

**THE**  
**FICTION**  
**STUDIES**  
**READER**

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# Introduction

## *Why a Fan Fiction Studies Reader Now?*

A fan fiction studies reader is overdue: fan fiction studies as a field is still in its early stages—as is fan studies. Both are increasingly gaining widespread appeal, however, and the field is quickly growing as an academic interdisciplinary subdiscipline. Fan studies offers a theoretical apparatus that explains much of the appeal of current audience responses and user-generated content. Anyone who has ever fantasized about an alternate ending to a favorite book or imagined the back story of a minor character in a favorite film has engaged in creating a form of fan fiction. Anyone who has ever recommended a YouTube mash-up, shared a cat macro, or reposted a GIF set has participated in the online culture of audience-generated texts. These more ephemeral artifacts are not available for purchase at Amazon.com but instead are often subjected to takedowns for either supposed terms of service or DMCA copyright violation—accusations that are difficult to fight and are therefore often successful even when not warranted. Yet these ephemeral artifacts are important traces of a culture where the producer has learned to use freely available tools to rip, record, and disseminate derivative creative artworks based on another media source. Studying them, and even creating them, can tell us much about our culture, and such study is worth our time.

The earliest works in the academic literature in the field of fan studies date only from the mid-1980s, but since then, fan studies has emerged as a truly interdisciplinary field, one that has adopted and adapted ideas from various other disciplines, particularly audience and cultural studies. The disciplines of English and communications interpret fan artifacts, their creation, and the rhetorical strategies they use to make meaning; anthropology and ethnography analyze the fan subculture; media, film, and television studies assess the integration of media into fan practice and artworks; psychology examines fans' pleasure and motivation; and law analyzes the underlying problems

related to the derivative nature of the artworks, including concerns related to copyright, parody, and fair use. The goal of these disciplines is to provide various modes of analysis, which might usefully be divided according to the classic rhetorical situation: What is the focus of the mode of analysis—the creator, the text, the text’s consumer, or some combination of these?

In *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, we gather together in one place some of the foundational texts of the fan fiction studies corpus. An increasing number of scholars are turning to fan studies to engage their students as a result of the overlap between fan studies and other disciplines related to popular and cultural studies, including social, digital, and transmedia studies. Fan fiction is certainly not the only aspect of fan works and fan engagement important for classroom use, but it is the most extensively studied, and this extensive research can often serve as a base for addressing other aspects of fan studies.

We are well aware of the myriad and important aspects of fan studies that focus on (1) other creative fan works (fan art, fan vids, podcasts, cosplay), (2) other sources (games, music, sports), (3) other forms of engagement (collecting, celebrity studies, official fan clubs), (4) fans of texts produced outside Western Anglophone media (anime, J-Pop, K-Pop; the reception of Western texts in non-Western cultures). We have nevertheless chosen to restrict our collection to transformative written works of Western media texts in order to provide a cogent history of one particular strand of fan studies research that has been prolific and influential to both fan and media studies.

Even given these restrictions, it is our hope that this volume will be a resource for teaching fandom in the classroom: fan works are readily accessible online, and they often engage students more easily than the professionally produced short stories, novels, TV shows, and films that tend to fill academic courses. Fan fiction studies provides a useful, accessible, and student-friendly site of interrogation for many concerns about producer-consumer relations and resistance, individual and community identity, performativity and online construction of personas, and audience responses and media transformations.

Finally, there is the importance of intertextuality within current literature in general and the rising role of fan fiction in particular: Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* is taught as regularly in college classrooms as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*; Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* may not be performed as often as *Hamlet*, but it remains an important stage play; and the musical *Wicked*, based on Gregory Maguire’s book, may be as familiar to today’s teen generation as *The Wizard of Oz* was to an earlier

generation. Yet none of these texts has been read as often as has E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*, a *Twilight* fan fiction turned New York Times best seller. The unprecedented success of the Fifty Shades trilogy, and the media attention it has prompted, might single-handedly justify a need to critically and comprehensively theorize fan fiction studies.

### **The Scholarly Field of Fan Studies**

The year 2012 marked the twentieth anniversary not only of Henry Jenkins's ground-breaking work *Textual Poachers* but also of Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women*, Lisa Lewis's essay collection *The Adoring Audience*, and Constance Penley's "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture." These were not the first academic discussions of fan fiction, but together, these texts would define the focal points and circumscribe the boundaries of what fan studies was to become. These fan studies texts came from a variety of different disciplines and used various methodologies, presaging the multidisciplinary nature of the field. These texts remain important to scholars of fan studies today. Even though much has changed within the field of fan studies since their publication—in large part as a result of the rise of the Internet, which changed the faces of fandom and academic studies—many of the approaches and concerns remain similar today.

Fan studies as a discipline is old enough to have its required-reading scholarship and leaders in the field. Determining what and who these texts and authors are is a collective decision within the field and a function of collections such as ours. In fact, the term *fan fiction studies* already defines itself restrictively, with its focus on English-language scholarship and its strong emphasis on textual artifacts. By creating this collection, we are actively engaging in a form of canon formation, foregrounding certain texts and not others. Within the introductory head notes to each of this book's four sections, we therefore not only explain our reasoning for including these specific texts but also provide further context: we elaborate on the texts that form the backdrop to the anthologized essays, and we survey the work that builds on and responds to this scholarship.

Although fans enact their interest, fascination, and even obsession with their beloved object in many ways, academic discussions have often chosen to look at transformative rather than affirmative fans. Affirmative fans tend to collect, view, and play, to discuss, analyze, and critique. Transformative

fans, however, take a creative step to make the worlds and characters their own, be it by telling stories, cosplaying the characters, creating artworks, or engaging in any of the many other forms active fan participation can take. Part of the academic interest in transformative fans is that there exist actual artifacts that can be studied and analyzed; another is that affirmative fans can range from casual viewer to aficionado, but transformative fans are always strongly emotionally invested. Further, transformative fans are often critical of the texts (both of the texts they consume and the texts they create), so they present an active audience that not only disproves the passive-audience models favored in early audience studies but also creates artifacts that can be analyzed and that exist to provide proof of that discontent.

Fan studies brings together various strands of media studies (particularly TV and film), cultural studies, and literary theory, drawing from ethnography, the social sciences, the languages, communication studies, Internet/Web 2.0 studies, and the humanities. All these strategies are brought to bear to study a field that encompasses subcultural communities and the works they create. The tensions within the academic work on fans and the artifacts they create include determining the actual object of study (should fan fiction be read as authored texts or as fan utterances to be anonymized and protected?) and the role of the academic (disinterested outside observer or involved participant?). Likewise, the roles that fan-created artifacts play can vary from scholar to scholar. A fan-created text functions as an artistic objects for literary scholars, but media scholars may regard it as an important insight into the reception of the commercial text on which it is based, and sociologists may read it as one data point in the vast amount of texts within that particular fandom. Most academic work on fans and fan works often exists at the intersection of these disciplines, negotiating different theoretical approaches and methodologies.

Moreover, within the last twenty years, the relationships between fans and public media as well as between fans and academia have shifted. Fan fiction is one example. Whereas Jenkins and Bacon-Smith in the 1980s and early 1990s had to find a way into the community, go to conventions, and mail-order hard-copy fanzines that collected fan-written stories and artwork, college students today have grown up with fan fiction easily available on the Internet. They readily survey and analyze their fan friends and the stories they write. Fan fiction is even mentioned in scripted television shows; most people at least know what it is, even if they haven't read any. Although most of the essays in this collection were written after the rise of the Internet and

the mainstreaming of fan cultures, 2012 may indeed mark the conclusion of this slow shift from nearly unknown and indecipherable subculture to mainstream behavior: the year's surprise hit novel, E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*, originally a *Twilight* fan fiction, headed the *New York Times* Best Seller list and outsold the series on which it was originally based.

This volume collects a variety of essays that showcase the different modes and approaches as well as the theoretical shifts and changes of the last two decades. The introduction presents the current state of the field and lays out the book's organization in broad terms. Each of the four sections contains several important texts of fan studies by well-established scholars. The sections' titles and division indicate how certain ideas have been central to fan studies at various times, and the essays within each section indicate the changes and theoretical developments in the field. We contextualize the essays in each section by providing an overview of foundational texts that influenced them and the discipline as a whole, and we explain the relevance of the selections in terms of the argument we wish to make about their importance to the field. This situates the essays in such a way as to allow readers to understand their roles and the ways they intersect and communicate with one another and with the larger scholarship. Each section also contains a suggested reading list that expands the general discussion begun in the essays and showcases the different directions scholarship is taking, but we know that these reading lists will date quickly, and we encourage readers to expand them on their own.

## **What Is Fan Fiction?**

Although we have talked about fan texts and fan artworks to emphasize the diversity of forms that fan works can take, this volume will focus primarily on fan fiction. Fan fiction was the first sort of fan-created text to be analyzed. The concept of fan fiction as derivative amateur writing—that is, texts written based on another text, and not for professional publication—can be traced at least to the Holmesian pastiche or extensions of Jane Austen's universe, although of course fans have always played with texts, rewritten endings, and in general created texts. Fan fiction as a term didn't appear until 1944 (Speer 1944). Moreover, it was coined for an entirely different purpose: to describe fiction about fans, which would appear in science fiction fanzines. This meaning fell out of use in favor of the notion of fan fiction as the imaginative

interpolations and extrapolations by fans of existing literary worlds. But even with this current understanding of fan fiction, a wide variety of texts may be included or excluded, depending on how one defines the term.

These inclusions or exclusions relate to how one thinks of fan fiction. If we think of it as a form of collective storytelling, then the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* might be tagged as the earliest versions of fan fiction. If we think of fan fiction as a response to specific written texts, we can trace fan fiction back to the Middle Ages (Keller 2011; Simonova 2012). If the term is understood to include a legal component, then fan fiction could not have existed before the development of authorial copyright, so the first fan fiction could, for example, be some of the rewrites of Jane Austen by her readers. If the term requires an actual community of fans who share an interest, then Sherlock Holmes would easily qualify as the first fandom, with fan-written Holmes pastiches serving as the beginnings of fan fiction. Finally, if we look at it as a (sometimes purposefully critical) rewriting of shared media, in particular TV texts, then media fan fiction, starting in the 1960s with its base in science fiction fandom and its consequent zine culture, would start fan fiction proper.

Following most academics working on fan fiction studies, we use the last of these definitions, which is also the most narrowly defined. This definition places the beginnings of media fan fiction in the late 1960s. The 1960s saw the rise of the television program *Star Trek*, fans of which followed existing science fiction fandom infrastructure, with its vibrant convention and fanzine culture, to create media fandom, the self-adopted term by transformative fans of Western media products (Coppa 2006a). This—especially in the beginning—primarily female fan community started with *Star Trek*, but it soon came to include a variety of television shows with genres ranging from cop and spy shows to romance and mystery; besides *Star Trek*, other early notable media fandoms arose around *The Professionals* and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* From the beginning, the *Star Trek* zines not only included theoretical musings and critical reflections but also creative responses to the show: *Spockanalia* (1967), the very first *Star Trek* fanzine, contained the first creative piece, Dorothy Jones's "The Territory of Rigel," which Francesca Coppa analyzes in her essay in this collection.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, fans connected via cons and zines as well as via traditional postal mail and circulating texts known as apas (amateur press associations). Sometimes zines and cons were focused on particular TV shows or films, but soon fan fiction began to create its own fandom



with its own infrastructure. Zines might include fan fiction from a variety of shows and cons, such as Media\*West, held in Lansing, Michigan, which even today brings together media fans of a wide variety of film and TV texts to celebrate and share fan creations, including fan fiction, filk, cosplay, vids, art, and crafts. Although there are many different forms of derivative and transformative fiction based on other media texts, the term *fan fiction* as the majority of fan scholars use it mostly tends to adhere to this tradition. As a result, other developing traditions, such as yaoi/boys' love, Sherlockian published pastiches, fantasies depicting fan relationships with music stars, or even fan-written soap opera scripts, often do not fit the generalizations put forth about fan fiction and media fandom.

Thus, we look here at fan fiction as historically situated in the last forty years, tending to respond to a specific form of media texts, and encompassing a specific amateur infrastructure for its creation, distribution, and reception. Within that definition, fan fiction is stories written about (Western live-action) TV shows that started with *Star Trek* and spawned con and zine culture, the form of which was borrowed from science fiction literary conferences. In the 1970s, fandom began spreading to include fans of other TV shows—and, in time, to other media. TV series such as *Starsky and Hutch* and *Doctor Who*, and the *Star Wars* films began to create their own zines, and by the 1980s, multimedia zines (composed of fan fiction for a variety of shows or films, rather than focusing on a single text) had become popular. This development suggests that readers were interested in the stories themselves, so that one might read a story for a show one wasn't necessarily fannish about simply because the story was enjoyable or because the reader liked the author. In effect, fan fiction had established its own fandom. This admittedly narrow focus offers a well-defined group of readers and writers who readily share their stories and their thoughts about them, among themselves and with scholars. As a result, many early scholars focused on these groups, and others followed their lead, including Henry Jenkins, Camille Bacon-Smith, and Constance Penley.

### **Fan Texts and Scholarly Responses**

The rise of the Internet in the mid-1990s has led to a variety of interfaces: Usenet and shared mailing lists (Listservs, Yahoo! groups), archives and journaling platforms, Tumblr and Twitter. All have changed modes of dis-

tribution and consumption, and with it the demographics of fan fiction fans. No longer did fans have to learn about fandom through personal engagement with other fans; the Internet handed it to them, and they could engage alone or within a group. Scholarship has changed to incorporate changes in stories and communities, even addressing the ways interfaces have shaped both of these. Our 2006 collection, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, is a good example of a type of scholarship that places fan fiction studies firmly within the procedural and formal contexts of online infrastructures. Moreover, like its contemporary collection, Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington's 2007 *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, it acknowledges the dual role of academic as fan and fan as academic; it also highlights the multidisciplinary, multivocal approaches that connect the social to the textual and the literary to the historical.

The central directions in fan fiction research may be divided into a variety of approaches that loosely correspond to the different essays we have chosen for this collection.

1. *Fan fiction as interpretation of the source text.* Essays following this approach regard fan fiction as an interpretive gesture, so fan fiction is studied to gain insight into what it says about the primary text, the characters, or both. Practically, they focus on the source text and often use particular fan stories as examples. Often such essays can be found in source text-specific collections, with a study of fan fiction used a mode of interpreting and analyzing a given show, film, or book (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995; Lancaster 2001; Brooker 2002). Because this collection is interested in fan fiction as a general and theoretical subject, the essays here focus mostly on fan works and the communities that surround them rather than specific source texts.

2. *Fan fiction as a communal gesture.* Essays that focus on the fan community and its internal relationships often use fan fiction to gain further insight into such community structures. In this collection, an excerpt from Camille Bacon-Smith's 1992 book about *Star Trek* fandom, *Enterprising Women*, closely analyzes various Mary Sue stories, but she is ultimately interested in how these stories function within the fan community. Likewise, Roberta Pearson's (1997) discussion of online Sherlock Holmes fandom showcases the similarities in organizing and retrieving information for the nineteenth-century sleuth and his erstwhile followers.

3. *Fan fiction as a sociopolitical argument.* In this approach, sometimes connected with close readings, the fan community is analyzed, often in terms of feminist and/or queer reappropriations of the primary texts. This approach is among the most common in fan fiction studies, often underlying and supplementing others. In our collection, Lamb and Veith (1986), Russ (1985), and Penley (1997) all use this contextual community approach, as does Jones (2002), albeit more critically.

4. *Fan fiction as individual engagement and identificatory practice.* This approach explores collective sexual dynamics and with it invites a focus on more individual psychological motivations and effects. In reaction to the community-centered focus prevalent in the 1990s, academics like Matt Hills (2002), Steven Bailey (2005), and Cornel Sandvoss (2005) have moved away from studying media fandom as a particularly interesting case study. Instead, they have widened the field of research and the definition of fan. In so doing, the research foregrounds the specific emotional investment of individual fans and the relationship between their investment in their fannish objects of desire and their psychological and cultural identity construction. In these approaches, fan fiction becomes just one way that fans interact with their fandom.

5. *Fan fiction as one element of audience response.* Fan studies is greatly indebted to early cultural studies and in particular to Stuart Hall's (1991) incorporation/resistance paradigm. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) suggest an alternative model they call the spectacle/performance paradigm, which they hope lacks the confrontational quality of Hall's initial concept. According to this model, media invites complex and diverse audience responses that should not be simplified into a binary division of viewers who fully incorporate the intended message and ideology and those who choose to subvert it. In its stead, they suggest a model where viewers engage with the programs on multiple levels, negotiating its myriad messages and responding with interpretations and performative responses of their own. In addition to an excerpt from Abercrombie and Longhurst, Jones's (2002) essay explicitly uses this model.

6. *Fan fiction as a pedagogical tool.* With the increase of ever-younger readers and writers, fan fiction has become an important aspect of teaching literacy, basic language, and writing skills. Henry Jenkins (2008) establishes the importance of fan fiction as a pedagogical device. Indeed, research has fo-

cused on the various ways fan fiction can be used in the classroom: from fan fiction writing assignments as interpretive exercises to fan fiction used to help foreign-language acquisition (Black 2008; Larsen and Zubernis 2012).

## Reader Overview

The reader is divided into four broad sections, though—as with any such arbitrary division—many of the essays could fit thematically in more than one section. The fan fiction directions we just outlined run throughout all the sections, though certain sections may rely more strongly on one of the approaches than others.

### *Fan Fiction as Literature*

The essays in part 1 focus on the creation of fan artifacts, mostly fan fiction, as a form of textual tension and poaching. Although we see fan fiction as a textual phenomenon as well as one with important social and cultural ties (that is, it creates a group of people invested in a particular source text known as a fandom), the three texts we have chosen all focus on the relationship between literary studies and fan fiction. These essays set the stage for the more communally focused essays that follow in parts 2 to 4, exploring the fraught relationship between the fan creator of derivative artworks and the producer of the originary text, as well as the status of fan fiction as literature.

We begin with an excerpt from Henry Jenkins's 1992 discipline-defining work, *Textual Poachers*, in which he introduces the world of media fans and the expansive worlds they create in their stories. He uses Michel de Certeau's term *poaching* to describe the active reading strategies of fans, who steal something that belongs to someone else, here the producer, and make it their own. Jenkins discusses the aesthetic and the political implications of fan works and analyzes in depth the myriad intertextual dimensions any fan text contains—not just with the source text but also with other texts, like TV shows or films featuring the actors, other fan-created texts, other literary texts, and specific cultural contexts. This early work on fan fiction already features the complex intertextuality, the strong cultural component, and the complicated relationship with the media industry that characterize later studies.

Although most fan fiction scholarship deals with fandoms based on film and television, Roberta Pearson's 1997 essay focuses on one of the largest

literary fandoms: Sherlock Holmes. Pearson discusses the confrontation of old media and new, of book fandom and the Internet, of analytic and interpretive approaches to the source texts. “It’s Always 1895: Sherlock Holmes in Cyberspace” testifies to the immense changes the Internet brought to fan fiction. Pearson draws connections between content and form of the fandom as she discusses Sherlock Holmes’s amazing deductive powers and his extensive collection of facts alongside the memory power of the Internet. Her essay serves a historical function, just as Jenkins’s does: he observes late zine and con fandom, whereas Pearson describes the very early stages of the Internet. Both demonstrate which aspects of fan fiction fandom have changed little and which have been completely altered.

The final essay in part 1 is Cornel Sandvoss’s 2007 “The Death of the Reader? Literary Theory and the Study of Texts in Popular Culture.” Sandvoss writes back to several decades of media and cultural studies, and his essay provides ways to usefully engage literary theory to escape the disciplinary criticism that has been leveled against the field. Sandvoss, by situating fan studies clearly within a historical-political and literary-theoretical context, showcases how a more philosophically influenced approach to fan studies can benefit both fan studies and literary theory. His essay focuses on the similarities of approach among the texts rather than the differences of content.

### *Fan Identity and Feminism*

Whereas in part 1 we focus on fan fiction as literature, in part 2 we look at the community surrounding the production, dissemination, and reception of fan fiction, both online and off. In particular, the essays included here assess how fan fiction has often been read as a way for its writers to explore feminist and/or queer identity issues. Early academic work in particular was faced with an almost entirely female fan community, which invited questions of gender and sexual identity when discussing the fan texts in terms of identification with a source text. Slash, a fan artwork genre that focuses on homoeroticism, resulted in academic scrutiny particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, and scholars remain interested in it.

In Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diane Veith’s 1986 essay “Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and *Star Trek* Zines,” the authors provide a complex explanation as to why male-male slash fan fiction might be so appealing to women fans. They conclude that slash depicts transcendent romantic love in a way that traditional heterosexual love cannot: as a love between true equals of equal

power. Arguing that neither reality nor its televisual representation permits true equality between genders, they trace the gendering of the male-male pairings. Both of the men in such a pairing, they argue, contain male and female stereotypical characteristics, furthering the sense of equality between them and allowing identification of female readers with either and both.

In contrast, Joanna Russ's 1985 "Pornography by Women, for Women, with Love" passionately defends sexually explicit fiction by and for women. She acknowledges Lamb and Veith's argument, but instead of focusing on the emotional subtext, she concentrates on the explicit sexuality explored in many of the stories. As the title suggests, Russ celebrates slash fan fiction as possibly the only noncommercial pornography produced specifically by and for women—a fact that deserved note in the middle of a struggle of the relationship between pornography and feminism through the 1980s.

Concluding part 2 is Sara Gwenllian Jones's 2002 "The Sex Lives of Television Characters," an important rejoinder to these earlier essays, whose arguments had all but become generally accepted truth in the intervening fifteen years. Rather than celebrating the political or sexual subversiveness of slash, Jones focuses on the plot elements of both the source text and the stories based on it. She finds that the source texts prevent heterosexual romance from taking place—or rather, that the settings are all too often hostile to traditional romance. The homosocial nature of many of the shows thus invites slash pairings, but in fiction, these pairings often are situated in domestic settings. Most slash scholars posit that fan fiction subverts and resists the sources, but Jones argues that the slash stories often reinforce heteronormative notions, albeit within a same-sex pairing.

### *Fan Communities and Affect*

Part 3's focus is analysis of fans in particular, both as affective agents and as enthusiasts. The three essays included here interrogate the impetus to engage in fan activities, and they investigate the community practices for welcoming new members and establishing hierarchy. Beyond the textual analyses of fan works, two approaches have always existed in fan studies: one that focuses on the psychology of the fan, and one that centers on the sociology of the community. The essays look at both of these and the way they intersect and play out within the history of fan studies.

Camille Bacon-Smith's 1992 *Enterprising Women* is a central text in fan studies. It showcases the slow initiation of an outsider into a fan community

before the rise of the Internet, when fan communities were created in person. The chapter excerpted here, “Training New Members,” follows Bacon-Smith’s steps to her first *Star Trek* conventions and offers an analysis of the zines she encounters there. She focuses on fan stories with central female characters that either are originally created by the author or that expand on minor canon characters. Her close reading of the stories brings together textual, psychological, and sociological analyses as she explores the phenomenon of the Mary Sue, a genre of story that features an idealized, perfect author stand-in, and the criticism that these stories generate within the fan community.

Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst’s 1998 *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* provides a concerted and comprehensive look at audience studies, where the authors discuss spectacle and performance in an attempt to better describe the complexity of fans and fandoms. “Fans and Enthusiasts” provides a model in which audiences have a wide variety of subject positions in terms of identity and in terms of relationship to the fan object. Abercrombie and Longhurst describe a continuum of intensity, identity, and productivity. The essay adds an important sociological look at fan cultures and the diverse individual performances scholars of fans encounter.

Constance Penley’s *NASA/Trek* reflects a different methodological and disciplinary tradition. The work is a fascinating look at the relationship between fandom—in particular science fiction fandom—and technological developments, including the space program. In “Future Men,” Penley engages with the slash theories posited in the previous section by Lamb and Veith as well as by Russ to show how fan collectives reshape not just the male psyche but the male body as well. Connecting fandom with both feminist practices and theories of technology, Penley suggests that writers of slash attempt to imagine a more feminist public sphere by utilizing technologies of the present and future. This essay is an early example of a text that addresses the limitations of fandom, in particular how the focus on feminist issues tends to push aside any concerns of race and class.

#### *Fan Creativity and Performance*

Part 4 focuses on the way fandom creates identity and the associated role of performativity in fan studies. The two essays in this section discuss place, identity, and performance as enacted by fans and their texts. Rather than limiting texts to fan fiction, these essays discuss all textual utterances that, online, often can function as specific performances of identity.

Kurt Lancaster's 2001 book *Interacting with "Babylon 5": Fan Performances in a Media Universe* uses performance theory to discuss the way fans interact with the text and one another. "Performing in Babylon—Performing in Everyday Life" addresses the way fan culture fails to exist outside of the often quite purposeful performative acts of its practitioners. Focusing on *Babylon 5* show runner J. Michael Straczynski in particular, Lancaster shows how different self-presentations and self-representations are required when facing journalistic critics and fans of the show. Lancaster analyzes the famous B5 message board, where Straczynski simultaneously performed the roles of fellow fan and adored show runner, thus modeling show runner–fan interactions.

The final selection, Francesca Coppa's "Writing Bodies in Space: Media Fan Fiction as Theatrical Performance" (2006b) explores the theme of the fan self as gendered performance. Coppa explores the way fan culture itself has gendered different forms of fannish engagement, with the less valued fan practices both being focused on the body and gendered as female. She suggests that fan fiction is a dramatic performance rather than a literary engagement: its repetitive qualities and its focus on the body situate fan fiction closer to theater and its communal, endlessly replicated performances.

### **A Note on the Editing**

As a general rule, the essays in this volume appear exactly as they did in their original publications, with the following exceptions:

- Some pieces were cut for length, in which case we have added ellipses and in some cases bracketed words to fill in the context.
- Some illustrations that appeared with the original essays were deleted.
- Some standardizing of the format of in-text references, endnotes, and bibliography entries has been applied.

In addition, all bibliography and works cited entries were combined (with duplicates removed) and moved to the back of the book. Where bracketed ellipses [. . .] appear in the book, these are copied from the original essays and do not indicate where we, as editors, removed textual material. We made no attempt to standardize such things as use of British versus American spelling, stylistic treatment of numbers, and capitalization.



## Conclusion

This collection of essays, which covers twenty-five years and a variety of disciplinary approaches and theoretical shifts, only hints at the proliferation of fan studies in recent years. As fan fiction has moved from a mostly subcultural hobby of a few committed fans to an advertising tool for media companies—and even as a commercial juggernaut for publishing companies—discussions of writers and stories must change. Yet many of the analyses here remain central to studying the online discourses surrounding fan communities.

Many more intersections with other disciplines exist than could be provided in this volume, including law, economics, and new media. We could just as easily have grouped legal concerns and the status of authorship, the economy of transmedia fan texts, or identity and online fan communities as additional sections. Especially because fan fiction can become a valuable property and fan affect has been recognized by media makers as a valued commodity, with producers using fans as free labor to generate buzz and interest, many scholars have shifted from a focus on fans to an interest in fan-friendly production and fan interpellation. In other words, significant academic focus has moved to concerns of authorship and creation of commercial transmedial networks in their attempts to create and reward loyal fans as well as the dangers of exploitation such use of fan labor may entail.

Nowhere is this move more obvious than in the development of Henry Jenkins's work. Having studied, in *Textual Poachers* (1992), the primarily female media fan communities, which he understood as independent from, if not in opposition to, media industries and the fan works they produce, in *Convergence Culture* (2005), he focused on the relationship between media producers and audiences and their converging cultures. With the term *convergence culture*, Jenkins describes how different media forms work together, often in response to the ever more prevalent transmedia elements, where one franchise engages within a variety of interfaces (print, TV show, Web, comic book) and in a variety of different forms.

Associated with this is the way fan cultures have moved from being a tolerated or ignored unruly fan response to an important and sought-after audience of engaged leaders. Fans used to be a small, easily mockable subculture, but changes in distribution models, audience interaction, and cultural acceptance have mainstreamed the term and behavior, with media industries

trying to model fannish modes of engagement to ensure engaged, positive, and active audiences.

This volume looks back on historical approaches as we have entered an age of convergence. Engaged viewers are now actively invited and courted by producers, including even the previously marginalized fans. This doesn't mean that sexual content (for example) is necessarily welcome, or that many of the less conventional romantic fan pairings will suddenly become canon on the shows. However, it does mean that producers are now paying attention to fans and their online reactions, as on bulletin boards. The anxieties surrounding fan productions have eased for various reasons: (1) mores regarding sexualities and sexual identities have changed in the West, in particular, making both sexually explicit writing and gay themes more acceptable; (2) fans and geeks have entered the mainstream, thus changing the media-presented image, so it is easier to identify and know that a community exists out there and for fans to consider becoming active; (3) media producers are consciously inviting fans to contribute and actively participate; and (4) fans are self-consciously organizing and establishing their rights to create transformative works.

This collection shows the historical roots of fan studies, and even as fan studies is expanding and moving in new directions it remains vital to know where we came from in order to understand where we are headed. Many current ideas continue the approaches that have successfully served the study of early Internet and pre-Internet fan studies, and it is crucial to see these connections. At the same time, it is important not to assume that the current status quo was always such and to look at the developments, both fannish and academic, that have gotten us here. Fundamental shifts have occurred in reaction to the changing fan-producer relations, the changing demographics of fans, and the wider accessibility of texts, in large part as a result of technological shifts but also as a result of the changing theoretical frameworks of media and cultural studies. We argue, however, that it is exactly because the field has changed and the discipline is growing that this collection is important. It shows the historical roots of fan studies, indicating both similarities and differences from the work that is being done right now—and in the future.

The overview preceding each section traces the central ideas of the articles that follow, including identification of the texts that have influenced—and that have been influenced by—related essays, as well as a summary of intersections with other essays addressing similar concerns. We thus situate

the essays historically and thematically. But we also point toward the various trajectories of their central ideas. Literary and cultural phenomenon are important to consider together in order to contextualize events, but it requires an approach that shows how ideas have developed and evolved over time to fully understand the fannish and academic moments that have led to this present. By showcasing a selection of the central texts of fan fiction studies and introducing readers to the academic scholars who have founded and continue to add to the discipline, we offer the necessary context to understand what fan studies offers today—a world that has changed entirely, but one that is not all that different than that of the *Star Trek*-loving scribbling ladies of nearly half a century ago.