**WHY WE NEED FEMSLASH**

Master's thesis

Book and Digital Media Studies

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## Table of content

**List of abbreviations**

| Abbreviation | Explanation |
|---|---|
| A/N | Author notes |
| Angst | Fan fiction that is primarily dramatic in nature |
| AO3 | Archive of our own |
| AU | Alternate universe |
| Beta | A person who proofreads or edits fan fiction |
| Clexa | The romantic pairing of Clarke Griffin and Lexa |
| Darkfic | A fan fiction category that fits somewhere between angst and H/C |
| E | Rated explicit |
| F/f | A female homosexual relationship in fan fiction |
| Fanfic | A fan fiction story |
| Femslash | Fanfics with a focus on a homosexual relationship between two women |
| Fluff | A fanfic category that is focused on romance |
| G!P | A fanfic with a girl with a penis |
| GA | General audience |
| Gen | Fanfics that are not necessarily based on a relationship |
| H/C | Hurt/comfort: a genre of fan fiction with a focus on comforting the hurt |
| Het | Fanfics with a focus on a heterosexual relationship |
| K+ | Rated age 9 and up |

| M | Rated mature |
| --- | --- |
| M/m | Male homosexual relationship in fan fiction |
| OCs | Smaller characters that evolve into wholly expanded characters in fanfic |
| *OUAT* | Once upon a time |
| Profic | A fanfic that has been published for money |
| Prompt | A fanfic idea sent by a fan to an author |
| Ship | Romantic pairings often used in creative works such as fan fiction |
| Smut | A fanfic category that is focused on sex |
| Smuff | A fanfic category that is focused romance and sex |
| Slash | Fanfics with a focus on a homosexual relationship (often between two men) |
| SQ | SwanQueen: the romantic pairing of Emma Swan and Regina Mills (The Evil Queen) |
| T | Teen audiences and up |
| TW | Trigger warning |

**Introduction**

The fight for equality in society is more prevalent than ever. Gay marriage is being legalized in more countries every year, celebrities seem less hesitant about coming out, and an increasing number of TV shows are including queer characters.

Nevertheless, in mass media there is still insufficient LGBT(Q)[1] representation. Furthermore, many queer people lack the ability to identify with characters in mass media, due not only to the lack of queer characters but also to general dissatisfaction with how the (few) queer characters are dealt with. For instance, several articles have explored the often unsatisfying fate of LGBT(Q) characters. In a recent article on *Autostraddle*,[2] the author has listed all of the lesbian and bisexual characters who have died or been killed off on TV shows, namely 155 women.[3] Another *Autostraddle* article on the same topic has listed the lesbian and bisexual characters that either had a happy ending or are still alive, and the figure is significantly lower than for unhappy endings (29, to be precise).[4] This huge difference between happy and unhappy endings for queer females is significant. In discussing the recent death of Lexa, a beloved queer character from the show *The 100,* an article in *Blastr* states that:

> From the perspective of queer people who don't feel like they see a lot of faces on television they recognize as being similar to their own, Lexa is very important. Stories matter. When you're an oppressed minority, having a story feature someone like you doesn't just make you, as an individual feel represented, it also gives people like you legitimacy.[5]

The article asserts that due to the treatment of Lexa, 'many fans […] have sworn they will never watch *The 100* again'.[6]

However, a question remains as to whether these fans simply leave the fandom or instead

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[1] LGBT is an abbreviation that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. However, LGBTQ is more inclusive, also including intersex, asexual, queer, questioning and so on.

[2] Autostraddle.com is an independently owned online magazine and social network for lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. The website is a 'politically progressive queer feminist media source' that features content covering LGBT and feminist news, politics, opinion, culture, arts and entertainment as well as lifestyle content.

[3] Riese, 'All 162 Dead Lesbian and Bisexual Characters On TV, And How They Died', *Autostraddle,* 11 March 2016, n.pag. <http://www.autostraddle.com/all-65-dead-lesbian-and-bisexual-characters-on-TV-and-how-they-died-312315/> (10 April, 2016).

[4] H. Hogan, 'All 29 Lesbian and Bisexual TV Characters Who Got Happy Endings', *Autostraddle,* 15 March 2016, n.pag. <http://www.autostraddle.com/all-26-lesbian-and-bisexual-TV-characters-who-got-happy-endings-331601/> (10 April, 2016).

[5] D. Roth, 'Why *The 100*'s showrunner just lost 15k followers, and why it matters', *Blastr,* 8 March 2016, n.pag. <http://www.blastr.com/2016-3-8/why-100s-showrunner-just-lost-15k-followers-and-why-it-matters> (12 April, 2016).

[6] Roth, 'Why *The 100*'s showrunner just lost 15k followers, and why it matters'.

seek and/or create other ways to enjoy the character with whom they identify. This thesis argues that the latter often happens. More specifically, it posits that queer people seek identification in other ways, because they are inadequately represented in the media and characters who do represent queer females do not live long enough for queer women to identify with them. Queer people remain fans of a character or a pairing (a relationship between two characters) and criticize the writers and producers of a show, with many fans continuing to write and read fan fiction. Therefore, the hypothesis of this thesis is that queer people write and read femslash fan fiction due to their unsatisfied need to identify with characters in the media.

To test this hypothesis, the first chapter outlines some important concepts and terms. Following this, the second chapter discusses why people write fan fiction in general. The third chapter then illustrates the rise of slash fiction and explores why it is such a popular form of fan fiction. Once the reasons why people in general write fan fiction and the popularity of slash fiction are illustrated, the thesis introduces two case studies of femslash fandoms. These case studies analyze the general reasons for writing fan fiction and slash fiction, seeking to draw comparisons with femslash fandom in particular. The first femslash fandom this thesis uses is the one surrounding the pairing 'SwanQueen' from *Once Upon a Time,* since it is a very popular femslash pairing and the author of this thesis is familiar with most of the fan fiction on this pairing. The other femslash fandom it uses is 'Clexa' from *The 100*, since it is another popular pairing that has been discussed extensively in the past year.

## 1. Terms and concepts

To be able to understand why people write fan fiction – and in this case, 'femslash' fan fiction – it is important first to define fan fiction. As such, the present section discusses the important terms and concepts encompassed by fan fiction.

### 1.1 Defining fan fiction and establishing how it came about

Merriam Webster defines fan fiction (also referred to as 'fanfic' or ˈfik') as 'stories involving popular fictional characters that are written by fans and often posted on the internet'.[7] This definition delineates a narrow view of fan fiction, focusing mainly on the storytelling aspect and not addressing aspects such as community. Fan fiction is a much larger subject than this simple definition suggests, encompassing many characteristics and an interesting history. Delving into this history reveals some important terms that illustrate how fan fiction first emerged.

Fan fiction distinguishes itself from normal fiction by the use of the adjective 'fan'. In terms of what constitutes a fan and a fandom, fandom has its origins in sports and theatre, where certain people – called 'fans' – would support their favorite team, athlete, actor or actress and cheer them on, rather than the sport or play itself.[8] Fandom as we now know it today, and as it is used in reference to fan fiction, originates from a science fiction magazine called *Amazing Stories* (1926). *Amazing Stories* is a magazine that published readers' letters to the editor and other readers, which created a community dialogue. From thereon fans started to organize themselves, for example through magazines. Indeed, one of the main things associated with fan fiction fandom is the fanzine, which is a fan-created magazine with a particular fandom as its primary subject. In general, fanzines are amateur, non-commercial and irregular publications run by a small team of people committed to a fanzine's subject, but more on this will be explained in 1.2. Fanzines commonly came into existence when fans started to organize themselves. Over the next decades, the number of fanzines grew exponentially, marking the real beginning of fandom. In the continuation/extension hereof, fans started to organize conventions. This further propelled the move to modern fandom, in which fans gather at conventions and meet their idols. Nevertheless, fanzines still remain essential to modern fandom, specifically because they were the driving force behind the beginning of (modern) fandom, or fandom as we know it today.

So far, there has been discussed how fandom came into being as a phenomenon; however, fandom is a diverse and large phenomenon which accommodates different subcategories. These

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[7] Merriam Webster, 'fan fiction', <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fan%20fiction> (11 April 2016).

[8] P. Güldenpfennig, *Fandom, fan fiction and the creative mind*, Masterthesis Human Aspects of Information Technology Tilburg, (2011).

categories, and consequent groupings of people/fans it consists of, might centre on content, which is the case for media fandoms. Media fandoms are at the root of fan fiction. These fandoms center on a specific media aspect rather than encompassing a whole genre. As mentioned in Coppa's 'A Brief History of modern fandom', the most notable media fandom, which is often seen as the start of fandom and fan fiction, is *Star Trek* (1966-1969). This series still has one of the largest and strongest followings. *Star Trek* truly was one of the first 'creative' fandoms. The diversity in fanzines and fiction concerning *Star Trek* illustrates this. As F. Coppa has written:

> From the start, Star Trek fans produced not simply the critical discussion typical of science fiction fandom but creative responses to their favourite show. From the first, Star Trek zines included fan art – poems, songs, stories, drawings, teleplays […] Indeed, a creative Trek culture rapidly developed through the proliferation of fanzines like Spockanalia, ST-Phile, T-Negative, and Warp Nine: A Star Trek Chronicle.[9]

As Coppa mentions in his quote Star Trek fans did not only discuss the show but also created their own art deriving from the show. They were the first fandom to be known to do this in mass. *Star Trek* fandom is such a historically popular fandom that a separate book, *Star Trek Lives!* (Lichtenberg et al.), exclusively discusses the culture itself.[10] One of the chapters in this book describes the book itself as one of the first examinations of fan fiction as a part of literature. As Coppa mentions, the authors of *Star Trek Lives!* do not see fan-written stories as examples of 'fan communication' but as the start of new stories in a completely new genre of science fiction.[11]

Media fandoms started gaining attention in the 1980s. This widened interest mainly relates to the fact that media featured more complex narrative storylines and characters. Through these fandoms, reading and viewing went from silent consumption to active conversation.[12]  Due to the large and diverse content produced in the present day, there are many sub-cultures and subgenres within fan fiction.

This section now turns to a more precise definition of contemporary fan fiction. People often describe fan fiction as a derivative of an original work of media. This implies that there is a source text that produces a fan fiction response (henceforth, this thesis refers to this source text as a 'canon story'). As mentioned, media fandom began with the *Star Trek* fandom. This was also the first fandom that wrote fan fiction. In this case, the canon story is *Star Trek*. However, describing fan

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[9] F. Coppa, 'A Brief History of media fandom', Hellekson, K., Busse, K. (Ed.). *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2006), p. 44.

[10] Fanlore, 'Star Trek Lives! (book)', <https://fanlore.org/wiki/Star_Trek_Lives!_(book)> (22 April 2016)

[11] F. Coppa, 'A Brief History of media fandom', p. 45.

[12] A. Jameson, *Fic: Why Fanfiction is taking over the world*, p.xii.

fiction as the response to or a re-imagination of a canon story is problematic. This definition would define many works of art as fan fiction, simply because they are a re-imagination of a canon story. Therefore, this thesis needs to establish a distinction between a work of fan fiction and a re-imagination of a canon story.

Güldenpfennig has argued that the dividing line could simply be the fact that fan fiction does not target a consumer market, as is often the case with well-known re-imaginations. Rather, fan fiction targets fans. In contrast, although fans are a target audience for re-imaginations, their aim is to draw a larger audience towards the work. To quote Güldenpfennig: 'whereas re-imaginations are aimed at a market with a general audience, fan fiction is aimed at a fandom and its fans'.[13] To elaborate, the earlier Merriam Webster definition describes fan fiction as '[…]stories involving popular fictional characters that are written by fans'. If this is the case, one could consider a show such as *Elementary*[14] fan fiction, since the show is about Sherlock Holmes and goes further than the canon story. Moreover, the producers of the show are obviously fans of the character. However, *Elementary* is a TV show that makes money. Hence, targeting a wider audience and seeking profit distinguishes a re-imagination from a piece of fan fiction.

In this regard, it is also important to highlight that so-called 'profic' somewhat blurs this distinction. Profic is a piece of former fan fiction that a publisher has subsequently distributed for money. In the following subchapter the move from fanzines to online fan fiction will be elaborated upon and how this has influenced the popularity of fan fiction.

### 1.2 From fanzines to fanfiction.net

In the previous subchapter there has been established how fan fiction came to be. And as fanzines were briefly touched upon before, this section is dedicated to further outlining what fanzines are and can be, and when fans started to move from offline reading to online reading and how that influenced the way fans establish themselves.

As mentioned previously fanzines commonly came into existence when fans started to organize themselves and with time the number of fanzines grew exponentially. The term zine is a recent variant of fanzine, a neologism coined in the 1930s to refer to magazines self-published by aficionados of science fiction.[15] In general, fanzines are amateur, non-commercial and irregular publications run by a small team of people committed to a fanzine's subject, including editors choosing what to publish. They are published particularly for special interest groups.

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[13] P. Güldenpfennig, 'Fandom, fan fiction and the creative mind', p.14.
[14] CBS, 'Elementary', <http://www.cbs.com/shows/elementary/> (8 July 2016).
[15] Janice Radway, 'Zines, Half-Lives, and Afterlives: On the Temporalities of Social and Political Change', *PMLA*, Vol. 126, No. 1 (January 2011), p. 140

Janice Radway, an American literary and cultural studies scholar who explored the importance and history of zines in her article, stated: 'Zines explored subjects like environmental justice, sexual abuse, queer sex, and body-image problems, as well as everyday obsessions and odd tastes unacceptable to the print mainstream.'[16] As a result, zines provide a physical link between communities with specials interests, and, equally important, create a place for networking and exchange within these fan based communities. The address of a contributor is included in the fanzine. As a result, fanzines are established as an open system. Accordingly, interaction and reader involvement are essential to fanzines and to characterizing the phenomenon that 'the fanzine' is. Zines thus create an environment for networking and exchange.

The distribution of fanzines takes place principally within the community that generates its content.[17] Fan communities exchange thoughts, ideas and art for a fanzine and the zines were distributed within these communities. Zines became especially popular during the 1980s as part of their do-it-yourself aesthetic of the punkers in that time and as an outsider way to communicate in their community about their defiant response to the commercialism of mainstream society.

Mike Gunderloy, author of the article 'Zines: Where the Action Is: The Very Small Press in America' for *Whole Earth Review* sees the authors and editors of zines as the one cutting edge of social change. According to him, the zines had the potential to challenge the institutions of mainstream society. Nevertheless, Radway can be cited here to provide a counterargument to his statement: 'If most zines disappeared only a few years after their inception, one has to wonder what they accomplished.'[18] In spite of their transience, Gunderloy suggests that zines had a longer lasting effect through discussing subjects and expressing opinions that were typically ruled out of the mainstream. Thereby, zines were broadening public discourse and influencing dominant culture. Radway continues her earlier-cited quotation as follows: 'In what sense might they have had cultural or political effects? That they did, at least in some circles, seems evident, since public awareness of zines gradually increased and broadened after 1990. Zines challenged the sense of what the media environment was.'[19] In other words, besides forming and sustaining communities, zines also (have the potential to) form social interventions. It is in this case not surprising that fan fiction (especially on special interests like queer relationships) could be found in many fanzines.

Having outlined the main characteristics of zines, it is also important to understand who read these zines. The audience of fanzines are pre-existing fans, not people wishing to become a fan. The purpose of fanzines is to enable fans to enter discussions going on in their fandom and keep up to

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[16] J. Radway, 'Zines, Half-Lives, and Afterlives: On the Temporalities of Social and Political Change', p. 141
[17] Stephen Perkins, 'Science Fiction Fanzines', *Zinebook,* n.pag.
<http://www.zinebook.com/resource/perkins/perkins2.html> (21 April 2016).
[18] J. Radway, 'Zines, Half-Lives, and Afterlives: On the Temporalities of Social and Political Change' p. 141
[19] J. Radway, 'Zines, Half-Lives, and Afterlives: On the Temporalities of Social and Political Change', p. 141

date about all aspects of the fandom's subject.

The technology used to make fanzines has changed over the decades. Early fanzines were hand-drafted or typed on a typewriter and printed using primitive reproduction techniques like for example a hectograph. This resulted in a small number of copies, so the circulation and the distribution were minimal. Later, the use of mimeograph machines ensured greater press runs. Eventually, the photocopier further increased the velocity of the printing process. Today, zines are often made via desktop publishing or self-publication which results in something akin to professional magazines. Even though the distribution and the printing process of fanzines became easier, this is not accompanied by a distribution to a larger target audience, the zines still largely only reaches its fans.

There are a few problems that come with fanzines. The main problem of fanzines is that we live in the physical world and, until recently, most of our entertainment media did too.[20] But that means that there are limitations on our entertainment. For example the need to find local audiences. Although fanzines were often send all over the world, you couldn't just easily find a specific one in a local bookshop and thus find one you might like. The other problem is that in comparison to online fan fiction, fanzines cost money (maybe not a lot, but still they cost money). The only price you pay for online fan fiction, is the cost of your internet connection.

According to Jenna Wortham , 'the maturation of the internet should have killed off the desire for zines entirely. The web is a Gutenberg press on steroids, predicated on free software platforms created by companies that invest considerable sums to lure people to their sites and make exactly the kind of content [most people crave].'[21] However, she also mentions that the internet gives people the ability to send authors hateful remarks anonymously. The web makes it therefore easier to attack an author or authors without it having consequences or it being filtered out. The web is thus more toxic than the traditional form of publishing. This might be a reason why zines do still exist in their traditional form, Wortham mentions. It also seems that 'the deliberation and care that goes into making [zines remains] important.'[22] The fact that a zine is physical is thus not only a problem, but also a reason why they still exist.

Still, with the amount of fanzines covering so many topics a decline was somewhat inevitable. This because a fan wouldn't always know what fanzine would cover the subject of his or her interests. With the introduction of Usenet and later the internet in the 1990's these problems

[20] Chris Anderson, 'The Long Tail', *Wired¸* January 2004, n.pag. <*https*://www.wired.com/2004/10/tail/> (21 March, 2017)
[21] Jenna Wortham, 'Why the Internet Didn't Kill Zines', in *New York Times Magazine,* <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/28/magazine/why-the-internet-didnt-kill-zines.html?_r=0> (21 March, 2017)
[22] J. Wortham, 'Why the Internet Didn't Kill Zines', n.pag.

were solved by introducing technologies like mailing lists, message boards and archives for fan fiction. By using these technologies, fans could filter their results and find what they were looking for. This was the start of a drastic change in the realm of fandom. [23] Usenet was the Internet's predecessor. It was a bulletin board system used for exchanging messages. Every interest or subject had its own Usenet-group, within these Usenet-groups people could exchange messages, discuss the subjects of their interests, exchange files and even set up meetings. It became the archive for many fandoms out there. And it was the beginning of the globalization of online fandom. Fans from all over the world could access these files and talk to other fans of the same subject. [24] And as Francesca Coppa mentions: 'Now people could just google their favourite show, join the available lists, or start reading fiction – even erotic fiction – on a public online archive.'[25] It is therefore not unexpected that fans started to assemble online rather than through physical fanzines.

With the rise of the Internet, the successor of Usenet, the sense of community grew enormously. The internet enabled fans to socialize with other fans and relive moments from their favorite work, without any delay, through social networks. This was an important break from the fanzines, where contact between fans involved many intervals without contact due to the printing time. Furthermore, increasing internet use gave rise to websites such as fanfiction.net[26], where, in contrast to fanzines, all fans are able to produce their own content without editors. Websites such as fanfiction.net often have easy-to-navigate user interfaces, which again reduces the barrier preventing fans from distributing fan fiction on a wider scale. As Rhiannon Bury mentions in her work *Cyberspaces of Their Own* '[t]he internet has become a site of publication and distribution that both overlaps with and provides an alternative to fan conventions and fanzines'[27]

Another important reason for moving to the Internet for finding what you are looking for is something that can be described as "the long tail". The long tail is a phenomenon that has emerged with the rise of the internet. Chris Anderson, author of 'The Long Tail', an important article on the long tail published in *Wired,* argues that products in low demand, or products that have a low sales volume can together make up a market share that can rival or even exceed bestsellers and blockbusters.[28] The long tail is thus the many products that are low in demand but together are a big part of the turnover of a business.

Whereas marketing often is focused on the popular products and media. You can recognize

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[23] P. Güldenpfennig, *Fandom, fan fiction and the creative mind*, p.9
[24] P. Güldenpfennig, *Fandom, fan fiction and the creative mind*, p.9/10
[25] F. Coppa,, *A Brief History of media fandom.* In: Helleson K., Busse, K. (Eds.) *Fab Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet.* Jefferson: Mc Farland, 2006.
[26] Fanfiction.net is the largest online fanfiction archive.
[27] Rhiannon Bury, 'Cyberspaces of their own: female fandoms online',  (Peter Lang: New York, 2005), p.1
[28] C. Anderson, 'The Long Tail', n.pag.

this when for example you go into a bookstore a lot of place is reserved for popular products or so-called "hits". It can then be hard to find less popular products that one might enjoy. With the rise of the internet though this has changed. The supply online is endless. As Anderson mentions in his article on the long tail:

> You can find everything out there on the Long Tail. There's the back catalog, older albums still fondly remembered by longtime fans or rediscovered by new ones. There are live tracks, B-sides, remixes, even (gasp) covers. There are niches by the thousands, genre within genre within genre. This is one of the things that's different between the physical world and the online world. You can find anything and everything online.[29]

With online stores, a big part of their turnover comes from less popular products. Products at the end of the curve, as mentioned before. The more products you have, the bigger your turnover will be, this is essentially what the long tail entails. Anderson sees this shift to online exploring instead of offline as having a cultural benefit, according to him there now 'is much more diversity, reversing the blanding effects of a century of distribution scarcity and ending the tyranny of the hit.'[30] And maybe even more than with zines people can form and sustain communities and form social interventions, since more people can be reached.

It is interesting for this thesis because it shows how it's easier to explore alternatives when they're just a click away, and thus searching online for content you would like, instead of having to look around in obscure bookshops where you might never even come across a special interest you have.

Online exploring can be seen as one of the reasons why fan fiction has become more popular. One has easier access to content that they might have never come across when they were browsing offline, however when browsing online regarding your interests you get easily sucked into backlogs and many niches of that particular interest, and that's how one might end up stumbling across fan fiction on their interest.

With establishing how fans moved from fanzines to online archives and websites, this section now turns to a more precise definition of contemporary fan fiction by explaining different types of fan fiction.

### 1.3 Types of fan fiction

This section expands on the many forms and shapes of fan fiction. Obviously, there is more than one type of fanfic. The primary distinction concerns two overlapping types of fanfic, which are explored

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[29] C. Anderson, 'The Long Tail', *Wired*¸ January 2004, n.pag.
[30] C. Anderson, 'The Long Tail', *Wired*¸ January 2004, n.pag.

below. The subsequent discussion deals with other types of fanfic, most of which fall under the two main types.

### 1.3.1 Two types of fan fiction

The first type of fan fiction is a story that fills the holes that a canon story leaves open. In this case, the fanfic stays true to the canon story (at least initially). The second type is a story that reimagines the canon story in a way that deviates from it. The community refers to stories in this category as Alternative Universe (AU) fanfics. An AU explores canonical facts about the setting, characterization, timeline or other aspects of a particular fictional universe in a non-canonical way. It often falls into the category of 'what ifs' (which will be elaborated upon in Chapter 3), exploring possibilities stemming from circumstances that do not occur in the original work.

### 1.3.2. Three types of Alternative Universe fanfics

Within this AU genre, there are three main categories: 'alternative timelines', 'contextual reassignments' and 'crossovers'.

The first category, alternative timelines, includes fanfics that break with the canon story at a certain point, in order to develop a separate story. These breaking points are often plot developments that the fan, in the role of fan fiction writer, changes to continue the story thereon. Figure 1 shows an example of an alternative timeline.

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**The Curious Princess**
By: giaparrilla

What if Regina never casted [sic] the curse? Emma is the daughter of Snow White and Prince Charming. What happens when Emma's curiosity gets the best of her and she reads about a certain Evil Queen? AU, SwanQueen for sure, no curse, G!P rated T for now.

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Figure 1: An example of an AU. Source: Fanfiction.net.[31]

This example contains a description of a fanfic that mentions the term AU. The description also includes other elements that make this fanfic an AU. The first question posed, namely 'What if Regina never casted the curse?', shows a break with the original canonical setting of the series, in which the curse is a central element of the plotline. The community describes a story as AU when other aspects

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[31] Fanfiction, 'The Curious Princess', <fanfiction.net/s/11403256/1/The-Curious-Princess> (10 July 2016).

are identical to the canon story and characters. In essence, an AU is an alternate timeline of the canon story.

The second category is contextual reassignments. Contextual reassignments retain canon story characters and their characteristics but alter the context in which the story occurs. Figure 2 demonstrates this. Here Emma, the main character of *Once Upon A Time*, is a soldier instead of what she originally is in the canon story. As can be seen in Figure 2, AU stories can radically deviate from the settings, characters and context. However, as mentioned before, it must retain some characteristics of the canon story to remain a work of fanfic.[32] These characteristics often relate to characters and character development. The following AU provides an example of a complete break from the canon story, except for the characters.

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# *Letters from War*

### *hunnyfresh*

### *Summary:*

Emma is a soldier on reserve in Fort Benning. Regina is the Mayor of Storybrooke. Through a pen pal program designed to ease the ache of homesick soldiers, Emma and Regina begin sending letters to one another as their relationship grows from cordial acquaintance to something neither woman would have expected - until the letters stop coming.

### *Notes:*

For stable-girl.
Disclaimer: I do not own Once Upon a Time or any recognizable characters.

AN: This is written for my friend, stable-girl, over on tumblr who asked for an SQ story based off of Pink's song "Who Knew." This is an AU, and as much as I researched, I almost guarantee there will be inaccuracies when it comes to anything military. I hope you guys can bear with me on that. Also, I was able to do the pen pal thing to the troops in high school, and I don't know if it's the same with the States, but let's just say it is. The title of this story comes from Mark Schultz's "Letters from War." The story will run for roughly three chapters. Thanks for the prompt, and I hope you enjoy it!

Due to some inaccuracies about Emma's position and such, I have updated this chapter. I had her as a technician, but it makes more sense for the story to have her as infantry. Hopefully now it's more accurate military-wise. Big thanks to tjemd, Jules-Day, and RedReader1 for pointing out the problems! I owe you guys big time!

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Figure 2: An example of an AU. Source: AO3.[33]

In the case of 'Letters from War', the characters are the same as in Figure 1. However, in Figure 2 the context is completely different from the canon story, except for the fact that Regina is the mayor of Storybrooke in both the canon story and this AU. Even so, character qualities do remain the same in this kind of AU.

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[32] Pugh, *The Democratic Genre,* p.65.
[33] AO3, 'Letters from War', <http://archiveofourown.org/works/1165427/chapters/2369580> (10 July 2016).

The third category of AUs is the crossover. Crossovers combine two fandoms together into one story, borrowing characters and context from both universes to create one large alternative universe. Figure 3 shows an example. Here Regina and Emma are professors at Hogwarts. In this case, this is a crossover between *Once Upon a Time* and the *Harry Potter* universe.

# The Magic of Theatre

acautionarytale

## Summary:

SQ Hogwarts AU - Muggle Studies Professor Emma Swan wants to put on a play at Hogwarts. Minerva McGonagall agrees to allow it only if Potions Master Regina Mills agrees to participate as well.

## Notes:

(See the end of the work for notes.)

**Figure 3: An example of an AU. Source: AO3.[34]**

*1.4 Gen, het, slash and femslash fanfic*

In addition to the two overarching types of fan fiction and the distinction within these types, there are also other categories into which fanfics fall. For example, some fanfics focus on relationships, whether they be friendships, family bonds or romantic relationships. Since one of these categories, femslash, is the main focus of this thesis, it is important to know the distinction between the categories Gen, het, slash and femslash.

Stories always fall into several categories. Take for example the *Harry Potter* stories. While there are romantic pairings, friendships and family bonds in these stories, they do not revolve around pairings. Instead, the stories mostly revolve around the action and adventure that takes place in the *Harry Potter* universe. However, when someone is reading or watching something like *The Notebook,* it is clear that the focus of this story is the relationship between Allison and Noah.[35] Followers of fan fiction refer to stories such as *Harry Potter* as 'General' stories (or 'Gen' for short) and stories based around heterosexual relationships 'Het'. 'Slash fiction' contrasts these categories, in that it is 'fanfiction depicting a sexual and/or romantic relationship or situation between two characters of the same gender. [It] may involve real people or imaginary (sometimes copyrighted) characters.'[36]

It is important to explain the distinction between shipping and romantic pairings in order to

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[34] AO3, 'The Magic of Theatre', <http://archiveofourown.org/works/3742801/chapters/8298943> (10 July 2016).

[35] Nicholas Sparks, 'The Notebook', <http://nicholassparks.com/stories/the-notebook/> (6 May 2016).

[36] Urban Dictionary, 'Slash Fiction', <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=slash%20fanfiction> (25 April 2016).

understand the 'slash' and 'het' categories further. 'Shipping' is a fan's desire for two people to be in a relationship, whether they be real people or fictional characters. This relationship is often romantic, but it could also be a friendship or something else. These 'ships' are romantic pairings that are often used in creative works (such as fan art), but they play a more important role in fan fiction. A ship established by a canon story is referred to as a 'canon ship'. For example, 'Clexa' was a canon ship, a romantic pairing between Lexa and Clarke established in the TV show *The 100.* The fan fiction community often names ships or romantic pairings after the characters involved. For example, Clexa combines the names Clarke and Lexa. However, the show killed off Lexa, so the canonship has sunk. Referring to the above-mentioned examples, 'SwanQueen' (SQ) is a non-canon ship. This ship consists of Emma Swan and Regina Mills (also known as the Evil Queen) in *Once Upon a Time*. Both women are or have been in other relationships but this ship has an enormous fan base. An interesting fact about both SwanQueen and Clexa is that they are romantic pairings between two women. The fan fiction community describes fan fiction about same-sex pairings as 'slash fiction'. There are further distinctions between same-sex pairings between either men or women, but before addressing this topic the present discussion establishes how slashfic came about.

Slash fiction has been around for some time now. It originated when fan fiction began dealing with romantic pairings. In these instances, a forward slash connected the initials of the characters concerned. Pugh has suggested that slash fiction emerged during the height of *Star Trek*'s popularity in the 1970s, when *Star Trek* introduced the specific pairing of Kirk and Spock. After a short while, 'slash' was a term that specifically indicated male homosexual relationships (indicated as 'm/m').[37] A fanzine published the first slash story. This story, which concerned Kirk and Spock, was entitled 'A Fragment Out of Time'; it was written by Diane Marchant and published in *Grup* in 1974.[38]

The initial slash fandom consisted of a group of people who enjoyed writing and reading homoerotic interactions between popular media characters (sometimes canon heterosexual characters).[39] Slash fiction can be defined as homosexual fan fiction stories, often erotic in nature. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, slash fiction includes female/female (f/f) relationships or pairings, but many people make a distinction between m/m and f/f, by defining f/f as 'femslash' and m/m as plain 'slash'.[40] Femslash became well known following the rise of the *Xena: Warrior Princess* fandom. Femslash fiction, in this case, concerned the Xena/Gabrielle ship.

As with all media, there are terms we can use to describe certain stories or communicate about media. Distinguishing between genres such as horror, thriller, pornography and comedy or

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[37] S. Pugh, *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a literary context* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 2005), p.91.
[38] Fanlore, 'Slash', <http://fanlore.org/wiki/Slash> (25 April 2016).
[39] J. Bruner, *I 'like' slash: the demographics of Facebook slash communities,* Electronic Theses and Dissertations. (2013), Paper 170. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18297/etd/170>, p.IV (26 April 2016).
[40] J. Bruner, *I 'like' slash: The demographics of Facebook slash communities,* p.8.

between ratings such as G, PG 13 and R help us define the nature of a piece of media. This is especially relevant in the fan fiction community. In the fan fiction community ways of communicating are especially important. The following chapter considers this last point further.

*1.5 Communication within the fan fiction community*

In the fan fiction community ways of communicating are especially important. This section considers this last point further. Before going into the ways fans communicate in the fan fiction community, it is important to explain what kind of audience fan fiction reaches and what exactly a community constitutes.

Earlier on there was a discussion that distinguishes fan fiction and profic by the fact that fan fiction exists to please fans rather than to make money. However, the fan fiction audience is itself distinct in other ways. These other distinctions are important to note because they help establish why one would read or write fanfic.

Audiences are often considered passive, as for example Adorno mentions in his theories. According to Adorno's theory of the 'Culture Industry', the masses and thus the audience are passive [41]vessels. They have no other choice but to believe what the culture industry prescribes them.[42] However, the fan industry clearly demonstrates entirely different behavior. Fans are readers who are actively engaging with the media. Jenkins mentions in his book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* that this audience reacts to the media and they are active rather than passive. They engage more in a process of making, rather than simply absorbing, meanings.[43] This relates to 'reception theory', a version of reader response literary theory. Reception theory's main principle is that a text holds a different meaning for each individual, depending on his or her background and experiences. The rise of the internet makes it possible for these individuals to engage in discussions and share and develop their interpretations of texts.[44] The way an audience interprets a text can therefore be wholly different to the author's intended meaning. By giving their opinions on social media, fans can even influence the creators of the canon.

What exactly does a community constitute. Bury uses the following definition by Iris Young: 'Community is an understandable dream, expressing desire for selves that are transparent to one another, relationships of mutual identification, social closeness and comfort.'[45] One can thus understand that being an active participant in a fandom is being a part of a community. Rhiannon Bury also mentions in her work on female fandoms that 'being a member of a community is not

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[41] R. Bury, 'Cyberspaces of their own: female fandoms online', p.15
[42] T.W. Adorno, The culture industry: selected essays on mass culture, (London: Routledge, 1991)
[43] H. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992).
[44] J. Bruner, *I 'like' slash: The demographics of Facebook slash communities.*
[45] Rhiannon Bury, 'Cyberspaces of their own: female fandoms online', (Peter Lang: New York, 2005), p.15

something one is but something one does'.[46] This can be seen in the same light as Jenkins participatory culture. Interactive communities, like the fan fiction communities, can be described as 'social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public [and private] discussions long enough, with sufficient feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace'.[47]

So how does this audience and thus interactive fan fiction community communicate? Similar to other media artefacts fan fiction stories fall under different categories or genres that do not entirely correspond with common fiction genres. While some genres remain, such as romance, fan fiction has its own language or 'slang' to describe its genres and categories. The following paragraphs explain some important genres and categories. This is an important way of communicating within the fan fiction community.

Hurt/comfort (often abbreviated to H/C) is a fan fiction genre that involves physical pain or emotional distress for one of the main characters, who another character then cares for. This genre allows us to learn more about the characters and their relationship. The term 'whumping' (or whump) is a specific form of H/C that amplifies the hurt aspect.[48]

'Angst' characterizes stories that are 'intended to provoke the feeling of unrest and uncertainty in readers. It generally signifies that the story will be primarily dramatic in nature, rather than comedic or light-hearted.'[49]

'Darkfic' is a category that fits somewhere between angst and H/C but is darker than the two: 'Darkfic is fan fiction that deals with intentionally disturbing material, such as physical and emotional violence. The main characters may be the victims of the violence, the perpetrators or both.'[50]

The fan fiction community does use romance as a term, but it also utilizes two other related terms: 'fluff' and 'smut'. 'Fluff' is a mostly romantic story (with many cute moments and declarations of love), whereas 'smut' is mostly sexual.

Another category of fan fiction is 'crackfic', which describes a surprising and often ridiculous story.

Combinations of all of these subgenres are also possible. Sometimes two subgenres merge, such as 'smuff' (which is a story that is heavy on fluff but also contains smut). Following this logic, subgenres such as smutty angst etc. also exist.

Besides using these terms to describe the categories or genres into which fanfics fall, fans discuss their fanfics in many other ways. These discussions between readers and writers are

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[46] R. Bury, 'Cyberspaces of their own: female fandoms online', p.14
[47] R. Bury, 'Cyberspaces of their own: female fandoms online', p.14
[48] Fanlore, 'Hurt/Comfort', <http://fanlore.org/wiki/Hurt/Comfort> (25 April 2016).
[49] Fanlore, 'Angst', <http://fanlore.org/wiki/Angst> (25 April 2016).
[50] Fanlore, 'Darkfic', <https://fanlore.org/wiki/Darkfic> (25 April 2016).

important, since communication is a key element of fan fiction. Author notes (A/N) are an example of this. These notes allow authors to give their readers a message at the beginning of every chapter. By writing these notes, authors direct readers into a certain position and explain how to approach a story. The writers use A/N to indicate that they do not own the characters used in their stories or to comment on certain terms or decisions. Fanfics also frequently feature trigger warnings (tw) in these A/Ns. The writer uses tw to warn people that certain aspects of the story include, for instance, foul language, sexual assault, violence or any other possible triggers. Rating the fanfic is another way to prevent people from reading what might trigger them or may not be something they want to read. An M rating, for example, indicates that the story is mature and thus may contain violence, sexual acts or mature language. The common ratings are K, for content suitable for all ages; K +, for ages 9+; T, for teens and up; M, for mature (as stated before); and lastly E, for explicit (which is essentially the same as an M rating).[51]

Readers are also able to comment on the chapters and let the writer know what they think of the story, which can push the writer in a certain direction. Feedback and reviews are important to many writers because they encourage them to write more chapters or continue in a certain direction. This is an important part of the fan fiction community. Beyond just choosing to listen to readers' comments and reviews, a writer can also assign a 'beta'. A beta is a person who proofreads or edits fan fiction. Many writers choose to assign a beta since they do not have the time or concentration to check their own texts for grammar errors and other mistakes.

A 'prompt' is a reader of fan fiction who comes up with his or her own ideas for stories. Prompts can request either a simple change or an entire plot that they want to read. Fan fiction can therefore be a real team effort. The fact that the internet is such an open environment makes it easier for the author to communicate with his or her audience, and thus the audience has more influence on the text. In this way, the texts can become a product of a community rather than one author. Readers can also give kudos to a fanfic when they like it, to either simply express their appreciation or motivate the author to write more chapters or even entire fanfics.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, fan fiction first emerged from fanzines; however, once the internet emerged, fans moved to online communities. The two most popular websites for fan fiction are Fanfiction.net and Archive of Our Own (AO3).[52] The latter is a multi-fandom archive on the internet; fans use the website to read, write, search for and discuss fanfics from all fandoms. Fanfiction.net is a similar site and the largest fan fiction online archive. It is a multi-fandom archive and includes several thousand fandoms that upload many hundred new stories daily.

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[51] Fanfiction, 'Guidelines', <https://www.fanfiction.net/guidelines/> (2 July 2016).
[52] AO3, <https://archiveofourown.org/> (3 July 2016).

As of April 2016, it receives approximately 3.5 million visitors each day and contains over 2 million stories.[53] These websites are accessible to anyone with an internet connection, which gives them a huge potential audience and offers an easy way for fans to find texts that they like as well as authors and other fans with whom they can communicate.

It is obvious that due to the accessibility of the internet, a work of fan fiction reaches a broader audience than a published work. This is not only because the internet is 'free', but also because the work can be accessed on any device. However, these online spaces provide much more to the fans than reading, publishing and commenting. In addition, as Thomas has written:

> […] they provide a supportive community for many young people (in this instance, many adolescent girls) to express themselves and play with the texts they enjoy without fear of negativity or exclusion because of issues such as gender.[54]

This is also something that makes fan fiction readers and writers really feel part of a community. It gives them a safe space and, in contrast to mass media, it includes them. The fan fiction community makes people feel less alone. It provides them with stories and people to identify with. As Angela Thomas also mentions in her article on fan fiction: '[…] the community itself is a place for talking about the text and engaging in a range of discursive practices beyond individual narrative writing.'[55] Writing fan fiction is for many fans a way to be a part of a fan based community and to discuss aspects of the canon story and the fandom. This can be seen as a reason to write fanfic as mentioned at the beginning of this section.

### 1.6 Gender and sexuality

To prove the hypothesis that queer people write and read femslash fan fiction due to their unsatisfied need to identify with characters in the media, it is necessary to clarify other important terms outside of fan fiction. Since the focus of this paper is on why people write and read lesbian fan fiction, sexuality and gender terms provide a clear view of the phenomenon femslash. More specifically, as the section discusses shortly, heteronormativity is a key reason why people read fan fiction. The terms need clarifying to understand why one would write/read fan fiction. After clarifying the terms such as heteronormativity, the thesis focuses on analyzing why one would read and/or write fan fiction.

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[53] Worth of Web, 'fanfiction.net', <http://www.worthofweb.com/website-value/fanfiction.net/> (1 August 2016).

[54] A. Thomas, 'Fan fiction online: Engagement, critical response and affective play through writing', Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2006, p. 235 <http://www.sfu.ca/~ogden/BCIT%20LIBS/LIBS%207025/M_Nilan/Fanfiction%20Lecture/FanFictionOnline_AngelaThomas.pdf> (1 August 2016)

[55] A. Thomas, 'Fan fiction online: Engagement, critical response and affective play through writing', p. 231

To clarify heteronormativity, first we need to discuss sexuality. Sexuality constitutes a significant part of people's lives and differs for each person. The American Psychological Association defines sexuality as:

> […] an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes. [It] also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions.[56]

Sexuality differs for everyone. A person can be attracted to the opposite sex, the same sex or to both. However, in today's modern society, our hegemonic belief about sexuality is heteronormative, meaning that the dominant set of norms regarding sexuality assumes that individuals are either male or female and that they are normally attracted to the opposite sex.[57] The term gender describes the range of characteristics specifically assigned to one of the sexes. This range commonly differentiates between masculinity and femininity based on a person's sex.[58] These two sexes have a corresponding set of gender roles.[59] Assigned to these genders (roles) are a set of norms. Heteronormativity associates femininity with being more emotional and masculinity with assertiveness. It also sees women as submissive and passive and men as sexual initiators.

Our language expresses these distinctions. For instance, Bruner has mentioned in her paper on descriptions of sex that it is more common to refer to the penis inserting itself into the vagina than to the vagina enveloping the penis. This makes the penis the dominant sex organ and establishes the male as dominant. Another example is the saying 'grow some balls', which means 'man up and respond maturely to a given situation or problem'.[60] Here acting maturely and not emotionally is something 'manly' and therefore connected to the male gender. There are many similar examples in language that confirm society's prevailing heteronormative view. The subsequent analysis of certain fanfics further touches upon this.

Heteronormativity is also about sexuality. Whereas heterosexuality is the norm,

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[56] American Psychological Association, 'Sexual orientation and homosexuality', <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx> (1 September 2016)

[57] Vance, C. (1989). Social construction theory: Problems in the history of sexuality (keynote address). In D. Altman, et al (Eds.), Homosexuality, which homosexuality? International Conference on Gay & Lesbian Studies (pp.13-34). (London: GMP Publishers) p.14.

[58] J.M. Habarth, *Thinking 'Straight': Heteronormativity And Associated Outcomes Across Sexual Orientation*, (Michigan: The University of Michigan, 2008), <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/60664/jhabarth_1.pdf> (2 September 2016)

[59] K. Lovass & M.M. Jenkins, 'Charting a path Through the Desert of Nothing' In: *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday life: A Reader* (Washington: Sage, 2007)

[60] Collins Dictionary, 'Grow some balls', <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/submission/9147/Grow+some+balls> (10 October 2016)

homosexuality is different. [61] The heteronormative perspective views heterosexuality, or expressing desire for members of the other sex, as normative. Meanwhile, it often views homosexuality, or expressing desire for members of the same sex, as deviant. People often transfer heteronormative roles ascribed to heterosexual men and women onto homosexual relationships. However, looking at homosexual couples in this way is incorrect and simplistic. As noted by L.A. Peplau and S. D. Cochran, 'Many contemporary lesbians and gay men strive for power equality and shared decision making in their relationships. Three studies have found that relationship satisfaction is higher when lesbians and gay men perceive their current relationship as egalitarian'.[62] The roles are much more flexible than the heteronormative view allows, not only in gay relationships but often also in heterosexual relationships.

It is simplistic to view sexuality as an either-or proposition. Many researchers have tried to look at sexuality as a scale rather than a binary system. For instance, Alfred Kinsey, an Indiana University researcher '[…] conducted the first large-scale survey of American sexuality, discarded the either-or model and instead depicted sexuality as a seven-point continuum, in which it was certainly possible for one to be completely homosexual (1) or completely heterosexual (7), but more likely that one had experienced some level of attraction to members of both sexes at some time or another.'[63]

As Kinsey's seven-point continuum has indicated, sexuality is not black and white, but rather a scale with many sexualities possible besides heterosexuality and homosexuality. This approach significantly challenges the heteronormative view.

Another important term is 'queer'. The exact origin of the term 'queer' is unknown, but its meaning has changed over the decades. Queer was slang for homosexual and often used for homophobic abuse. However, academics and non-heterosexual people began to utilize queer as a neutral term over the past two decades. As Bury mentions in her work 'First used in the academy by Teresa de Lauretis in 1991, "queer" has come to embrace a multiplicity of nonnormative sexualities, including gay and lesbian, that don't necessarily rely on homosexual practice.'[64] Therefore many people now use it as an umbrella term for all sexual and gender minorities and a descriptor of non-normative identities and politics. They thus define queerness as being against heteronormativity and all that heteronormativity entails. Being queer is to reject these roles. As such, being queer does no only include gays, lesbians, transgenders and bisexuals. Calvin mentions that: 'Queerness . . . [is]

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[61] K. Lovass & M.M. Jenkins, 'Charting a path Through the Desert of Nothing'.
[62] L.A. Peplau & S. D. Cochran, 'A Relationship Perspective on Homosexuality' in P. McWhirter, S. A. Sanders, & J. M. Reinisch (Eds.), *Homosexuality/Heterosexuality: Concepts of Sexual* Orientation, pp. 321-349. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 334.
[63] J. Bruner, *I 'like' slash: The demographics of Facebook slash communities,* p.4.
[64] R. Bury, 'Cyberspaces of their own: female fandoms online', p.7

more a posture of opposition than a simple statement about sexuality'.[65] Queer theorist Michael Warner attempts to provide a solid definition of this concept of 'queer':

> Social reflection carried out in such a manner tends to be creative, fragmentary, and defensive, and leaves us perpetually at a disadvantage. And it is easy to be misled by the utopian claims advanced in support of particular tactics. But the range and seriousness of the problems that are continually raised by queer practice indicate how much work remains to be done. Because the logic of the sexual order is so deeply embedded by now in an indescribably wide range of social institutions, and is embedded in the most standard accounts of the world, queer struggles aim not just at toleration or equal status but at challenging those institutions and accounts. The dawning realisation that themes of homophobia and heterosexism may be read in almost any document of our culture means that we are only beginning to have an idea of how widespread those institutions and accounts are.[66]

Queer theory thus explores and questions how we categorize gender and sexuality by, for example, recognizing the problematic way that heteronormativity embeds itself in our culture. Queer theory is more a critique of an identity than a specific identity. Judith Butler, a well-known gender theorist, has emphasized this in works like *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.[67] She states that the term queer will always be mobile, because it is not a specific entity. Rather, it is a way to deconstruct sexual identities. Heteronormativity is the focus of the discussion when theorists such as Judith Butler and many others are being considered.

When the media deviates from the heteronormative view, it often implicitly reflects queer theory's theoretical perspectives. *Brokeback Mountain* is a good example. Hollywood normally pursues the 'straight' theme: masculine male stereotypes in westerns, action movies and other genres. However, *Brokeback Mountain* chooses two cowboys, masculine male characters, to fall in love.[68] This choice steps away from Hollywood's typical heteronormativity. Since that queer theory looks at destabilizing heteronormativity in the media, this can be seen as alike.

With the arrival of the digital age, it is easier to be critical of this heteronormative view. Social media helps queer people present and express themselves in a safe environment. In a way, writing fan fiction and playing with characters' sexuality is a performative action and a display of

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[65] T. Calvin (eds.), *Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004).
[66] M. Warner (ed.), *Fear of a queer planet queer politics and social theory*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. xiii.
[67] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2006)
[68] IMDB, 'Brokeback Mountain', <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0388795/> (21 August 2016)

queerness. So wanting to step away from heteronormativity and displaying this queerness is one of the reasons to write fan fiction it seems, but this will be elaborated on later in this paper, namely in the case studies in Chapter 4.

## 2. Why do people read or write fan fiction?

Having established what fan fiction is and discussed relevant terms and concepts, this thesis now explores in greater depth why one would read or write fan fiction.

People write fan fiction for a specific fandom due to their personal interest in the canon. Authors of fan fiction are familiar with the context and writing of the canon, since a fanfic must resemble the canon story in some manner. In other words, 'the motivation is already present in the process of writing fan fiction.'[69] However, writing and reading fan fiction goes beyond an interest in the canon. After all, people have little reason to write fanfics if they are satisfied with the canon.

There are two overlapping reasons for writing fan fiction: fanfic authors and readers either want 'more of' a certain story or 'more than'. This chapter clarifies both reasons.

### 2.1 More of

The first major reason why fans read or write fan fiction is because they want more of a story or "more from it". For instance, Sherlock Holmes fans wanted their character to solve more cases and more mysteries.[70] Writers of TV shows such as *Elementary* create these kinds of stories, but this is not fan fiction since these stories are for consumers and the writers and/or producers actually make money from them. However, that shows like *Elementary* exist does show us that fans desire more from the original canon, which can explain why many fans write fan fiction.

Fan fiction is also about 'filling the gaps'. A writer is curious about a character's background story or what happened in the summer that the canon story skipped and thus chooses to explore this in a fanfic.[71]

Fans sometimes write fan fiction simply because they want more of the story after it ends. For example, they want to know what happens after Harry Potter defeats Voldemort in the final book of the *Harry Potter* series. Therefore, people continue to write adventures about Harry Potter and his friends. For example, *Unhinged* is a thirty-nine chapter story about what could have happened after the final battle.[72] In this story, Harry and his friends have to face new troubles in the wizard and muggle world.

'More of' could also imply that the writers wanted to see more of the characters and their interactions. The history of fan fictions shows that this is quite often a reason for fan fiction to be written. Canon stories such as *Star Trek* and police dramas such *Starsky and Hutch* were initially all

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[69] P. Güldenpfenning, *Fandom, fan fiction and the creative mind*, p.26
[70] S. Pugh, *The Democratic Genre*
[71] The problem with this is the fans writing these stories want to stay true to the canon. But the canon may fill the gap later and shows the fan fiction story to be incorrect about what might have happened during that gap. In this case the fanfic is 'jossed' as Pugh states in *The Demotic Genre.*
[72] AO3, 'Unhinged', <http://archiveofourown.org/works/3440789/chapters/7543229> (22 August 2016)

about adventures, with not so much emphasis on character interactions or developments. Fan fiction targeted these shows in particular. Fans, especially women, liked the shows, the characters and the characters' relationships, but they missed character depth and interaction. They therefore started to write fan fiction that delved into the characters instead of their adventures. Later on, in the 1970s and moving into the 1980s, shows such as *Star Trek: The Next Generation* seemed more relationship based, which supports the notion that fans lacked relationships and character interaction in the earlier shows.

The lack of interesting female characters in TV shows was also clearly visible during the same era. Many female characters only developed in-depth personalities in fan fiction. Pugh has even said that this might have encouraged the production of shows with strong female characters such as Buffy and Xena.[73] Male characters also became more complex.

Many shows now feature more relationship- or character-based storylines contrary to the 1970s and 1980s. 'More of' reasons for writing fan fiction are therefore also based on a particular character that a fan is interested in. The fan fiction community calls these kinds of fans 'character junkies'. These individuals write or read stories because the show does not focus enough on a particular character. They thus write stories focused on these characters. These are often H/C stories. Fanlore[74] reports the following fan statement about this genre:

> A very simple reason lies in our social culture, where males are not supposed to show
> feelings, and homosexual relationships are frowned upon as unnatural and
> perverted. So, when is it acceptable to show emotions? Well, when someone is hurt,
> it is unkind to be unfeeling, so then real emotions can be shown, possibly pent-up
> ones saved from other times.[75]

By writing H/C stories fans can dive into the feelings of male characters with reason.

Writers of fan fiction can also choose to write due to a particular interest in minor characters in the canon. Doing so gives them more freedom to be creative, since these characters have had little or no character development. When fans make them main characters in their fan fiction, they are effectively turned into what Pugh in his book calls original characters (OCs). In this case, OCs are minor characters who evolve into wholly expanded characters created by the fanfic author. As mentioned on Fanlore, the term OC 'sometimes […] can refer to characters who are only mentioned

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[73] S. Pugh, *The Democratic Genre*

[74] Fanlore is a collaborative site by, for, and about fans and fan communities that create and consume fanworks. Here, you can read about fan activities, fannish vocabulary, and the histories of fan communities -- and add your own voice, memories, and experiences to our collective story. Source: <http://fanlore.org/> Accessed: 5-4-16

[75] Fanlore, 'Hurt/Comfort', <http://fanlore.org/wiki/Hurt/Comfort> (25 April 2016).

in passing in the source but are developed by fan authors.'[76] Meanwhile, being able to be more playful with these characters, more so than with main characters who are already wholly expanded on in the canon story, makes it easier for other fans of the canon to accept a fanfic that makes character changes within these characters.[77] Since these characters have little character development in the canon and the fanfic develops these characters itself, these kinds of fan fiction stories are easier for the general audience (GA) to relate to.

Fans must dedicate significant work in order to make a fan fiction story appealing to the GA. The term 'filing off the serial numbers' describes this effort.[78] In these cases, fan fiction writers have to delete certain references to the fandom in order for the GA to enjoy and understand the story. Fan fiction writers who are also profic writers often engage in this work. An example of a writer who has done this is K.L. Hughes, also known as Chrmdpoet. The latter is her name as a writer of fan fiction and the former the name under which she published *Popcorn Love* (a fanfic that was made into a profic and is now sold on websites such as eBay). While authors often start writing fan fiction for a fandom, many won't hesitate when they get asked to publish them for the GA.

Relationships also make fans want to write their own stories. Whole fan fiction genres emerge due to fans lacking character interaction and feeling that the emotional content of a canon story is underdeveloped. This is where the term 'shipper' stems from. The community coined the term to describe writers and readers who focus on the emotional relationships between characters.[79] In the case of 'more of', it is important to talk about relationships between characters in the canon story. When shows do not provide enough of a certain relationship, fans of that relationship feel compelled to read more about it – and thus create stories themselves or read stories that other fans have created. One of the greatest compliments that a writer of romantic pairing fanfics can receive is 'that's so them', especially if he or she is writing out of love for the pairing and a desire for it to have more coverage.

However, fans have different views on characters and what things they would say or do. This is a problem particular to fan fiction: readers have the feeling that they know the pre-existing character before the author of the fanfic has even written a word. This can be the case with pairings as well as single characters. When someone is interested in one particular pairing (just as a character junkie is interested in one particular character) so much that they see it as the primary pairing of a fandom or even the only perfect pairing overall, the community terms it their 'One True Pairing' (OTP). A fan interested in an OTP may have little or no interest in reading or creating works for other

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[76] Fanlore, 'Original Character', <http://fanlore.org/wiki/Original_Character> (26 April 2016).
[77] S. Pugh, *The Democratic Genre,* p.82.
[78] S. Pugh, *The Democratic Genre,* p.83.
[79] S. Pugh, *The Democratic Genre,* p.76.

pairings.

Moreover, OTPs do not necessarily have to be canon. However, when they are not, we refer to fans as wanting 'more than' as opposed to 'more of' a certain work. This leads to the second reason why fans write fan fiction.

### 2.2 More than

Instead of wanting more from a certain canon story, it is also possible that fans want 'more than' what the canon story is giving. This is possible in many ways. For example, it occurs when fans do not agree with a choice made in the canon story or fans decide that something should or should not have happened (and subsequently decide to write the story differently). The term 'fixing it' describes this process. Another part of this chapter includes writing a fanfic because a fan wonders 'what if' a specific scenario happened.

### 2.2.1 Fixing it

In relation to 'fixing' a story, deaths of characters present a perfect opportunity for fans to write fan fiction in which a specific character has not died. Examples include fan fiction stories in which Dumbledore[80] does not die.

Another incentive for fixing occurs when a story takes a certain turn that a fan does not appreciate. That individual can then disregard this turn and continue writing the story him- or herself. As mentioned before, AUs are examples of these kinds of stories. Some fans of *Once Upon a Time* were truly upset that the main characters decided to go to the underworld to save Hook[81] in the second half of the show's fifth season.[82] Therefore, many decided to stop watching the show. However, because they remain fans of the characters, they continue to write and read fan fiction as if the second half of season five did not happen. Television reviewer Lily Sparks was one of several mainstream writers who also criticized the midseason finale of season five.[83] Given these reactions, it is not surprising that many fans decided to rewrite the finale. These rewrites are cases of 'fixing it'.

Fans may also want to fix characters or relationships between characters. As Pugh states: 'If the original scriptwriters fail to explore ideas or relationships adequately, they leave fanfic to do it

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[80] Professor Albus Dumbledore is a fictional character in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series.
[81] Captain Killian Jones, better known as Hook, is a character on ABC's *Once Upon a Time*. He is also the love interest of Emma Swan, who is one of the main characters of *OUAT* and part of the SwanQueen ship.
[82] Example: <https://tmblr.co/ZaTb5o21WLP4W>.
[83] She says the following in her review about the 5a midseason finale: 'Then Emma was going to march her whole family down there to literally give her heart to a man who tried to kill them all in the first place? Girl bye.' Source: <http://www.TV.com/shows/once-upon-a-time-2011/community/post/once-upon-a-time-season-5-episode-11-swan-song-review-144942941967/page3/>.

[…] Holes and inconsistencies in plot lines tempt fanfic writers to try to resolve them.'[84] Fan fiction writers engage in fixing when they feel that the original writers have made a mistake. From the early days, fixing has always been an important reason to write fan fiction. As Pugh also mentions, in the 1960s and 1970s (when fan fiction is seen to have started), there was an absence of sex and strong female characters in the canon TV shows, as mentioned earlier in this paper. By writing fan fiction, fans fixed what they saw as a problem.

Fan fiction writers might not always explicitly criticize the writers of a certain canon work. However, they implicitly criticize the canon writers through the differences they create between the canon story and the fanfic; A/Ns also explicitly criticize the canon story.[85] However, not all fan fiction authors necessarily think that the original writers have made mistakes. Sometimes they just wonder what could have happened if another route had been taken, which would be a case of 'what if'.

### 2.2.2 What if

Many AUs are cases of 'what if'. What if character A were in love with character B? What if the story did not take place in the 21st century but in the 19th? What if character A were a teacher and character B a student? There are infinite possibilities, many of which fan fiction explores. Character junkies identify so much with a certain character or pairing that they want to see them in all kinds of situations that deviate from the canon. For example, imagine Harry Potter never being a wizard (while he is in the canon story); how would he have lived his life, being a muggle[86] and knowing nothing about magic?

Pairings can also be a reason to read 'what if' situations in stories. Sometimes this is because the pairing does not get enough attention, as mentioned before; however, it is also often because the pairing does not exist in the canon. The SwanQueen pairing is an example of this. Emma Swan and Regina Mills (i.e., the Evil Queen) are not an established romantic pairing in the canon. However, this pairing has a huge following. All of the fanfics concerning this pairing are 'what if' and 'more than' stories, since the characters are not a couple in the canon storyline.

Now that it's clear why people generally write fan fiction, reasons specific to slash fiction can be discussed. Chapter 5 analyzes why fans make Emma Swan and Regina Mills a pairing and why they have such a huge following. Meanwhile, the next chapter discusses the reason for writing slash fan fiction in general, since more literature addresses why slash (m/m) is popular than why femslash is

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[84] S. Pugh, *The Democratic Genre,* p.41.
[85] M.L. Leavenworth, *Reader, Please Follow Me* (Borås: University of Borås, 2015), p.104.
[86] A term used for non-magical beings in the *Harry Potter* series.

written, and there are some similar reasons, it is interesting to elaborate on this subject first, before delving into the reason for writing femslash in particular.

### 3. Why do people write and read slash (m/m) fan fiction?

Slash fiction is one of the most popular types of fanfiction.[87] Research carried out in 2013 by a member of the AO3 community into the statistics of various categories of fan fiction on AO3 has shown that m/m is the largest category when compared to Gen, f/f and others.[88] Figure 6 charts the results.
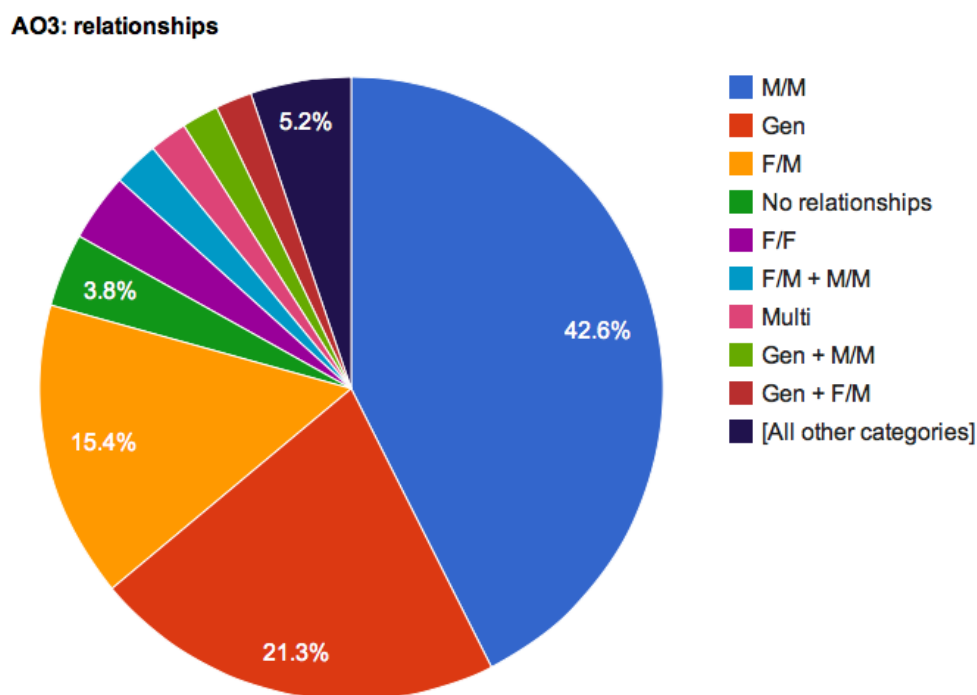


Figure 4: Diagram reprinted from: "Fandom stats: It's not just you – there is a lot of M/M slash on AO3." by toastystats, (1-11-2013) from AO3[89]

As AO3 is one of the largest databases of fan fiction, it is fair to conclude that slash fiction is indeed a very popular fan fiction category. This obviously has much to do with the rise of the internet. As Hansen has mentioned in her paper *The Darker Side of Slash Fanfiction*, prior to the advent of the internet, '[…] slash remained a relatively obscure, underground genre, available only to those "in the

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[87] J. Bruner, *I 'like' slash: The demographics of Facebook slash communities,* p.9.
[88] AO3, '[Fandom stats] It's not just you -- there is a lot of M/M slash on AO3', <http://archiveofourown.org/works/1026854> (24 August 2016).
[89] AO3, 'Relationships' <http://archiveofourown.org/works/1026854> (25 August 2016).

know" via private mailing groups or short-run fan club magazines (fanzines).'[90] However, with the internet fans can easily discover a vast array of fandom and fan fiction.

Now that the popularity of slash has been confirmed, it is necessary to establish the reasons for this popularity. To this end it is important to understand who reads and writes slash fiction before exploring why they do so.

### 3.1 Who are these so-called 'slashers'?

Jenkins has described slashers as fans who go against the norm of passivity when it comes to receiving media and instead seek an active role.[91] As discussed earlier, this seems to cover most fan fiction authors and readers, not necessarily only slashers. Jenkins has thereby also mentioned that most slashers are female and heterosexual. Bacon-Smith and Russ have corroborated this argument. Indeed, they even go so far as to say that women in slash fandom are often not only single but also have had few to no sexual or romantic relationships. It is interesting to note that slashers are female and often heterosexual, since slash fiction is about sexual and romantic relationships between two male characters. The following section outlines why slashers read or write slash fiction and not fan fiction about female characters.

### 3.2 Lack of strong female characters

This paper stated earlier that a reason for writing fan fiction in general is that there are not enough strong female characters in canon stories. This also seems to be a reason to write slash fiction.

There are several reasons for these writers to write about m/m relationships rather than f/m relationships. Bruner mentions in her paper that one of the most prominent theories as to why women read or write slash is because they empower themselves by reconstructing the romance narrative. Through this reconstruction, they express their desire for equality in relationships, an aspect that is often missing from traditional romantic stories between men and women. Writing about two men avoids the built-in inequality of men and women in the heteronormative romance formula. As Bacon-Smith has stated: 'The visual media, still overwhelmingly controlled by men, send out a clear message to women: female heroes don't have satisfying sexual relationships unless they learn to take second place in their own adventures.'[92]

As demonstrated here (and mentioned before), heteronormativity is very present in the media and thus also in the romantic relationships it portrays. Men are often the dominant gender. By

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[90] B. Hansen, 'The darker side of slash fanfiction on the internet, A. Mousoutzanis and D. Riha (eds.), *New media and the politics of online communities*. (Oxford, UK: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010), p.2 <https://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/bhansenpaper.pdf> (21 July 2016).
[91] H. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. (London: Routledge, 1992).
[92] C. Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women - Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p. 241.

not writing a female character, authors avoid the traditional role of passivity. Moreover, since the slashers do not recognize themselves in this traditional role, when they avoid writing about a character who is in the submissive position in a relationship, they can relate to the relationship being portrayed. These slashers are therefore not necessarily fantasizing about a homosexual relationship but rather an equal relationship. An equal relationship that doesn't seem possible with a female character of that particular canon story. Why they not create a female character alike themselves will be illustrated in 3.6.

### 3.3 Unexplored subtext

Another reason for writing about a certain (slash) pairing can be the unexplored subtext of the canon story. As mentioned before, fanfics create many of the slash pairings due to the closeness of the characters in the canon. Fans often read a friendly glance or another friendly gesture as sexual and/or romantic interest and the romantic relationships in slash fiction frequently progress from a canon friendship. Moreover, as Jenkins has stated, the characters face many obstacles before they get into a romantic relationship.[93] Slash stories often fall into the H/C genre. The fan fiction community defines them as 'buddyslash'. These stories are often less sexual than other slash stories, since they are more about the emotional connection than the physical. Nonetheless, this does not mean that there is no sexual slash fiction; quite the opposite is true. However, the paper covers this later.

Even when a pairing in the canon is not at all friendly, fan fiction authors can choose to read the relationship differently. Fan fiction often pairs enemies together romantically and sexually, precisely due to this tension. As we have all heard before, 'there's a thin line between hate and love'. The community calls this slash relationship 'enemyslash'.

Power relations between characters can also be read as sexually charged. A well-known example of this kind of a pairing is Snape/Harry in *Harry Potter*. The community calls this slash relationship 'powerslash'.

Fanfics often interpret the closeness of two characters who are friends or even foes as something more – such as romantic or even sexual. For instance, one could see a friendly glance as a longing or a deadly stare as a sexual yearning. A lot of fan fiction exists simply because fans have interpreted the original canon in a homoerotic way: 'Slash fans are often accused of "misreading", "distorting", or, if the accuser is being positive, "resisting" the text.'[94] Even so, many slashers themselves argue that there is definitely homoerotic subtext and that they are simply having fun

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[93] H. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992).
[94] C. Tosenberger, ' "Oh My God, the Fanfiction!": Dumbledore's Outing and the Online Harry Potter Fandom', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Vol., Nr. 2, Summer 2008, pp. 200-206, p.202.

developing this.

As Bruner says, 'slashers can find homoerotic subtext in almost anything'.[95] However, the friendly glances and deadly stares often help the case. The community defines many of these situations as 'eye sex'. A famous case of this is in the first *Harry Potter* movie, when Harry and Snape exchange looks when Snape makes his first appearance. As Bruner has highlighted, many slashers interpret this exchange as desirous, despite the canon depicting it as basic curiosity. The community often sees a character invading another's personal space as something more than it meant to be. Many slash pairings – perhaps maybe even every slash pairing – share these looks and moments in the canon. One pairing that shares many looks, moments and glances is SwanQueen, but more about this pairing will be discussed in Chapter 4.2.

### 3.4 Desire

Not every m/m pairing or canon story has the same amount of homosexual subtext. Sometimes slashers write about a pairing simply because they desire the actors or characters, not because the lack of strong female characters or unexplored subtext or anything else. By writing romantic and/or sexual scenes between the two characters, the slashers can imagine themselves having a relationship with both men of the pairing.[96] The slasher in this case is attracted to the actors or the characters they portray and their character traits. As mentioned before, the female slashers are predominantly heterosexual women, therefore lusting after men, and in this case characters in a show or actors that portray those characters.

Like many other people, slashers often have a healthy sexual appetite and therefore want to write sex scenes with the actors involved. Many slashers and slash readers have attested that reading 'smut' (sex scenes in fan fiction) can be as arousing and fulfilling as watching pornography.[97] However, it is not only about basic sex scenes. Smut in slash stories frequently goes further than a typical pornographic movie. As Hansen has noted, 'A large proportion of slash – the darkfic slash, […], are more complex, based on unequal, complicated relationship[s] showing evident dominant/submissive roles, often sadomasochistic, sexually explicit and/or violent.'[98] This might seem contradictive to the earlier statement that female slashers want to read or portray an equal relationship. However, writing or reading about D/s[99] relationships can easily be seen as a kink[100]. And '[k]ink is a way to intentionally engage with systems of power. As a kinky person, you can opt in,

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[95] J. Bruner, *I 'like' slash: The demographics of Facebook slash communities,* p. 24.
[96] J. Bruner, *I 'like' slash: The demographics of Facebook slash communities.*
[97] As for example read on https://www.bustle.com/articles/113667-9-best-sites-for-free-erotica-because-porn-doesnt-cut-it-for-some-of-us (12 October 2016).
[98] B. Hansen, 'The darker side of slash fanfiction on the internet', p. 14.
[99] This is the most shortest definition for dominant/submissive. Often used in fanfiction tags and description.
[100] A sexual taste for a person. Usually a kink is an unusual taste in sexual behavior.

you can opt out, you can play, you can exchange, you can give, you can take, you can end it at any time. It is yours to leave and or take.'[101] You can be in an equal relationship but still play with power.

The range of the pornography industry is of course quite broad, but some people still prefer reading to viewing. This is also perhaps because they can imagine specific characters they like from a certain canon story, instead of the actual actors in a pornographic movie or video.

The fact that reading about rather explicit sexual acts is still (or once again) popular is proven by the sales success of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, a book which was – curiously enough – originally published as a fanfic about the pairing Bella/Edward from the *Twilight* series. As Hansen concludes in her paper:

> The communities that formed around fanfic sites allowed many women the
> opportunity to really explore aspects of their sexuality for the first time, and they
> have found that sexual phantasies are not only far more complex, but also darker,
> than many believed. [102]

Slashers, most of whom are women, often entertain their sexual curiosities by watching or reading their fantasies instead of immediately acting on them physically.[103] As mentioned, they also do this by reading about their favorite male characters that act their fantasies out. The slash communities and websites that revolve around slash have allowed slashers to self-publish their sexual fantasies without the constraints of a male-dominated print media.

### 3.5 Defying heteronormativity and making things right

Recent discussions have shown that the LGBTQ+ community is angered that the media lacks a positive and realistic view of their community.[104] This relates not only to the number of queer characters, but also to the quality.[105] Many queer characters are stereotypes. *Modern Family*[106], which features a flamboyant gay couple, provides a good example. The men are clearly stereotypes, with jokes about them wearing the same outfit or dressing up their adopted daughter Lily. More than that, the show also portrays them as not sexually active, in contrast to the two straight couples in the show (who clearly have healthy sex lives).

As mentioned before, many slash stories are very sexual and full of smut. In these cases, fans

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[101] C. Yates, 'Being Kinky Doesn't Make You Queer', *Autostraddle,* 5 April 2017,
<https://www.autostraddle.com/kink-is-not-queer-374216/> (10 April, 2017)
[102] Hansen, 'The darker side of slash fanfiction on the internet', pp.6
[103] J. Bruner, I 'like' slash: The demographics of Facebook slash communities.
[104] Take for example the articles on *Autostraddle* that were mentioned before.
[105] As can be read on: Critical Media Project, 'LGBT'
<http://www.criticalmediaproject.org/cml/topicbackground/lgbt/> (25 August 2016).
[106] *Modern Family* is an American television mockumentary sitcom that premiered on ABC.

seem to compensate for the lack of 'sexual' queer characters in the media. Generally, as Hamming has mentioned, fans write slashfic due to the lack of homosexual couples in the media.[107] In this way, slash writers defy heteronormativity and protest the lack of representation of queer people in the media. Moreover, by writing about confusion, coming out and sexual fluidity, slashers help readers – and even themselves – to resolve issues related to their sexual orientation. Writing and reading slash fiction can therefore also be about self-relation and recognizing oneself in a written character. Likewise, queer fans can also relate to the sexual encounters, infatuations and fun sides of their sexuality that are represented in slashfic, which makes them feel part of a (queer) community.

### 3.6 Mary-Sueing

In summary, fan fiction may result from fans who want to identify with characters or relationships that are not present in mass media and thus feel compelled to create their own. However, if the majority of the slashers are female and straight, a question remains as to why they do not create characters that are similar to themselves.

It seems that this is because writers fear that the fan fiction community will accuse them of what is referred to as 'Mary-Sueing'. The prototypical Mary Sue is an invented female character in a fanfic who obviously serves as an idealized version of the author. Writers create such a character in order to fantasize about actually living out the storyline themselves. The character is often exotically beautiful, with an unusual appearance and a non-generic name: 'She often lacks any realistic, or at least story-relevant, character flaws — either that or her "flaws" are obviously meant to be endearing.'[108] According to an entry on Fanlore, 'In fan fiction, it is considered extremely gauche, or at least very immature, for an author to create characters based on him- or herself.'[109] It therefore seems understandable that authors want to avoid writing this particular character; they instead use a character who already exists in the canon story and possesses some of the traits that the writer can identify with or admires.

This chapter has outlined several reasons why women write and read slash fiction, from simply desiring the men to recognizing unexplored subtext or wanting to relate to a pairing or character. This last reason seems to be the main reason women read slash fiction, since the lack of strong female characters, heteronormative relationships and sexual fantasies are only a few reasons that they write and read slash fiction. And it is possible to summarize these reasons as generally wanting to identify with a character or a relationship, since they feel like they can't identify with

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[107] J.E. Hamming, 'Whatever turns you on: Becoming lesbian and the production of desire in the Xenaverse'. *Genders*, 34, 2001. <http://www.whoosh.org/news/cache/011101-genders.html> (24 August 2016).
[108] TVtropes, 'MarySue', <http://TVtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/MarySue> (8 September 2016).
[109] Fanlore, 'Mary Sue', <http://fanlore.org/wiki/Mary_Sue> (8 September 2016).

characters and/or relationships that appear in mass media. This is thus the most convincing reason for writing and reading slashfic.

Women who write and read slash fiction are mostly straight and want to read about relationships with men. However, this leaves out those female fan fiction writers who are not interested in men, but rather in women. Such writers are likely to prefer fanfics that revolve around relationships between women (i.e., femslash fanfic). The next chapter discusses two fandoms with femslash pairings.

## 4. Case studies

This chapter presents two case studies of fandoms and their pairings. Both pairings are popular in the femslash community, and this chapter analyzes why. It also explores if the reasons to write and read fanfics on the pairings differ or are similar to the reasons for writing fan fiction in general and slashfic. The chapter first discusses Clexa, a pairing from the TV show *The 100*; thereafter it examines SwanQueen, a pairing from the TV show *Once Upon a Time*. These case studies illustrate different reasons for writing femslash fan fiction.

### *4.1 Clexa*

Clexa is the name of the ship between Clarke Griffin and Commander Lexa from *The 100*. It is a very popular femslash pairing, as illustrated by the fact that it was the eighth most reblogged pairing on Tumblr in 2015.[110] Clexa has also been very important in the discussion about queer female visibility in the media. Contrary to many other femslash ships, Clexa was a canon ship. This means that the TV show established the characters' romantic and sexual relationship. However, their relationship did not last long. The first time the characters showed feelings towards each other was in season two, but before they were able to continue their relationship, Lexa betrayed Clarke. They only acted on their feelings again and slept together right before Lexa's death. This left the many fans of the Clexa pairing unhappy and angry, especially since contemporary TV shows have a general tendency to kill off their queer female characters, as mentioned in an earlier chapter and as read on Autostraddle[111].

As Maureen Ryan states in an article in *Variety,* the character who died, Lexa, was one of the few well-developed and complex lesbians on TV; however, she was also a victim of an unfortunate but enduring TV cliché that lesbians rarely – if ever – live happily ever after. In an episode that first aired on March 3, 2016, *The 100* invoked one of TV's oldest gay clichés by killing Lexa off mere seconds after she consummated her relationship with another woman.[112] The TV cliché that Ryan talks about in her article is the 'bury your gays' trope:

> Often, especially in older works (to the extent that they are found in older works, of
> course), gay characters just aren't allowed happy endings. Even if they do end up
> having some kind of relationship, at least one half of the couple, often the one who

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[110] Year in Review, 'Most Reblogged Ships', <http://yearinreview.tumblr.com/post/134751774307/most-reblogged-ships> (9 September 2016).

[111] Riese, 'All 162 Dead Lesbian and Bisexual Characters On TV, And How They Died', *Autostraddle,* 11 March 2016, n.pag.

[112] Variety, 'What TV Can Learn from '*The 100*' Mess', <http://variety.com/2016/TV/opinion/the-100-lexa-jason-rothenberg-1201729110/> (1 October 2016).

was more aggressive in pursuing a relationship, thus 'perverting' the other one, has
to die at the end.[113]

This rings true in the case of Clexa, where Lexa was the "out" lesbian pursuing Clarke. There are more gay characters in contemporary media. However, the trope remains a problem, especially for lesbians, seeing as there are many tropes on lesbian deaths, there is even a specific bury your gays trope for lesbians (the 'dead lesbian syndrome'), as mentioned on TVtropes.net[114]. As this present thesis emphasizes, lesbians rarely have a happy ending when they are portrayed in mass media. As an article on TVtropes has discussed:

[…] sometimes gay characters die in fiction because in fiction sometimes people die[…]; this isn't an if-then correlation, and it's not always meant to 'teach us something' or indicative *[sic]* of some prejudice on the part of the creator. [...]The problem isn't when gay characters are killed off: the problem is when gay characters are killed off far more often than straight characters, or when they're killed off because they are gay.[115]

One could argue that many characters die in shows such as *The 100*, not only those that are lesbian. However, the problem is not necessarily that Lexa died, but the way she died and when. As Ryan mentions in her article on the writers' poor handing of Lexa's death: '[…] it wasn't all that surprising that the character was written off, nor did most fans — or myself — have an innate problem with her exiting the show by dying or leaving in some other way.'[116] Rather, the fans were upset that Lexa died immediately after the eagerly anticipated consummation of her love for Clarke. Furthermore, a stray bullet from an angry male servant was what killed her. She did not deserve such a death after having fought her way through many battles. However, according to the TVtropes article, what enraged fans even more is the fact that:

[…] [they] knew that Lexa would appear in the season finale. The trumpeting of her appearance at the end of the season prompted many viewers, especially fans of the Lexa and Clarke pairing, to keep hope alive, but in reality, there was no hope to be found. If her appearance in the finale had been secret, that might have allowed the show to unleash a potentially interesting surprise, but in addition to taking the air out

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[113] TVtropes, 'Bury Your Gays', <http://TVtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BuryYourGays> (1 October 2016).

[114] TVtropes, 'Bury Your Gays', <http://TVtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BuryYourGays> (1 October 2016).

[115] TVtropes, 'Bury Your Gays', <http://TVtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BuryYourGays> (1 October 2016)

[116] Variety, 'What TV Can Learn From 'The 100' Mess', <http://variety.com/2016/TV/opinion/the-100-lexa-jason-rothenberg-1201729110/> (1 October 2016).

of that presumed twist, the way *The 100* shamelessly toyed with LGBTQ viewers —
who are among the show's most active promotional allies — constitutes inexplicable
and deeply unwise misdirection.[117]

So-called 'queer baiting' is a tactic that mass media uses to draw in a queer audience. It involves using subtext and hinting at a queer romance without any intention to ever follow through with it. Since there is a lack of well-written queer characters in mass media, this can be very hurtful to queer fans. According to Ryan's article, one fan on Twitter tweeted something that most queer fans agree with: 'I feel like I'm being used to keep up their ratings.'[118]

This explains the anger that fans directed at producer Jason Rothe for his decision to bait the queer audience and kill off Lexa. Many fans stopped watching *The 100* after the episode in which Lexa died, the ratings and number of viewers subsequently dropped, and Rothe lost thousands of Twitter followers. Evidently, fans can engage much more with TV shows nowadays. But, as Maureen Ryan states in her article for *Variety,*

[…] intense fan engagement is a double-edged sword. The fans who know how to
help raise a show's profile and make noise on social media are also whipsmart in any
number of other ways. Today's TV viewers will not countenance a show using them
as pawns, nor will they help promote a show when they feel it has let them down.
With the events that occurred in the March 3 episode of the show, many think *The
100* did just that.[119]

It seems logical that many fans who loved Lexa and the pairing Clexa wanted more of both. It is therefore unsurprising that Clexa is a popular pairing for femslash fan fiction. In this case, unexplored subtext is not the reason femslash writers and readers want to write and read about the pairing, since it was a canon pairing. However, because the relationship was only short-lived, the 'more of' and 'what if' reasons for writing and reading fanfics on the pairing are still relevant. 'Making things right' might be an overlapping reason for many fans of Clexa to write fanfics. Many feel that the producers and writers of *The 100* definitely made a mistake in ending Lexa's life; as such, writing fanfics in which Lexa is still alive and in (or about to be in) a relationship with Clarke is making things right. Such fanfics therefore also fall into the 'what if' category.

A similar fanfic is *Lightning Only Strikes Once* by fiona_249. In this fanfic, Lexa does die; however, when Clarke is consumed by grief and climbs Lexa's tower, she is struck by lightning and

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[117] Variety, 'What TV Can Learn From 'The 100' Mess'.
[118] Variety, 'What TV Can Learn From 'The 100' Mess', <http://variety.com/2016/TV/opinion/the-100-lexa-jason-rothenberg-1201729110/> (1 October 2016)
[119] Variety, 'What TV Can Learn From 'The 100' Mess'.

transported to a time before Lexa's death – where she tries to save her. In writing this fanfic, the author wants to rectify what the writers and producers did wrong. The author continues from the episode where Lexa dies but makes sure to save Lexa and have Lexa and Clarke continue their relationship. In the A/N, the author of this particular fanfic acknowledges everyone who is upset by Lexa's death by stating 'We're all in this together.'[120] Accentuating the feeling of a community.

       Fans not only write fanfics about this pairing; they also take to social media to let everyone know that the death of Lexa was unfair to the LGBTQ community. As Maureen Ryan mentions: '[…] a subset of viewers got #LGBTfansdeservebetter to trend for hours during the show's time slot on March 10, 2016, demonstrating that they can use their collective might to very different uses than a network might like.'[121] By writing fanfics and sharing their opinions on social media, fans are trying to provide exposure for the issue of LGBTQ representation in mass media. In light of Lexa's death and the deaths of many other queer characters, fans started raising awareness by, for example, raising money for The Trevor Project (an organization dedicated to offering crisis support to LGBTQIA youth).[122] The fans of *The 100* gained much attention through their social media activities and many people started actively paying attention to how TV shows represent queer women. As mentioned on Mary Sue: 'Most shows didn't fare well under that lens.'[123] As mentioned before, viewers started using the hashtag #LGBTfansdeservebetter, which evolved into what Twitter has dubbed 'The Lexa Pledge'. This pledge, which was developed by the creator of the Trevor Project and three female TV producers, contains 'seven tenets for positive LGBTQ representation' (as listed in Figure 5).

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[120] AO3, 'Lightning Only Strikes Once', <http://archiveofourown.org/works/6176245/chapters/14150431> (18 October 2016).
[121] Variety, 'What TV Can Learn From 'The 100' Mess'.
[122] Mary Sue, 'The Lexa Pledge', < http://www.themarysue.com/the-lexa-pledge/> (18 October 2016)
[123] Mary Sue, 'The Lexa Pledge'.

1) We will ensure that any significant or recurring LGBTQ characters we introduce, to a new or pre-existing series, will have significant storylines with meaningful arcs.

2) When creating arcs for these significant or recurring characters we will consult sources within the LGBTQ community, like queer writers or producers on staff, or members of queer advocacy groups like GLAAD, the Trevor Project, It Gets Better, Egale, The 519, etc.

3) We recognize that the LGBTQ community is underrepresented on television and, as such, that the deaths of queer characters has deep psychosocial ramifications.

4) We refuse to kill off a queer character solely to further the plot of a straight one.

5) We acknowledge that the Bury Your Gays trope is harmful to the greater LGBTQ community, especially to queer youth. As such, we will avoid making story choices that perpetuate that toxic trope.

6) We promise never to bait or mislead fans via social media or any other outlet.

7) We know there is a long road ahead of us to ensure that the queer community is properly and fairly represented on tv. We pledge to begin that journey today.

| NOELLE CARBONE | WRITER, CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER | APRIL 21/16 |
| Adam Pettle | WRITER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER | APRIL 21/16 |
| LEY LUKINS | WRITER, CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER | APRIL 21/16 |
| Patrick Tarr | Writer, Co-executive Producer | April 21/16 |
| Sonia Hosko | Producer | April 21/16 |
| GRAEME STEWART | WRITER | APRIL 21, 16 |
| THOMAS PEPPER | WRITER | APRIL 21, 16 |
| HAYDEN SIMPSON | WRITER | APRIL 21, 16 |

Figure 5: The seven tenets of 'The Lexa Pledge'. Source: LGBTfansdeservebetter[124]

Noelle Carbone, one of the founders of the Lexa Pledge, has said of its importance:

> I don't know how that kind of representation [in this case lesbians getting shot or stabbed and regularly dying on television] wouldn't burrow into your subconscious and send a message of pain and futility. Which I guess is why the pledge is getting the response it's getting online. It contains a message of hope that lots of people, especially young people, need to hear.

In light of this pledge, it is clear that many queer females are not satisfied with their representation in mass media and in this case television. It is thus not surprising that they would rather turn to fan fiction, where they can find stories with happy endings instead of stories that always end in death.

Another reason why fans might want to write fan fiction about Clexa is because *The 100* is a show that is mostly about action rather than interaction between the characters. It features many

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[124] LGBTfansdeservebetter, 'The Lexa Pledge', <http://lgbtfansdeservebetter.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/pledge2.1.3-originalsigned.pdf> (11 October 2016).

battles and there are few quiet moments. It seems reasonable that fans of the Lexa and Clarke pairing would like to see more interaction between the two. The lack of interaction between characters has been a reason for writing fanfics from the start, as Chapter 3 mentions. Many fanfics on Clexa are therefore AUs that place the characters in situations in which adventure and danger are not always lurking around every corner. This is the case with four of the five fanfics with the most kudos on AO3. An example of a Clexa AU is *Lover in Low Light* by Chrmdpoet.[125] In this story, the two characters have broken up and moved on with different partners; however, they meet again five years later and realize that they are still in love with each other. By making Clarke bisexual and Lexa a lesbian, the author is true to the characters as depicted in *The 100*. However, by giving the characters longer and more realistic relationships and struggles, the fanfic presents a story that many queer women will identify with more than the short-lived and unrealistic relationship that Clexa had in *The 100.* The fans of the pairing have recognized themselves in the characters in *The 100*; however, since the plotline ended quickly, fans want more of both the characters and their relationship.

Clexa having been a canon ship makes it easy to understand why one would write or read fanfics on the pairing. The canon established them as a couple, but the relationship did not last due to the death of Lexa. Many were invested in this queer relationship and wanted 'more of' this relationship. In this case, the reason for writing and reading fan fiction is quite clear. Namely the fact that many fans of the pairing were sad to see the relationship end because Lexa died. They had finally found a relationship and/or character they enjoyed or could identify with but it was short-lived therefore they keep the relationship alive by writing and reading fan fiction on the pairing. That together with the lack of queer female(s) and relationships in mass media (as can be concluded because of the Lexa Pledge) is the reason for writing and reading fan fiction on this particular pairing.

This case study has discussed the reasons for writing femslash on a canon ship. The following case study moves on to explore why femslash is written if a pairing or ship is not canon, namely by examining the SwanQueen pairing.

### 4.2 SwanQueen

SwanQueen is the name of the ship between Emma Swan and Regina Mills (i.e., the Evil Queen) from *Once Upon a Time*. The pairing and ship are not canon. Nevertheless, *AfterEllen* considers the femslash pairing to be the most popular (at least in 2015),[126] given that it won the so-called 2015

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[125] AO3, 'Lover In Low Light', <http://archiveofourown.org/works/4613709/chapters/10515837> (12 October 2016).
[126] AfterEllen.com, founded in April 2002, is a website that focuses on the portrayal of lesbian and bisexual women in the media.

femslash tournament.[127] Furthermore, it was the 14th most reblogged pairing (including m/m and f/m) on Tumblr.[128] Hence, this non-canon pairing is chosen to analyze why people write femslash.

      *Once Upon a Time* (*OUAT*) started out as a show with two strong female leads, Emma Swan and Regina Mills. Neither was in a relationship and together they shared a son. They began as rivals rather than lovers or even friends. However, as Bruner has mentioned in his paper on slash, 'enemyslash' is one of the three main types of slash. As such, it is not surprising that this formula is also a common occurrence in femslash. As Bruner has suggested, the reason why rivals are often shipped together is that 'Fans typically interpret the hatred and loathing in the canon as a type of unresolved sexual tension, and many use the old adage that there is a thin line between love and hate.'[129] This case study is a great example of an instance of enemyslash. With all of the long glances between Emma and Regina, it is not surprising that fans believe sexual tension exists between the two characters. As mentioned in Chapter 4.3 these long glances or 'eye sex' can be read as romantic or sexual subtext. Lily Sparks, an editor of TV.com, has reviewed *OUAT* and noted every longing glance between the pair. Her articles and created images are all over the internet. Figure 6 and 7 show two examples of the images.

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[127] AfterEllen, 'SwanQueen winner 2015 femslash tournament', <http://www.afterellen.com/TV/463621-SwanQueen-winner-2015-afterellen-ultimate-femslash-tournament> (20 August 2016).
[128] Year in Review, 'Most reblogged ships', <http://yearinreview.tumblr.com/post/134751774307/most-reblogged-ships> (20 August 2016).
[129] Bruner, 'I 'like' slash: The demographics of Facebook slash communities', p.10.

Figure 6: Source: TV.com[130]



Figure 7: Source: TV.com[131]

[130] TV.com, '*Once Upon a Time*'s Cruel Un-intentions: Swan Queen, Mulan, and the Show's Fascinating Subtextual Dimension, <http://www.TV.com/shows/once-upon-a-time-2011/community/post/once-upon-a-time-swan-queen-138316970768/> (20 August 2016).
[131] TV.com, '*Once Upon a Time*'s Cruel Un-intentions: Swan Queen, Mulan, and the Show's Fascinating Subtextual Dimension' <http://www.TV.com/shows/once-upon-a-time-2011/community/post/once-upon-a-time-swan-queen-138316970768/> (20 August 2016).

Many fanfics written during or shortly after the show's first season play with the notion of the pair being rivals and trying to resolve their sexual frustration. An example of such a fanfic is wherethewiled's *I'm Your Dead Sea,*[132] in which the pair have many sexual encounters but remain very blunt and hostile towards each other outside of them. This is a perfect example of enemyslash. As the reason for writing this fanfic is the subtext of the canon show, the fanfic can be placed in the 'what if' category.

Recognizing homosexual subtext is at least one reason for fan fiction about this particular pairing. However, when the show progressed fans wrote many different fanfics, some of which were not at all similar to the fanfic just mentioned. Many AUs came about that were more romantic than hostile, such as *I'm Your Dead Sea*. 'Buddyslash' is also a well-known form of slash fiction. This form concerns a pair that are close friends or work together very often. To say that Emma and Regina are close friends is a bit farfetched. However, after season one, they are no longer enemies and work together on almost every occasion.[133] Their closeness as friends and companions in their missions makes the pair perfect for buddyslash. As a result, many fans write fan fiction that sees this closeness evolving into something more. An example of such a fanfic is *Right Here All the Time* by devje.[134] In this fanfic, Henry, the son of both Regina and Emma, notices that his mothers have become close. He tries to help them realize that they are more than friends or companions so that their relationship evolves into something more. The closeness the two women have in canon might not be recognized as homosexual subtext by everyone, but it does make sense for many people that are fans of the SwanQueen pairing. It also makes for relatable way of falling in love namely moving from a friendship into something more.

The final popular form of slash fiction that Bruner has elaborated on is 'powerslash', in which there is a clear distinction in power between the two characters. Emma and Regina's relationship in the canon story lends itself to powerslash fan fiction, since Regina is the mayor of Storybrooke and Emma is the sheriff (and thus works for Regina). For instance, fanfics depict Regina toying with Emma, making Emma come to her office at awkward times and without good reason. These situations often involve sexual relations. An example of this is *let me be your ruler (you can call me queen) by* insanetwin.[135] At first Regina asks Emma do all kinds of chores for her, such as tending her garden and filing paperwork. However, the requests become gradually more sexual, with Regina

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[132] AO3, 'I'm your Dead Sea', <http://archiveofourown.org/works/762003/chapters/1426030?view_adult=true> (26 August 2016).

[133] In this case we're talking about their relationship in season two, three and four.

[134] AO3, 'Right Here All the Time', <http://archiveofourown.org/works/3290426/chapters/7180775> (26 August 2016).

[135] AO3, 'let me be your ruler (you can call me queen)', <http://archiveofourown.org/works/935604> (27 August 2016).

aggravating Emma by telling her to undress. Other powerslash fanfics create AUs in which, for example, Regina is a teacher and Emma her student. As with slash fiction, it is clear that powerslash is a popular category in femslash. This might be connected to the homosexual subtext, but it might also be connected to fans' desire for a romantic or sexual relationship they can relate to. As mentioned in Chapter 4, this can often be the case for writing or reading slash fiction, the following discussion shows this to also be the case for femslash.

This paper discussed earlier that heteronormativity is very visible in our use of language. When looking at language in femslash fics, it is obvious that most writers eschew heteronormative discourse. One especially well-known fic about SwanQueen explicitly disregards heteronormative language. The title of this particular fic is *Sheath her Sword*.[136] Furthermore, in this fic Regina is able to 'magic' herself a penis. Needing a penis to have sex with a woman may seem heteronormative, but the title does imply that the vagina in this case 'envelops' the 'sword' (or in this case, the penis). This puts the focus on the vagina instead of the 'penis'. Of course by writing about same sex relationships and/or sex and thus also writing femslash about two canon straight women is defying heteronormativity in itself.

In the canon story, the language sometimes has homosexual subtext. In one of the first episodes, Regina Mills ponders 'How to get the savior to taste my forbidden fruit?'[137] In this case, she speaks of a poisoned apple that would put someone under a sleeping curse. However, 'forbidden fruit' has a distinctly sexual connotation. As the Urban Dictionary mentions, it refers to either sex or someone who is either unobtainable or not good for an individual to get involved with.[138] Fans have written many fanfics based on the quotation mentioned earlier alone, with Emma wanting to taste Regina's 'forbidden fruit'. The SwanQueen fandom has even created a challenge solely around this quotation. The challenge related to the 2014 SQ Big Bang, a week-long event during which SwanQueen writers and fan artists created works for each other inspired by different themes, quotes and prompts. One of these themes was 'forbidden fruit', inspired by the quotation. An example is *The Infamous Flavor of the Forbbiden [sic] Fruit* by Shadowdianne, a work produced in response to this theme. The summary of this fanfic illustrates how this author interpreted the canon quote by Regina:

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[136] Fanfiction, 'Sheath her sword', <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/11485870/1/Sheath-her-sword> (27 August 2016).
[137] *Once Upon A Time*, Season 1 Episode 21, 00.33.53-00.34.00. Or Youtube, '*OUAT* 1.21 Regina - Taste My Forbidden Fruit', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9Xn6-fwYkc> (10 October 2016).
[138] Urban Dictionary, 'forbidden fruit', <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=forbidden%20fruit> (15 October 2016)

An idea that @swanfckngqueen gave me. After the first time that Emma and Regina

have sex... what could be the first rational thought of the sheriff?

"So this is how the forbidden fruit tastes like"-said the sheriff, this time her voice

echoing in mirth and sexual innuendo.[139]

There are many works developing *OUAT*'s sexual and romantic subtext. The subtext being for example parallels between former romances of Regina or Emma to the characters wearing the same shirt in different episodes, and the colors of true love and the colors of their magic being the same. However, it is not necessary to go into depth on all fan fiction interpretations of the subtext. It all comes down to the same thing: fans recognize love in the subtext and therefore write fanfics on the characters being together.

This can also be filed under the 'what if' category, since the fanfic explores scenarios that entail the characters recognizing and acting on the love they have for each. However, there are also many what if scenarios arising from situations that have happened in the canon story. For instance, fans have rewritten the season one ending out of dissatisfaction with the curse ending the way it did. However, this does not necessarily explain why they write about a romance between Emma and Regina.

Like *The 100, OUAT* is a show that focusses on action more than on interaction. In addition to recognizing a subtextual romance, another reason for writing fanfics on the pairing is thus that fans want to see more interaction between the two characters. This corresponds to the previously mentioned category of 'filling the gaps': fans wonder what happened on the boat to Neverland when the characters were not fighting or sleeping.[140] An example of such a fanfic is *Accidents Happen* by PhoenixRisingOnTheMoon.[141] In this fanfic Emma accidentally touches Regina inappropriately a few times and eventually does so deliberately. Thereafter their friendship evolves into something more.

The main reasons for writing SwanQueen fanfics are thus that fans either see a romance between Regina and Emma that is not (yet?) there in the canon story or they want to see more interaction between the two characters. This is not a surprise, as there is a large amount of subtext in the story. However, it is also a wanted romance because there are not many queer relationships between women in mass media, as can be seen on social media as for example the Lexa Pledge, as mentioned in Chapter 5.1.

The producers of *OUAT* noticed this and felt that their fan base wanted a queer relationship

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[139] AO3, 'The infamous flavor of the forbbiden fruit', <http://archiveofourown.org/works/1543751> (30 August 2016).
[140] In season two Regina, Emma and some others go to Neverland on a boat to find their missing son.
[141] AO3, 'Accidents Happen', <http://archiveofourown.org/works/4029325> (19 October 2016).

on the show, but they apparently did not want it to be between Regina and Emma. Therefore, to please their unhappy queer fans, the writers decided to introduce a queer couple. However, it was yet again a short-lived relationship, much like Clexa in *The 100.* In the relationship between Ruby (also often named Red) and Dorothy (with the nickname Slippers), neither character died. However, the airtime of the relationship was as short as possible. The pairing appeared together for only one episode, which only served to enrage the queer fans of *OUAT* further.

By trying to promote RubySlippers,[142] the show did not give queer female fans the representation they deserve. The women only knew each other for a couple of days before they became each other's true loves. While the other true love couples on the show (all of which involve heterosexual relationships) have considerable airtime, RubySlippers only appeared for little more than one episode. Nearly every fan can appreciate characters who are strong and independent and have a connection. The writers instead chose to give each main character (namely Emma Swan and Regina Mills) a boyfriend, thereby disappointing the fans. And by offering the fans only a very short-lived romance between two women, in this case RubySlippers, queer fans felt it was another case of queerbaiting. This approach leads queer fans to move on from watching the show and instead write and read fanfics. They feel compelled to do this in order to enjoy characters and relationships like their own. It makes sense that they choose Regina and Emma as fan fiction characters, as these women interact in almost every episode, have had a connection since episode one, share a child, and are complex, strong and independent. As Figure 8 shows, even people who do not watch the show recognize that it would make sense for Emma and Regina to be a couple.
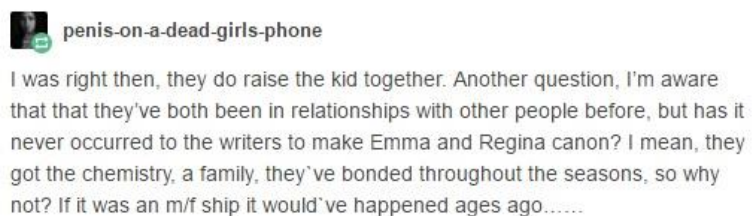


penis-on-a-dead-girls-phone

I was right then, they do raise the kid together. Another question, I'm aware that that they've both been in relationships with other people before, but has it never occurred to the writers to make Emma and Regina canon? I mean, they got the chemistry, a family, they've bonded throughout the seasons, so why not? If it was an m/f ship it would've happened ages ago......

**Figure 8: A comment of a non-viewer on SwanQueen. Source: Tumblr**

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[142] The shipname of Ruby or Red and Dorothy or Slippers on *OUAT*.

**Conclusion**

The hypothesis of this thesis was that fans write and read femslash fan fiction out of a desire to identify with a character or pairing.

Firstly, Chapter 1 outlined terms and concepts from fan fiction and the literature on sexuality and gender. The term fan fiction describes fan-written stories involving popular fictional characters, often posted on the internet. Fan fiction authors write fan fiction neither for profit nor to draw a larger audience to the fandom. However, fanfics do derive from a canon story and thus are part of a fandom. Why fan fiction authors do write fanfics has been made clear in this paper and will be summarized in this chapter.

The way one gains access to fan fiction has also changed over the decades, whereas one earlier on would have to find a particular fanzine of his or her interest it now has become increasingly easier to find your special interest and thus to come across a fan fiction that you like. This because with the rise of the internet you can now easily browse the internet and come across more obscure subjects; subjects or stories that may speak to you.

There are many forms of fanfics, from AUs to non-AUs. Fanfics also fall into several genres: romance, angst, H/C, fluff, smut or combinations thereof. If the fanfic is not Gen (i.e., not focused on a romance), it can either be a het, slash or femslash fan fiction. Femslash, which consists of stories involving a relationship between two queer women, is the focus of this thesis.

Queer defines a position that is dismissive of the heteronormative view on relationships and gender. In the case of femslash, two women are romantically and/or sexually interested in women and in a romantic or sexual relationship with each other. Therefore, both women are queer. As queer in this case is an umbrella term for any sexual and gender minorities, queer women are non-heterosexual women.

Chapter 2 discussed some general reasons for writing and reading fan fiction, from wanting 'more of' a story (e.g., after a show has ended) or wanting 'more than' the story. When there is not enough interaction between a pairing due to a show's focus on action rather than interaction, authors write femslash fic because they want more of a canon story. Nevertheless, in most cases, fan fiction authors write about a pairing that no longer exists (given that one of the characters has died) or is based on a subtextual romance. In this case, the reason is that the author wants 'more than' the canon story. This 'more than' justification has subcategories of reasons for writing fan fiction. For example, fans want more than the story specifically because they want to 'fill the gaps' or 'fix' the story as a result of being unhappy with its development. Another reason for writing or reading fan fiction is the 'what if' reason, which as the term implies concerns fans reimagining the story (for example, the possible outcome if character A were to fall in love with character B).

Chapter 3 explained the reasons that fans write and read slash fiction, namely the lack of strong female characters, unexplored subtext, desire, defying heteronormativity (and thus making things right) and being afraid of Mary-Sueing. It also as mentioned that most of the writers and readers of slash fiction are heterosexual women. All in all, the reasons for writing slash fiction can be summarized as women not being able to identify with the women and relationships portrayed in mass media. Therefore these women feel compelled to create stories that they can indeed identify with.

Chapters 1 to 3 were necessary foundations for the main subject of the thesis: the reasons people write or read femslash fan fiction. In chapter 2, two case studies were used to see if the reasons for writing fan fiction in general and the reasons for writing slash fiction in particular are applicable to femslash fan fiction as well. The conclusion from the case studies is that the reasons for writing fan fiction in general and writing slash fiction in particular (mostly) also apply to femslash fan fiction.

The first case study was the Clexa pairing from *The 100.* This case study illustrates that a TV show choosing to portray a relationship between two women is not immediately enough to satisfy queer women's need for identification. In this case, the relationship was too short-lived, since the show killed off one of the characters. The show also received negative attention for the way it treated its queer fans, many of whom moved on to write and read fan fiction. The Lexa Pledge shows that Lexa was not the only queer woman who died on a TV show. As such, it is fair to surmise that fans of the other shows in which the lives of the queer women ended (abruptly) would also opt to move on to fan fiction.

In the second case study, the reason for the popularity of the pairing in the femslash fandom is a little less obvious. However, most analyses of the show, the pairing and the fanfic point towards the show's homoerotic or homoromantic subtext. Fans of the pairing find subtext in the glances, conversations and language of the characters. Since the pairing is not canon, fans have to move to fan fiction to see more than the pair just being enemies (or later friends). From 'what if' situations to 'filling the gaps' in the canon story, a lot of fan fiction is found on the pairing.

Since neither of the women, Emma Swan and Regina Mills, are your typical heteronormative woman and are instead assertive, powerful and independent, it is not surprising that queer women recognize themselves in both of them. However, since they either remain single or are in a relationship with a man, fans of the pairing have to move to fan fiction to see a relationship that they can identify with. Like *The 100, OUAT* did portray a relationship between two women (RubySlippers); however, as with *The 100,* this relationship was short-lived (in this case because they only received a little more than an episode of airtime). Whereas SwanQueen could have finally provided queer women characters and a relationship that queer women can relate to and identify with, like many

other shows it decided not to do so.

These case studies underline that there are insufficient women and relationships in the mass media to which queer women can relate. They may identify with a character and/or relationship (e.g., Clexa of *The 100*), but TV shows do not provide queer women with enough pairing interaction or a long enough relationship to satisfy them. Alternatively, as with SwanQ, queer women recognize something in the subtext that they can identify with. However, the canon story does not explore the subtext, which results in fans of the pairing moving on to fan fiction.

Overall, fans write femslash fan fiction because queer women need relationships and characters to identify with and there are not yet enough available in mass media. Queer women look for these relationships and characters in canon stories, but they are mostly disappointed. As Angela Thomas mentions in her article on fan fiction:

> One of the features of most fan fiction is that fans of the text can take it and write in characters and plots that are relevant to their [in this case queer women] own identities and lives, giving them a voice in a text in which they might otherwise be marginalised.[143]

Queer women's need for identification is what drives them to write and read femslash fan fiction.

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[143] A. Thomas, 'Fan fiction online: Engagement, critical response and affective play through writing', p. 234.

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