

Editorial

Roundtable: The Past, Present and Future of Fan Fiction

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Fanfiction as a cultural practice has rapidly evolved in recent years, from a community-based form of social interaction to a globally recognised form of narrative world-building. Once a niche genre of writing, shared mainly within small communities to express emotional connections with popular media texts, fanfiction is now viewed as a means to create new content that extends and builds on those texts beyond national and industrial boundaries.

Moving from notions of the mass audience to individual levels of fandom—and thus from the sociological to the psychological—early studies largely explored the psychological processes and motivations of female fans in the forms of pleasure, fantasy, and desire, as evidenced in key examples drawn from science fiction series such as *Star Trek*. By critically assessing notions of gender and sexuality in fan culture, these works highlighted the need to account for sexual desires and pleasures in fandom while illustrating the limitations of such approaches in their inability to conceptualise sustained and regular consumption practices. More recent work has recognised the increasing popularisation and professionalisation of the genre, where authors are able to reach a wider audience, create their own readership, and see fanfiction of their work emerging. Digital platforms and alternative forms of storytelling have helped to change what we might now consider fanfiction. It is not just about textual inspiration; celebrities and other personalities in the public eye have become the subject for fanfiction authors. Social media platforms, fanfiction websites, and other digital spaces for sharing content, such as YouTube and TikTok, have caused the genre to become an international phenomenon that crosses linguistic and cultural borders.

This Special Issue of *Humanities* seeks to explore the new and changing forms of fanfiction and consider the importance of new technologies, social platforms, and global audiences in creating new methods of storytelling in a digital world. By way of an introduction, we invited four leading experts in the field to discuss what they consider to be the key developments in the study of fanfiction and what important work remains to be done on this ever-evolving medium. We want to thank Kristina, Francesca, Louisa and Khursten for agreeing to be on this roundtable discussion on the past, present, and future of fanfiction.

About the Panel

Kristina Busse has a PhD in English from Tulane University and teaches in the Department of Philosophy at the University of South Alabama. As an independent scholar and media

fan, Kristina is a former board member of the fan advocacy group *Organization for Transformative Works* (2016–2019) and cofounder and former editor of its online peer-reviewed academic journal *Transformative Works and Culture* (2008–2022). She is the author of *Framing Fan Fiction* (2017) as well as co-editor of *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* (2006), *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom* (2012), and *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* (2014). Her work on fan fiction and fan communities has appeared in numerous anthologies and journals, including *Cinema Journal*, *Camera Obscura*, and *Popular Communication*. She is currently co-authoring with Alexis Lothian *Fan Fantasies and the Politics of Desire*.

Francesca Coppa is a Professor of English and Film Studies at Muhlenberg College where she currently chairs the Department of English Literatures and Writing. A founding member of the Organization for Transformative Works and an architect of the Archive of Our Own, her books include *The Fanfiction Reader: Folk Tales for the Digital Age* (U. Michigan, 2017), which won the Prose Award for Best Book in Media and Cultural Studies, and *Vidding: A History* (U. Michigan, 2022), an open-source, multimedia history of fan music video.

Kristine Michelle “Khursten” Santos is the Executive Director of Ateneo Library of Women’s Writing (ALiWW) and assistant professor in the Department of History and Japanese Studies Program at Ateneo de Manila University. Her research focuses on social, cultural, at times historical, and affective interventions that impact women’s queer and transformative engagements with Asian media. Her studies examine a wide range of literacies related to comics production, fan networks, and Boys Love culture. She specialises in gender, cultural studies and history, and popular and fan cultures in Asia. Kristine has recently written on the transcultural flows of queer practices between East and Southeast Asia, self-published comics, and other developments within Philippine comic culture. Her recent publications include “Independent and safe panels for youths Queer comics in a time of Southeast Asian populism” in *Queer Southeast Asia* (2022) and “Queer Affective Literacies: Examining ‘Rotten’ Women’s Literacies” in Japan (Critical Arts, 2020).

Louisa Ellen Stein is an associate professor of film and media culture at Middlebury College. Louisa is author of *Millennial Fandom: Television Audiences in the Transmedia Age* (University of Iowa Press, 2015) and co-editor of *A Tumblr Book: Platforms and Cultures* (University of Michigan Press, 2020), *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom* (McFarland, 2012) and *Teen Television: Programming and Fandom* (McFarland, 2008). Louisa’s work explores audience engagement in transmedia culture, with emphasis on questions of cultural and digital contexts, gender, and generation. Louisa is also mother of two fans, and in her spare time she edits fan video and remix video.

Editors: We’d like to welcome and thank all of you for agreeing to participate in this roundtable on the past, present, and future of fan fiction. To begin with, could each of you situate yourself in relation to the subject and your particular interests?

Kristina: I am really excited about this roundtable with its focus on fan fiction, because I am by training and at heart a literary scholar. My focus has always been on the written medium rather than film or television and, as such, it is exciting that we finally seem to be at a point where we can look at fan fiction as literary texts rather than ancillary documents that allow us to study media and their fandoms more broadly. Even though fan fiction is often the most widespread, most visible, and most referenced of all fan works and fan activities, there exists surprisingly little research that looks at fan fiction as a literary text. More often, fan fiction is seen as one aspect of fannish engagement—albeit one that can easily be cited and referenced. As such, fan fiction most often has been read as collective fan interpretation, as evidence of interpretive communities, and as ways through which fans respond to their beloved source text. Fan fiction is used to corroborate fannish emotional responses to the source text, the socio-historical contexts, and fannish self-understanding. So, my main focus at the moment is to return to studying fan fiction within the academic discipline of literary studies.

Francesca: I'm also a literary scholar as well as a performance studies scholar, and I've historically been interested in fanfiction as a female-dominated literary world beyond the marketplace. But lately I've been fascinated with the ways in which mainstream literary criticism has taken on fan-studies perspectives—Kristina, what you want to be happening is already happening, but more on the lit side than the fan studies side, I think! Fanfiction has reshaped the traditional literary landscape by providing a broadly-visible, alternative space for literary creation and criticism not only outside the market but also outside the university (that is, the not-for-profit world of formal literary study and creative writing workshops etc.) As the chair of an English department, I'm not supposed to say that's a good thing, but—(shh, I think it's a good thing.) I'm sure I can't be the only English major who stopped writing, discouraged, after reading perfect sentence after perfect sentence in a lit class. Fanfiction, by contrast, tends to incite creativity and participation, because if all of *these* people can do it, why not me? (This is really what I think is meant by "you have to read to write"—not only "you have to read the good stuff and be inspired by what great writing can be" but also "you have to read the wide variety of what gets published and realize that not every story is all that and a bag of chips") In recent years it has become obvious that fanfiction has given literary scholars new tools to think with, and we can now see fanfic studies' growing influence on both English department pedagogies and contemporary literary criticism.

Khursten: Similar to Kristina, I am stoked to be a part of this roundtable discussion on the state of fan-fiction. I am hoping to ground my participation in this discussion as a scholar who has examined Asian fan histories and culture and as a participant who has engaged in various iterations of fan expressions in Anglophone and Asian fan spaces for a great part of my life. My experience as a fan has enriched my research which has witnessed the way transformative fan literacies have broadened conservative notions of gender and its expressions. Fan fiction is a rich repository of these literacies that shows the infinite potential of reading, interpretation, and expression. It would be interesting to situate fanfiction in an ever-evolving media landscape that has given fans more tools for fan expression.

Louisa: Delighted to be part of this conversation as well, which I think is an important one! I'll build here on Khursten's point about fanfiction as part of an ever-evolving media landscape. This isn't to undermine the importance of looking at fan fiction from a literary perspective, but I do think it's vital that we consider the multiple forms that fan fiction takes in 2022, within multiple digital contexts and platform—be it Archive Of Our Own, Wattpad, AsianFanFics, show specific archives (yes, these still exist!) Twitter, Amino, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Tumblr, Webtoons, or (Budiarto et al. 2021). All of these spaces host fan fiction and fan fiction writer and reader community interactivity. I'd be interested to hear what sites folks in this conversation have their eyes on for developments in fan fiction? And what new patterns, genres, narrative structures, forms do you see emerging?

Editors: Starting with Kristina and Francesca's opening statements, you both create a seeming opposition between fan and literary studies. Can you all say a bit more about your approach to fan fiction and/as literature?

Kristina: From the 1990s through the 2010s, fan studies was most commonly studied and researched within the disciplines of media and new media studies, and, as a result, there exist few academic approaches that engage more traditional literary research approaches. Reader-focused models fell out of fashion in literary studies by the mid-late 1980s, but even when they were popular, they discussed the reader as a function of the texts they studied and analyzed rather than looking at how people were actually reading.

And it is at the very moment where reader response falls out of fashion in literature departments that television studies begins to move away from the psychoanalyzed film audiences that mostly were as imagined, intended, and ideal as the reader response readers and begins looking at actual television viewers. Audience studies came out of cultural studies and took seriously the attempt to interview actual viewers in their homes and

describe their reactions and interpretations. So, when Henry Jenkins writes *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins 1992), he does so with a cultural studies lens and while he cites some reader response theorists, his driving models are more indebted to Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and Stuart Hall (1991) than Wolfgang Iser (1974) and Stanley Fish (1980). And while he analyzes and categorizes fan fiction, much of the fan studies of the following decades looks at fan fiction as a function of television viewing and interpretation instead of literary texts in their own right.

[Kristina] And the one important academic work on literature that uses ethnographic research like we see in audience studies is Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (Radway 1984). And it is not incidental, I'd argue that it is genre fiction, in particular romance, that receives this treatment. Fan fiction, just like genre fiction, is seen less as a literary text in its own right and more as a cultural artifact that tells us something about the communities that write, share, and read the stories. And yet we all know that there are amazing short stories, novellas, and novels published every day that deserve to be studied both as examples of particular genres of writing and as literary artifacts!

Francesca: I think we're seeing a potentially fruitful collapse between fanfiction and other kinds of literary writing as fan studies forces people to challenge the various distinctions and definitions. While I am particularly sensitive to money as a factor which differentiates fan and professional work, when it comes to literary writing, market forces are not necessarily dispositive. So, I think literary studies and fanfic studies are heading for a merge. Critics like Rita Felski are now using affect theory and network theory to talk about literature in ways familiar to fanfiction fans: arguing that stories survive the proverbial test of time not simply because of their aesthetic qualities or the relevance of their themes, but because they are at the center of an affective network—or what we might call a fandom. To be fair, theatre scholars got there first: it doesn't matter how good a play is, if it's not picked up by directors who want to produce it (that is to say, reproduce it), then it's a dead thing, a museum piece.

[Francesca] Similarly, books are kept alive by their fans (readers, critics, librarians, publishers, makers of "best of" lists, creators of syllabi) and their fandoms: all the adaptations, remixes, reboots, sequels, homages, and other kinds of fanfiction. (Everyone was teaching *Beowulf* again after Maria Dahvana Headley wrote both *The Mere Wife*, a contemporary novel retelling the story, and a hip-hop-ish translation of *Beowulf* itself, for instance. And of course, it was mostly Tolkien who argued that *Beowulf* was an important literary—as opposed to historic or linguistic—text in the first place; Tolkien was a *Beowulf* fan!) The idea of a network of textual works—an ecosystem, or in Gail De Kosnik's framing, an archive—also challenges the conventional hierarchy of a "great", "original" artwork and its "derivative" fanfiction (De Kosnik 2016); as any fan knows, no text is great until its fandom says it is, and some fan works or fanons forever change earlier works or even displace them. All these ideas are all now being discussed and used in mainstream contemporary literary criticism.

Louisa: While I absolutely agree with the value and necessity of considering fan fiction as (to borrow Kristina's words from above) "literary texts in their own right," as a media studies scholar, I'm especially aware of the evolving multimodal nature of what constitutes fan fiction. Indeed, I'd suggest that one of the key challenges that fan fiction studies scholars (and the field as a whole) must grapple with is the diversity of what fanfiction is in 2022. On top of that, there's the ephemerality of fan fiction forms that change so rapidly within various microcommunities on ever-shifting platforms.

Given this ever-expanding and shifting diversity of fan fiction forms, as scholars of fan fiction, we face the tricky problem of who chooses to write about what types of fan fiction and within what fields/for what audiences, what practices get heralded as worthy of scholarship to whom, and what works get canonized, and why. This challenge isn't new though; fan scholars often write with insight into the communities they know, and this personal insight can lend nuance but also can limit the field of what they write about.

Francesca: In response to what Louisa said above: what I've personally grappled with is the tension between talking about fanfiction in terms of a network, an archive, a collective, an ecosystem (which is what I think is accurate, because it's difficult to impossible to read a single piece of fanfiction in isolation; fanfiction is a networked thing best read in batches which inform and explicate it so as to form something more than the sum of its parts) but also wanting not to lose fanfiction in the great sea of "crafts" rather than as named, credited, literary art. I mean, you really can't read a single poem in isolation either if you know anything about poetry, but we force students to do it all the time, and we credit—whomever. John Keats. T.S. Eliot. Marianne Moore. Danez Smith. I find Chuck [Klosterman's](#) (2016) essay, "Which Rock Star Will Historians of the Future Remember?" useful for thinking about canon formations; as he points out, marching music was once an incredibly varied field, and now it's all reduced to one guy: John Philip Sousa. Time, Klosterman argues, will inevitably narrow rock and roll to one or two artists who get studied in school: The Modern Lovers what, Adam Ant who? Franco Moretti's "The Slaughterhouse of Literature" ([Moretti 2000](#)) makes a similar argument about the minute percentage of Victorian literature even 19th century experts read; the Victorians were just too damn prolific.

Those of us in fanfiction studies experience a similar Slaughterhouse of Fic every day; you just can't read even the tiniest percentage of it. So, it is in that context that I've chosen to err on the side of naming artists and forming canons: we're fighting the tides of time anyway. (Blake's what? SGA who?) But as more fanfiction scholars emerge, and more fanfiction stories get written about in more contexts, things will shake out. Our sort of fanfiction is a pretty new literary form and we should expect most of it to be ephemeral—and that's okay, that doesn't make it bad or pointless. (We don't read most of what was on the bestseller lists of yore, either, and English Departments have changed radically in the last 20 years; we're just losing whole subfields on the undergraduate level. Who can afford classics, a medievalist, an 18th century specialist; there's just not the demand.) But, to go back to network theory and to paraphrase Felski, artworks have friends, and in fandom, rec lists, tweets, newsletter recs, podcast reviews, Fanlore pages, and academic articles are all part of the network that may or may not help a particular story get read or be seen as significant.

Editors: Louisa and Francesca are already hinting at the changes that fan fiction as a genre has seen over the decades and how these changes are connected to changing interfaces, generational zeitgeist, and size and types of fan communities. We'd like to hear more of your thoughts on the topic of generational divides and on the effects of ever-changing platforms?

Louisa: One of the challenges I think about a lot is the rapid generational shifts in perceptions of what fiction is, where it's found, who knows about it, what it means to young people, and generational tensions around who should be writing what fan fiction and for whom. Scholars writing about fan fiction see it as a longer tradition, and are aware of histories and developments in the form. But young people engaging with fan fiction come to it fresh, if influenced by the various forms and works that permeate digital culture. And the fan fiction that an 8-year-old might encounter online is very different from the fan fiction a 12 year old may encounter online, and both are likely quite different from the fan fiction writing cultures of adult fans. Not that there aren't intergenerational intersections, but experiences of fandom as a whole and fan fiction within it are quite diverse generationally in 2022.

As much as interfaces shape fan fiction trends, so do developing norms within specific communities, often delimited by generational usage and spurred on by microcommunities' particular feedback cultures. That is, what types of fan fiction achieve popularity and take off as new forms of fan fiction differ within particular microcommunities. Trends within narrative videos on the Chinese video-sharing site Bilibili created by Chinese video editors are significantly different from those within Wattpad fan fiction, or those within fan fiction written within the National Novel Writing Month/Young Writers' Program (Nanowrimo), or those within crowdsourced twitter-fic where people build and share fic concepts tweet by tweet. There may be some overlap between these trends and the communities that

deploy them, but we need to acknowledge them as distinct evolving forms. That's a rich if daunting scope for fan fiction studies present and future!

Kristina: Totally! I also think it's important to look at the way terminologies, trends, tropes, etc. differ not just between communities but also how important shifts occur over time. In fact, my co-author Alexis Lothian and I have been working on the history of slash fan fiction and when we drafted our proposal we realized that we're not just writing a history, but that effectively the term is already one of the past. Today's fanfic readers and writers rarely use the term and I doubt many under 30 would ever consider themselves slashers, as many of us older folks did in the 90s/early 00s. Or, to give another example about shifting norms and expectations, there were four more or less taboo subjects in many fan fiction communities in the nineties: underage, real people fiction, incest, and domestic discipline. Now three of those four mainstreamed in the early 2000s, heavily driven by Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings Real People Fiction fandoms. So, you'd suddenly encounter Cartercest (Aaron Carter/Nick Carter), which was the trifecta of taboo subjects, in regular channels rather than hidden away.

More recently, of course, new and different concerns have arisen, and it's worth looking at the way not only fan fiction changes but also fan discourses about fiction are changing. At the center of many of these current conversations lies the relationship between fiction and reality, which is a question that I feel almost every generation faces yet again, be it Plato wanting to banish the poets from his ideal Republic, Victorians wanting to encourage edifying literature only, or second wave feminists battling pornography as encouraging actual rape. Sadly, a lot of the conversations flatten a really complex subject when it becomes a simple binary that either posits a 1:1 correspondence or declares fiction to be utterly disconnected from reality. Fantasy plays a central role in literature in general and fan fiction in particular, and I'd argue that looking at the reality/fiction dichotomy through the lens of fantasy can usefully complicate questions of influence and potential harm.

Louisa: As a media studies scholar, I'm certainly aware of the overlap (if we can call it that) between media studies exploration of new forms of digital authorship and community and the emerging practices of fan fiction that unfold within those spaces. But from a media studies framework, these practices are not always understood as fan fiction or put in conversation with other traditions of fan fiction, past and present, and this is something fanfic researchers can offer to these literatures on digital media tools and uses, for example, the growing literature on TikTok, Instagram, and Webtoons. Plus, there is growing literature on fan authored narratives, for example, on Webtoons, that are perhaps not making the "fan studies" radar but really could and should be considered as such.

Kristina: I love how Louisa always returns to the way platforms and interfaces meaningfully matter, not only in terms of accessibility and dissemination, but also in the way they actively shape fiction. We wrote an essay together some years back on the way constraints (in source text, fan text, context but also medium) can engender creativity, and this relationship between form and content, between platform limitations and the types and forms of stories created in response to that. Back then, we looked at the character limits of USENET and mailing list messages, at drabble trees on multi-threaded social media like LiveJournal and text-based role-playing games where every character has their own (fictional) social media account.

With every new media platform, we see fan fiction being shaped by the technical affordances. Wattpad encouraged reading and writing on smart phones, which tended to create very short chapters and immediate publication. AO3 mostly followed traditional fan fiction archives, but its metadata and the central role of tags in the search engine has affected the way fans think about genres, tropes, pairings, and more. Twitter, Tumblr, and other interfaces become both content in media narratives (i.e., a fanfic told entirely in Twitter texts or IM conversations or a mix of various forms of online textual interaction) or they can become the actual place of publication, which, obviously, affects the types of stories that can and will be created.

Finally, the conversations surrounding fan fiction, the fannish meta, recs, and analyses changes depending on where these conversations take place. LiveJournal was actually an outlier in the way it collapsed fiction, paratexts, and response/feedback/ commentary into the same spaces, often having them side by side in one post or crosslinked within the same platform. Between the rise of AO3 and the particular nature of Tumblr, Twitter, and Discord (among the many places where fans now congregate and communicate), the shared conversations, the prompts and gifts and other forms of fiction as social interaction and parts of ongoing conversations still exist, but it is much harder to follow it, both as fans, but even more so as researchers.

Francesca: Following up on these thoughts about platforms, it's been fascinating to see fanfiction culture move onto visual platforms like TikTok which are so much less anonymous (and less textual) than fanfiction internet culture has historically been. I have a student, Katherine Behling, who researches the ways TikTok users are integrating their lives as fanfiction readers (and less frequently, as fanfiction writers) into their existing TikTok personas; in a way, this is both a return to the kind of squeeful, in-person encounters that we used to see in the fannish convention space, and also a place that we've never been before in terms of embodiment and the performance of the self as a (squeeing and sometimes shamed or shameful) fan.

Kristina's 2007 article with Alexis Lothian and Robin Reid ([Lothian et al. 2007](#)) framed fanfiction fandom as a queer female space, but it was always an (apparently) disembodied and carefully pseudonymous one; my own work on vidding ([Coppa 2022](#)) talks about the way in which fans have historically worked to be the subject of the gaze/the one who looks rather than (as is more common for women) the object of the gaze/the one who is looked at. But now, with fans filming themselves giving enthusiastic fanfiction recs or sometimes performing their fannish shame ([Behling \(2022\)](#) discusses TikTok memes that purport to express fannish shame: e.g., "Would you rather drink a bucket of bleach, or show your parents your entire ao3 history?" or "Rap or I'll expose the fanfics you read") we are seeing new kinds of embodied fannish performance. This provides the opportunity for new kinds of fannish community, but also the potential for (or should I say, the risk of) anonymity collapse. Anonymity, or rather, pseudonymity, is something I value in fan culture, because I fear surveillance and agree with Peggy [Phelan's \(1993\)](#) assertion that "Visibility is a trap." So I'm simultaneously touched by and afraid for these fannish Tiktokers and the information they're giving to the world.

Khursten: I do agree with everyone thus far that the shapes of fan fiction are adapting and transforming along with the technological developments of various media platforms that have different points of access for people across the globe. While some of us easily imagine how different social media platforms are easily accessible to everyone, my exposure to fan communities faced with economic challenges have made me realize that particular platforms become increasingly central to fan fictions or communities because of low bandwidth consumption (such as Wattpad) or promotions with mobile service providers (e.g., unlimited access to Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok is free for a particular amount of days under specific providers). This limited access enabled many fan creators to work within their economic and technological limits. Seeing Francesca talk about TikTok reminds me of how the platform has been used by some Southeast Asian fans to merge local viral audio with edited fan clips creating interesting transnational fan fictions. The elaborate fan fiction videos in danmei fandom as mentioned by Louisa are also deeply immersive. There are also Social Media AUs seen on Twitter that was particularly popular during the pandemic within Asian fandoms (K-Pop and ThaiBL) that increasingly localized fan fictions and imaginations (e.g., Desi AU and Filo AU). In my ongoing research on these local fan fictions, I've noticed how these works empower queer expression in highly conservative countries.

Location-specific platforms, such as Pixiv in Japan or Naver and Postype in Korea or Weibo in China also offer a different fan experience and culture for their local audiences. These localized fan spaces have pushed global fans to widen their literacies for these platforms,

languages, and cultures. Fan translations of fan fictions are also increasingly becoming commonplace and diverse across different languages. Wattpad, Ao3, and community forums become important spaces for these translated works. Collectively, these platforms provide very important contact zones for transcultural exchange within fandom.

Editors: We'd like you to speak a bit more about how fan fiction fandoms have or have not fully engaged with the internationalization of sources and fan creations. Furthermore, as we shift from a community model to one of contact zones, as Lori Morimoto and Chin (2017) have described them, what are ways in which we can acknowledge and give voice to those that often were ignored in earlier fan fiction and fan fiction studies.

Louisa: I find myself thinking frequently about the internationalization of fandom these days and what it means for fan studies more broadly and the studies of fan works more specifically. Or rather, fandom was always international, of course, but with increased access to international digital media, fan communities from different national and cultural contexts are becoming increasingly more aware of one another, and with more visible transcultural interaction and frictions. My own fan interests and involvements (and media viewing practices) have shifted to encompass anime, c-dramas, k-dramas, j-dramas, and kpop, and the fan works surrounding them, in part because of fandom visibility and in part because of access to these texts on streaming networks like Netflix Amazon Prime, Youtube, and Viki. I've been struggling with how to integrate my more recent transcultural fan experiences and consumptions into my own scholarship given the limits of my cultural knowledge.

I think the answers I'm finding are in collaboration and increased dialogue between scholars across national as well as disciplinary boundaries. One amazing (pre-pandemic) example of this type of collaboration was the Fan Studies Japan Tour organized by Lori Morimoto that I was lucky enough to participate in back in 2018. We wrote about our experiences and their value in a Transformative Works and Cultures piece here (<https://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/1975>). Another more extensive example of the value of transcultural fan studies conversation is the more recent instances of the Fan Studies Network North America conference (of which I'm one of the organizers). Because we chose to go virtual with the pandemic, the conference has attracted a much wider set of scholars leading to valuable transcultural conversations that we hadn't had at previous in-person instances of the conference. I think it's vitally important that we intentionally and actively foster these collaborative transcultural fan studies conversations and experiences to mirror the transcultural evolutions of fandom.

Kristina: There has been a challenge from the very beginning of fan fiction studies (and fan studies in general) in that we all too often only study the things we know and love (or love to hate). And while I endeavor to move beyond my own fannish interests, I am most comfortable writing about fan fiction where I know the fandom well and about fandom spaces where I am an active participant. Yet this clearly raises several questions: (1) How should we select our research objects? (2) Should we purposefully study texts and fandoms we don't actively participate in? (3) Are we merely describing fannish popular subjects or should we actively focus on selecting previously ignored fannish interests?

As a English literature scholar, for example, I don't see myself studying non-English language fan fiction, though I know it is an under researched area. As a non-native English speaker, I am quite fascinated by the way fan fiction in English is immensely international in its authorship. (In fact, I have a special interest in podfic, and the percentage of nonnative speakers recording English podfic is surprisingly high, and I will write about that one of these days!) So, speaking realistically for myself, the one move I have been trying to make actively is focused less on expanding my object of study and more on critically engaging with my methodologies and theoretical frameworks. This means moving beyond the well-trodden fan fiction studies texts in order to bring in insights from different disciplines and nonacademic writing. Expanding our critical approaches forces us to break open the

hitherto established fan studies canon where a small number of people cited one another and effectively created a fairly narrowly focused idea of accepted knowledge.

Khursten: If fan fiction is an exploration of the infinite potential of various literature and media then I think there is room in welcoming the infinite ways of studying fan fictions from different communities all over the globe. An interesting example that highlighted this infinite potential is through fan fictions in relation to Boys Love culture which has its roots in Japan but has grown to develop fandoms and fan communities in the Philippines (Fermin 2013), China (Yang and Yanrui 2017), and Thailand (Baudinette 2019) which eventually contributed to the diversification of BL media in the world. We have also seen how fan fiction has empowered English-language learners in literacy studies (Black 2009; Sauro 2020), opened new avenues for postcolonial imaginations (De Kosnik 2019), and provided an interesting contact zone between different media cultures and fan communities across different ethnicities and languages (Nadkarni and Sivarajan 2020; Bauwens-Sugimoto 2021). These are just some that are distributed in English-language scholarship and there are many others that have been published in other languages. The burden to represent this foreign language scholarship could be shouldered by English-language fan studies scholars who have the skills to dialogue with these works. Within fanfic studies, embracing scholarship that focus on non-Anglophone fanfics or fanfic creators outside of “centers” of fan cultures can help decolonize the field. If fanfic studies can decentralize the imagination of fan fiction outside of the English language or outside of fan communities in the United States or Britain, there are opportunities to broaden and develop our understanding of fanworks. As mentioned earlier, this is already happening. The more these works are visible, the more we could expand our imaginations of how vast fanfiction could be.

Embracing this growing literature on fan fictions from diverse communities all over the world can help make Fanfiction Studies inclusive. As academics, I think we can help foster interest in this growing scholarship by dialoguing with these works, including them in our citations, inviting them in our panels, or by encouraging younger scholars from diverse backgrounds to capture their own diverse fan experiences and dialogue with different kinds of scholarship on fan fiction. For example, a Japanese Studies graduate student is currently looking into the transformations of Omegaverse in Japanese media, rooting their foundations on Kristina’s work while also learning from Japanese fans and creators who have transformed aspects of this trope. This kind of transcultural dialogue in fan fiction scholarship helps raise the visibility of other forms of fan fictions, broaden how we imagine fan fiction practices and communities outside of Anglophone spaces, and embolden scholars from diverse backgrounds to contribute to the field.

Our largest hurdle in decolonizing the field also involves our own disciplines and institutions that may push specific perspectives that enforces this colonial hold on our scholarship on fanfics. This is a tough hurdle which hopefully can help us think of creative ways to respond against this colonial hold that could disempower our research.

Editors: Thank you for your comments that both delineate the field of fan fiction studies but also show the fertile intersections with other disciplines. What are your thoughts and hopes for the future of fan fiction?

Kristina: If there’s any guesses (or maybe wishes?) I have for the future of fan fiction studies it is that we look at fan fiction less as an artifact that allows us to study source texts, fan communities, and online platforms and instead situates fan fiction as a particular form of literature. It connects fan fiction to its various literary ancestors and to various contemporary genres that may offer insight into structural, thematic, and aesthetic connections. These include traditional collective storytelling, mythologies, and classical transformative works as well as adaptations, genre fiction, and forms of writing that may be ephemeral, more personalized, and for smaller specific audiences. As such, we must look at fan fiction and its relationship to other literary texts, both premodern and modern literature and contemporary fiction. We must study particular fan fiction genres and tropes as well as specific characteristics when looking at types of source texts. Finally, we must look at

writing engagements within fan fiction communities and various approaches of studying and teaching fan fiction within different disciplines and methodological frameworks.

Khursten: In the next few years, I'm hoping to see diversification in fanfic studies, one that recognizes that there are various forms of fanfictions all over the globe, that contributors to Anglophone fanfiction come from all corners of the world, and that fanfiction has become increasingly multimodal on social media. This is already happening but I hope this diversity in fanfiction and fan cultures continues and become increasingly visible. As fanfiction finds new forms, I also hope that fanfic studies can capture these developments. These multimodal fanfictions are growing (and disappearing) quite quickly so the challenge is for fanfic studies to remain on the pulse of youth expression and fandom.

Louisa: I feel like/hope that we can see the near future of fan fiction studies in the current student papers and theses being shared online now; or perhaps we should consider those the present of fan fiction studies, rather than gatekeep to officially published works by more senior scholars. Fan fiction studies is growing (and needs to grow) to encompass close case studies of the diversity of forms that fan fiction now takes, from vtube narratives to twitter threads, from TikTok fan fiction readings to still thriving Buffy the Vampire Slayer archives, from POV reader insert "imagine" structures to the increasing visibility of and diversity of uses of Archive of Our Own (some not the intended uses!) and everything in between.

Francesca: I hope fanfiction stays small and literary and resists becoming mass culture storytelling even as our digital platforms seem to be encouraging that. By that I mean, I hope fanfiction keeps on being a grassroots world of personal artistic decisions and a site of connection and community between readers and writers (and readers who become writers, and writers who become readers) rather than a "broadcast" system that seeks a large, paying audience. Fanfiction writers who have gone pro still routinely return to fandom and fanfiction for that close writer-reader connection: that place where the author (pace [Barthes \(1977\)](#)) is not dead but is chatting happily with you (and where tomorrow they're the writer and you're the reader!) Writing alone, and then sending that text out to an audience (even a large one, even a profitable one) isn't the same. I've written about fanfiction as a form of performance, and performance nurtures both creators and audiences; it's about the bodies in the room. Performance also is difficult to commodify, and that's one of its strengths; from that point of view, the inability to create meaningful long-term canons of fanfiction stories is a plus and a sign of fanfiction's health and importance as a performance structure. It's responsive, it's for the people reading now; I feel like I would end by quoting Kristina's and Karen Hellekson's introduction to *Fan Fiction and Fan Cultures in the Age of the Internet* ([Hellekson and Busse 2006](#)), where they describe the day to day practices of fandom: "Somewhere in cyberspace, someone complains: 'I had a lousy day! Need some cheering up'. Soon after, a friend posts a story dedicating the piece: 'This is for you, hon'". This is the spirit of fanfic, to me, or as one of my favorite Tumblr posts puts it:

fanficmemes ↻ notsuchasecret Follow



emilyjanesturgess

I love how internet best friends show each other how much they love each other by dedicating fan fiction to one other It's like "Hey, You're a fantastic bestfriend, Here's two guys fucking in a kitchen"

37,424 notes



"I love how internet best friends show each other how much they love each other by dedicating fan fiction to one another It's like 'Hey, You're a fantastic bestfriend, Here's two guys fucking in a kitchen' [sic]—emilyjanesturgess

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