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Emotional Ownership and the Fan Fiction Community

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Introduction

Fan fiction is writing based on the universe of some entertainment franchise such as a film, a television series, or a book. An individual writes an original storyline, but based to some degree on the events and characters in the franchise. These stories may vary widely in their content and their level of consistency with the original work. While fan fiction occurs in all genres of films and series, it is especially popular amongst science-fiction fans.

Previous research has focused on fan fiction as a strong form of participatory fandom, since it is the creation of a text that is in a sense just as authentic as the work on which it is based. Very recent research has dealt with how this participation sometimes places fans at odds with producers of science-fiction material, and how producers can deal with this optimally. Fan fiction sometimes clashes with producers' interests because fan fiction expression can run counter to the commoditised product that the producers are trying to promote.

The emergence of the Internet has revolutionised fan fiction, and fandom activities in general. It allows fans to meet and discuss their stories in real time without the need for a common physical space. The Internet is highly democratising even in this instance; even non-fans can enter the world of fan fiction through forums, chat room, and other interactive media. The guests may not necessarily have ill-willed intentions but can at times annoy the true members when acting "unfannish". Unfannish behaviour in this paper generally entails that members oppose the community principles of fan fiction content. This also suggests that it might be hard for the researcher to find appropriate fan participants, as anyone can pretend to be one on the Internet.

Furthermore, communication between fans, fan clubs, and producers has also increased, since it is much easier to write and send criticism over the Internet. This indicates a stressful situation for the producers, since they cannot distinguish between serious concerns and concerns and minor quibbles. This problem is twofold. From one side, the producers cannot adjust to every critical claim from the fans since that would entail a limitation on essential artistic creativity. From the other side, nor can they totally ignore the fans' opinions. Hence,

assuming that such actions would be publicly known through the media, it is possible that the mass market that the producers are trying to satisfy is influenced by the interaction between the two parties. George Lucas is a major example of this, since he was initially quite opposed to fan control over his creative actions, but eventually caved when he realised that the revolutionary power of the Internet gave fans much more power they had when the first Star Wars film came out in the late 1970s.

Therefore, the Internet means that we cannot think of fandom in traditional ways. The incredible networking force of the Internet means that fans from all over the world can congregate and form one global community. However, it could well be that the organization of that community is much more fluid than we have seen before. While research conducted in past decades looked at fan fiction as a group phenomenon where values came from outside the individual, this approach might not be appropriate in an age where fans have more agency to seek out meaning which appeal to them. Therefore, it might be good to look at individual meanings rather than group meanings.

While many authors have tried to tackle the conflicting discourses between producers and fans from the producers' point of view, or have analysed the fan community as a whole, few have concerned themselves with the conflicting discourses amongst fans. As we shall discuss, a common conclusion of those researchers that have been interested in fan community behaviour, including fan fiction, is the framing of various fan activities in terms of cultural resistance. In the context of fan fiction, one of the central ideas of cultural resistance is the oppositional or contradictory contents of the authors' stories.

In comparison to mass culture, the fan communities are indeed based on distinctive ideologies. However, this is not necessarily the same as assuming that they are formed in order to protest against the mass culture. It might be more appropriate to assume that fan communities are based on a shared passion and interest for a certain franchise. In the same vein, it is possible that fan fiction that is not strictly based on the original material, is not necessarily an attempt to damage the canon itself or the creators behind it.

Fan fiction is an interesting area of study for two reasons. First and foremost, our culture has a tendency to look down on basically any group that takes a seemingly excessive interest in anything. By showing that the motivations behind writing fan fiction are not all that different

from the motivations behind pursuing more mainstream forms of recreation, we might weaken the “freak” label that is often placed on fans. Second, and on a related point, fan fiction can and should be placed in the historical context of media and storytelling. While the 19th and 20th centuries saw the centralisation of storytelling power to a relatively small number of movie and television producers, fan fiction could be seen as a democratisation of expression. Fan fiction could be at least a small counterforce to the centralised power of mass media entertainment.

Research Problem

Previous fandom studies have revolved around fans attempting to exert ownership over the narrative through active participation. When it comes to fan fiction in particular, this implies that such writing activities alone demonstrate that fans claim ownership over the narratives. This is because the writing activity itself implies some degree of control over the direction of the story.

However, the motivational drivers of ownership claims by fan fiction writers is still somewhat vague, as previous research seems not to question why fans use the material for private use. Consequently, without rejecting these studies in absolute terms, we observe a general tendency to cast fan ownership as aggressive. Thus, it is very often concluded that ownership claims are merely another typical characteristic of aggressive cultural resistance.

Our choice of the term “ownership” is hardly arbitrary. It comes from the fact that many previous articles have discussed the clash between movie producers and devoted fans. These disagreements have often arisen because fans feel that they have some right to the material. Nevertheless, with the increasing popularity of fan fiction, stemming to a large degree from the Internet, the science-fiction narratives have come to be available in multiple interpretations. This partly implies that the producers lose control over the franchise in the sense that they are inevitably forced to accept their work being misused or used in contexts for which they do not want recognition. In this sense then, the lost control and / or ownership of the producers over their canonical work is to some extent taken over by the fans. We thereby arrive at the following research question:

How does the concept of ownership reveal itself in the discourse of science-fiction fan fiction writers?

Ownership connotes rights and privileges, and it is arguably these that are at stake in any interrelational power play. The fans’ concept(s) of ownership, which they themselves might not define in these terms, is therefore of interest if we want to understand their grievances against the movie studio. What we can say at this stage, and throughout the whole paper, is that ownership feelings have no connection to legal terms such as intellectual property and

copyright. That is, since it is well understood by all parties that fan fiction authors do not have a legal entitlement to the original material, its applicability is thus limited in this examination. Therefore, our paper would discuss and analyze the wide variety of emotional and creative claims that are possible. Because of the difficulty of measuring the degrees of these factors in relation to a rather unexplored phenomenon, this study to must dig deeper into the individually constructed worlds of the participants. Hence, as one paper cannot at this stage, by itself, provide the various aspects of ownership within the fan fiction field, there is a preliminary need for us to investigate the authors' attitudes, feelings and emotions, all of which have important implications for the sense of claiming ownership over the source material.

In Hills' (2003) analysis, fans act out contradictions and cannot be placed in linear terms. Hence, the author indicates that it is in the very nature of being a fan to be critical at the same time as being loyal. Further, there are fans that take the narrative for what it is and there are those that do not. While fans might well verbalise displeasure about a series, this might not mean that they harbour any ill will towards the producers. Hills' findings are useful in emphasising that fans are rather multi-dimensional in their behaviour and consumption, and that fans need to be understood on an individual basis apart from a collective.

Expressing oneself, especially in Western cultures, is sometimes an end in itself. Fans might complain about a studio's creative decision not because they care so deeply about the decisions themselves, but because they need to vent frustrations. It might be a necessary way of feeling more complete and empowered as a person. Fandom might be an arbitrary way of enacting broader social concerns. In other words, people need something that they can complain about, and fandom is a harmless way of doing so.

The same applies to the writing of fan fiction. It might be that by investigating fan fiction in terms of the universe in which it takes place, researchers are putting the cart in front of the horse. It could be that the impetus for this creative activity is the human need to express oneself. Outside of fan fiction, many people may write novels or paint or pursue other activities that express their inner selves. Fan fiction, which is written within an already existing world, might therefore be a convenient way of expressing meaning without having to take the time to create plot elements such as characters and settings. Furthermore, there is a

built-in audience for fan fiction, since there is an already existing base of readers who know the rules of the fantasy universe in question.

As implied earlier, this examination will need to gain a more thorough understanding of fan authors' meanings surrounding the various aspects of the narratives, and the writing of fan fiction, in order to identify the manner in which ownership is manifested within the fan fiction community. Therefore, the kind of knowledge that will best enrich our conclusive findings and thoughts are of a qualitative nature. Hence, the qualitative approach enables the researcher to interpret the participants' lived experiences through interaction with the participants. This would enable us to conceptualise some major tendencies that could help us to generate a piece of theoretical framework. An ethnographical research method, where the researcher is in the same geographical area as the study objects, would be appropriate to investigate the social constructs that are relevant to the study. However, due to the shift of fan communities from physical fan clubs to virtual online communities, there is a need to expand and / or adjust the ethnographic approach (Hills, 2003). Therefore, netnography (ethnography on the Internet) serves this purpose well, considering that it is better able to communicate with the participants across space. .

Review of Previous Literature

We have identified four areas of study that are particularly relevant to our discussion: cultural studies, audience participation, fandom, and fan fiction itself. These areas could be seen as four layers of an onion, with cultural studies being at the centre and fan fiction research on the surface. In order to understand the underlying assumptions of fan fiction research, we must understand the three fields upon which it is based (general fandom research, audience studies, and cultural studies). Specifically, we believe that the emancipatory overtones of fan fiction research originate in the cultural studies movement, and that this field needs to be understood if we are to step out of this framework. We will now discuss each of these four areas separately.

Cultural Studies of Resistance

Cultural resistance is an ever-present theme in studies of science-fiction fandom and fan fiction studies. Especially Star Trek fandom is discussed in these terms (Jenkins, 1992; Cusack et al., 2003), perhaps because of the unusual amount of ridicule that these fans attract from mainstream society. Shefrin (2004) and Murray (2004) discuss conflicts between movie producers and fan fiction writers. Even outside of science-fiction fandom, Mihelich and Papineau (2005) describe a form of anti-corporate resistance amongst music fans.

A lot of academic criticism has since the early 1980s questioned the usefulness of resistance as an academic construct. The term's ambiguity perhaps comes from a desire on the authors' part to show readers and other audience members as opposing the mainstream cultural force. Resistance might not be the fans' deliberate intention; it could simply be a way of seeking out fun. However, we are not discounting that some form of resistance is at play in their subconscious motivations. Resistance in popular speech means a reactive force opposing some outside oppression, usually of a political nature. In contrast, in cultural studies it is an act with undefined intentionality and motivation. We will discuss both of these in turn.

Much of previous fan fiction research implicitly assumes that the act of contradicting the original material is in itself an act of cultural resistance. Although Jenkins (1992) provides an excellent account of forms of resistance amongst fan fiction writers, he does not clearly define

whether they are doing so intentionally. This might well be because he, like other fan fiction scholars, takes for granted that fan fiction resistance is intentional. Because fan communities are initially built through the initiative of fans, it is very easy to assume that all activities undertaken by members are intentional and thought-through.

Furthermore, apart from this debate about intentionality is the possibility that the motivation of fan fiction could be either positive or negative. Fans could be trying to oppose the original narrative because they are disappointed with some aspect of it, or because they felt that their social views were not taken into account. Alternatively however, the writers could be very constructive and simply writing for the joy of writing. These possibly positive and joyous intentions are rarely discussed by researchers. This is interesting precisely because many researchers have pointed how little these negative fan motivations actually impact the conditions that cause anger amongst the fans (Morris, 1990).

Because fans actually have very little influence over the works that they enjoy, we could suspect that their motivations come from something more than protest. Many researchers allude to this point. Both Graeme Turner (Butsch, 2000) and Morris (1990) point out that fans cannot be motivated primarily by the desire to change the franchise, since they have so little potential impact. While many would argue that fan activity is then a way of venting frustrations, another possible explanation is that they are writing simply because they enjoy it.

One of the major questions in our work, as we shall see, is whether fan fiction is opposing or not. Previous fandom and fan fiction research is built to some extent on the spirit discussed above. This is relevant to our work since cultural studies of resistance imply that the only way of showing ownership is through resistance. This in turn implies ill will, protest, and discontent from the fans' point of view. A research gap is therefore whether other forms of ownership claims are possible.

Audience Studies

Butsch (2000) places our contemporary conception of audiences in its historical context, and this is relevant to studies of science-fiction fandom. Specifically, it shows that the extreme audience participation of science-fiction fans is not that strange. Ironically enough, audience participation reached such heights in past centuries that the distinctions between performer

and spectator sometimes broke down entirely. Similarly, contemporary work by Corrigan (2005) would argue that fan participation in both the consumption and production of the performance is not abnormal.

The empowerment of audiences has been mediated by technological, economic, and social factors. The advent of the electric light meant that theatre owners could cast an otherwise rowdy crowd into darkness. Often, these owners' fear of working class audiences mirrored political strife and unrest outside of the theatre. The wealthy could be equally rowdy, although the justification for their participation was socially constructed around their literal patronage of the venue. Science-fiction movie producers' fear of fan fiction writers can therefore also be placed in a historical context, since past producers of performances have been at odds with their audiences.

Audience participation therefore becomes inextricable from class anxiety. Before the masses were quelled by the introduction of unidirectional forms of entertainment such as television, movies, and radio, the fear was of mass unrest. After their introduction, the fear was the Baudrillardian seduction of the audience into passivity, inaction, and sloth. Engagement with the performance is therefore an irrefutably political act driven by an exogenous force; theatre served at times as common reference points for meetings that could just as well have taken place in the streets.

In this sense, the idea that writers form communities around fan fiction sites primarily in order to feel a part of something is not that abnormal in an historical context. A research gap is therefore whether or not online fan communities, where there are no barriers of entry to, include only "fans" or also non-fans that are simply looking for community. A problem with previous fan fiction literature might well be the assumption that all fan fiction writers are fans in the traditional sense. While this might have been a reasonable assumption when fans club met physically, this might no longer be the case in the Internet age.

Butsch's analysis ends in 1990, the same year that the World Wide Web was proposed and the year before the publication of Pierre Baudrillard's *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. The book therefore excludes both the postmodernization of mass entertainment and the enormous interactivity available through the Internet. While fan fiction was in the early 1990s distributed through the circulation of fanzines (Green et al, 1998), within ten years it had

shifted onto the Internet (Murray, 2004). There is a lack of research regarding fan fiction and the Internet, perhaps because we do not yet have the historical perspective to fully understand the Internet as a social phenomenon. The Internet namely lessens the passivity of television and allows audiences to participate in a way that was impossible for most of the 20th century.

Science-Fiction Fandom Studies

While our discussion has thus far shown the nuances of our research, we now turn our attention to the research gaps that justified our problem in the first place. As Harris (1998) points out, very few theoretical constructs exist within the field of fandom study. Classen (1998) chides other fandom scholars for not moving from the mere description of fan behaviour to the theorisation thereof. Fittingly, the direction of present research seems to implicitly confirm our previous criticism that fandom studies' object of study needs to be clearly defined.

Most of this discussion revolves around finding a good definition of "genre", and how the science-fiction genre in particular can be defined. This is important for our purposes since it would be wrong to assume that all fan communities behave in exactly the same way regardless of genre. Lindlof et al (1998) propose defining genres in general according to what they call "interpretive communities". These communities, all of which correspond some particular genre, are defined by being a group of fans that together dictate the "correct" interpretation of a set of movies. This is a convenient way of categorising audience members, since it comes from their own definition of themselves. One drawback however, is that it treats fans in collective terms, while fans are commonly defined in the individual terms of their fanaticism. Genre is usually used in such analyses to mean the object of interest of an interpretive community.

Science-fiction is a particularly slippery genre since, in Rick Altman's terms (Jancovich, 2000), it can be defined neither syntactically nor semantically. The latter defines genres according to the inclusion of plot elements while the former defines them according to the relationship between the plot elements. The presence of zombies, love affairs, and cowboys would semantically define the horror, romance, and western genres, respectively. In contrast, Star Trek has been syntactically defined as a "space opera" because its emphasis on personal drama mirrors that of daytime television.

However, University of Toronto professor Dena Taylor defines science-fiction as the exploration of a “what if” premise (Sci-fi / fantasy discussion, 2006). We therefore face a genre that has absolutely no preordained plot elements, and can therefore not be semantically defined. It can however be syntactically defined if the “what if”, in other words the subversion of reality, is an important element of how fans conceive of it.

While science-fiction might well be a useless label for a genre, it is not necessarily a useless label for fan fiction writers. As we shall see, because fan fiction often explores “what if” scenarios based on the text itself, its writers are arguably the one group of fans to which this is definitely a relevant syntactic element. In mid-May 2006, the three most written-about movies by far on www.fanfiction.net all had significant fantasy elements, and similar patterns were found in the book and television archives. Strage (2006) notes in passing that fan fiction is hardly found in any genre outside of science-fiction. However, it might be possible that many fan fiction writers who try to adhere to the story, and therefore do not explore “what if”, are not covered by this reasoning. Their particular interest in fan fiction is therefore another interesting research gap.

Fan Fiction Studies

Even the briefest foray into fan fiction studies will inevitably turn up discussions of “slash”. This homoerotic pairing of two characters in fan fiction is usually written by heterosexual women (Cicioni, 1998), and is a central preoccupation of fan fiction scholars. Jenkins (1992) devotes about half of what has become the “bible” of fan fiction research, *Textual Poaching*, to the subject. Brooker (2002) devotes an entire chapter to the subject, despite hardly mentioning fan fiction in general. Both fan fiction articles in Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander’s 1998 anthology *Theorising Fandom* deal exclusively with slash.

The prospect of heterosexual women depicting male homoerotic encounters is of course a counterintuitive phenomenon. It is therefore of more than trivial interest because the resolution of this contradiction necessarily lifts the overall fan fiction discussion out of “common sense” clichés and develops potentially useful theoretical constructs. Furthermore, most slash research sheds a practical light on feminist and queer theories of female textual interpretation.

A more cynical view would be that salacious content makes for more interesting research and that such a focus infers that slash and fan fiction are synonymous terms. While Green et al (1998) do point out that fan writers do not place slash on a conceptual pedestal in the same way as academics, this is beside the point. Simply saying that slash and fan fiction are separate is correct, however, it is easy to confuse the two simply because slash makes up such a large part of fan fiction research.

Nevertheless, slash research has resulted in a number of propositions that are applicable especially to the vast majority of non-slash fan fiction writers that are women. Both Green et al (1998) and Cicioni (1998) come to the general conclusion that most slash is only nominally homosexual. Slash is in this meaning an example of emotional realism at the expense of technical realism; writers use male characters as husks into which they can pour their own feelings. The exclusion of strong female characters from the storyline makes it difficult to write erotic fan fiction about them.

Reading our discussion above, one might come to the conclusion that we intend to write about slash. However, this is not the case. We have discussed slash for the simple reason that it is so ubiquitous in fan fiction studies. However, this does not imply that it is widespread in fan fiction itself. One research gap that our research problem partially covers is an impression of fan fiction outside of slash. Only a minority of the sample that we will be discussing write slash. This begs the question of the motivations and aspirations of non-slash writers.

Methodology

Research Design

Our investigation will be based around a case study design. This design is preferable simply because of the novelty of fan fiction as an academic field of study. Because relatively little is known about the field, the case study design's ability to broaden possible interpretations of the field without necessarily falsifying or verifying existing findings is extremely valuable. The goal is to produce new theoretical insights, rather than to refute those mentioned in our previous literature section. For example, while the bulk of our fan fiction literature discussion revolved around studies of slash, we believe that our investigation broadens the field to include non-slash writers. Case study design allows us to go beyond scratching the surface, by letting us investigate the topic in a detailed and intensive manner.

One feature of the case study design that we would need to take care with is the fact that it deals with one single population. In our case, this would be defined as science-fiction fan writers. However, as alluded to before, we cannot be entirely certain how homogenous this community actually is. One possible difference is the motivation for pursuing fan fiction. Hanmer (2003) shows that many *Xena: Warrior Princess* fans are attracted to the series because of a need to reveal their lesbianism, while Hills (2005) shows an instance of fandom being a passing phase. The implication is that, while we can look for patterns and tendencies within all of science-fiction fan fiction, we should be reflexive when we integrate the responses of several respondents into one conclusion. However, this issue actually justifies the use of case study design, since this design never, to the same degree as other designs, assumes that there is less difference within the population as between the population and the outside world.

Later on, we will discuss our method in terms of the "netnography" research design as it is described by Kozinets and others. An important point is that while we are drawing knowledge and experience from this field of literature, our research design is firmly rooted in case study methodology. However, because we feel that the netnographic literature is the most advanced and informative source for the nuances and potential dangers of conducting research over the Internet, we have imported many of its central concepts to our methodology. We recognise

also that research designs are labels more than mutually exclusive categories, and in this light one could say that our research design is a combination of case study and netnography.

Our method is inductive, considering that we are attempting to generate new theoretical insights from data. As such, we will sift through the data that we gather and hopefully coax out new categories and ways of conceptualising the field. This is similar to Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory approach (Easterby-Smith et al, 2003), and we have made every effort to derive our results from the emic terms of the respondents themselves. However, our implementation of the inductive approach cannot tell us the relative importance or prevalence of the trends that we identify. The full practical implications of our research would perhaps not reveal themselves until our results were followed up by a deductive investigation.

Procedure

We began our empirical investigation before we had narrowed down our focus to specifically fan fiction. With the aim of exploring the desires of science-fiction fans in general, we began by monitoring discussions on the newsgroups alt.fan.starwars and alt.startrek. Our tentative goal at this point was to identify topics of discussion that the participants were particularly impassioned about. This search was vaguely informed by previous research on consumer desire by authors such as Russell Belk, Guliz Ger, and Sören Askegaard.

We quickly found that many discussions revolved around the relative quality of new instalments of the Star Wars and Star Trek franchises as compared to the originals. We wrote a set of appropriate questions (Appendices A and B) for both groups of fans and sent them to 96 email addresses. Nine responded, and most of their answers did not go into great detail. Many of our questions included concrete examples to illustrate the rather abstract concepts we were asking about, and this unfortunately caused many respondents to address the specific examples rather than the questions themselves.

One respondent was particularly interesting because she wrote fan fiction within the Star Trek universe. She gave long and elaborate answers, and our questions about ownership over the story elicited stronger responses from her than from the other respondents. Her attitudes regarding her rights to the story seemed much more nuanced than other fans. Given this especially forthcoming response, and our discovery of a trove of academic research devoted to fan fiction, we decided to narrow the scope of our investigation to fan fiction.

As before, we decided to conduct our investigation over the Internet. Our limited budgets and time meant that we could not leave southern Sweden for face-to-face interviews, or any other form of personal contact. Meanwhile, we reasoned and later confirmed that the majority of our respondents were to be found in Anglophone countries. As such, some form of online research method was in order.

We opted once again for email interviews. While the more netnographic approach of actually reading fan fiction stories and reviews was possible, it would have been impractical since neither of us have more than a casual interest in science-fiction, and would therefore need lots of time to unravel the emic terms in the stories. The questions in these interviews addressed what we believed at the time to be the main gaps in fan fiction research: fans writing habits outside of fan fiction, exactly how they use the plot elements from the films, and exactly what liberties they take with the material (Appendix D).

Fan fiction is today published mainly on dedicated websites; it is exceedingly rare that fan fiction is published on sites aimed at a broader fan audience. We found sites through Google searches for “fan fiction” combined with the names of prominent science-fiction series. Our impression of online fan fiction is therefore to some extent coloured by this search engine’s ranking system. Because Google ranks pages by popularity in the first instance, this method probably glossed over lesser-known fan fiction sites.

These sites vary for example in the content of the stories, the specific science-fiction franchises they deal with, their submissions policies, and their way of archiving stories. Some sites, such as www.lotrfanfiction.com and trekfanfiction.net cater only to a specific franchise, while www.fictionalley.org and www.fanfiction.net have a more generalist bent. Harry Potter site www.checkmated.com contains only romantically-themed stories but restricts minors’ access to sexually explicit material. A site could organize stories by for example submission date, popularity, length, content, or genre. Some have only a handful of writers while others have hundreds. More generally, we found that online fan fiction is a major phenomenon with a large and diverse corps of writers.

We finally decided to base our investigation around www.fanfiction.net. We registered as a member in order to gain access to other members’ email addresses. This site was suitable primarily because it had a larger volume of stories and authors, which we believed we needed if we were to overcome the low response rate that we had experienced in our newsgroup

study. Stories were organized only according to franchise, and ranked according to date of submission. While other sites identified prominent and presumably more dedicated authors, the limited time available to us meant that we had to concentrate on volume.

We contacted authors who had written stories based on Star Trek, Star Wars, The Matrix Trilogy, Harry Potter, and Lord of the Rings (Appendix D). All of these franchises can be placed under the loose category of “science-fiction”, since this term can refer to all fantastic fiction rather than just fiction that takes place amongst futuristic technology. These franchises were the most familiar to us as casual media consumers, and we felt therefore that we would be better able to interpret any emic terms that might appear in these writers’ responses. These films were also amongst the most popular on the site. For each franchise, we selected the latest 100 submissions where the authors had made their email addresses public, and sent our questions to them. This resulted in a pool of exactly 500 potential respondents. The questions were essentially the same for each franchise, though the examples given were adjusted. This resulted in ambiguity in the Harry Potter questions, since our questions were designed for a completed franchise, while there are more books and movies planned in this series.

There was a considerable variance in response rate between franchises. 62 Lord of the Rings, 43 Star Wars, 32 Harry Potter, 29 Star Trek, and 23 Matrix writers responded, making a grand total of 189 respondents. The overwhelming majority of respondents were young teenage girls, especially in the Harry Potter franchise, and this could well be a result of our chosen site’s liberal submission policy. There were a few women writers in their early 20s and some in their early 50s, but almost none in their 30s and 40s. There were only a handful of male writers, and most of them wrote within the Matrix universe. Of the 500 emails we sent, we received approximately 50 delivery error responses from servers, indicating that the addresses were either fake or abandoned. A few wrote back openly questioning our motives, while one woman wrote a long and helpful essay on theoretical sources that we could use in our research. Of course, each franchise pool is only a small sample in statistical terms, meaning that they might not be representative of the fan fiction population as a whole.

The vast majority of respondents wrote in such a relaxed manner that we might infer that English is their mother tongue, and the majority of these used colloquialisms and spelling conventions that would suggest that they are from the United States. A few respondents wrote that English was not their mother tongue, and the majority of these were from Eastern Europe. About half of the respondents wrote less than three sentences per question, and about a

quarter wrote more than one paragraph per question. We ultimately used quotes from 18 different respondents, but read and were informed by all of them.

On a few occasions, these respondents indicated that www.fanfiction.net was simply a repository for stories by fairly inexperienced authors, and pointed us towards more dedicated sites. As a result, we decided to contact authors on www.lotrfanfiction.com. However, as we were close to a deadline, we could not spend the time gathering hundreds of email addresses. We contacted five authors on the site, and received two responses (Appendices F and G), both from women. These questions were tailored to the authors, since they had given links to their personal websites with lots of information that on which we could build our questions. One of these two authors is quoted in this document.

Approximately one week after the initial emails, we sent an email thanking respondents for their cooperation and informing them that they would receive a copy of the final product and that they would be consulted if they were quoted directly (Appendix E). Several wrote backing thanking us for the information, and one respondent said not to send the thesis as she would not be planning on reading it. Throughout our correspondence, most the respondents were amicable, and many felt honoured to have so much interest focused on their hobby.

Netnographical Methodology

A qualitative research method is necessary considering that the knowledge that will be most appropriate for this study concerns interpretation of words rather than numbers that characterises quantitative studies (Bryman & Bell, 2003). As we are interested in how the ownership phenomenon is manifested in fan fiction, and as we do not have sufficient relevant information to describe this, we will need to examine the participants' textual or verbal accounts of their feelings, thoughts and emotions that are related to ownership. The qualitative approach enables one to meet those standards by enabling the researcher to experience the individual participant's social world either through verbal or textual interpretation of their defined meanings.

According to Hills (2003), in conjunction with the development of newer or changed cultural communities, such as online fan communities, there is also a need to develop new research methods that are specifically based on characteristics that have given reason for the communities' existence. Therefore, the Internet has been used for data collection. This kind

of method is more commonly known as netnography. A precise definition of the latter as provided by Kozinets (1997) describes it as “a written account of on-line cyberculture, informed by the methods of cultural anthropology”. Hence, the written account suggests that we will be looking to analyse and interpret textual outputs and that we do not have verbal interactions with the participants. Further, the recognition of on-line cyberculture in this definition refers to such cultures that are mediated via contemporary computerized communications technology including the Internet. As such, the objective of this study is to investigate the ways ownership is exerted within a particular activity, fan fiction, which has grown in significance with the extensive use and practicability of the Internet.

The application of netnographies has during the last decade grown within the study fields of cultural anthropology, consumer research and cultural studies. It is also within these fields among some others that studies of fandom in general are conducted. Netnography has within those areas to a certain extent come to replace the traditional ethnography. Kozinets (1997; 1998; 2002) outlines that netnography is an extension of the traditionally known research method ethnography. The crucial difference is that with netnographies, data is mainly of textual nature where one will be analysing the content of the fans’ communicative acts and not the “complete sets of observed acts of consumers in a particular community” (Kozinets, 2002), which is at the heart of ethnographies. Apart from that netnographies enable the researcher to retrieve the same kind of thick descriptions (Langer & Beckman, 2005) of the participants’ lived experiences.

Alternatively, we could have opted for traditional ethnography enabling us to meet and observe the participants directly. That way, one could have a richer understanding of the various aspects of the culture and its members that is being investigated. However, there is a risk with this method where the researcher’s physical attendance may be interpreted as intrusive. Further, members may behave non-naturally due to the fact that they know that they are being observed and their meanings are being studied (Svensson, 2006). Although this is not to say that such issues would not occur with netnographies, it is indeed less likely (Kozinets, 1998).

Concerning the transcription of data collection, netnographies have a clear advantage where data emerge as already transcribed whereas in ethnographies transcription can take days or weeks. This indicates that netnographies are less time consuming and cost efficient.

However, because it is easy to collect data, there may be difficulties in discriminating relevant data. What is more important to mention perhaps is that due to geographical limitations we did not have the opportunity to identify participants. Hence, we failed to locate fans in the nearest geographical areas to Lund/Sweden. Therefore, it was indeed not likely (if not impossible) for us to take onto the ethnographical approach especially considering the time restriction and limited resources.

According to Langer and Beckman (2005) when conducting a study that concerns delicate and sensitive topics, that people at large are unwilling to talk about publicly, for instance undergoing cosmetic surgery, netnography is particularly useful. That because, it is more likely to attract participants to discuss such topics when they know that they can partake anonymously and thus does not have to reveal any kind of personal information that could be traced back to the particular participants. Accordingly, fandom studies in general can be said to be a sensitive topic. Jenkins (1992) has devoted a whole chapter to examine the tendencies by the society to label fans as outcasts and freaks because of their perceived fanatic behaviour. Fans being aware of such negative connotations would therefore be less prone to express their true thoughts and feelings in a confronting method such as ethnography.

Ethical issues

Because the computer users can “hide behind the computer screen” and remain anonymous, it may be that they present a more carefully planned and favourable self-image than that may differ from their actual image, which in turn may affect the trustworthiness of the data analysis. We did take this into consideration, and considered at one stage that perhaps we would gain more truthful reflections if we pretended to be as members to the various fan communities, and thereby conducted a covert netnography. Hence, if we could make them believe that we were members of that community then the communication process would be more natural and honest. Another reason for taking the latter option into consideration was due to the fact that we initially received only nine e-mails from respondents that were interested in being a part of this study. The data in such instance would be gained by asking hidden and discrete questions after a moderate length of time of getting to know them.

The plan was however never carried out for ethical reasons. Hence, considering that we would need to use some information that we retained in that manner, we could not possibly do so

without their consent. Asking for consent afterwards would have meant risking upsetting the participants. Therefore, it indicates that they would not agree on cooperating with us regarding that we would have been lying about our initial intentions, and that the information gained would rather be waste of time.

However, in order to minimise ethical issues, when contacting the fans, we wrote a simple and comprehensive e-mail introducing ourselves as two International Marketing postgraduate students from Lund University, Sweden (Appendix A). Further, we explained briefly about the nature of our study and ensured confidentiality.

None of the respondents' names appear next to their quotes. Although many gave, without our asking, permission to use their names, many did not do so. We never explicitly informed them that we would quote them directly in the paper, and doing so would therefore be unethical. While it might have been understood that we were allowed to use their names, we did not want to take the risk of offending any respondents, especially since much of our analysis places their responses in theoretical terms that they might not agree with. In this sense, we felt that if we were to ask permission, we would also need to show the context in which the quote was being used. This would have taken a lot of time, since again, much of the analysis is quite theoretical and not at all self-explanatory to people who have not studied marketing or other humanities subjects at a university level.

Data collection

There are two kinds of data that is relevant in netnographies as applied during this study. First are the already transcribed data that we retrieved from the e-mail interviews, and second are our notes from our personal experiences while conducting the study.

Qualitative interviews

The data collection was pursued by online interviews via e-mail. There is a mutual challenge for interviewer and interviewees with online interviews concerning that neither party is able to be influenced by visual and auditory cues (Bryman and Bell, 2003). This means that there is a possibility that we may have missed out pieces of essential information for our data interpretation. For example, frustration, anxiety, body language, sighs and groans may be

fruitful factors for conducting a research of this kind looking for meanings, attitudes and feelings, and that sometimes the answers can be found in the manners that participants signal the abovementioned criteria.

Opting for face-to-face interviews would certainly have the benefits of overcoming such shortcomings. On the other hand, with the online method, the interviewee has the possibility to reflect upon the questions and therefore give a more detailed and richer response. Further, the absence of the interviewer means that the respondents are freed from the bias that may be present due to, for example the tone in which the interviewer asks the questions that may have an impact on the manner the participants respond to it. Nevertheless, as explained previously, because we did not have the possibility to meet the fans, and did therefore not have the alternative to conduct face-to-face interviews.

The communication with the respondents was established via e-mails. Further, the method is also of the asynchronous type. That is, it was not in real time indicating that the responses were not retrieved immediately after the questions had been sent to the respondents. To use such approach may be problematic at times, for example, there is greater possibility for the participants to drop out, and sometimes they can take far too long time to answer to the questions. To remind the participant(s) to send the answers in such circumstances may be interpreted as insensitive, intrusive and annoying from the participants' part, and perhaps giving them a clear reason to not participate. At one occasion, one of the participants responded saying that indeed the questions that we had sent were interesting and worthwhile her time to answer, but that it required some time to think over, and further asked about the deadline date. As we did not want to seem pushy, we sent her the deadline date and that it is important that she does not answer the questions when stressed so that we can gain a true understanding of her meanings. However, she did not reply ever since. We concluded then that either she did not have the time for participating or she simply changed her mind, and therefore we did not pursue further that interview. Further, for the same reasons we did not make a second contact with those who did not reply to our e-mail from the first instance.

We could have alternatively opted for the synchronous approach, communicating directly with the participants i.e. in a chat room. This approach would enable us to explain the questions in more depth making sure that they were immediately understood. It would also make it easier to ask follow-up questions and/or ask them to elaborate on their answers. The

time saved could be of significance allowing for more semi-structured or unstructured questions. Further, it could also allow us go into areas that we did not think of from the beginning but was revealed to us during the interview. Although it could also be accomplished with the asynchronous approach, it would take too much longer time. And because the time limit for conducting this study is rather approximately two months and strict, it would not be appropriate.

Moreover, the synchronous approach would have required that we have access to the same hardware and software which may perhaps make some participants feel insecure about loading that software, or it may be incompatible with their (and / or our) computers' operating systems (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Further, they may need some time to answer some of the questions which would then terminate the interview for the time being. Such issues can be easily be overcome by the asynchronous approach, giving them the time needed to construct their perceptions of the study subject, and meanings relevant to the questions. One could naturally continue with the interview later, but then again there is a chance for the participants to reflect upon the previous session and try to figure out the nature of the study, and require the interviewer to change previous responses in order to be represented in a more favourable way. Despite the fact that such response validation is important; it may at times be non-usable material if the researcher suspects that later correction of responses is rather dishonest. Or in other situations, it may also be that they sense a pressure of answering the questions immediately without having the opportunity to think it over and therefore give an untrue insight. Further, because of the fact that it is not a face-to-face interview, the participants can just log off from the interview whenever they feel uncomfortable with the situation.

Procedure of online interviews

We have already mentioned our sampling techniques in the previous section, but what follows is a netnographic discussion of its potential problems, nuances, and considerations.

Three different interview question templates were used. For the first ninety-six fans that were contacted we used Appendices A and B. The questions were sent as an e-mail attachment after they had agreed on taking part of the study. One benefit of the attached form is that the questions can be represented more attractively. On the other hand, it would require more computer expertise and therefore fewer respondents may want to answer (Bryman and Bell,

2003). Nonetheless, these respondents were sent follow up questions (Appendix C) to elaborate on some of the answers that they had been provided us. Such a method is flexible in the sense that it enables one to dig in to areas that one perhaps had not thought about initially. Indeed, it is partly from these responses that we noticed that fan fiction writing is a common activity taken by fans. Therefore, we decided to contact more fans to participate in the study on the basis that they were fan fiction writers.

When approaching the five hundred additional fan fiction authors, the questions in Appendix D were sent in the e-mail body at the initial contact. To send the questions at once was both to save time and because we wanted to test whether a different technique would increase the probability of raising participation interest. Indeed, we then received 189 responses. These interviewees were on the other hand not sent any follow up-questions. The reason being that, after having received over one hundred responses and reviewed those, we came to the conclusion that we had more than enough of thoroughly described insights in relation to the topics we were interested in and more.

All questions were quite structured. One could argue that structured interviews are inappropriate to qualitative studies, and that it is not possible to gain deeper meanings using such. We argue that taking the fairly new method into consideration and that there is a lack of clear and definite guidelines, the quality of the interview should not be regarded as being either structured or not. Thus, the most important factor here is based on the quality of the interview content. That is, the kind of questions asked and responses given. In general, the questions were clear and simple in order to minimise misunderstandings.

We had several open questions so that the respondent would have an opportunity to highlight what is most important to her/him within the topic referenced. For example, “How would you describe...” and “Could you describe...” Further, we also had some direct questions followed by a request for them to elaborate on their answers. Given our limited time frame, this would allow us quick access to information relevant to our investigation while allowing the respondents the opportunity to question the premise of the question.

Furthermore, the structured questions were complemented with unstructured questions sent to specific authors, and based upon statements that these authors had made on their personal websites (samples in Appendices F and G). While one might argue that these questions were

structured since they were quite direct and targeted, they are unstructured in the sense that they were tailored to fit their specific bodies of work. Because we were in an asynchronous interview situation, this was in fact the best way of simulating an unstructured synchronous interview.

One issue when interviewing aficionados of a somewhat non-mainstream topic is that they have a tendency to use “emic” rather than “etic” terms. The former are terms generated spontaneously by the respondents, while the latter are terms introduced into the conversation by the interviewer. While emic terms are not in the technical sense “lingo”, since researchers often can understand what they mean, the danger in science-fiction is that they might be undecipherable. Therefore, questions were formed generally in order to keep the amount of emic speech to a minimum, since neither of us are true fans. Later on, we will see that some of our analysis follows from emic terms that we could interpret, as well as from the more enthusiastic responses to etic terms that we introduced.

Personal experience of the data and previous literature

Strage (2006) introduces the presentation of his novel “Fans” by admitting that he is a passionate fan. Likewise Jenkins (1992) explains several terminologies and phenomenon by reference to personal fannish experience. Hills (2003) puts this into the open claiming that fandom studies are conducted by fans, which explains why many of these are in favour of romanticising the state of being a fan. In short, these authors admit that it is hard if not impossible to be objective when conducting a fandom study.

We perhaps approached our work from the fans’ point of view. One possible reason for the latter is that during the first stage of sending e-mails to the participants we received very few responses. We then felt that we had to be extra careful in our actions when communicating with those participants so that they would not lose interest. More importantly, we were rather thankful for their interest in participating. There is a possibility therefore that we on an unconscious level did not want to criticise them, since it could be perceived as ungrateful. This was also partly due to that many asked for a copy of the paper, a request which we of course could not refuse. Thus, assuming that some of them would at least skim through it, there is a small possibility that we have written in fan-favourable manner so that they would not be upset about the findings.

It is undeniably true that our personal thoughts have been more open to the idea of being a passionate fan. One could say that the latter evolved over time. The more interviews that we revised and the more fandom studies that we reviewed, the more we realised that fans were like any other individual in other aspects except from them being involved in fannish activities. It is perhaps unavoidable when interviewing a group of people, and having very little knowledge or preconceived notions about the fields from before, to take those individuals' perspective.

On the other hand, we felt equally compassionate about the idea that non-interference by external parties is essential for artistic creativity. We found it questionable whether there was any point in realising the production of a film or TV-series if needing to consult with external parties about the content and direction of it. This was particularly problematic when coming to the conclusion that there are, in contrast to many studies, significant differences among the fans and their perceptions about how the narrative should develop. It seems rather unrealistic for the producers to satisfy all wishes at the same time in the same narrative. This also implies that no matter how the story is told and further developed, someone will always be disappointed. It is possible that if we had had the opportunity to interview or get into contact with any party that is involved in realising films such as writers, directors or producers, and if the objective of the study had been to analyse their perceptions, the findings would have been more favourable to them.

Analysis

In practical terms, we can best understand ownership by seeing how writers actively appropriate and use elements from the original science-fiction material. Different writers might have different goals, motivations, and ways of using the material. Therefore, ownership may be claimed in different manners.

Our analysis is based on the semi-structured responses to a relatively short and general sample of questions. Some of these questions were quite direct, resulting in answers that contained many etic terms. The obvious danger is that we might have forced respondents to make pronouncements on issues that really were not that important to them. On the other hand, our questions were largely based on issues that we had found in Jenkins' work.

We queried writers about several aspects of their work. We asked about whether they were trying to correct or improve some disappointing aspect of the original work, with the goal of eliciting some comments on resistance. We asked about their general level of respect towards the original storyline by asking them to liken the original story to hard stone or malleable clay. Finally, we asked about their writing habits outside of fan fiction, with the goal of identifying whether their motivation comes primarily from the desire to express themselves or from the science-fiction material.

Much of our analysis is therefore coloured by the distinction between fans who contradict the original material and those who do not. This distinction is touched on by Jenkins, and is undoubtedly an etic term. However, as we shall discuss, writers themselves classify their stories according to whether or not their stories are "Alternative Universe". No respondents questioned our distinction, and several elaborated on it in a manner that would suggest that it has at least some emic resonance.

We have identified five broad ways of appropriating the science-fiction material: completing the story, fixing the wrongs, building an alternative universe, silly putty and collecting, promoting peripheral characters, and seeking religious inspiration. Each of these titles was inspired by a different source. "Completing the story" and "fixing the wrongs" address the cultural resistance bias that we perceive in previous fandom research. "Alternative universe",

an emic term brought up by many of our respondents, actually illustrates an important part of our conclusion. “Silly Putty and Collecting” builds on a metaphor used by Jenkins.

“Promoting peripheral characters” is to some extent emic, since it was the main element brought up when respondents were asked what elements they wanted to change in the original material. “Seeking religious inspiration” is etic, since not one single respondent named it, but is so much a part of popular opinion of fandom, that is needed to be addressed.

Generally however, most fan fiction can be seen as a kind of borrowing for the satisfaction of various needs. First, there is a tendency amongst fan fiction authors to use the narratives as a template for advancing their writing skills. Many respondents see the original storyline as a tool that makes the writing process much easier than it would have been if they had been forced to invent a completely new universe themselves. The original storyline is therefore not only inspirational, but could also be a crutch to help individual authors improve their writing technique.

The original storyline is sometimes borrowed in order to deal with personal experiences and issues. Several respondents indicated that they use their work as a way of working out problems and issues in their personal lives. In this regard fan fiction could be seen as helping the authors manage their feelings and thoughts about events in their lives.

An unavoidable term when speaking about fan fiction is “canon”. Although the exact boundaries of this term are disputed, it is generally thought of as the “central” works in a franchise. “Expanded universe” includes these works plus officially commissioned novels and other material that are to some extent under the editorial control of the original creator.

“Alternative universe”, an emic term amongst writers, specifically refers to fan fiction works that contradict either the canon or expanded universe in some way.

Most fans do not place any explicit claims on canon material, and this aspect is nevertheless outside of the scope of this paper. This is because most fans are aware that they do not hold a legal entitlement to the original material, and there seems to be little interest in discussing ownership from that aspect among fans. Fans do however, in combinations with the idea of borrowing, have a sense of ownership over the canon by basing their work on it and constructing meanings around it.

Bielby, Harrington & Bielby (1999) highlight the central role of evaluation when referring to ownership. It is an important point to have in mind when analysing the responses in this paper because fan fiction content and the authors' motivations has a close connection in the manner that they evaluate the canons in terms of consistency, originality, credibility and its applicability in other settings other than from the one that is shown in the films or TV-series. The authors' understanding of the ownership phenomenon partly stems from Jenkins approach, textual poaching. This terminology refers to the process of appropriations of the fictional characters, settings, and story lines to deliberately use them in their creative activities including fan fiction. Thus, the narratives' universes could be regarded as a common platform for the authors to construct their own meanings in print format.

We will begin our analysis with three seemingly mutually exclusive behaviours: completing the story, fixing the wrongs, bringing peripheral characters to the forefront, and creating alternative universes. These activities are perhaps complete opposites of one another, but are often pursued by one author at different times. We will end our analysis with discussion of challenge and fun, and religious appropriation. These are more general topics that do not refer to the specific way in which writers appropriate textual elements.

Please note that these categories are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. They show major patterns and behaviours that we have observed, and the same author might engage in or be motivated by several of them at the same time. They are rough guide, given our qualitative research, of what we believe are the salient elements amongst fan fiction writers.

Completing the story

In an attempt to complete the story the authors are somewhat trying to make a better sense of the universe that the narrative is based upon. Hence, going into the depths of certain events or characters that better explain or give reason to the way they were told in the existing canon material. Or, it may be that they consider that there is an important scene missing that would help to explain the occurrence of certain events.

We asked authors whether they considered the canon characters to be stone or clay, and their choices reveal the different ways that their fiction is structured and shaped. Hence, the "stone" authors find it important to stay true to the original creator's vision, and are therefore careful

about the existing characters' traits. Accordingly, they will not make any major changes with those. Instead, the gaps are typically filled by adding missing scenes or the stories are retold in different circumstances. The "clay" author on the other hand finds joy in moulding the existing characters and events to add a greater depth to the stories.

Moreover, the completion of the stories can be an indicator of an author's attitudes towards rules. That is, whereas some consider that fan fiction should be written following certain stricter guidelines, others do not find them essential to artistic creativity. The essence of the rules and guidelines are to mirror that they are in congruence with the true vision of the canons. There is also the implication that this approach is a way for the author to prove to others that he or she is an authentic fan.

"...I enjoy exploring deeper into their world. I hate to read fan fiction where I feel the author has not stayed at least at a basic level true to the cannon characters."

"When I write, I take what I believe should have happened on a series and expand it within the realm of reality. Anything I write about, I have to love and respect enough to try and stick to the original vision of the show..."

From the responses above, it is easy to liken to what McCardle (2003) calls the canons the "Holy Bible" of the authors' creative work, where the intentional closeness to the latter is a manner where the stories will appear as "a natural expansion of the story arc" to the audience. Furthermore, it is often such kinds of authors who have the perception that the narratives are stone, and existing characters and scenes should not be altered.

The authenticity (credibility) of fan fiction, to some degree at least, is evaluated using measures that can identify the likelihood of the particular story taking place in the canon and whether the characters are accurately given voice and appearance to. It would then not be surprising to see that work that stretches too far outside of that universe is discarded by these authors.

On the other hand, there is significant number of authors claiming that fan fiction does not necessarily have to slavishly follow the director's original vision. Hence, the purpose of fan fiction is that one has a moderate degree of freedom to go in the direction one wants. Therefore, although a clear connection is necessary to give clues to the reader about the universe that the story is referring to, it should also provide the author with autonomy in developing his/her individual storyline. This entails that such authors rather prefer to treat the canon as clay.

These clashes parallel Jankovich's (2002) work on cult fictions where the author found conflicting views on the nature of cult movies. As Jancovich notes, there could be just as much difference in attitude amongst fans as between fans and non-fans. To explain why and how this is possible, one could apply Sandvoss' study on how people read and interpret texts in general. Sandvoss' (2005) paper about the one-dimensional fan departs from the notion of polysemy. That is, there is no one single meaning or interpretation of a particular text, or in this case a film or TV-series narrative, but rather multiple. This suggests that depending on who the individual viewer is then the constructed meanings will differ between fans. Similarly, so will the piece of fan fiction written too. Therefore, the manner in authors completing the story will highlight distinct elements, characters and events.

Further, this is also to suggest that there are varieties of authentic fans and fan fiction. While some fans would have the opinion that the novelty of the fan fiction is evidenced by writing according to strict rules, others would argue that as long as they have a burning passion for a particular canon and not trying to damage it consciously their fan authenticity should not be questioned. Nevertheless, we come to the conclusion that, not depending on which basis the particular author claims her/himself to be authentic, ownership can be explained in the manner that individual meaning is combined with the original storyline.

A science-fiction film in a movie theatre or on a DVD is undoubtedly a commodity, simply because it is mass produced and shipped all over the world. Fans could be seen as those in the audience who decommodify the film by adding their own interpretation to it. For fans, the story is much more than just a movie, as evidenced by the number of peculiar fan activities that are not practiced by mass society. However, once a fan writes his or her own fan fiction based on this decommodified narrative, he or she once again creates a commodity that is available in mass form within the online community. They put their writing out in the open

for anyone to criticise, meaning that it quickly loses its personal meaning for them in one sense, since everybody's opinions matter almost as much as theirs. Meanwhile, many of our respondent indicated the deep personal experiences they had reading other people's fan fiction. Here, through their enjoyment and interpretation of other people's work, they once again decommoify the narrative. This continues and proceeds in cycle, potentially for ever. Therefore, the entire fan fiction process can be seen as a cyclical movement in and out of commodification. We might posit therefore, that fan fiction is some form of cyclical ownership, in which fans appropriate material for themselves, only to relinquish it to the greater community once they are done.

Fixing the wrongs

Creativity can be sparked by a feeling that the producers or the creators of the canons got parts of the screenplay canons wrong. The fans then feel an obligation to correct the sometimes "disastrous" mistakes. This indicates that the authors are indeed very passionate about the science fiction material that they base their work on. These authors have a clear idea about what goes and what does not in that particular universe. Their opinion about the credibility of the narrative is normally based on years of devotion to the film or TV-series. Watching the films or the series multiple times over the years, the authors thus form opinions about acceptable behaviour from the characters that fit into that particular culture. What is interesting here is that the mistakes corrected are usually opposing to the beliefs of the producers regarding the consistency of the plot. This implies that there are conflicting views between the fan fiction authors and the producers on the logical occurrence of the storyline.

According to Bielby, Harrington & Bielby (1999), the producers are creating a commodity. For the fans however, there is no distinction between production and consumption. Instead they are simultaneously a part of both. This can be explained by the acknowledgement that although emotional pleasure can be derived from the narrative, it is not to be regarded as easily accessible. This indicates that it requires some degree of investment on the viewers' part to sense and enjoy that value. When the fans feel that the screenplay is not true to the canon, they feel a lesser degree of emotional pleasure. Consequently, they sense that they have a certain responsibility as a fan to "complain and assert claims on how the quality of the show could be improved" (Bielby, Harrington & Bielby, 1999). Further, this also protects the aesthetic value of the canon from being abused purely for economical gain.

However, as many fan fiction scholars would agree, such contradicting approach to writing could be seen as an act of cultural resistance (Hills, 2003). That is, a protest to the inconsistency of the narratives or lack of essential ingredients. Although not explicitly stated, Jenkins holds the similar view that when fans feel agitated and frustrated then there is a tendency amongst fan fiction writers to produce a story that is contrasting to the 'TV-series' or films'.

“I do like to write about things I think needed more screen time, things like GOOD romance (I hate all of George Lucas's romance. It makes me sick!), and certain situations I think he should have stuck the character in that would have made it more exciting...I like to totally leave the world Lucas has created and make my own, whether it fits Lucas's vision or not.”

“I am still very upset that the writers/producers did not listen to the cries of the public concerning how many of us wanted it to turn out. This is why we write fanfic and make fiddled pictures..to CREATE what SHOULD have happened on the show.”

As indicated from the responses above, it is easy to judge creative work as an action taken to be resistant, to correct the mistakes of the authorised creators. The tendencies for cultural resistance as described by many authors are centred on a disagreement between the people with the legal control over the narrative and the fans. As such, George Lucas has for example for a long time been known for discarding the opinions of the fans and bashing Star Wars fan fiction, and emphasising that he first and foremost makes the Star Wars films for himself. Therefore, what everyone else thinks, including the fans and other authorities involved in the film production, do not seem to be relevant. Similarly, “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” creator Joss Whedon has expressed the importance and need of being a visionary artist in contrast to a commercial producer to serve the fan market (Hills and Williams, 2005).

However such rather dismissive claims of the producers imply risking the loyalty and trust in the relationship that they have to the fans (Shefrin, 2004). An arguably more beneficial approach to deal with the latter issue, as implied by Shefrin, is to cooperate with the fans.

Although it may be conceived as a threat to the visionary director's creativity, Peter Jackson's co-interpretation with the fans when realising the production of the Lord of the Rings is a proof that the integration of discourses can be beneficial to both the producers and to the fans. Hence, the fans got the story the way that they wanted it to be told, and the previously unknown B-movie director got his breakthrough in Hollywood at the same time as his work broke the box office.

Many fan fiction writers do write in reaction to disappointments in the franchise production. While we wrote in the last section that writing fan fiction commodifies the narratives, because it makes it so widespread, this is not the only way of looking at it. If a fan fiction writer is consciously trying to correct what he or she sees as mistakes, then the act of writing can be seen as decommodifying the narrative. Usually, this type of behaviour is taken when writers see the producers as being driven by profit, such as trying to satisfy the non-fan mass market, rather than art. In this sense, they see some element of the film as a commodity, which they try to correct by decommodifying it according to their own terms, through their fan fiction. This is perhaps the strongest way of showing ownership, since it is very hard in the world of goods at least to decommodify something that you do not own.

Alternate/Alternative Universe (AU)

It is not always appropriate to conclude that all fan fiction material that does not follow the strict consistency of the narratives is a form of resistance. A significant number of the respondents not criticising the producers' vision explain their engagement in terms of "Alternate/Alternative Universe" (AU). An emic term that emerges in the discussion is the willingness to explore "what ifs" in the storyline. The AU material essentially revolves around making radical changes to the canon in relation to the setting and nature of characters. One could thus say that it is identified by the unlikelihood of the written elements happening within the canon universe. However, some of the authors argue that AU is not always entirely in contrast to the canon. Hence, some claim that well-written AU fan fiction has a recognisable connection to the original work. Nonetheless, what is important to note is that the purpose of such work usually is not to bash the canon intentionally or protest against it. The two major favourable reasons for writing AU fiction are that it enables the author to deal with his/her personal thoughts and feelings identified within the canons, and to opt for the challenge in retelling the story in different circumstances.

“Rarely, as it happens, do I write about characters that were strictly created by the actual owners of any fiction--I usually make my own characters and use the universe the brilliant writers and producers have provided for our entertainment. I like to use my own characters and situations because it gives me more room to maneuver as far as plot and/or character development. I don't think that I have ever written a fanfic because I was not pleased by the original series of events--mostly I write fanfics because something strikes my imagination about the universe or the kinds of people living in it.”

For the respondent, fan fiction appears to be a source of pleasure that she gains from creativity. It is about exploring the untold, the possibilities that one sees in the plot. However, although alternate universes may be seen more original in content and style, they are still imitations of some degree of existing science fiction canons.

Just as these fans describe their work as exploring the “what if” of science-fiction, science-fiction is usually defined as a “what if” of the real world. Therefore, all fan fiction is in a sense a copy or a copy, or a simulacrum in Baudrillard’s terms (Merrin, 2001). Fittingly, this is illustrated by the Matrix plot. The content of the science fiction movie is a reflection about the confusion between “reality” and the reality that it ought to be before, according to Baudrillard, the image society overshadowed what we actually perceive as real. As highlighted in the Matrix and in congruence with Baudrillard’s idea, we cannot thus actually say that we know something considering that it is a reflection of what signs and symbols signal us perceive what reality is and what it is not.

Fan fiction is in this sense simply science-fiction taken to a new level; it is a “what if” of a “what if”. The characters and events as illustrated by authors are then simulacra (signs that refer to the original narrative), communicated by simulation (imitation or fan fiction). More than simply appropriating the obvious plot elements of the canon material, fan fiction writers are appropriating the very spirit of science-fiction. This would be a very interesting explanation for why most fan fiction is based on science-fiction franchises. More interesting, however, is that this might offer an alternative explanation for why producers are sometimes so concerned about their works being used by fan fiction writers.

One example that is commonly used to illustrate simulacra is the story of the “Golem”. This is the story of a Jewish intellectual who through magic brings a mass of mud to life, creating a monster called “the Golem” (Koven, 2000). The intellectual considers himself exceedingly wise because he has used the Jewish holy scripts to work this magic, and sees himself as a hero for bringing the Golem into the world. In many tellings of the story, the Golem gains a life of its own and turns on its creator (Nocks, 1998). The Golem is a copy of an idealised version of a man, or a simulacrum in Baudrillard’s terms.

Atwood (2002) likens the Golem to text written by a novelist. Here, the text, like the Golem, gains an independent life of its own after it has been written down. While it contains the lifeblood, experience, and raw emotion of its creator, it is outside of his control. Similarly, science-fiction fan fiction contains both the textual and spiritual elements of science-fiction itself, and could therefore be scary to science-fiction producers in the same way that the Golem was scary to its creator. The trouble with basing an entire genre on “what if” is that it can become stale once that question is answered. One result of this is that the “what if” must be constantly expanded, and fan fiction could be one result of this.

Fear of the Golem is in fact a hot topic in science fiction, indicating that it might have some subconscious resonance within the community. Arguably the first science-fiction book, *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* (Sci-fi / fantasy discussion, 2006), is a modern day version of the Golem story. The Golem has also been used in many contemporary horror stories and horror movies (Koven, 2000;Nocks, 1998). Nocks likens the science-fiction series *The X-Files* to the Golem archetype:

“The series itself is like a modern Golem: something powerful; a thing that is remembered differently by each person who encounters it; a presence something like ourselves, but not quite--which perhaps brings the truth, perhaps a lie; and which can be 'turned to dust' or 'switched off' (by simply pressing a button on the remote) when it gets out of control. “

In the same way that the *X-Files*, which is an “original” series, is an homage to previous science-fiction elements, AU fan fiction can be seen as an homage to science-fiction

franchises. The point is that fan fiction writers are in a sense not doing anything differently than the producers themselves. They are basing their work, implicitly in the producers' case, and explicitly in the fans' case, on previous films and series. The Golem metaphor, here, means that any creative production gains a life of its own by being used by other people. This process can be incredibly scary for the original producer, since so much of his or her soul went into the work, yet he or she has no control over it.

As Sandvoss explains, what really occurs when there are multiple variations of narrative interpretations is that they are brought down to an individual level. The narratives are thus normalised to fit into the individual experiences and the way that they view the social world. Similarly, one could say that AU is the outcome when a particular canon is normalised by the individual author. This is to suggest that the AU authors' work is an incorporation of the canon and a piece of themselves. Indeed, from this regard, it would be appropriate to claim that all authors borrow others' work for the purpose for it to fit personal needs. Furthermore it is inevitable to reveal a piece of one's own personal experiences and thoughts in the writing process. As Chabon (2005) claims, impersonal literature that does not disclose any of the authors' secrets, or those of his or her friends' and / or families', is inanimate and pallid.

Fan fiction writers' ownership claims over the material, in this sense, is exactly the same in a moral sense as the ownership claims of "real" producers. All good creative output involves some kind of personal input into the work, and all good creative output is interpreted differently by different audience members. It is here that one of the central fears of creativity emerges, the loss of control over one's own soul in the sense of revealing something about yourself and giving others the opportunity not only to criticise it, but to base movies, books, and fan fiction upon it.

Silly Putty and Collecting

Jenkins (1992) likens fan fiction writers' use of characters to "Silly Putty". Silly Putty is a toy sold in the United States and the United Kingdom, and is like malleable dough that can be squeezed into a variety of different shapes. While Jenkins obviously used this metaphor to highlight the malleable nature of characters in fan fiction, it also interestingly enough recalls the idea of childishness amongst fan writers. This begs the question of whether, as in the real world, there is an adult equivalent to this toy in the fan fiction realm. While most of our

respondents were quite young, we did note that older respondents cared much more about following canon and the “rules”. Note that we will be discussing age in terms of experience, not in terms of physical age. Older writers will tend to be more experienced, but this is not necessarily the case. It is very possible that an adult could write in the “Silly Putty” format as well. Could it be that Silly Putty is simply one stage in a maturation process that eventually leads writers to treat characters with the same care that adults treat their hobbies? Several writers describe their own or others’ maturation processes:

“I’m not going to attack an author for disregarding canon if they are writing something that is obviously a wishfulfillment fantasy. While it might be rather annoying to see the glaring errors, everyone has to start somewhere and I cringe at some of the things I’ve written myself anyway.”

“But a lot of fanfic writers move on from Mary Sue writing...”
(editorial note: “Mary Sue” writing is the practice of explicitly placing oneself in the fictional universe, and is looked down upon in some fan fiction circles)

“In the past I was more flexible with their personalities when I was first starting out with fanfiction and I dabbled more with Mary-sues and AU... but I’ve found as I grow more knowledgeable with Middle-earthian history that I’ve sort of slipped into the mode where I don’t really like changing certain characters too much from their original selves.”

It seems that once writers mature with experience they stop the “Silly Putty” behaviour of moulding characters to their own will, and start writing in a way that is more consistent with the canon. The interesting point, however, is that they take pleasure in following the rules, rather than seeing it as a chore:

“It’s a fun challenge to take someone else character and try to do it justice.”

In fact, several fan fiction writers engage in a search for details of the story.

“I check every detail for accuracy and research my subject thoroughly before writing.”

We see here that the “hobby” that more mature writers pursue is very much like collecting, and can therefore be likened to the more literal collection described by Belk (2001). There is previous support for this analogy. Fredrik Strage (2006) describes how music fans actually collect experiences such as hugs and kisses with pop stars, rather than objects. The possibility is therefore that, since fantasy worlds by definition do not exist, that fan fiction writers collect experiences within that world.

Many of the subtleties of behaviour described in that line of research are applicable to fan fiction writers. First, both collector and fan fiction writers say that the process of getting together with people with similar interests is just as important as the activity itself. Second, both collectors and fan fiction writers tend to obsess about the completeness of what they are creating. Third, both collector and fan fiction writers face criticism from the mainstream society. Fourth, the science-fiction universes upon which fan fiction is based are the ultimate collector’s objects.

Many collectors note that the very process of meeting with other collectors and comparing collections is more important than the collecting process itself. One respondent said that exchanging knowledge about the series is more important than the knowledge itself, which maps onto Christ (1965) pointing out that the process of getting together and buying and socialising is more important for collectors than the collecting itself. This sentiment is echoed by many other respondents:

“truly, though fanfiction.net is a great archive site, there is absolutely NO community involved. I view it as a sterile environment, whereas places like livejournal or individual archive sites like checkmated.com and sycophanthex.com have much more to give.”

“The community is also a receptive one which always offers feedback. I would say that I get more of an emotional reward from the fiction

that I write on my own, as a whole. But it does feel great when someone reads a fanfic story and responds by congratulating you on nailing a character that they know so well.”

“But, I read in a lot of other fandoms that have nothing to do with LOTR, and I can say that the bunch of people who are in the LOTR universe are ... special. Never before have I seen a fandom that is so lively, compassionate, helpful, talk active, creative, emotional, review friendly...”

Furthermore, Belk stresses the importance of completeness in collecting. Similarly, some of our respondents indicated that they have to digest certain episodes of a series even if they are displeased by them. Namely, the emotions that arise in anticipation of this completeness are conceptually similar to Roman Ingarden’s “suspended harmony” (Iser, 2005). In other words, fans wait in eager anticipation of having the story be completed, and this might even be a motivation for the behaviour described above in our “completing the story” section.

The stigma that fan fiction writers experience is even similar to that which collectors experience, with the crucial difference being that fan fiction writers have fewer points on which to defend their behaviour. Belk (2001) describes four ways in which collectors defend their activity: the rareness of their collection, the human nature to hoard things, the rational investment motive, and being a steward of lost or endangered things. Fan fiction writing and the universe upon which it is based are both the ultimate mass produced communities, and are therefore not rare. Fan fiction writing cannot be blamed on human nature, since writing is neither basic nor unavoidable. There is no rational economic motive of investment, since fan fiction is published for free, although some writers do dream of turning “pro”. Collecting knowledge through writing could never be said to save lost or endangered things, since fantasy universe knowledge is available in thousands of reproduced books and movies. Therefore, while fan fiction writing has many of the traits of collecting, it has none of the built-in “excuses” to present to the mainstream world.

The very idea of science-fiction lends itself well to collecting. . Kopytoff (1986) points out that collected stamps are preferably cancelled to show their worthlessness, but knowledge of fantasy knowledge is even more worthless. A major issue with fantasy series, if they stop

growing, is that they are of limited size, and therefore might fail at some point to provide the surprise that collectors require (Grasskamp, 1983). Fan fiction, therefore, could be seen as a way of providing new surprises once the studio gives up on a franchise. In addition, Belk's (1995) implication that collecting is a way of focusing consumption energy in an otherwise chaotic world of fads is eerily similar to Maurice et. al's (2003) idea that Star Trek fans focus their consumptive energies because they are excluded from the wider world of consumption.

If fan fiction can be likened to collecting behaviour, then the type of ownership expressed is one of a steward. Many collectors see themselves as simply the caretakers of their collections, to pass them on to future generations. Some respondents, when prompted, agreed that they would like future generation to enjoy the same material that they enjoy. We might say, therefore, that some fan fiction writers are simply "taking care" of the narratives, rather than keeping them for themselves for all time. They are giving something back as much as they are taking.

Peripheral characters

The minor peripheral characters from the original material are sometimes brought into the centre of a fan fiction story.

"I have always been drawn to characters in books and movies who are on the fringe, the "mysterious man in the corner", who comes and goes throughout the story but never has his own story told."

"Most of what I write builds on Tolkien's basic storyline, and extrapolates into the future on characters he didn't do much with beyond a certain point."

"I do write quite a bit about Haldir, and he had very little screen time, and very little page time."

"I also have a tendency to focus on very minor characters that catch my eye - Seraph, for example, or the Random Nameless Minions of the Chateau Melee."

“So I usually take minor characters or my own original characters to centre a story on and briefly introduce LOTR’s major characters, consequently giving a less possibility of messing them up.”

We have already touched upon the possibility that fan fiction is not all that different from previous forms of audience participation. Specifically in this case, the act of taking minor characters from an existing work and placing them in the centre of a new work was done several times in 20th century modernist literature. This was done usually for some type of dramatic effect, usually to illustrate the negligible power of the “everyman” in society. We suggest that fan fiction might be making the opposite comment on an unconscious level, as we shall explain below.

For example, in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, playwright Tom Stoppard takes two minor characters from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and puts them in the spotlight. While Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are undoubtedly at the centre of the play’s narrative, they are unable to affect change. They are at the mercy of the characters in the background. This is usually taken as a commentary about the powerlessness of the common real man in deciding his own life.

Fan fiction writers do the exact same thing as Stoppard, but with one major difference. Instead of making the minor characters powerless, they promote them to the status of heroes within their stories. While this might not be a commentary on the real world, it could be a form of wish fulfilment. Some of our respondents indicated that they wrote simply because they had little power in their own lives due to external forces, amongst other things. The placing of peripheral characters in the spotlight in fan fiction can therefore be seen as a symbolic act of resistance against cultural forces. Specifically, we found that many authors tried to rewrite the deaths of minor characters:

“When I write movie-verse I do tend to keep Haldir alive, and give him a happy ending.”

“at the end of ythe story i'm writing Lily and James are not going to die.”

“When I do change the story, maybe by keeping Boromir alive, I will shuffle him off to the side, to keep the original plot from changing.”

A more open question is whether this resistance is directed at the outside culture in general, or specifically at the producers of the franchise. What is interesting about all of the films that we studied is that they feature heroic characters that repeatedly save a group of powerless minor characters from evil. This could be seen as an anti-democratic force, since the minor characters are not able to save themselves. The act of placing minor characters in a state of heroism could therefore be seen as a democratic statement. While the science-fiction franchises that we studied implicitly support a world in which a few people have the power, like Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* or the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, fan fiction could in this sense be promoting a more socialist world view where everyone is equal and help each other as they are able.

Such behaviour could in an ownership sense be seen as hijacking the potentially socially destructive message of the films. Because the films are in a sense telling the fans how to look at themselves, they are reacting to it as they want to see themselves. Of course, we can only speculate on their deep down motivation for doing this. What is ironic however, is that by trying to balance out the distribution of power, the writers themselves are creating a narrative with one central hero, in other words recreating a new version of what they are trying to correct. This illustrates the point that the original producers need not be consciously promoting anti-democratic values when they make their films. Simply the act of telling an enjoyable story can have political implications.

Myth, Religion, and Fan Fiction

Religious tendency amongst fans is a concept so engrained both in popular discussion and academic discourse that it is almost unavoidable in our discussion. In broader consumer research, Belk and Gulnur (2005), Muniz and Schau (2005), Stern (1995), and Thompson (2004) all analyse consumption from the point of view of myths. Within fan communities, O'Guinn (1991) and Kozinets (2001) have compared fan communities to religious sects. Jenkins (1992) describes how mainstream culture can sometimes see fans as being religiously devoted. What struck us when reviewing the responses, however, was that nobody referred to

any transcendent meaning in their writing, but rather to smaller sources of pleasure. This discrepancy between popular opinion and our findings deserves some reflection.

Nevertheless, fan fiction writers are actually a very interesting case of religious devotion, since they could be seen as retelling myths. If we see science-fiction canon as a myth, then fan fiction is a way of adjusting that myth to everyday circumstances, just as people do when they discuss religion. Several scholars and interviews have pointed out that George Lucas' Star Wars series is a myth (Moyers, 1999). As we just mentioned, science-fiction films tend to feature one powerful hero who protects his people, and this is a feature of many myths as well. Many of these heroes have suffered tremendously but keep their grace, much like Jesus. All of the movies we studied focus very much on how people should treat each other and their surrounding, much like myths and religions. It is these elements that are usually referred to when discussing the religious tendencies of fans.

One respondent in particular brought up that she did not believe that Anakin Skywalker could ever turn to the dark side and become the evil Darth Vader. She wrote stories that found ways around this. If we see Darth Vader as a religious depiction not too unlike the devil, this becomes extremely interesting. The devil, and other religious motives, is an element that differs in how it is interpreted even within religions. The point is that such a seemingly central part of the film is being debated by the fan fiction writer in much the same way as religious canon is debated between different denominations and religions.

However, from our responses we can show that there are two finer points that need to be brought up when likening fan fiction to religion. The first is that science-fiction and religion might only be superficially similar, without have any shared deeper meaning. The second is that we must be clear on exactly what type of god we are referring to when we use the "religion" label. Both of these nuances will be explained below.

God and science-fiction share one trait: they cannot be spoken about. God cannot be spoken about because he is beyond Being, or beyond what we can understand as humans. Science-fiction universes cannot be spoken about in a constructive way because they literally do not exist. Most of the science-fiction universe that fan writers portray does not even exist on a metaphysical level, since most of the universe is never shown in the films. We argue,

therefore, that it could be the act of speaking about the unspeakable that produces similar behaviour without coming from similar desires.

Derrida (1989) argues that God can only be known by defining what he is not, rather than what he is. As Kermode (1989) points out, Derrida writes this especially to point out that this negative way of speaking about God is different from Derrida's famous concept of "différance". While the former asserts a type of "hyperessentiality", or being beyond being, the latter does not (Kermode, 1989). "Différance" is, very roughly speaking, that we cannot describe reality with language because everybody has their own slippery interpretation. This is a much better metaphor for fan fiction than religion, since science-fiction fan fiction refers to objects that are absent in real life, since they do not exist anywhere. This is yet another reason why they cannot be spoken about in any constructive sense. Science-fiction fandom could therefore be seen as a literal re-enactment of "différance" rather than a retelling of religious narratives. While both behaviours are superficially the same, they have radically different motivations. In essence, just because fan fiction writers retell stories in the same way as religious devotees do, does not mean that they are using the science-fiction material as an ersatz God.

When Westerners refer to religion, we typically think of a religion with one God who both created the universe and dictates how to act morally in that universe. This is not the case for all religions. As Campbell (1991) describes, some religions have one god who created the universe and another god who manages it. In polytheistic religions in fact, there is often one god for every force of nature, such as fire, water, and love, for example. Our respondents all gave very different reasons for why they pursue fan fiction, ranging from creative passion to emotional therapy. In this sense, each respondent could be "worshipping" a different "god" representing some emotion or motivation for writing. This does absolutely not imply that this god is the same as the transcendent and singular God that we in Western culture normally speak about. In other words, the label of "religion" might be unhelpful in our particular cultural context; being passionate about some aspect of a science-fiction series does not mean that you think everything in the world can be understood through that series.

It is very easy to confuse any type of devotion with religious belief, without considering the deeper meanings behind the devotion. Given the arguable decline of organized religion in many regions, it would be easy to argue that things like fan fiction are some kind of

replacement. However, religious material is actively produced by priests and others for that specific purpose, while movie producers cannot be said to do so. In the film *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, a Bushman finds a Coca-Cola bottle and assumes that it is a religious icon, while this was of course never the intention of the bottling company. Similarly, fans might be reading religious narratives where they were never intended. Regardless of whether fan fiction is a religion in a traditional sense therefore, fans are definitely exerting, or trying to exert, ownership over the material by reading some form of meaning into it that was not thought out by the original creator. This is therefore a type of ownership where the fan actually claims the material in order to use to produce meaning.

Conclusion

So far, we have looked at various aspects of our respondent pool. Now, we will attempt to classify them all under one framework. We have noticed two broad groups of fan fiction writers- the non-ironic and the ironic. We use this terminology in the same way as MacCannel (1973, 1976; Corrigan, 2005) refers to tourists. In this regard, the non-ironic fan looks for authenticity, while the ironic fan looks for staged authenticity.

In addition, the both the non-ironic and the ironic groups can be further split into two subcategories. We will therefore individually examine all four of the smaller categories that result from this classification scheme. The non-ironic fan fiction authors include the “die-harders” and the “questioners”, while the ironic authors include the “anti-conformists” and the “hobbyists”. Our distinction between non-ironic and ironic fan fiction authors follows from the fact that not all authors are authentic fans of the canon on which they base their work. We use authenticity to refer to an author’s true passion and devotion to a particular science-fiction film or television series. We will now explain this by detailing each of the four subcategories. Note that these subcategories could overlap; we are not building a strict taxonomic classification, rather, we are highlighting general tendencies that we observed in our response group.

The Non-Ironic Fan Fiction Authors

Authenticity can be seen in the way Bielby, Harrington & Bielby (1999) distinguish between “television watchers” and “fans”. Fans go beyond simply watching their favourite programme on the television by pursuing such activities as subscribing to fanzines, conversing with other fans on the Internet, or joining fan clubs. Therefore, it is the emotional investment that sets the fans apart from the mainstream. To many fans, the canon of their favourite movie or television series is more than a mere leisure pursuit; it many times has a very deep impact on how they perceive and deal with their real-world surroundings. Many of our authentic respondents mentioned the emotional impact that a particular film or series had whilst they were growing up.

Die-Harders

These are the fan fiction authors usually described in existing fandom and fan fiction studies. They are very devoted fans of a film or television series and have devoted a large portion of their lives to it. It was not at all unusual for our die-hard respondents to remark that the canon has had, or indeed still has, a profound influence on the way they look at the world and how they relate to other human beings.

Die-harders have encyclopaedic knowledge of canon; they know just about everything there is to know about their object of interest. They are sometimes referred to as the “expert customers” in contrast to the passive dupes that the mass culture member is (Hills, 2002). They are constantly hunting for more information and artefacts, and it would seem they know the plots and characters better than the producers themselves. It is precisely through the use of this knowledge expertise that they claim ownership.

It is this expertise that leads the die-harder to have very strong opinions about what should and should not be written within fan fiction. Not only do they police their own writing for possible canon infractions, but they inform other writers in no uncertain terms when they believe some plot element has been violated, and they have strong opinion about how producers should proceed with the film or series. One respondent said that she could not stand reading inconsistent fan fiction material. Die-harders express ownership namely through their displeasure at others using the canon in an improper, and they intimate that this entitlement comes from their massive amount of knowledge. Knowledge is in this sense like a kind of legal entitlement, in that others must have permission to use the work. One marker of the die-harder is that they refer to specific events, characters, and terminologies to illustrate and explain their thought and feelings, and to advance arguments about the rights and wrongs in the fictional universe.

This is not to say that the die-harder forms his opinions and impressions in a bubble, and dictates the cultural rules of the community without any cooperation with others. Rather, he or she negotiates meaning, usually with other die-harders, but also commonly with the fan fiction community at large. In fact, inconsistencies are not necessary a bad things amongst die-harders, instead, they revel in the opportunity to establish rules and common interpretations through discussions and arguments. This finding agrees with Bielby,

Harrington & Bielby (1999), who note that ownership is expressed through community evaluation and discussion.

In terms of our analysis, die-harders are characterised chiefly by the desire to treat the plotlines and characters as stone. However, they have many other tendencies that also emerged in our discussion. “Fixing the wrongs” can be seen as die-harders on a crusade against something that has violated the sanctity of the work. It is natural and deep passion of this group that often puts them at odds with producers. “Collectors” are die-harders in the process of amassing their encyclopaedic knowledge base. “Completing the story” can be seen as the ultimate payoff for die-harders, since it involves such exquisitely thought-out preparation and study, and results in a product that is immaculately in tune with the original story. In fact, many of our die-hard respondents cited this as the central joy of their fan fiction pursuits.

Questioners

The questioner’s writing is not necessarily consistent with the original canon. However, her emotional investment in the canon material is equal to that of a die-harder. The point of their writing is to use the canon universe to explore the full range of alternate possibilities of a particular scenario. They derive pleasure from twisting the events and characters around to match the emotional preoccupations of their own lives. These could be religious beliefs, or the curiosity of an event would play out in different circumstances if a minor character were put in the spotlight instead of the hero. Many of our respondents indicated, and much of our reading of fan fiction pointed to, the practice of using fan fiction to seek answers about the meaning of life, existence, and other spiritual questions.

Questioners do not intentionally try to harm the original work; instead they would assert that they have the right to tell it from a different perspective. They might be attracted to completing or supplementing some unclear event in the narrative. It may seem that these authors do not see any or little limitations when writing. In fact, although these authors do take liberties when developing their plots, they will most often have a clear link to the original narrative. Again, this behaviour is not unlike what “real” science-fiction auteurs practice when making movies. George Lucas once remarked, that even though the vacuum of space makes sound impossible, he felt he had to add sound to enhance his retelling of spaceflight. In

other words, just because fan fiction writers might violate the canon does not mean that the violation is an end unto itself. Writers have their own personal set of rules that enhances their personal writing style. Questioners can in this sense be distinguished from die-harder by their opinion that characters and plots are like clay.

We already touched upon the similarities between religion and fan fiction writing, while stressing that they are not necessarily the same things. Another commonality is that the open-ended nature of both religious and science-fiction canon allows each individual to have a variety of interpretations. In others words, the canon has a different personal meaning for each and every individual. In this sense, the questioner is asserting her right to this by regurgitating her interpretation of canon in the form of writing. Questioners could in a sense be pursuing a form of spiritual ownership over the material. This might well be why this group is markedly less aggressive than the die-harders; they themselves recognise the personal significance of the canon.

This also implies that they do not feel that they have to ask for permission regarding which rules to use when creating a story. This therefore suggests that these authors may have the opinion that the narrative as intellectual property is not a limited good (Shefrin, 2004). Hence, the narratives can be seen as what Jenkins (2003) describes “as “shareware”, something that accrues value as it moves across different contexts, gets retold in various ways, attracts multiple audiences, and opens itself up to a proliferation of alternative meanings.” (Shefrin, 2004).

The Ironic Fan Fiction Authors

On the other hand, the ironic authors usually lack the emotional investment, or other authentic characteristics, described above. This group takes advantage of the science-fiction universes as a platform for their own creative work, without necessarily being a fan of the original canon. Some of our respondents indicated that they did not even like, or indeed watch, the films or series on which they based their work. Just like MacCannel’s inauthentic tourist, the ironic fan fiction author admits that the films and series that they delve into are superficial and without much emotional depth to them. However, they are able to escape, if only for a little while, from their mundane lives to find meaning in the playing out of their fan fiction in the social milieu, rather than the science-fiction material itself. In other words, like the

inauthentic tourist, they value the social interaction and other peripheral activities that surround fan fiction writing more than the original storyline itself.

Anti-conformists

This group can in a sense be likened to either challenging or ignorant questioners, or both. They typically see no boundaries and write intentionally contradictory fan fiction for the sake of it. They see the science-fiction canon as a commodity that, in Marx' terms, is easily exchangeable with anything else (Corrigan, 2005). Like the Questioners, no sole entity has ownership over the canon. However, unlike the Questioners, they would argue that the canon has no true value. In the days before the Internet, these authors would probably not have been welcome in physical fan clubs. Their fan fiction would not have been as widespread as it is now in the age of the Internet.

While Questioners might write alternative universe stories with the care of a collector, Anti-conformists do so like children playing with Silly Putty. The latter differ from the former, namely, in that they show an intentional willingness to fight against narrative plots, in other words by being consciously inconsistent. It is common for these authors to for instance write parodies and fictions that contains rather provocative sexual references. One respondent, who planned on writing an erotic novella based on the Matrix Trilogy, stepped out of the stone-clay dichotomy that we suggested, and said that he saw the characters as paper that he could rip apart and tape back together to suit his own liking. We are not referring to slash fiction, but instead to writers who are humorously amused by the sexual acts represented by him or her. These authors are not as devoted as non-ironic authors, sometimes to the point of not being devoted at all. In a sense, they are intruders within the authentic fan community.

They claim ownership by writing stories that explicitly ridicule the canon, turning the screenplay into a large joke. By trespassing all over the material, the Anti-conformists are the fan fiction counterpart of Anarchists. By flouting the rules, they show that, even if they have no technical ownership over the material, neither do the producers in a very real sense. One might argue that this is also the case for Questioners, but Anti-conformists are much more nihilistic than that. While Questioners would argue that everybody partly owns the canon, Anti-conformists would argue that nobody owns it. While the ends result might seem the same in a superficial context, the motivations differ radically.

Anti-conformists are typically young boys in their early teens. We might speculate that they acting out some of the frustrations and angst that comes along with their puberty. Their youth therefore makes us question whether they are as serious threat to the community as one might think at first glance. What is concerning is the apparent lack of parental supervision in this age of technological advancement. Arguably, parental guidance might therefore be in order to lessen the prevalence of such behaviour.

The hobbyists

Like the Anti-conformists, these are hardly fans of the material on which they are basing their work. Also like the Anti-conformists, these writers often write in more than one genre, taking the opportunity to cruise around various universes and apply them to their creative work. These authors will usually say that the reason for their writing is the fun and challenge of further developing pre-established characters. Despite that they usually do not wish to consciously humiliate the original canons, they rarely respect restrictions and rules in order to stay as consistent as possible.

The result is that this group shows ownership in a variety of ways. They might sometimes use their knowledge of a certain canon in order to act like die-harders and retell the stories according to the rules. In this case, they might find it rewarding to have authentic fans read their work and provide them with feedback. This is perhaps why many of them acknowledge that they see an opportunity in fan fiction creativity to advance their writing skills in general. Hence, many hobbyists have the goal of becoming authentic non-fiction novel writers, and to improve their abilities they devote some of their time to fan fiction for practising purposes. One of our respondents likened fan fiction to the “training wheels” that children use when learning how to ride a bicycle.

At other times they might seek to write Alternative Universe stories, with the goal of dealing with issues of personal interest not unlike what Questioners do. Finally, some of the hobbyists will write inconsistent material consciously to rather kill some time. Hence, many see fan fiction interaction on the Internet as an opportunity to get in touch with people that share the same passion, writing in general. Hence, it is an alternative way of being socially interactive, or “killing some time” as some of our respondents put it.

While we previously stated that die-harders were to most like the writers discussed by Jenkins, the hobbyists are perhaps the most in tune with his idea of textual nomads. While Jenkins likens fan fiction writers to nomads because they move from franchise to franchise, we here liken them to nomads because they move from style to style. They never completely enter any of the three other categories, but rather dabble along the edges of established traditions.

Like Anti-conformists, one could say that they trespass on other people's property. However, their intentions are not destructive. Like Bedouins, they move from oasis to oasis without disturbing or asking anything of other owners, both legal and moral, or the original work. We might say that rather than owning anything, or even laying claim to anything, they rent a piece of property in the fan fiction landscape, only to leave once they are finished.

Discussion

Our contribution with this paper has been to broaden the number of possible way of looking at fan fiction writers and the manner in which they exert variations of ownership. What is surprising is that non-fans, which we term ironic fan fiction writers, constitute a significant part of our respondent pool. These people are not “fan” fiction writers as much as they are writers who describe fan objects. The implication is that fan fiction studies might have to be divorced from fandom studies to some extent; the two fields might have a great degree of overlap, without the former being a subcategory of the latter. This could, namely, be a result of the transformative power of the Internet. Lower barriers to entry and freer avenues of dissemination have lead to a more dynamic community, where people fluidly enter and leave as they please.

Thompson and Haytko (1997) point out that a variety of “countervailing meanings” can exist within the cultural sphere of fashion. Often, individual consumers’ personal meanings and interpretations of fashion are ironic oppositions to what they perceive to be going on in mainstream fashion culture. Arguably, the “fashion discourse” that the article refers to, is facilitated by the relatively easy access that we have to new clothes these days. It is precisely the disposability of individual clothes that creates the dynamism of the fashion discourse. Companies such as Hennes & Mauritz, and Zara can now put new designs onto racks within a matter of weeks. This creates a fluidity of meaning that could arguably never have been achieved in an age where people kept the same clothes for more than a season.

The Internet has arguably done the same thing for fan fiction. Writers no longer just mimic the meanings that are thrust at them by the studio, but can also parody them, turn them on their heads, and laugh at them. Just as the easy accessibility of new clothes creates dynamism and conflicting meanings in fashion, the easy accessibility of fan fiction stories and discussions could foster conflicting meaning in fan fiction. Thompson and Haytko show that some people refer to the dominant fashion trend when dressing without actually joining it. Similarly, ironic writers might write in conflict with canon, while still referencing it and using it. Just as untrendy people are in a strange way swept up by fashions, non-fans might be swept up by fan fiction writing.

On the other hand, fashion and fan fiction differ in that fashion is the product of unavoidably visible encounters we have everyday with other people. Dabblers within fashion walk on the street everyday and are known to their friends, peers, and family. Dabblers in fan fiction can be anonymous. While clothes are an obligatory component of our modern existence, entering the fan fiction community is an explicit choice. Therefore, there must be a force from outside that drives the ironic fan fiction writers' entry into the community.

Countervailing fashion trends are arguably sustained by the fact that people need a common reference point to express meaning, and this is why untrendy people get swept up. Similarly, the writing conventions of fan fiction provide the same common reference point for meaning for non-fans. Ironic fan fiction authors might therefore be swept up by the need for an audience, in other words by the need to appeal to non-ironic fan fiction authors. Considering that it is extremely difficult to get a book picked up by a professional publisher, fan fiction might well be a way of honing one's writing craft and venting creative steam. Writing fan fiction might be the only way for many hobbyists to gain an audience.

Non-ironic fans criticise producers for selling out and trying to satisfy a mass science-fiction market, for the simple sake of making money. Their argument goes that true fans are such a small market that producers do not listen to them. What is interesting, if this critique is true, is that some ironic fans behave in the same way as the producers. However, the ironic fans' target market is the non-ironic fans themselves. While the producers would be motivated by money, the ironic fans would be motivated by exposure, audience, feedback, and writing practice.

While we came to our research with the assumption that there was a conflict between fan fiction writers and producers, we never considered that there might similar conflicts within the fan fiction community. While many fan fiction and fandom scholars would readily admit that there are differences within the community, none have shown that the community could even include non-fans. We therefore see a possibly new layer of resistance where for once the original producer of the creative work is absent.

While we have in this paper to some extent untangled the different types of ownership, future research would need to untangle the different sources at which ownership can be directed. In this sense, our work is-one dimensional, since our question to the respondents did not take

into account the variety of sources of meaning that they might lay claim to, such as other fan fiction authors. We have as a bi-product of our research scratched at the surface of a rich dynamism within the fan fiction community itself. Future research would therefore need to move away from the temptation of seeing writers only in relation to the producer, and would need to move towards seeing them in relation to each other. This could most easily be achieved with non-interview methods, such as monitoring fan fiction discussion boards. This would take a great deal of time, but would ultimately clear up many ambiguities, in fan fiction studies, as well as fandom studies and broader consumer culture studies.

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Appendix A:

The Initial Context Message

Dear Star Wars fan,

I, Aynur Akpınar, and Martin Wennerström are two International Marketing students at Lund University, Sweden. We are currently undertaking our last semester in the master programme which comprises of writing a final thesis. Martin and I are investigating the fandom phenomenon of science fiction movies, and the emotions and thoughts involved in relation to the matter. As active internet surfers we have come across several news rooms enabling fans to communicate and interact with one other. Therefore, in light of contemporary technology we have decided to conduct our research with help of netnography. However, in order to conduct our study we need participants who can enrich the content of the study and also add to its credibility. We therefore turn to you to help us understand the unique feelings and ideas evolved around the consumption of science fiction movies.

We have chosen to contact you specifically after having read your comments on [alt.fan.starwars](#) that we found interesting and insightful for our study. The participation involves answering some questions that we find relevant for this particular study. If you find any question intrusive or annoying, then naturally we respect your point of view and you do not have to answer such question(s). We guarantee that all answers provided by you are fully confidential and will not be used for any other purposes.

If you have any further questions about confidentiality or the content of the study, you are welcome to contact us any time.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Wennerström and Aynur Akpınar.

Appendix B:

The First Questions

Questions regarding Star Trek fandom

1. What is your opinion of the relationship between the various Star Trek films and TV-series in terms of authenticity and consistency with the overall storyline of the Star trek universe?
2. How would you describe the impact of the Star Trek series on your life? What does Star Trek mean to you personally? How would you describe it as a lifestyle?
3. Do you feel that the series produced since the 1980s in any way betray the vision of Gene Roddenberry?
4. How do you feel about the recent decision taken by the Star trek producers to end the latest series without any replacement in sight? Do you feel that they have an obligation to keep the franchise going?
5.
George Lucas has in one interview emphasised the importance of artistic creativity in directing and producing motion pictures. Do you think that artistic creativity on the part of the director is the (single) core ingredient in making movies?
6. Do you read books or otherwise consume material in the so called “extended universe” (EU – to borrow an expression from Star Wars) of Star Trek, that is to say material outside of the movies and TV series? If yes, please elaborate and describe your motivations for stepping out of the “mainstream” films and series that moviegoers and TV-watchers are not familiar with.

7. Do you read or otherwise consume material such as fan fiction and other so called “non- canon” material? Do you yourself write such material? If yes, please describe your motivation for pursuing content that does not necessarily agree with the vision of Gene Roddenberry or his successors.

8. Do you feel that certain elements of the Star Trek universe are more legitimate than others? Do you regard the entire collection of series and movies as one complete work? Or do you actively try to ignore certain elements? For example, are there any characters or plotlines that you ignore because you think that they could have been presented differently?

9. We have noticed lots of discussions on alt.startrek that revolve around questions that are unresolved in the TV-series and/or movies. For example, there was a discussion about exactly how fast a slipstream drive is. There is often a great deal of debate surrounding these questions, drawing from sometimes contradictory sources. How does knowledge of facts and events that are outside the main plot of Star Trek affect your enjoyment of the series?

Appendix C:

Message and Questions to Follow-Up Participants

Dear XXX,

We found your responses very insightful for our study. What we found particularly interesting was how common it was for fans to actively consume (read and/or write) science fiction literature based upon films and TV-series. We were therefore wondering if you could elaborate on that specific topic with the following 3 questions.

1. Can you imagine not reading or writing fan-fiction or novels based on science fiction films/TV-series?

2. Do you read/write other material other than fiction based on science fiction films/TV-series?

3. What are your attitudes towards future generations reading such literature?

Yours sincerely, Aynur Akpınar and Martin Wennerström.

Appendix D:

Message and Questions to the Last Round

Hello!

We are two Swedish university students who are writing a masters thesis about the world of fan fiction. We found your email addresses through www.fanfiction.net, and are very interested in your attitudes, opinions, and feelings surrounding your work. We would appreciate it very much if you would take some time out of your day to answer the four questions below. We can guarantee that your responses will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Kind regards,

Aynur Akpınar and Martin Wennerström
Lund University, Sweden

1. What is your age and gender?

2. Do you try to write about characters, relationships, feelings, or events that you wish had had more screen time in the Star Trek TV series? Or maybe you try to change elements that you wish had been presented better? If so, how do you feel about the fact that the TV producers did not tell the story the way that you would have wanted it to be told? Please elaborate.

3. Do you consciously try to “complete” the story by being as true as possible to Gene Roddenberry's vision, or do you draw pleasure from the opportunity to invent your own stories? Please elaborate.

4. Do you write any fan fiction outside of the Star Trek universe? Or maybe you do creative writing outside of fan fiction? If so, do you get the same type of emotional reward out

of writing in the Star Trek universe as writing other fan fiction or creative writing? Please elaborate.

5. In general, how do you combine your desire to tell your own stories with the need not to stray too far from the established Star Trek universe? For example, do you see the characters of Star Trek more like clay (that you can mould) or like stone? Please elaborate.

Appendix E:

Last Message to All Participants

Hello!

We have received many positive responses in regards to our thesis about science fiction fandom and fan fiction, and we are grateful for that. We also received some questions about our study which we would like to answer in this mail.

First of all, the topic for the thesis emerged from a pre-study on the various desires that all people have within the consumption culture theory field. During the course, we noticed the notion that more and more contemporary scholars addressed the consumer as being active in their consumption. Thus, one could then also say that consumers are productive in their consumption activities. One area where this phenomenon is especially regarded to be true is brand consumption, where one can say that consumers not only consume the product but also the brand, and therefore adding value to brands. The latter point can be explained by looking at some typical brand consumption activities, for example people tattooing their favourite brands, joining brand communities, describing themselves as a “Nike”, “Harley-Davidson”, “BMW” person etc. We came to think about that the recognition of (brand) communities is actually not a new phenomenon, and that fan-clubs have been around for a longer while and function in the same manner. That, in combination with the desires studies, is how our interest emerged.

As we are not “very skilled” researchers, we still have no clear directions about narrow and specific focus and purpose of our study. Nevertheless, our thesis is due early June. We will then, around that time, send copies of the final work to all of you.

We hope that this is satisfactory information for the time being.

Best regards, Aynur Akpınar and Martin Wennerström.

Appendix F:

First Tailored Message and Questions

Text that could reveal the identity of the respondent has been censored to protect their privacy.

Hello XXX!

We are two Swedish university students who are writing a masters thesis about the world of fan fiction. We found your email address through www.lotrfanfiction.com. We have read your stories, and are very interested in your attitudes, opinions, and feelings surrounding your work. We would appreciate it very much if you would take some time out of your day to answer the questions below. We can guarantee that your responses will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Kind regards,

Aynur Akpınar and Martin Wennerström
Lund University, Sweden

1. Many of your stories, particularly "XXX", feature the first-person point of view of a LOTR character. Often, there is a great deal of self-reflection in what they say. What draws you to writing about the internal emotions and feelings of characters?
2. You seem to stick to LOTR canon characters to a greater extent than other prominent fan fiction writers on the site. Is there any particular reason for this?
3. How concerned are you that your stories, and in particular how you use canon characters, stay true to Tolkien's (or Peter Jackson's) vision?

4. We see from your personal website that you write about lots of series outside of LOTR. Do you write in each of these different genres for the same reason, or is there a different motivation behind each particular body of writing?
5. Do you do any creative writing outside of fan fiction? What emotional difference is there between writing fan fiction and creative writing more generally?
6. Do you read other people's fan fiction? What do you think of it?
7. Do you write mainly for your own pleasure, or do you direct your writing more towards the fan fiction community at large?
8. Could you please elaborate on your attitude towards realism in fan fiction? What is your attitude toward Mary Sues? We ask because you admit in XXX that you take an ironic stance in your stories, so we cannot tell how serious your criticism is.
9. How (and why) did your interest in writing XXX fan fiction die down?

Appendix G:

Second Tailored Message and Questions

Text that could reveal the identity of the respondent has been censored to protect their privacy.

Hello XXX!

We are two Swedish university students who are writing a masters thesis about the world of fan fiction. We found your email address through www.lotrfanfiction.com. We have read your stories, and are very interested in your attitudes, opinions, and feelings surrounding your work. We would appreciate it very much if you would take some time out of your day to answer the questions below. We can guarantee that your responses will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Kind regards,

Aynur Akpınar and Martin Wennerström
Lund University, Sweden

1. What drew you to fan fiction initially? Were you inspired by seeing the LOTR movies, or do you have an interest in creative writing outside of fan fiction?

2. We note your interest in "XXX". Was this interest inspired by something that you observed in the LOTR films/books? If not, where does the interest come from?

3. You have written a couple of stories from the point of view of two minor characters in the fellowship (XXX and XXX). Did you feel that their points of view were underrepresented in the movies/books? Do you feel that these characters should have been more than supporting characters in the movies/books, or do you see your work as supplementary to the main storyline?

4. You seem to write more "alternate universe" stories than other XXX authors on the site. What are your feelings towards realism vis-à-vis the canon movies and books?

5. XXX mentions that you are interested in the friendship between XXX and XXX, but not on a XXX. Do you try to bring out XXX elements that you felt were underplayed in the movies themselves, or do you focus on elements that you wish had been in the original movies?

6. Do you write any fan fiction outside of the LOTR universe? Do you do any creative writing that is not fan fiction related? How is the process of writing fan fiction different from creative writing more generally?