Tara Moses

Composition II

Palmer

February 10, 2016

3 Misconceptions about Fanfiction (That Fanfic Authors *Really* Wish You Knew)

Fanfiction: probably the most informal writing style you've ever only slightly heard of. Even though it’s a [decades-old](http://www.dailydot.com/geek/complete-guide-to-fanfiction/#teens) medium of writing mostly popular among people who consume large amounts of media (read: almost everyone nowadays), it’s not exactly well-known. It’s talked about—frequently—but most of the time, only in online articles written by people with very little experience or research into fanfiction culture. As a result, these stories and the people who write them are commonly misrepresented.

Maybe you’ve heard these misconceptions most of your life, or maybe this is your first time learning about the wonderful world of fanfiction and you want to hear the truth about it straight from the horse’s mouth before being poisoned by popular opinion. Either way, as both an author and contributor (once upon a time) to the plethora of fanfiction on the internet, allow me to tell you just what fanfiction really is, and, perhaps more importantly, what it *is not.*

Let’s start with the first and most dismissive stereotype. People new to fanfiction are quick to believe that…

1. Fanfiction is Lazy

THE MISCONCEPTION

As fanfiction authors, we've heard it all before: “Why don't you just make up your own characters? Are you not creative enough?” People new to the concept of fanfic think that writing it is sort of like making a collage: cut out pictures of people from magazines, slap some speech bubbles on them, and you're done. No real effort involved, right?

Wrong.

THE REALITY

Fanfiction isn't just using other people's characters as your literary glue. Within any given fandom (a 'fandom' being a group of people who follow a certain show/book/movie/etc.), there are multiple fanfiction authors, and chances are, if you read two fanfics by different authors that feature the same two or three characters, the differences you find will be more than stylistic. Fanfiction authors are, at the end of it, just people, and people tend to have differing views on what a character is like, regardless of how developed they are in canon: what their goals are, how they would act in different [situations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternate_universe_%28fan_fiction%29), imagined backstories for them, anything along those lines.

Fanfiction authors have an opportunity that is almost nonexistent in any other medium. They have the chance to take a skeleton of a character and flesh them out using their own, personal idea of the character. There isn't any room for cutting and pasting a character into their work, because there's no such thing as a set character to cut and paste. This is especially true if the character isn't well-developed in canon, a subject about which we fanfiction authors in general are [fond of writing](https://books.google.com/books?id=w0mxxsXluUkC&pg=PA119&lpg=PA119&dq=fanfiction+about+background+characters&source=bl&ots=9sGEdaDNFR&sig=B9HKrjfZIfyC5ceOtty_xMxIF2s&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj77sOn3_DKAhVW0mMKHY_eAmwQ6AEIIjAB#v=onepage&q=fanfiction%20about%20background%20characters&f=false).

Also, fanfiction authors routinely create their own original characters (OCs) and write them into their stories. But it seems like this is fuel for another misconception…

2. Fanfiction Is Filled With Self-Inserts

THE MISCONCEPTION

Great. It seems like authors can’t win. No original characters? LAZY. Any original characters at all? Must be some desperate author trying to write themselves into the story. Can you say frustrating?

The idea goes like this: the only reason to write fanfiction is so you can create a character representing yourself to put into your favorite pop culture universe. Ever wanted to interact with the band members of One Direction? Then write a [story](https://www.wattpad.com/search/one%20direction) and do it. Why else would you write fanfiction other than to vicariously live out your delusional fantasy through your OC?

THE REALITY

As with any widely-used medium, there's a bunch of variety in writing type, genre, and (of course) quality. Sure, every once in a while you get a story with a ridiculously powerful, no-flaws original character, but there are also a whole lot of fics with no original characters at all, self-insert or not. And for that matter, there are a bunch of fics with original characters that aren't self-inserts. These are written for tons of reasons: maybe someone wanted to take a character they loved and stick them into a completely new place, so they created new people for the character to interact with. Maybe the author wanted to continue a series that was cancelled, and doesn’t need to create any new characters at all. The possibilities are limitless, really.

The worst self-insert offenders tend to make their inserts the dreaded [Mary-Sue](http://www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/the-most-infamous-mary-sues-in-fiction/), a type of character who has no real flaws and is liked by everyone in the story to the point of being boring to the reader. But the threat of making a Mary-Sue character is so well-known among fanfic authors (even newer ones) that creating one is easily avoidable. There's even [this handy litmus test](http://www.springhole.net/writing/marysue.htm) to help authors decide whether their characters are well-defined, reasonable characters or not.

Along the same lines as this stereotype, people for some reason believe that…

3. Fanfiction Is Always Poorly Written

THE MISCONCEPTION

The public idea of fanfiction is that it’s filled with shameless self-inserts (see my previous point), poor grammar and spelling, repetitive word choice, and everything else that people associate with irredeemably terrible writing. Fanfiction authors are predominantly teenagers, and teenagers are notorious for being awful at stuff. Everybody knows that.

THE REALITY

First things first: not all fanfiction writers are teenagers. Forget what you’ve heard. *Not all* [*fanfiction*](http://www.vulture.com/2015/03/6-famous-authors-whove-written-fanfiction.html)[*writers*](http://www.supernaturalwiki.com/index.php?title=S.E._Hinton)[*are*](http://www.eljamesauthor.com/books/)[*teenagers*](http://www.themarysue.com/neil-gaiman-gollumsmeagol-fan-fiction/)*.*

As for the quality of the work, this is another “bunch of variety in the medium” thing. Some (okay, a lot of) authors, when they're just starting out, tend to get sucked up in the glitz and glamour of Mary-Sues (especially teenage girls, and [this article](http://starofdavida.blogspot.com/2014/04/mary-sues-and-sexism-in-literature.html) might explain why) and forgetting to proofread, but that's just how people grow. Fanfiction is a medium with a lot of people just starting to discover their love for writing, and as a result, you're definitely going to get some bad fics. There's no quality bar to reach [before](https://www.fanfiction.net/) [you](https://archiveofourown.org/) [publish](https://www.wattpad.com/) [something](https://kindleworlds.amazon.com/) to the internet.

But look on the bright side: there are TONS OF FICS. And as many crappy fics as there are, there are even more high-quality fics: stories written by authors who have a real passion for writing, and have honed their skill for years. Maybe they started off writing awful fics, too.

The Long and Short of It

So now you know: fanfiction is one of the most mainstream forms of writing on the internet, right next to writing articles and blogging. It’s so widely used that there’s almost no way to describe it; its userbase is just too diverse. But people try to describe it anyway (we’re only human, after all): the medium is lazy, the writers are uncreative, the writing itself is poor, etc. All lies.

What I hope you guys take away from this is that fanfiction is open to everyone, and even though it might be misunderstood by non-fanfic-authors and –readers, it’s actually a completely normal and common hobby to have. If the only thing stopping you from writing about your beloved TV show characters—or maybe your favorite superheroes, or whatever—is the fear that you’ll be associated with lazy, inept, teenage writers, then I’d say, congratulations! All of those qualities are wholly misrepresentative of this very large, very *fun* genre. Write your stories. You can’t let people who don’t understand your interests stop you.