

Fanfiction keeps a work alive

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With the success of *Fifty Shades of Grey* fanfiction, fan writings based off an original intellectual property, has entered the mainstream media consciousness. *Fifty Shades of Grey* started life as a *Twilight* fanfiction and became so popular in its own right that its author decided to publish it.

Whatever the literary merits of *Fifty Shades of Grey* (minimal) it is astonishing that it should have taken this long for fanfiction to receive serious attention. A look at the site *fanfiction.com* reveals a rich and longstanding archive. Of course many fanfics are pornographic and written by teenagers with too much sexual enthusiasm and a tenuous grasp of anatomy but there are also many fanfics with genuine literary merit, fanfics which expand and greatly improve on the original works.

Some authors, such as Anne Rice, are not in favour of fanfiction, while others, such as JK Rowling, support it as long as no pornographic fics are produced. Author disapproval or support, however, has no bearing on the fanfiction produced. It's like we're seeing the formation of the Greek myths from local beliefs into something more literary; people cannot resist putting their own spin on beloved stories. It is the return of old-fashioned storytelling to the modern world, the same kind of storytelling that caused a Chinese fairy tale to transform into Perrault's *Cinderella*.

Sometimes this individual spin can lead the reader down bizarre paths. 'Slash' fiction is a well-known phenomenon, the pairing-together of two characters of the same sex. However a lot of slash is well-written and rationalized; for something truly disturbing the reader should check out *the Sonic the Hedgehog* fandom. I'm not sure if Jim Davis ever envisaged Garfield as a Lothario action hero; madman/genius Shakespeare/Hemingway has. The column 'Fan Fiction Friday' on the blog Topless Robot presents a critical skewering of some of the grossest fanfiction.

For all of that the prevalence of fanfiction proves one thing: storytelling has become democratic again. In an age of overweening literary estates that's something to be glad about. Fanfiction keeps fictional characters alive and beloved; ring-fencing intellectual properties legally will soon sap the vitality of any story.

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