural production or gift culture are linked to political and social

commentaries, such as the gendered practices involved in fic writing (Dressman; Lemke). Other perceptions of *making fanfic* may note the influence of digital mediation and technological adoption in distribution and circulation of fan writing as it has evolved from zines to digital archives and microblogging (Bacon-Smith; Coppa; De Kosnik; Hellekson and Busse; Karpovich). As I approach fanfic in this article, I instead frame *making fanfic* as an integral part of the meaning-making process for members of fan communities, requiring the situation of making fanfic within specific communities that enact that making for particular cultural, social, political, and personal reasons.

Like other forms of making, particularly those within the maker culture tradition, fan fiction is most likely understood in terms of palimpsest, that is, the “non-hierarchical, rich layering of genres” with a variety of “themes, techniques, voices, moods, and registers” by which the source material is “reworked in a postmodern, multivocal, and intertextual fashion” (Stasi 119). Through this understanding, the meaning-making is not merely limited to the fan-who-writes but the source material’s original making. Fan writing, whether viewed in terms of negotiating existing patriarchal structures and societal pressures or its function within and without capitalistic aims, is not only an artifact of interaction or production, but instead an action that is performed in its own right. As writers make fanfic, they often seek to share it with their community—whatever form that sharing may take. Making fanfic becomes part of a larger conversation, a larger effort in meaning-making within a community context.

### ***Fan Fiction as Self-Publication in a Public Forum***

Most fan writers post their work on public sites, such as FanFiction.net and Archive of Our Own. They often do this without seeking any sort of monetary compensation for their work. In much scholarship, this is referred to as gift economy or gift culture, in which the published work is freely available without expectation of a “return” (Busse; Hellekson; Riley; Turk). (However, many fan writers [including myself] have expectations of dialogue through posted reviews and private messages, which is a type of “return.” Response becomes part of the cyclical gift culture within fan writing communities.) In fact, the idea of monetization is often stigmatized within fan communities, from monetization of fan works violating copyright and fair use to the idea that fan production operates outside of capitalist culture. Archive of Our Own, often called AO3, very clearly bans advertising and payment solicitation through sponsorship and crowdfunding websites such as *Patreon* and *Ko-Fi* in its terms and conditions. In 2017, this sparked an ongoing dialogue regarding the Organization for Transformative Works’ non-profit status and the monetization of fan fiction. Though much discussion regarding AO3’s monetization policy refers to the legality of monetized fan fiction, copyright law, and Fair Use, as well as its functions within the frames of capitalism, others commented on the subversive nature of fan fiction—it’s “rogue” elements (Jamison; De Kosnik).

In *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom*, Abigail De Kosnik describes the development and maintenance of fan fiction archives. She notes



that these “rogue archives” preserve cultural memory in a way that is democratized and meaningful in its diversity and inclusiveness while creating platforms through which fan creators may celebrate and create community. De Kosnik describes perceptions of the Internet’s tendencies to encompass all fan making, with print and material fan productions being subsumed by encroaching digitally mediated fan productions. By necessity of its context, the circulation of fanfic is quite different from the fanzines of the 1960s and 1970s, and likewise, different from the 1990s fanzines that circulated at conventions and via mail order. Of course, none of this is news to those who are familiar with fanfic and the scholarship that engages with it. Technology and fanfic seem to be almost symbiotic in their development and circulation. Anne Jamison, in *Fic: Why Fanfiction is Taking Over the World*, observes that new technologies enable new stories to be told and that fanfic “paradoxically, [...] the cultural enterprise apparently dedicated to revisiting familiar ground, ends up leading us to new models of publishing [and] authorship” (18). Most scholarship regarding fanfic and publishing discusses perspectives on “pulling to publish,” or revising fanfic to seek commercial publication. The notion of “pulling to publish,” or “filing the numbers off,” is a highly contested action within fandom. Within these ongoing debates, to “publish” or to seek “publishing” means to seek publication through or by a publishing house—to *be commercially published*. However, there is very little discussion of *self-publishing* and fanfic. The term is rarely associated with any fan writing outside of fanzines and e-books. “Publishing fanfic,” in many discussions, refers to pull-to-publish and not to the act of putting the work out for the public to see, read, and engage (Jamison). And *self-publishing* a fanfic is a mere extension of that idea, indicating that the author “files the numbers off” a fanfic in order to publish it (usually) for monetary gain through their own means. The idea of self-publishing in fan writing communities seems confusing. In fact, within Anne Jamison’s landmark *Fic*, fan fiction and self-publishing are clearly delineated as separate, though perhaps related, endeavors.

Despite this, I have always— in my ten years as a fan writer— perceived my work as “self-publishing.” When speaking to friends or family, I would often say: “I just published a new chapter.” or “I published that fic I was talking about.” Perhaps this stemmed from a certain naïveté regarding the lines drawn around what “publishing” is and ignorance of the fact that my fanfic may not fit into those lines. Such a distinction was never clear to me: Is it only (self-) publishing if I draw a profit from circulating my work? Surely, that cannot be it as writers have been (self-) publishing long before there was a profit associated with the action. (This continues still with public and non-profit presses, some of which you may have even read about in this special issue.) Writers have been “publishing” their work for centuries without profit being part of their definition. Michael Warner asserts, in his definition of public as discourse, that a public “exists only as the end for which books are *published*, shows broadcast, Web sites *posted*, speeches delivered” and so on (67, emphasis mine). As I designed the pages and edited my chapters, as I planned the release dates and prepared paratexts, was I “posting” and not “publishing”? Is this distinction only present because my works are hosted on online archives? Would this be different if



my works were bound and could sit on your shelf? If I wrote a fanzine, the perception would certainly be different. (Is this where I should mention that one of my readers printed off all 657 pages of my fic? Is this where I should mention that one of my readers drew a comic for my fic?) Would my fan writings be considered “published” if I had more control of the websites on which they are displayed? True enough, there were aspects of my work that I could not and cannot affect or change, a la Kristen Arola’s observation of templates<sup>3</sup>. (Which, by all technicalities, authors rarely have too much control over how their work is formatted, marketed, and presented by publishing houses.) FanFiction.net does not allow for manipulation of code, and all work on the site follows a template. Archive of Our Own is slightly different. I have changed the HTML code in my works to design the text as I see fit, while still fitting into the frame of the website’s archive format. It is very likely that anyone coming to this article with a background in (self-)publishing, fanfic, media studies, even Rhetoric and Composition, will have a different answer to each of the questions I just posed. Therein lies the issue.

These questions and tensions I have raised thus far have no clear answer. To answer would be to add another voice to the cacophony of perspectives on the legitimacy of fan writing and the complicated histories of self-publication. Instead, perhaps it is valuable and meaningful that fan fiction lay somewhere in the in-between— left to be defined by those who make it. Perhaps even then, fanfic could be defined more in terms of *making* than in terms of *publishing*. But that is a different article. In many important ways, fan communities can be likened to the many civic communities discussed in this special issue. Fanfic communities can critique, engage, and empower, and they do this across the globe, through screens and in garages, in attics. They do this across languages. They do this in-print and online. The practice of writing and sharing fanfic creates the community and sustains it. Whether others perceive their work as (self-) publishing, posting, making, fan writers will continue doing whatever it is that they do. Fanfic writers thrive in the blur. It’s that blur that makes people uncomfortable. It especially makes institutions uncomfortable because institutions thrive on definitions—and particularly, definitions of productivity.

### ***Making Fanfic and the Tension of “Production”***

After publishing the final chapter in a four-year series, I received a collection of private messages congratulating the completion of the work. One reader’s note stands out in my memory. She had been reading my work since she began high school, and she detailed how my fan fiction had encouraged her to seek a degree in history. She told me that she appreciated that I put citations in my story so that the audience could track down sources to learn more about the historical context I’d described in the text. Part of the experience of the fic itself was finding those sources and learning more about the topic. I haven’t heard from her in a year, but last we corresponded, she had finished her first year as a history major. Another reader described how my fanfics had helped her through a terrible battle with depression and anxiety. She went on to explain her future goals in pursuing a graduate degree in social sciences. I am telling of these exchanges not to espouse my own “success” as a fan writer, but instead

to note that my fanfic makings have had an impact on the lives of others within the fan communities I engage. (Truthfully, by fan fiction archive standards, my fanfics are moderately received in terms of the usual measures for fanfic “success”—review counts and kudos.) As an instructor of writing, I aim to positively affect the lives of the students I teach by expanding their knowledge of communication and rhetoric. I am actively invested in their growth as communicators and professionals within their given fields. As a fanfic writer, I follow these same principles. I write for myself as much as I write for others.

I told this story to one of my colleagues once over coffee. “One of my readers sent me a message over the weekend. They’re starting a degree in history partly because of that story I’ve been working on. I finally finished it.” Brows rose and coffee was sipped before a slight shrug: “It’s too bad you can’t put that on your CV. Would that fall under...advising? Mentorship?” “Neither,” I responded. “Or maybe both?” There was never meant to be a place for my fan fiction in my *curriculum vitae*. And, perhaps more importantly, why did my colleague’s mind default to the CV as a measure of a (self-)published work’s worth? This exchange was echoed two times over: “Do they know you’re in graduate school? They can write a rec.” The debate of publication legitimacy in terms of the *curriculum vitae* and tenure are certainly not limited to fan writing, self-publication, and online archives (Krause; Tyson). However, these exchanges are telling of deep-seated perceptions regarding “legitimate” publishing within our field. My experience is not new and it is not unusual. Though I did not broach with my colleagues where they thought my fan writing would fit onto my *curriculum vitae*, they nevertheless felt the need to situate my fanfic within that framework of productivity. They felt the need to *define* it.

Gwendolyn Pough uses the pseudonym Gwentyth Bolton to publish fiction and romance. Her works under this name are listed on her curriculum vitae as a vital part of her professional persona. Others have such listed under their own headings: “Creative Writing” or “Creative Publications” or “Creative Makings.” Despite my partial desire to disclose my own pen name, a larger portion demands that I keep my fanfic to myself and the close-knit community that has been given permission to know it—a careful personal choice of protective layering from the culture of academia. I do not write fanfic or make fanfic for citations or to fit any notion of productivity. I never wrote fanfic in order to be considered “productive.” I wrote and write it for *me* and to share with ones who might enjoy it. There is tension in that statement: I write for me and my community. Another side of myself, the one who knows the demands of my field and professionalization, wants recognition of that labor—on the job market, toward tenure. Over half a million words and incredible amounts of research makes me question if I should make more efforts to challenge the norms of academic “productivity.”

*Making fanfic* was another way for me to mediate my own experiences, to explore my own interests, and to have conversations that I could not through institutionally legitimized academic journals. Most recently, self-publishing fanfics allowed me to engage with communities that did not adhere to the same productive model as academia. My fan writing became countercultural

in that it worked against the idea of knowledge-production-for-citations that is so prevalent in graduate schools and academia. This is the case for many who produce work that is outside of or counter to institutions, whatever those institutions may be. Who is to say that my fan writing is any less worthy, less legitimate, than other publications? Who is to say that this article is any more meaningful or impactful than my latest fanfic chapter? These questions matter. They matter because they may have answers, but I don't know what those answers are. In a very real way, this tension can also be meaningful. My "professional" self and my "fan" self shouldn't be placed into opposition. Instead, they should be viewed in relation to one another, neither one taking precedence over the other.

The first time I felt legitimized as a fan writer was in my second year of college. At that time, I had only been writing fanfic for a few years. We created transformative works (such as fanfic and fanvids) in class, discussed how those transformative works responded to the source material, and explored how we might take lessons from that transformation. My instructor at the time learned that I wrote fan fiction and she encouraged me to keep writing, opening up a whole realm of circa 2010 scholarship regarding fan fiction that I never knew existed before that class. By all technicalities, I suppose that the institution—by virtue of a single open-minded instructor—helped to sponsor my growth as a fan writer and as a professional in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. If I had not been supported by that mentor in my fanfic writing, I doubt that I would have pursued study in my current discipline. Likewise, I would have never taught fan fiction in my composition classrooms if not for the support of mentors in my graduate program. Seeing these connections and influences is valuable, particularly as I approach this from the constellative view of cultural rhetorics. Each of these experiences is meaningful in my understanding of fanfic, fanfic publishing, and the communities in which my work circulates—both fannish and academic.

### ***“Fascinating, Captain.” A Forward Look***

Perhaps one day in the future, I will feel comfortable enough to situate my fan writing pen name under my “Publications” heading on my curriculum vitae. Though, it will likely still appear under a subheading due to the relatively negative perceptions of self-publishing in academia even outside of fan fiction. It is possible that I may decide to never release that pen name, to protect it from the productivity-based writing paradigms that exist within academia. Likewise, perhaps one day this stigmatization of fan writing will abate and future generations of fan writers will not need to be pulled aside to receive whispered warnings over cheese plates. This article is not to say that the higher education institution is whole-sale unsupportive of fan writing or fan production. In fact, there are several institutionally supported libraries that house archives of fan ephemera. Rather, this article was meant to build connections and relationships that may not have been discussed at length before, particularly by someone who prescribes to the titles of scholar and fan creator with equal fervor. Whether it be the decolonization of meaning-making, the creation of zines that challenge institutional power, or the empowerment of communities in their own

literacy practices or the production of texts that reshape our notions of consumption, the sharing of that work is essential in future of community literacy. It is only through that sharing (via publishing, posting, circulating, or whatever term should be used) that conversations may truly begin. Making fanfic is just one of these ways in which we might begin to consider how to decentralize our notions of what “publishing” is—and what it *can* be.

Just to see if this will pass the test:

“She didn’t have a conclusion. Not a real one anyway. What in the world *is* this?” Jim laughed lightly, shaking his head as he looked up from the papers. “And we’re supposed to do what, Mister Spock? Just accept that kind of essay?”

“I believe it is illustrative.”

“Illustrative?” The papers were snatched from the captain’s outstretched hand before the Vulcan Commander could take them. “It’s a bunch of hogwash. Who made an essay part of the requirements for Starfleet? Why were we assigned to read them? I’m a doctor, man, not a rhetorician.”

## Notes

1 There are many approaches to this term. Some use “fan fiction” as two separate words. Others use the term “fanfiction,” sans the space between “fan” and “fiction.” In this work, I will use “fan fiction” and “fanfic.”

2 “The mainstream understanding of it, to the extent that there is one, is that it’s (a) slavishly adoring of its subject matter and (b) pornographic. [...] It’s not simply about churning out more and more iterations of existing characters and worlds, or rather, it’s not just about that. It’s about doing things with those existing characters and worlds that their creators couldn’t or wouldn’t do. It’s about boldly going where no man or woman has gone before, because oh my God, who would even have thought of that?” (Grossman). There is plenty of raunchy and sexually-fetishizing fan fiction out there. I am not referencing the fanfic that lingers in the shadows of the Internet (the subjects of which are questionable even to lifelong fanfic consumers).

3 I refer here to Kristin Arola’s “The Design of Web 2.0: The Rise of the Template, The Fall of Design” (*Computers and Composition* 27, 2010). In the present, templates are often predetermined, offering few means for customization. Arola discusses the impact of this on student consideration of design choices in online spaces. The design of a page affects its meaning, but there is little choice in the design of *FanFiction.net* pages and only a few more design choices available for fan writers that post their work on sites like *Archive of Our Own*.

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